LETTERS
Illustrative of

THE GOSPEL HISTORY,

AND OF

THE EPISTLES,

AS CONNECTED WITH IT;

particularly

UPON THE INTERESTING SUBJECTS OF

THE COMING OF CHRIST—OF THE MAN OF SIN—OF
ANTICHRIST—OF ELECTION AND REPROBATION,
AND OF THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH.

IN REPLY TO

MR. GIBBON, MR. FABER, AND OTHERS.

BY N. NISBETT, M. A.
Rector of Tunstall.

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1812.
TO THE

REV. JOHN CONANT,

RECTOR OF ST. PETER’S,

SANDWICH:

THE following Letters having their origin in a friendly intercourse with you, are most humbly and most respectfully inscribed,

By your most faithful

and most obedient

Servant,

N. NISBETT.
I had not intended to have written any Preface to the following Letters, but on perusing the celebrated Mr. Locke's treatise on the Christian Religion, I was particularly struck with his address on that publication.

It appears to me so expressive of my sentiments and practice that I shall make no Apology for adopting it, with some slight variations.

"The little satisfaction and success that is to be found in most of the systems of Divinity
PREFACE.

I have met with, made me believe myself to the sole reading of the Scriptures to which they all appeal, for the understanding of the Christian Religion.

"What information, by an attentive and, I trust, unbiassed perusal I have obtained, I here deliver to the Reader. If, by my Labours, he has received any light, or information in the truth, let him join with me in grateful thanks to the Father of lights for his condescension to our understandings.

"If, upon a fair and unprejudiced examination, he finds I have mistaken the tenor and spirit of any one of the four Gospels, I beseech him, as a true Christian and as one who possesses the spirit of the Gospel, in the words of sobriety to set me right, in the doctrine of Salvation."

Feb. 9th, 1810.
LETTERS

ON

THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

LETTER I.

ON OUR LORD'S ORIGINAL LANGUAGE.

REV. SIR,

In a conversation we had together, in which you often indulged me, you mentioned the language which, in different forms of expression, runs through the New Testament, as affording one of the most formidable objections to the truth of Christianity which is perhaps to be met with in the whole of theological controversy.

"In the primitive church," says Mr. Gibbon, the celebrated historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, "the influence of truth was very powerfully strengthened by an opinion, which, however it may deserve respect for its usefulness and antiquity, has not been found agreeable to experience.—It was universally believed, that the end of the world and the kingdom of heaven, were at hand. The near approach of this won-
DEFFUL event had been predicted by the apostles; the
tradition of it was preserved by their earliest disciples,
and those who understood, in their literal sense, the
discourses of Christ himself, were obliged to expect the
second and glorious coming of the son of man in the
clouds, before that generation was totally extinguished,
which had beheld his humble condition upon earth, and
which might still be witness to the calamities of the
Jews under Vespasian or Hadrian. The revolution of
seventeen centuries has instructed us not to press too close-
ly, the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation;
but as long as, for wise purposes, this error was permit-
ted to subsist in the church; it was productive of the
most salutary effects on the faith and practice of chris-
tians, who lived in the awful expectation of that mo-
ment when the globe itself and all the various race of
mankind should tremble at the appearance of their divine
Judge.†

If this objection, so acutely and pointedly urged, had
originated with Mr. Gibbon; you might, very naturally,
have placed it to the account of his extreme enmity
against Christianity which he is said to have hated so cor-
dially that he might seem to revenge some personal in-
jury. But it is but justice to him to observe to you that
he really appears to have done no more, in this instance,
than to collect the opinions of the most able divines who
have distinguished themselves in theological controversy.
Grotius, you know, ventured to insinuate, almost in the
very words of Mr. Gibbon, that, for wise purposes, the

† History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.—Vol. 1, p. 470.
pious deception was permitted to take place. The father of the late Bishop Lowth, confessed without reserve, that the apostles were mistaken—and the present Bishop of Landaff has been accused, with some appearance of reason, of not having been extremely solicitous to relieve the apostles from the accusation of error; while another learned divine has, from one of our University pulpits, very gravely proposed it for consideration, whether the real interests of Christianity would not be more essentially promoted, by conceding the objection to his adversary, than by vainly attempting to remove it. Nay; it has been boldly asserted, in the Theological Repository, under the direction of the late Dr. Priestley, and never, that I know of, attempted to be contradicted, in any part of his numerous works, † that our Lord is recorded by his historians Matthew, Mark and Luke, to have declared that his second coming was one of these events which would happen during the lives of some of his contemporaries. And the late Rev. N. Cappe, says of St. Paul, that he had no conception, even of the existence of the church on earth, after the abolition of the Mosaic economy. In a word, there is not a single writer, of any denomination, among christians, who, in considering this subject, has not shown himself to be much embarrassed by it. With some truth, therefore, you will think, it has been said of Mr. Gibbon, that proud and elated by the weakness of his antagonists, he condescends not to handle the sword of controversy, but darts forth the

† If it had been noticed anywhere, it might have been expected, in his letters to a philosophical unbeliever, in which he directly attacks Mr. Gibbon, by name.
invenomed shafts of his sarcastic ridicule. He approaches indeed the camp and defies the armies of the living God; yet he approaches, not like Goliath, to call forth a champion, but to insult and triumph over his vanquished enemies.

When such, my dear sir, has been the language of the enemies of Christianity and such the concessions of its friends; it would almost induce you to tremble for its fate. But there is no real cause for alarm. You know well, that the attacks of infidels, and the inconsiderate concessions of Christians, have, in other instances, contributed, very materially, to its advantage, by leading to a more close and accurate investigation of its original records, and you may be assured, that this observation was never more strikingly verified, than it will appear to be, in the present case.

When you first mentioned to me the objection of Mr. Gibbon, it was, I must confess, altogether, new to me and it appeared so truly formidable that I felt and expressed to you my inability to reply to it. But, upon looking into the language with which the gospel history commences, a suspicion arose, in my mind, that what Mr. Gibbon had applied to the second coming of Christ, might, possibly, relate to his first coming, as the Messiah. This, I soon found to be the fact, and I now take the liberty, in this public manner, to lay before you, the result of my inquiries; being fully persuaded that it will prove as satisfactory to you, and to all who will be at the pains to attend to it, as it has been to me.

It is unnecessary to inform you that the language to
which I allude, was that of John the Baptist, announcing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; which our Lord himself, immediately upon his appearance adopted, and not only adopted, but made the very foundation of his whole system; expressly commissioning his apostles to announce its near approach. Say to them, i.e. to the Jews—the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. Their public instructions are likewise stiled—preaching the kingdom of God and preaching the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.

Thus far, you will, I am sure, agree with me, there neither is, nor can be any dispute. The only question, then to be discussed, so far as this phrase is concerned is, in what sense it is to be understood? If it relates, as Mr. Gibbon has asserted, to his second coming in the clouds to judge all mankind, at the last day—the controversy is at an end, and christianity must, upon the principles of sound reasoning, be adjudged to be an imposture. Here we are at issue and it only remains, with critical exactness and impartiality, to examine what is the genuine meaning of the phrase, as made use of, in the passages above referred to.

When John the Baptist, the harbinger of our Lord, asserted that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; you will not fail to observe that it excited universal attention. In the expressive language of the evangelist—then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region round about Jordan. And when our Lord went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel—or good news of the kingdom, which he had de-
clared to be at hand; it is said, there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea and from beyond Jordan.

It will probably appear to you that no account can be given of the universal attention which was thus excited, by the use of our Lord’s language, so natural and so rational, as that it was borrowed from the language of the Old Testament, and particularly from the prophecies of Daniel, and that their sentiments upon the subject were, in fact, founded upon them. In these prophecies, the creation of a new kingdom, by the God of heaven which was to be given to one like a son of man, was explicitly foretold—the time of its approach was limited to a certain period and that period was now nearly expiring. When therefore, they heard our Lord declare that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; it was no wonder that they flocked to him in such multitudes. Accordingly, it has been excellently well observed, by Dr. Sykes, that “the Jews were so well apprized of a kingdom which God had resolved to set up, that as often as Jesus talked of the kingdom of heaven, or of God; neither the people, nor their rulers, ever offered to ask him the meaning of the phrase; which, yet, we cannot suppose them not to have done, if he had talked with, and to them in a language they were unacquainted with.” Bishop Chandler, likewise has observed that “the expectation of the Messiah, intimated in the use of this language, was not the opinion of a few devout people only, who are said to wait for the consolation of Israel, and to look for redemption.

§ Sykes on the Christian Religion—p. 29.
in Jerusalem, at the time of our Saviour's birth; or of the meaner sort, who thought the kingdom of God (a phrase for the kingdom of the Messiah) should immediately appear; but it was the settled judgment of the chief priests, the scribes and the learned in their law. They who made the study of the scriptures their chief business, were unanimous in this belief—the expectation was national.

Nor, is this all.—The evidence of this general expectation of the Jews and the cause of it, is not confined to the christian scriptures, or to christian writers only. The celebrated Josephus, who, you know, was himself a Jew and a distinguished general in the early part of the war which terminated in the desruption of their country, bears ample testimony to the truth of these important facts, though, at the same time, he pretty plainly declares that he was not friendly to the christian cause.—"That," he says, "which chiefly excited the Jews to the war, was an ambiguous prophecy, which was also found in their sacred books, that at that time, some one, within their country, should arise, that should obtain the empire of the world." Tacitus, likewise, the Roman annalist, when mentioning the destruction of Jerusalem, says—"Most of the Jews were firmly persuaded that there was an express declaration in the ancient books of the priests, that, at that very time, the East should gain the ascendancy, and some body from Judea, acquire universal dominion." And he adds, that "this illustrious prediction had taken such warm possession of the common people, among the Jews, that they were not compelled to resign their dependence on this prophecy, but
by a series of calamities. And, most remarkable to the same purpose, are the words of Suetonius. "There prevailed," he observes, "over all the east, an old and constant opinion that it was decreed by the fates, that some one, about that time, should proceed from Judea and obtain universal empire. This prediction," he says, "was accomplished in Vespasian—but the Jews, applying it to themselves, excited rebellion."

With this general expectation of the appearance of a great personage, who should assume the character of the Messiah, at the time that our Lord announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, so fully admitted, by the Jew, the Christian and the Infidel; you would, my dear sir, very naturally have imagined that the whole Jewish nation would have become his willing and obedient subjects, and that nothing could have been more favourable to his reception under that character, than such an expectation. But you well know the fact is, as ingenuously acknowledged by the evangelical historians themselves, that very few, comparatively speaking, owned our Lord to be the Messiah. And, the whole of their history, as presented to us by these historians, plainly shews that as a nation, the Jews considered him as an impostor, in assuming that character and that, as such, they put him to a most ignominious and cruel death. You know, likewise, from the same history, that, even of those who did adhere to him, from a belief that he was the person whom they so ardently expected, it is, upon various occasions, related that they expressed the utmost anxiety to have those proofs of his being the Messiah, which they, in common with the rest of their.
countrymen, affixed to that character and, particularly, that he should put himself at their head and restore the kingdom to Israel.

This important fact is so fully and so ably stated by Dr. White, in his justly admired Bampton Lectures, that I am sure you will require no apology for presenting it to you, in his own words. "In the person of the Messiah, their promised deliverer," he observes, "they beheld a mighty and glorious king, who should appear with all the pomp of temporal greatness, and all the terrors of earthly power, trampling upon the enemies and oppressors of Israel and leading forth his people, amidst the triumphs of conquest, and the splendour of dominion. The manifest expiration of the time prescribed by the prophets—the departure of the sceptre from Judah and the subjection of their country to the Roman power, were circumstances which at this time added new weight to the opinion which had thus been eneared by early prejudice and sanctified by authoritative tradition. —Every heart was now warmed with hope, and every eye looked forward with anxious expectation to the moment when the glory of Zion should appear, and Judea be for ever exalted above the kingdoms of the earth—when they should behold suppliant nations crowding into the sanctuary and Rome herself, the haughty mistress of the world, bowing prostrate at the feet of Jerusalem.

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

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

From this mistaken opinion arose the frequent struggles for superiority among them, which they have so ingenuously recorded. Hence, too, the impatient and misguided zeal of Peter, who, when Christ pathetically related his approaching humiliation, his sufferings, and his death, took him and began to rebuke him, saying—Be it far from thee, Lord.—This shall not be unto thee. To this may be added, the words of one of the disciples, with whom, our Lord, in his way to Emmaus, conversed, after his resurrection. We trusted that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel. This reflection arose from the same prejudice that had long flattered the national vanity, and expressed the most painful sense of
disappointment. (See White's Bampton Lectures)—P. 114, to 118.

The learned and judicious Dr. Lardner has, likewise marked, upon this subject, that the expectation of the coming of Messiah, about the time of the appearance of Jesus, was universal and had been so, for some while. But, with this idea of a prophet, or extraordinary teacher of religion, they had joined also that of a worldly king and conqueror, who should deliver the Jewish people from the burdens under which they laboured, raise them to a state of independence, and bring the nations of the earth into subjection to them, to be ruled and tyrannized over by them. And because our Lord did not perform, nor attempt this, they rejected and crucified him. If he would but have assumed the state and character of an earthly prince, Scribes and Pharisees, priests and people, would all have joined themselves under his banner. Of this, we see many proofs, in the gospels. This disposition prevailed to the last.” (See Lardner’s Ancient Jewish and Heathen Testimonies).—Vol. 1. p. 69.

You are, my dear sir, too well acquainted with the gospel history not to discern that these observations of this learned man do not relate to matters of doubtful speculation, about which different opinions have been entertained. They are, on the contrary, fully admitted by christians of all denominations, as facts which are indisputable. They are facts which are believed by all who believe that there was such a person as Jesus Christ—or who think that there is any degree of credit due to
the Gospel history.—Nay, more—they are facts which the testimonies of Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius fully and unequivocally corroborate, and which no one has ever ventured to deny. And what you will I am sure, think highly worthy of attention is, that they are facts which have for their vouchers, all modern Jews; for they, at this moment, entertain precisely the same sentiments, and as Christians term them, the same prejudices with their remote ancestors, in the time of our Saviour, and consequently, they are, so far at least, living and incontestible witnesses that these facts are built upon such a solid foundation of genuine historical evidence, as to leave no room for doubt of their reality.

You will observe my dear sir, that I have been the more particular, in stating the evidence of the truth of these facts, because, if they are admitted, as I think, they must be, by every considerate and impartial person; it will naturally and indeed necessarily follow, that the Gospel history is an history of the great controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the nature of the kingdom which he had upon his entrance on his ministry asserted to be at hand, and that it ought so to be considered to have full justice done to it. In fact, every page of this history teems with proofs that it is such, and I will venture to affirm that it is owing to its not having been so considered, that the opinions of mankind have been so infinitely diversified, concerning what Christianity is.

The Gospel history being thus clearly ascertained to be an history of the controversy between our Lord and his countrymen, concerning the true nature of the Mes-
siiah's character; it must be extremely obvious to you, and
indeed to every one who considers the subject with attention, that it was absolutely impossible for him, without completely defeating the great purposes of his mission, to have unfolded the true nature of his character, all at once. It must, therefore, have been the primary object of our Lord, in the exercise of the duties of his office, to disclose it, in a gradual and gentle manner and as they were able to bear it—to correct, without too severely wounding their prejudices and to impress it, strongly upon their minds, that he was, at least, an extraordinary personage and might, possibly, be the Messiah, whom they so anxiously expected; though they, as yet, saw none of those marks of his sustaining that character, which they, one and all, had invariably affixed to it.

In such circumstances—what mode of conduct was it proper for our Lord, as a wise man, to pursue, in order, effectually, to secure these important purposes? What line of conduct did he actually pursue? If you consult the gospel history—you cannot fail to discover the most unequivocal and satisfactory evidence of his having conducted himself, in such a manner, as to consult, with an unexampled tenderness and humanity, the prejudices of his countrymen, concerning the nature of the Messiah's character. You will find that, far from being forward in declaring that he himself was the Messiah, even to his most intimate friends and associates, he left this, in general, to be inferred from the peculiar excellence of his doctrine—from his numerous and astonishing mi-
racles† and from the perfect purity and integrity of his moral and religious character. Occasionally, however, and as circumstances required; he gave them such assurances of the coming of the Messiah, as were calculated to answer the great purpose of keeping up their expectation of his coming in that character, and of ensuring their attachment to him, until by the full disclosure of the interesting and important events which were to take place during his abode upon earth, they should be led to perceive their mistake, in having supposed that he was to be a temporal Prince, to rescue them from the yoke of the Romans and to render them the Masters and the Lords of the world. It is, however, deserving of your observation that when our Lord did think it necessary to make these assurances of his coming; it was in a language, the most cautious and guarded that can well be imagined. For example, He did not say—Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, before I shall declare myself to be the Messiah—but till the Son of Man be com
—He did not say—There be some standing here, who shall not taste of death till they see me coming in my kingdom—but till they see the Son of Man coming in his

† Miracles have usually, and I think, very justly been produced as proofs of the truth of Christianity; but as they are manifest violations of the laws of nature—the strongest possible evidence of the truth of the history in which they are recorded, can alone, in my opinion, render them deserving of credit. This evidence is, I think, afforded, in an eminent degree, by considering the gospel history as an history of the controversy concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character; in which all who are concerned in that history are represented as acting in perfect unison with the sentiments which they severally held, and with the objects which they had in view.
kingdom. Nay—when near to the very close of his life—you will observe that he continued to use the same cautious language—he did not, even then, say that his kingdom—but that the kingdom of God was nigh at hand. And when he was arraigned at the bar of justice for assuming the character of the Messiah, not a solitary instance could be produced against him by his enemies, though they were at considerable pains to procure it, of his having acknowledged himself as such. But what is most worthy of your attention, upon this part of the subject, is that his judges were, at last obliged to extort it from him, by a most solemn adjuration. I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the son of God. These, I am sure, must strike you as strong marks of genuine history, when considered in, the circumstances in which our Lord was placed.

This cautious mode of proceeding, though it, most certainly, disappointed the schemes of our Lord's enemies, who were ever upon the watch to ensnare him—though it, probably, did not answer the sanguine expectations, even of his own disciples—though it sometimes threw them into the greatest perplexity, when they compared what he said to them, with their own preconceived opinions, concerning the nature of the Messiah's character—though, in a word, it did not fully satisfy them of what they most wanted to be informed—yet, I think, you will agree with me, that it was the only method which prudence dictated—or which the peculiar circumstances in which our Lord was placed, permitted him to adopt, whether it respected friends or enemies; for he, well knew that in the course of his ministry, he should
have information to give them which was totally incompatible with all their ideas of the nature of the Messiah's character!

Should these views, not hastily formed, meet that approbation, upon a close and attentive consideration, which, in private conversation, you have, so fully expressed, I shall, in my next letter, proceed to a more particular examination of the manner in which our Lord conducted his controversy with his countrymen. In the mean time,

I am, Rev. Sir,

Very respectfully,

Yours,

N. NISBETT.

TUNSTALL, 28TH NOV. 1809.
LETTER II.

ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

REV. SIR,

From the most cursory view of our Lord's Sermon upon the Mount, you will perceive that it was particularly directed to the correction of the prejudices of the Jews, concerning the nature of the Messiah's character and to restore that pure morality of Moses and the Prophets, for that which had been grossly vitiated by their traditions. This, you are fully sensible, has been allowed on all hands—but, as there has been some dispute whether it was addressed to the disciples exclusively—or to the people at large; it will be necessary to settle this point, previous to my laying before you what I conceive to be the spirit of the Beatitudes and the genuine meaning of some verses which immediately follow; which, I think, you will agree with me, have been much misunderstood.

As the prejudices of the Jews, the disciples of Jesus themselves not excepted, concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, were universal; you would naturally
have supposed that the sermon would be delivered to the multitude at large, and not, exclusively, to the disciples. The Evangelical Historian, you will observe, has been very particular, in stating this to have been the fact. At the close of the chapter, immediately preceding this sermon; after having observed that Jesus went about all Galilee, preaching the Gospel, or good news of the Kingdom, i.e. of the kingdom of the Messiah; he says, there followed him great multitudes of people, from Galilee, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea and from beyond Jordan. And in the beginning of the next chapter, the historian says, that, seeing the multitudes, which flocked to him, from these different places, he went up upon a mountain and opened his mouth and taught them. It is true, indeed, the historian adds, that when Jesus was seated—his disciples came to him—but, it is evident that his seeing the multitudes, was the exciting cause of his address: His disciples, therefore, made only a part of his audience. But this matter is put out of all doubt, by the Historian's remark, at the close of the Sermon, that when Jesus had ended his discourse—the people were astonished at his doctrine and that it might clearly be understood who were meant by the people, the historian adds that when Jesus was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

More, I am sure, needs not to be said to you, upon this subject—I shall therefore, immediately proceed to lay before you what, as I observed before, appears to me to be the spirit of the Beatitudes,

The Jews, in consequence of their expectation that
the Messiah was to be a temporal prince, naturally enough entertained, the pleasing imagination of enjoying high distinction and of possessing places of great trust and importance under his reign; insomuch that two, even of his own disciples, actually aspired to those of the greatest dignity; requesting him to permit them to sit—one on his right hand and the other on his left, in his Kingdom, i.e. most unquestionably, in the kingdom of the Messiah. To counteract this aspiring disposition—Jesus says—Blessed—or happy—are the poor in spirit—or who are unambitious and humble minded; for their's is the kingdom of heaven—they only are qualified to become the subjects of my kingdom.

With the possession of universal dominion under their Messiah, the Jews, it is probable, connected great pleasures and enjoyments of every kind—but Jesus, knowing the extreme depravity of their character, as a nation, taught them that a state of sorrow and mourning, was best suited to their circumstances and most agreeable to the declaration which he had, originally made, that Repentance was a preparation, absolutely necessary for the true enjoyment of the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom. Blessed are they that mourn—for they shall be comforted. In the midst of the calamities which are coming upon the Jews, as a nation, they shall have their peculiar consolations, arising from a sense of God's favour and from an enjoyment of the happiness of being under the reign of the Messiah—while they who have in view, no higher objects than worldly pleasures, shall have their expectations completely frustrated and shall, instead thereof, be involved in the general ruin which is approaching.
The Jews considered a war-like spirit, in their nation, as essential to the promotion of their aspiring and ambitious views, with regard to the conquests which, under the banners of their Messiah, they expected to make in order to their becoming the Masters and the Lords of the World. But, to this, you observe that Jesus opposed a spirit, both in its principle and in its effects, which was totally different. *Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.* This temper will better qualify them— for enjoying with comfort and satisfaction, all which this world can afford—all which the condition of human life, even under the reign of the Messiah, will admit of, and the providence of God may allot them, than the most warlike courage and the most heroic and enterprising spirit.

The Jews were thirsting for exemption from their servitude to the Romans and still more to conquer and subdue them and their appetites were not to be satiated, but by their obtaining, under the auspices of their Messiah, an Universal Empire. But in the true spirit of his religion, you perceive he directs their attention to a very different and a far more noble object for the exercise of their ambition. *Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness*†—after the possession of those moral and religious qualities of the heart which

† If the words are to be understood only of bodily thirst which Ladner says they are; (Cred. vol. 11. p. 790.) and which will be best reconciled with Luke; then must δικαιοσυνη be governed by κατα. In this case, one Evangelist will be explanatory of the other and the blessing pronounced, not barely on those who suf-
are the principal ornaments of human nature and without which, he who is rich in this world may justly be deemed poor. *They shall be satisfied*—there is no true enjoyment without them.

The Jews confined their charity and compassion within the narrow circle of their own Nation and held the rest of mankind in the utmost contempt. But to counteract this narrowness of disposition—this unsocial selfishness, our Lord says—*Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.* In St. Luke, the mercy they were to obtain is particularly described—*Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful*; which is finely illustrated by both the Evangelists; the one saying that *he is kind to the evil and to the unthankful*—the other—that *he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust* and both too, concur in recommending *the love even of their enemies,* from the consideration of the beneficence of their heavenly Father. What a noble lesson was this, to those who thought that *it was unlawful to keep company with,* or even to go to one of another nation!

The heart, you know, when in an unsound state, is the fountain from whence all sorts of impurities flow. With great propriety, therefore, did our Lord, pronounce them *blessed* who were *pure,* or clean in heart; for hunger and thirst; for many a bad man does that—but on those whom poverty, that is, hunger and thirst, cannot tempt to violate the laws of righteousness.

For this judicious criticism I am indebted to my learned friend, Mr. Jackson, the Vicar of Ospringe, who has been pleased to express his approbation of my labours.
alluding, probably, to the legal purifications of the law of Moses; hereby, strongly intimating that it was the grand object of his religion, not merely to regulate the external conduct, but to influence the secret motives and springs of action; for that would be the best preparation for their seeing God; seeing God, denoting the enjoyment of supreme felicity in his presence.

The sentiments of the Jews concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, naturally led them to cherish dispositions, unfriendly to peace—but to check and, if possible to root out propensities so extremely inimical to human happiness and even to the quiet and security of mankind, in general, and of their own nation in particular; our Lord pronounces them blessed who are Peacemakers; for they shall be called—or accounted the children of God, as the God of peace—By cultivating this peaceable disposition, they would be eminently qualified for becoming the subjects of the Messiah's kingdom, as a kingdom of righteousness and peace—of peace and good will to men.

A state of suffering, though not, entirely incompatible with the ideas which the Jews had formed of those glorious times, which they were then, so ardently expecting, was not what they imagined would take place, at least, to any very great extent. If, however, opposition should arise; they were sanguine in their expectations that, under the conduct of their Messiah, it would soon subside and terminate in the completion of their ambitious views. But the doctrine of our Lord, upon this subject, taught them, what, by referring to the his-
LETTERS ON THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

tory of their Ancestors, they might previously have known, that a state of suffering was, with respect to individuals, at no period of their history, a mark of the divine displeasure—that as, formerly, persecution and violence, from wicked and unreasonable men were the lot of the righteous; so they must not, even now, expect to be exempt from them. Blessed—or happy are they—not who are persecuted only—for there is no happiness in being persecuted—but who are persecuted for righteousness sake; for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad; for so persecuted they the Prophets who were before you.

In the closest connection with these Beatitudes, you will observe my dear sir, that our Lord proceeds, with an admirable unity of design, to awaken the attention of his hearers, to the superior importance of their situation, as Jews, and their super-eminent advantages for the reception and extension of the knowledge of what he had been communicating to them concerning the nature of the Messiah's Kingdom and the dangerous consequences to themselves, as a nation, of not making a right use of those advantages. v. 13. Ye are the salt of the earth—but if the salt hath lost its savour—or its saltiness—it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, or thrown away and trodden under foot—i. e. as the words seem, fairly, to imply—Ye Jews are, yet, as you have, by the special favour of God, hitherto been, from the earliest period of your history—the salt of the earth—the only depositories for the preservation of the knowledge of God among the nations of the earth—But, if the salt hath lost
LETTERS ON THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

its saltiness—or is become insipid—if by your traditions, afterwards, in this very sermon, particularly specified, you have made void the laws of God and so corrupted them, as to render them of no effect; you will cease to answer the purpose of salt, for preservation and being in consequence, become of no use—you will be thrown away and be trodden under foot.

In the following verse, our Lord changes the Metaphor—but still expresses the same sentiment, under the sublimest of images—Ye are the light of the world—a city which is set, or built upon a hill, cannot be hid; i.e.—Your situation for communicating light to the world around you, is as conspicuous as a city which is built upon an eminence and on that account, cannot be concealed.§

§ What not a little contributed to the preservation of knowledge in the East, says an able writer, was God's continuing to reveal himself to the Jews; so that, in process of time, the little spot of Jewry was the only place where the true God was known and taught. And some beams of this divine wisdom could not but shine forth, from time to time, upon the neighbouring people who conversed with them. Accordingly, whenever we find a people begin to revive in literature, it was owing to one of these causes; either to some transmigrants from those parts, coming and settling among them; or else to their going thither for instruction. From these fountains, they always had it, and at this fire they lighted their own. There is no instance to be given to the contrary. Hither Athens and afterwards Rome came in quest of knowledge and instruction. These were the schools and masters of the world. And though our accounts of Asia, are but short and defective; yet what remains there are; as also their traditions, even in China, trace their original and oracles westward; which
LETTERS ON THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

These verses, you are well aware, my dear sir, have, by the generality of commentators, been applied to the disciples of our Lord, as Ministers of the Gospel, and there cannot be a doubt that they were, in the councils of heaven, intended to be both the salt of the Earth and the light of the world—but upon consideration, you must, I think, be fully satisfied that, at the period when our Lord delivered this Sermon, these expressions could not possibly, in that sense, have been applicable to them, any more than to the rest of their countrymen. "The apostles," says Dr. Campbell, in my opinion, very judiciously, "were not yet qualified for teaching the system of doctrine, implied under the name Gospel, because, in fact, they did not know it themselves. They had then no notion of a Messiah, but as a Temporal Prince and mighty Conqueror; or of his Kingdom, but as a secular Monarchy; more extensive than, but of the same nature with those which had preceded; to wit, the Assyrian, the Persian, the Macedonian Empires, or that which was in being, at the time, the Roman. Not one of his hearers could have been more prejudiced than the Apostles themselves were, at that time, against a suffering Saviour, who was to expire in agonies upon the cross. The doctrine of the Gospel is, manifestly, what the Apostles were not qualified to teach, till they were enlightened by the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, after our Lord's ascension." Dr. C. adds that

is the fullest confirmation of the Mosaic history and of the propagation of knowledge by instruction only. (See Dr. Ellis's elaborate work, entitled—The Knowledge of Divine things from Revelation, not from reason and nature. P. 122.

D
—"after his resurrection, when they knew more than formerly, they were expressly commanded, before they should attempt to teach that doctrine, to wait the promised illumination from above. But they had been, long before, sufficiently qualified to announce the approach of this dispensation and to warn men to forsake their sins, and to prepare for the appearance of their Lord and King." See Campbell's Dissertations, pp. 156-7.

To the same purpose, Dr. Maltby observes, that in explaining the object and extent of the Disciples' commission, it is obvious to remark the limited nature of their preaching, during their Master's life-time. It was, simply and expressly to inculcate the necessity of repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. What this kingdom was, they had not yet learned: their thoughts indeed were often directed to the subject—but their ideas concerning its nature, were grossly inaccurate. Their whole conduct, both before and after their extraordinary powers were conferred on them, shews that they acted in obedience to the commands of their master in delivering to others, what he had enjoined; but that they were utterly unacquainted with the precise nature of their message.

In conformity with these sentiments, is the opinion of the learned Rosenmüller. Nil nunc quidem ultra mandatum apostolis, quam ut Judæos ad vitam meliorem hortarentur, et ad Messiam audirendum pertraherent, à quo accepti essent cætera, quæ ad salutem ipsis essent necessaria. Iesum esse hunc Messiam, nondum tunc temporis palam professi sunt discipuli. To the same ef-
LETTERS ON THE GOSPEL HISTORY. 27
fect, the pious and judicious Le Clerc expresses himself. Observandum est hoc loco, Matt. x. 7. Apostolos, qui
mittebantur ut nunciarent propinquum esse regnum
caelorum, vix ipsos satis scivisse quid esset; cum ad.ascensum ipsum Christi, eum in terris regnaturum suisse
crediderint. Vid. Act. i. 6. Nihil ergo reponere po-
tuiscent quærentibus quid iis verbis intelligerent, nisi se à magistro suo, Jesu Nazareno, ita jussos loqui; cui rel.
addere poterant fidelem narrationem, ex quâ quid con-
sequetur, elicere auditores poterant. - (See Maltby’s
Illustrations, p. 169. &c.

Such are the remarks of these able writers upon the
subject—and they are, so manifestly founded in truth,
that not to admit them, would be to contradict the whole
tenor of the Gospel History: consequently you must,
I think, agree with me that when our Lord said—Ye
are the salt of the Earth and the light of the World, he
had no reference to the knowledge of his religion—but
simply to that knowledge which his hearers, as Jews,
and as the peculiar people of God, had possessed; for,
you will recollect that I have already proved, from the
Evangelist’s own account, that the discourse was ad-
dressed, not to the disciples, exclusively—but to the Jews
at large.

This being the genuine application of the phrases the
salt of the Earth and the light of the World; there can-
not, I think, be any difficulty in giving to the verse im-
mediately following, a precise and determinate meaning
—a meaning which is replete with sound reasoning and
D 2
perfectly harmonizing with the Metaphor of the Jews being the light of the World. Men, says our Lord, do not light a candle—or a lamp and put it under a bushel but on a candlestick and it giveth light to all that are in the house. As if he had said—Ye Jews have been appointed by Providence to be the light of the World, upon the same principle and for the same purpose that men light a candle in their houses, that all who are in them may see and enjoy the benefit of its light. This being the design of men, in their humble spheres of action, in common life; it is for a like purpose, though a far nobler one, that God has placed you in the super-eminent situation, which as a nation, in a moral and religious view, you now enjoy. In this sense—how beautiful, as well as pertinent is the conclusion which our Lord draws from this reasoning. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Having thus pointed out to his hearers the superior importance and advantage of their situation among the nations of the earth, under the beautiful Metaphors of salt to preserve and of light to communicate the knowledge of God and having urged upon them the necessity of their improving these advantages, if they would not themselves, be deprived of them; he proceeds to guard them against imagining that to promote their ambitious and selfish purposes, it was his design, to introduce, or, in any way, to encourage a relaxation of the eternal laws of morality. Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets—Very far from it—I am not come
to destroy either—but to fulfil both—to give perfection to the one and to accomplish what the others have written of me; for verily I say unto you till heaven and earth pass, one iota—or one tittle, shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. And still farther to let them know, of what essential importance these eternal laws of righteousness—these lights, by which they were to shine before men, in his estimation, were, he adds, what must, for ever do the highest honour to him, and his religion—Whosoever therefore, shall break one of the least of these Commandments and shall teach men so—he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven—but, whosoever shall do and teach them—he shall be called great—or shall be highly esteemed in the kingdom of heaven. He then adds, most evidently, with a particular view to the lax morality and the vitious conduct of the Jewish rulers—of those who were the depositaries of the religious knowledge, which then existed in the world; for, I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall much exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall, in no case, or upon no account whatever enter into the kingdom of heaven—You shall be totally disqualified for becoming the subjects of my kingdom.

In what follows, you plainly perceive that it was our Lord's object to correct, in detail, the highly vitiated morality of the Jews, in points of great and essential importance—but upon this I do not mean to enter—If I have made it appear to you that the Beatitudes, were intended to correct the prejudices of the Jews concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, my end is, so far,
at least, answered, though I should not, in every instance, have given their precise meaning. My ideas of their sense have been, as much as possible, collected from other parts of the Gospel History, and I feel no doubt that not only you, but every one whose taste is not vitiated, will be struck with the wisdom which dictated it and with the internal proofs which it contains, of its having been levelled against the prejudices of the Jews concerning the nature of the Messiah's character.

I cannot however conclude my remarks upon this Sermon without observing to you that the description which our Lord gave of the hypocritical and ostentatious manner in which the chiefs of the Jews performed their prayers and offered their alms that they might gain a reputation for superior sanctity, must have had an evident tendency to abate the reverence in which they were held and to give the people an high idea of the excellence of our Lord's character, as a divine Instructor. In fact, the whole of his discourse made such an impression that the Evangelist says that when he had finished it, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority and not as the Scribes. It was altogether such as they were unaccustomed to hear.

In my next letter, I shall beg leave to call your attention to the commission which our Lord gave to his disciples to announce the near approach of the Messiah's kingdom; in which you will not fail to observe some very striking instances of our Lord's great ob-
ject in the exercise of the duties of his ministerial office—his endeavour to remove the prejudices which they had imbibed concerning the nature of the Messiah's character. In the mean time

I am,

Rev. Sir,

Very respectfully,

Yours,

N. NISBETT.

Tunstall, 1st Dec. 1809.
LETTER III.

UPON CHRIST'S COMMISSION TO HIS APOSTLES.

REV. SIR,

The manner in which the Evangelical historian introduces the account of the commission which our Lord gave to His disciples, to announce the approach of the Messiah's kingdom, is particularly beautiful and cannot fail to excite your admiration. Towards the close of the ixth. chapter, he says that Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel—or good news of the kingdom, i.e. of the kingdom of the Messiah and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion towards them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd: Then said he to His disciples.—The harvest, truly, is plenteous—but the labourers are few—pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he may
send labourers into his harvest. And, when he had called unto him, his twelve disciples, he gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out and to heal all sorts of sickness and every kind of disease.

The names of these twelve disciples are particularly specified and when you consider, who they were, what was their station in life and what the great object which our Lord had in view, viz.—the removal of their prejudices concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom; you will immediately discern the extreme wisdom of his choice. As has been excellently well observed, by Dr. Malthy; he could not have struck at the very root of the generally received opinions, concerning the Messiah, more directly, than by the choice of associates, mean in their circumstances, humble and even vilified in their occupation; and destitute both of talents, and knowledge. Such associates were little suited to promote the views of a Prince and Conqueror; and the selection of them was plainly a renunciation of that pomp and distinction, which were generally conceived to be essential to the character of the restorer of Israel.* With the same view, he instructed them to provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in their purses—no scrip for their journey—not two coats—neither two pair of shoes; nor two staves; for that the workman was worthy of his maintenance. Such were the Ambassadors which our Lord thought it proper to employ and such their equipment.

With respect to the nature of their commission, you

* See Maltby's Illustrations, p. 85. c.
will observe that it is expressed, precisely, in the same terms as those which had been adopted, by John the Baptist and by our Lord himself, upon his entrance on his ministry; hereby plainly evincing, as has already been observed, that it was the basis of his whole system. As ye go—preach, saying—the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Humble, however, as their preparations were, you will deem it by no means improbable, with their sentiments concerning the nature of this kingdom, that they were, not a little elated with being appointed the narhingers of such agreeable intelligence to their countrymen; imagining, perhaps, that though they were now thus poorly equipped, they should, at some future period, appear with greater splendour and dignity. But, to check the risings of ambition so natural to men, whose thoughts were wholly engrossed by the appearance of their master, as a temporal Prince—he immediately proceeds to inform them of the extreme difficulty of their employment and of the great hardships which they would have to encounter, in the faithful and upright discharge of their duty. Behold I send you forth, as sheep in the midst of wolves. But, beware of men; for they shall deliver you up to the councils and they shall scourge you in their synagogues and ye shall be brought before governors and kings, for my sake, for a testimony to them and the Gentiles. The brother shall deliver up his brother to death, and the father the child and children shall rise up against their parents and shall cause them to be put to death. And, to shew, in the strongest manner possible, the extreme violence of the opposition which they must expect to meet with, in the faithful
LETTERS ON THE GOSPEL HISTORY. 35

discharge of the duties of their office, he adds, that they should be hated by all men for his name's sake.

You will easily imagine the extreme surprise and astonishment which such a prediction of the mighty sufferings which his disciples would have to encounter, in the execution of the duties of their office, must, necessarily have produced, upon their minds; for though, they could not, perhaps, even upon their own principles, have expected to be, entirely, exempted from all sufferings, in the full attainment of the great object of their ambition; yet, it plainly, was not possible for them to have entertained any idea of such mighty opposition, at least, from their own countrymen, as to be delivered up to the great councils of their nation—to be scourged even in their synagogues and to be hated by all men—for proclaiming tidings, which they could not but have supposed, would have been equally grateful to their countrymen, as to themselves!

You cannot, my dear sir, fail to observe that our Lord was fully sensible of the powerful impression which this prediction must, necessarily, have had upon their minds; for, you perceive, that he immediately proceeds, with that benevolence and humanity which constantly marked his conduct, to offer to their attention such encouragements, as were peculiarly fitted to support their minds, under the difficulties of their situation. Thus he says—When they deliver you up—take no thought—be not anxiously concerned, how, or what ye shall speak; for it is not ye that speak—but the spirit of my Father which speaketh in you. He that endureth to the end; the same
shall be saved. In the mean time, he informs them that they might take all proper precautions to preserve themselves from the violence of their adversaries. When they persecute you in this city—see ye to another. And above all—he points out a fixed period, beyond which, their expectations of the coming of the Messiah, would not be delayed. Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come.

This last passage, is probably, one of those, upon which Mr. Gibbon has founded his opinion that Christ foretold his second coming, in the generation in which he lived—but, you will, I am sure, agree with me, that it is not easy to imagine, his disciples, in such circumstances, as have been described, could have entertained any other idea of the coming, here mentioned, than of the coming of the Messiah—or of the kingdom, which had been announced to be at hand; for, to that coming, it is demonstrable, their whole attention had been, originally directed. With a belief that Jesus was the Messiah, they had joined him and had lent a willing and anxious attention to his instructions, upon that head; in the hope that he would give them such information as they wanted. And the very circumstance of their having been invested with a commission to announce the near approach of the Messiah's kingdom, at the time when this discourse was addressed to them, naturally and necessarily led them to understand, the coming of the Son of Man, of the coming of the Messiah.

Besides; you will, easily perceive that if the disciples had understood our Lord, as speaking of his second
coming to judge all mankind; they must, immediately, and without hesitation, have forsaken him, as an Impostor; as not answering their expectations; for they, then, most incontestibly, entertained ideas which were totally incompatible with such an event: Nor is it easy to imagine how any one, claiming the character of the Messiah; in a series of arguments manifestly intended for their encouragement, under peculiar difficulties, should have introduced one which had an immediate and direct tendency to extirpate every hope that he was the Messiah, whom they so earnestly expected. In fine, the whole of the preceding context, you must be satisfied, compels us to understand this passage, respecting the coming of the Son of Man; not of his second coming, as the Judge of the World—but of his first coming, as the Messiah. And, that the subsequent context is a continuation of the same subject, must appear to you and to every one, who gives it, due attention, equally evident.

Thus; to the arguments which he had before made use of, to support his Disciples, under the gloomy prospect which he had, so pointedly set before them, he adds another which was admirably adopted to reconcile them to the difficulties of their situation, however hard they might appear to them. The Disciple is not above his Master, nor the Servant above his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more is it to be expected that they will call those of his household, by the same opprobrious name.* He therefore excites

* In the preceding chapter, the Jews had said—v. 34. He casteth out Devils through Beelzebub, the Prince of the Devils.
them to be of good courage. Fear them not, therefore; assigning the following cogent reason why they should not be dismayed: for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed—or hid, that shall not be made known. What I tell you in darkness—or, in the dark—that shall ye speak in the light and what ye hear in the ear; or in private, that shall ye proclaim from the house tops. And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul—but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. What a powerful and engaging consideration, was this, to the active and courageous performance of their duty? The powers of language, or even of imagination, can scarcely admit of a greater!

Another consideration, very consolatory to them in the circumstances in which they would find themselves placed, our Lord tells them was, that they were under the immediate inspection and care of him who seeth all things, and without whose knowledge, or permission, the most inconsiderable events could not happen. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing and one, even of them, trifling as, in human estimation, they may appear, shall not fall to the ground, without the knowledge of your Father. Nay—the very hairs of your head are all numbered—Fear them not therefore—for ye are of more value than many sparrows—i. e. If nothing can happen to the meanest of God's creatures, without his direction—how much less to you?

In the two following verses, you will observe that our Lord appears, very significantly, to intimate the dignity of his own character; though expressed in the language
of caution and to lead them to consider the design of his mission as having a peculiar reference to a future state, and that, consequently, it was of the greatest importance that they should adhere to him with fidelity, even though it should be at the hazard of their lives. Whosoever therefore shall acknowledge me before Men; him will I acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before Men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Upon reading the 34th. and following verse, in which our Lord appears, openly, and explicitly to avow that he came to send a sword upon earth† to dissolve all the tender and enduring ties of domestic affection and to arm them with inextinguishable rage against each other, you may perhaps feel your mind recoil and find it difficult to reconcile it to that benevolent spirit which is so characteristic of his religion and with his own express declaration that he came, not to destroy Men's lives, but to save them. But a moment's reflection must convince you that our Lord could only mean that this would be the accidental effect—not the design of his religion. From the very nature of the controversy which subsisted between him and his countrymen and from the different sentiments

† It seems, by no means, unlikely, that when our Lord said he was come, not to send peace upon earth, or rather upon the land; but a sword; he might allude to the destruction of Jerusalem; which he clearly foresaw and foretold; for it will be recollected that the sentiments of the Jews concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, were what principally led to their destruction. See page of these letters.
which they held, concerning the nature of the Messiah's character; it will be obvious to you, that these divisions, here so strongly described, must have been foreseen, would take place, even if they had not been foretold. It has been finely observed that the religion of Jesus opposes no dictate of our constitution—discourages no sensibility of our nature—dissolves no tie of kindred or affection—but still—our heavenly father is of more consideration than our earthly, and the claims of integrity and virtue are superior and antecedent, even to the dearest attachments of consanguinity, whether of wife or child, or parent. But you will, I am sure, agree with me, that no language can more forcibly express this, than that of our Lord. 

He that loveth Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me, and he that loveth Son or Daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it.† What a confidence, my dear sir, is here displayed in the integrity of our Lord's own character! How, perfectly agreeable to the great object which he had in view! It seems to be, upon

† There is, says Dr Campbell, in this sentence, a kind of Paronomasia, whereby the same word is used in different senses, in such a manner as to convey the sentiment with greater energy to the attentive. He who, by making a sacrifice of his duty preserves temporal life, shall lose eternal life; and contrariwise. The trope has a beauty in the original, which we cannot give it in a version. The original word is equivocal, signifying both life and soul; and consequently is much better fitted for exhibiting, with entire perspicuity, the two meanings, than the English word life. See in loc.
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this principle, also, that he thus concludes the whole
He that receiveth you, receiveth me, and he that receiveth
me, receiveth him that sent me. As if he had said—if
those who receive you, to whom I have given a commis-
sion, receive me; it will necessarily and unavoidably
follow—that, if I am the Ambassador of God and bear about
me, his credentials; no man can reject me, or contemn
my authority, without rejecting the authority of God
himself, who sent me: Nor will they who treat me, or
those to whom I have given a commission, with the re-
spect to which, as the Ambassadors of Heaven, we are
justly entitled; lose their reward. —He that receiveth a
Prophet, in the name of a Prophet, shall receive a Pro-
phet's reward: And he that receiveth a righteous Man,
in the name of a righteous Man, shall receive a righteous
Man's reward: And whosoever shall even give to any of
those little ones, a cup of cold water only in the name of a
Disciple; verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose
his reward.

If ever clearness and perspicuity were to be found in
writing, either ancient, or modern; surely they are to be
found here. What reasoning can be more close—or bet-
ter adapted to the situation and circumstances of the Dis-
ciples, at the moment of our Lord's giving them a commis-
sion to act as his Delegates, in announcing the near ap-
proach of the Messiah's Kingdom, than the whole of this
discourse. And, at the same time that it is distinguished
for clearness and perspicuity you must perceive that it car-
rries in every part of it, such unequivocal marks of genuine
history, as must leave no doubt of its authenticity—or a
single suspicion that the coming of the Son of Man, in the
23d. verse, can possibly relate to any other event than to the coming of the Messiah!

And while it stands, thus, recommended to your notice for these essential qualities of good writing—you will discern, that it is no less distinguished for the striking picture which it affords of the firmness and integrity of our Lord's character, in giving so frightful a representation of the difficulties and hardships which they would have to encounter in the faithful discharge of the duties of their office and of his benevolence and humanity in blending therewith, every degree of consolation and encouragement, which the peculiarity of their situation, so urgently demanded and, more particularly in that most essential and important article, which was the grand foundation of all their hopes and expectations and of their attachment to him, viz. the coming of the Messiah.

In my next letter, I shall request your attention to several remarkable incidents, as they occur, in the course of the history, respecting our Lord's controversy with his countrymen concerning the true nature of his character.

In the mean time

I am,

Very respectfully,

Yours,

N. NISBETT.

TUNSTALL, 4TH DEC. 1809.
LETTER IV.

VARIOUS Instances of the controversy concerning the nature of the Messiah’s character.

REV. SIR,

It being the object of this address to present you with some striking instances of our Lord’s controversy with his countrymen concerning the nature of the Messiah’s character; the first that occurs, in the course of the history, is the message which John the Baptist sent to him—art thou he that should come—whom we are anxiously expecting—or are we to look for another?

This message, you will observe, is an unequivocal proof, among many others, of the general expectation of the Messiah and the answer to it, exhibits another example of our Lord’s cautious and guarded conduct when questioned concerning the true nature of his character.
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Instead of directly replying to the question—you observe that he referred them to the numerous miracles which he had wrought and to the accomplishment of an express prophecy concerning the Messiah—Go and shew John again those things which you hear and see—The blind receive their sight—the lame walk—the lepers are cleansed—the deaf hear—the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.

In the following verse, you will observe a manifest allusion to the prejudices of the Jews concerning the nature of the Messiah's character—Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me. As if he had said—Happy is the man who shall not be offended at my present humble appearance, so incompatible with the general idea which is affixed to the nature of the Messiah's character.

When our Lord had dispatched this message to the Baptist, you immediately perceive with what respect he addressed the multitudes concerning him; declaring that among those who are born of women, there had not arisen one greater than he. But to shew, in the strongest point of view, the superior excellence of the establishment which he was about to set up, he adds—notwithstanding, he that is least, in the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah, is greater than he.

Another occasion of this controversy being introduced was, when our Lord had restored sight and speech to a blind and dumb person; which created, as the historian observes, such astonishment as to lead to an enquiry—whether he was the Son of David—or the Messiah.
whose lineal descendant he was supposed to be. Such a question, from the mouth of the common people, immediately roused the jealousy of the Pharisees, lest they should be induced to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah; regardless of the proof which he had just given them of the extraordinary power with which he was invested. Unable, however, to deny the reality of the miracle, which he had wrought and unwilling to suffer such a persuasion to get possession of their minds; they chose, most malignantly, to attribute the miracle to his connection with Demons. This follow doth not cast out Demons, but by Beelzebub, the Prince of the Demons.

You will, I am sure, agree with me, that if ever language was capable of rousing an honest and virtuous indignation, especially when the nature of the miracle which occasioned it, is considered, it was, in this instance! But what was the answer of our Lord? It was calm and temperate and fraught with a strength of argument which was not to be resisted. Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city, or house divided against itself, cannot stand. Now, if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself—How shall then his kingdom stand? If I therefore, by Beelzebub, cast out Devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore shall they be your Judges. But, if I cast out Demons by the Spirit or power of God—then is the kingdom of God—or of the Messiah come or rather coming unto you.

After this conversation was finished—you will observe that the Pharisees presented a petition to our Lord, say—
ing, Master, we would see a sign from thee, meaning is it is probable, the sign of the Son of Man, mentioned by the Prophet Daniel, coming in the clouds of heaven; which they interpreted of his coming to take vengeance upon their enemies. With this request, our Lord refused to comply, saying—An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign—a sign of their deliverance from the Roman power—but there shall no such sign be given to it, but the sign of the Prophet Jonah; for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the Whales belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the Earth. It was upon this occasion, you will observe, that our Lord took an opportunity, of asserting the dignity of his own character, in a manner which was clearly designed to convey a severe reproof of the Jews for their not attending to him. The Men of Ninivck shall rise up in judgment against this generation and shall condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, but behold a greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South shall rise up in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and behold a greater than Solomon is here.

Permit me, my dear sir, in finishing my remarks upon this chapter, to present you with an incident which for its simplicity and refined taste of moral excellence, is without a parallel! Take it in the words of the Evangelist—While he was yet talking with the people—behold his Mother and his Brethren stood without desiring to speak to him—Then one said to him—Behold thy Mother and thy Brethren stand without desiring to speak to thee. But he answered and said to him that told him—Who is
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my Mother and who are my Brethren? And he stretched forth his hands towards his Disciples and said—Behold my Mother and my Brethren; for, whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven; the same is my Brother and Sister and Mother.

What a lesson was this to his Disciples who had imbibed a spirit of worldly ambition! I am tempted to say that this little incident alone, is almost sufficient to persuade any Man to be a Christian; especially as it is the sum and substance of his religion—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy understanding—This is the first and great Commandment: And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.§

But, to return from this little digression, which upon such an occasion, you will, I am sure, readily excuse. Another instance which strongly recommends itself to your notice, relative to the controversy concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, you will find in Matt. xvi. 13. where our Lord asks his Disciples this question—Whom do Men say that I, the Son of Man am? And they said—some say, that thou art John the Baptist!—some Elias and others Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets. From this account of the public opinion concerning our

§ A similar instance of the exquisite relish which our Lord possessed of this substantial part of religion is recorded in St. Luke, ch. xi. 27. When one said to him—Blessed is the womb that bare thee and the paps which thou hast sucked—he said—yee rather—Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.
Lord; you will observe that, however various their opinions concerning him, were; all were agreed that he was, at least an extraordinary personage. Our Lord then asked them what was their own opinion of the nature of his character—or who they thought him to be? But whom say ye that I am? To which, the Apostle Peter, immediately and without hesitation, replied—Thou art the Christ, or the Messiah, the Son of the living God. This reply of St. Peter, met with an approbation from his divine Master, which is deserving of your particular notice. Blessed art thou Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood, hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. As if he had said—Had you consulted flesh and blood only—your worldly prejudices and secular views, with respect to the nature of my character, as the Messiah; you would never, under the present circumstances of things, have made the acknowledgment which you have now done—but the doctrines which I have taught you and the miracles which I have performed, in the name and by the authority of my Father, have, upon this occasion, plainly influenced your Judgment and extorted from you, a concession which no other consideration could have induced you to have made.

This remarkable acknowledgment of St. Peter, you will perceive, was so contrary to all present appearances and to the general ideas which then prevailed among the Jews, concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, that it was, evidently necessary, the Disciples should not be suffered to make it public; for if such an opinion should be disseminated amongst the great body of the
people, by his Disciples—by those who were known to be upon the most intimate footing with him; it might not only have created popular tumults and insurrections in his favour, which, he at all times, most carefully, avoided—but, it might, and in all human probability, it would have, entirely defeated the great object of his mission. He therefore, upon this occasion, charged his Disciples that they should tell no Man that he was the Christ—or the Messiah.

The Author of Christianity, not founded upon argument, has, you know, in his peculiar and insidious manner, dwelt much, upon this prohibition of our Lord—but this, you will readily perceive, is a reason for the injunction of silence upon his Disciples, which even Infidelity itself must acknowledge, as most satisfactory.

But our Lord did not stop here—He not only thought it absolutely necessary to charge his Disciples to tell no one that he was the Messiah—but, as he had, by his decided acknowledgment, plainly admitted that he did sustain that character; he clearly foresaw the farther necessity of effectually checking any propensity which they might have to break through his injunction and of repressing any worldly views which might now, with redoubled force, begin to operate upon their minds. You therefore, evidently perceive that it was, with the most consummate wisdom, that he chose this opportunity of informing them, in a very particular and circumstantial manner, of the sufferings which he, himself, in the course of his Ministry, should have to undergo; for you will agree with me, nothing could have been better
adapted for that purpose than such a discovery. From that time forth, says the Evangelist, began Jesus to shew unto his Disciples how that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the Elders and Chief Priests and Scribes and be killed and raised again the third day.

You will not fail to observe that our Lord had no sooner uttered this prediction than it created the utmost alarm. And well it might; for sufferings, like these, and from such a quarter were, so totally incompatible with all their ideas of the nature of the Messiah's character, that Peter immediately exclaimed—Be it far from thee Lord—this shall not be unto thee. And, it appears that upon a repetition of this prediction, in the next chapter—they are said to have been filled with extreme grief at the news. St. Mark, with much emphasis says—they knew not what to make of the matter, and St. Luke says the same, with this addition, that it was hid from them, that is—it was so totally contrary to their preconceived opinions concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, that they could not possibly conceive, how such a prediction could be compatible with his being the Messiah.

That prejudice was the real cause of the astonishment of the Disciples, upon the delivery of this prediction, could not have admitted of a doubt, even if our Lord had not particularly pointed it out—but, his reply to Peter's exclamation that no such sufferings should befall him, renders it absolutely decisive. Get thee behind me Satan—Thou art an offence to me; for thou sa-
voarest not the things that be of God—or spiritual things—but those that be of Man—or temporal things.

To counteract this worldly disposition, our Lord immediately proceeds, with that firmness and intrepidity which had already marked his conduct, when he gave them their commission and nearly, in the same terms, to point out the consequences of their conducting themselves, unfaithfully as his Disciples. If any Man will come after me, i.e. if any Man will be my Disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me; for whosoever will save his life by meanly shrinking from his duty, shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it; for what will a Man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul—or what shall a Man give in exchange for his soul?

In the following verse, there is so much appearance of ambiguity that it is not, perhaps, easy to ascertain its precise meaning. It is, however, a good rule, in such a case, to refer to other passages where the same phraseology is made use of, in order, if possible, to throw some light upon it. The verse in question is this. For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his Angels and then he shall reward every Man according to his works.

In Matt. xxiv. 30. you will, my dear sir, observe that it is said—that the Jews should see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And, in the 31st. verse, it is farther said, that he should
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send his Angels, with a great sound of a Trumpet—to
gather his Elect from the four winds, from one end of
heaven to the other. Again: In ch. xxvi. 64. our Lord
says—Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man, sitting on
the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of
heaven. In all these passages, it has been expressly,
and, as will appear hereafter; very properly admitted,
by Bishop Porteus, in his Lectures—there is a relation—
not to the final judgment of the World—but to the destruc-
tion of Jerusalem. All these passages, too, are directly
connected with the controversy concerning the coming of
Christ. The two former are, a direct answer to the
question of the Disciples. What shall be the sign of thy
coming? The latter was drawn from our Lord, in conse-
quence of a solemn adjuration whether he acknowledged
himself to be the Messiah. Now it is deserving of your
notice that the verse under consideration, is precisely, so
connected and is a continuation of that very conversation!
Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man am?

With respect to the latter expression—the Son of Man
rewarding every Man according to his works; it is fre-
quently, if I mistake not, to be met with, in the Old
Testament, to denote temporal rewards and punishments,
and it is remarkable that Mr. Le Clerc, in his note upon
this phrase, expressly applies it to the punishment of the
Jews. But what perhaps will appear to you to be deci-
sive of the meaning of this whole verse is what immedi-
ately follows—Verily I say unto you—there are some
standing here, who shall not taste of death till they see
the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom. This declaration
was made, you will observe, purposely, to support the
Disciples in the expectation of the coming of the Messiah, after the prediction of events, so totally incompatible with all their ideas of the nature of the Messiah's character. And, you will, I think, agree with me, that if it had not been made, they could not have continued to follow him. Besides; he had before given such an assurance to his Disciples, when he foretold the violent opposition they were to meet with, in announcing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and you will readily perceive, that, in the present instance, it was; at least, equally necessary.

You will observe, my dear sir, that I have been, thus particular, in directing your attention to the meaning of these two passages; because it will appear, highly probable that they have, among others, by being misunderstood, contributed to the supposition of Mr. Gibbon; so injurious to Christianity—that Christ foretold his second coming in the generation in which he lived; but which, by this time, you must have perceived, is contrary to the whole tenor of the history.

In the chapter succeeding this—you are presented with the history of the transfiguration; the evident design of which, agreeable to the great object of our Lord's mission, was to direct the attention of the Disciples who were the witnesses of it, to him, as the Messiah. And you will agree with me that it is most opportunely introduced, after the prediction, so distinctly and fully stated, in the preceding chapter, of his sufferings and death; which were so contrary to all their ideas of the nature of the Messiah's character.

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The late Bishop of London, Bishop Porteus, you are aware, has asserted, with great confidence; that it was a symbolical representation of Christ's coming in glory to judge the world and of the rewards which shall then be given to the righteous. But, if you will examine the history of that representation; you will not, I am confident, find the slightest ground for such an assertion—nor yet in St. Peter's account of it, to which the learned Bishop appeals.

If you consult the history itself—you will find it related that his face did shine as the sun—that his raiment was white as the light—that Moses and Elias conversed with him among other things, as St. Luke informs you, of the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem—that a bright cloud over-shadowed them and that a voice came out of the cloud; saying—This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. This appears to be the whole of the scenery and of the design of the transaction! Not a word is said about Christ's coming in glory to judge the World—nor any thing at all like it.

If from the original transaction, you turn to St. Peter's account; you will be still more fully convinced that he had no allusion to any thing of the kind, any more than the Evangelist. We have not, he says, followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of his Majesty; for he received from God the Father, honour and glory when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory. This is my beloved Son in whom
I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven, we heard when we were with him in the holy Mount.

St. Peter, you see, overlooks all the other circumstances attending the transfiguration and confines himself entirely to that which was the great object of it, viz. the receiving from God the Father, honour and glory, in proclaiming him to be the beloved Son of God.

In my next letter, I shall beg leave to direct your attention to our Lord's prediction of the awful destruction of Jerusalem; which was the last event which he had to unfold to them, with a view to shew them, how much they had been mistaken in supposing that he was to be a temporal Prince to conduct them to conquest and to empire. In the mean time I am,

Very respectfully,

Yours,

N. NISBETT.

TUNSTALL, 13TH DEC. 1809.
LETTER V.

UPON THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

REV. SIR,

It was, I believe, in my first letter that I remarked to you that it was the great object of our Lord, in his controversy with his countrymen concerning the nature of the Messiah's character to unfold it, by degrees and to disclose the events which were to happen, in the course of his Ministry, as they were able to bear them. You are now, my dear sir, capable from the survey which has already been made of his conduct, of perceiving the justness of that remark and the benevolence and humanity which distinguished his conduct, in revealing these events.

When our Lord gave his Disciples their Commission to announce the near approach of the Messiah's kingdom — You have seen that he told them they must expect to
meet with much ill treatment and run great hazards in the execution of the duties of their office—that they should be hated by all Men for his name's sake and that he himself should not be exempt from the like sufferings and a similar degree of hatred and that he blended with this unpleasant information, such encouragements as their situation required and particularly upon that capital article the coming of the Messiah. You have observed that it was not till they had been witnesses of the superior excellence of his instructions—till they had seen him perform the most numerous and astonishing miracles, which were ever exhibited to the eyes of mankind—till they had formed a personal acquaintance with him, sufficient to engage their affections—till, in short, they were so fully satisfied of the perfect integrity of his character, as even to extort from them, an explicit acknowledgment that they believed him to be the Messiah—the Son of the living God—it was not, I say, till then, that you observe him giving any explicit and direct information that he was to be the victim of Jewish malice and that, by their hands, he was to die upon a cross, as a notorious Malefactor and Impostor. How highly necessary this prudent and guarded conduct of our Lord, was—you must have perceived, from the extreme astonishment which they, even then, expressed and from their utter inability to comprehend what he could possibly mean by such a prediction. You will therefore conclude with me, that if it had been made sooner, they would have been overwhelmed with despair and have been induced, entirely, to have forsaken him.

But, if this cautious and prudent conduct was so ne-
cessary, upon these occasions—you will easily discern how much more so, it must have been, in the discoveries which he had yet to make to them. Had he, at an early period, unfolded to them the tremendous calamities which were approaching—the desolation of their magnificent Temple—the entire destruction of their capital City and the subsequent captivity of their whole Nation—their minds must have been, too severely, affected by so premature a discovery and you would find it difficult to imagine how, in such circumstances, they could have received the unwelcome intelligence, without immediately deserting him as an Impostor. Our Lord, therefore, well knowing how extremely ungrateful these awful predictions could not but have been, to them, seems to have been induced, in the earlier part of his Ministry, to have communicated them, by distant hints and obscure intimations and chiefly by the aid of parable. And you will perhaps, think it highly probable that he postponed a more full and explicit prediction of these awful calamities, till towards the close of his life, that his Disciples might, by their own observation, be enabled more accurately to ascertain the real character of their countrymen, and particularly of their rulers and that thus they might be the more easily reconciled to events, which were so incompatible with all their most sanguine expectations and deep-rooted prejudices.

You will not think it improbable that it was with a particular view to prepare the minds of his Disciples for these truly awful denunciations that in the xxiii. chapter of St. Matthew, the tyranny—the injustice and the hypocrisy of the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees, are de-
scribed with a strength and boldness of language, which is nowhere else to be met with in the New Testament. But, in the midst of this description, you discern that our Lord displays his great affection for them and his deep concern at the awful fate which awaited them. You will recollect that he had formerly described them, as the salt of the Earth and the light of the World, and had pointed out to them the dangerous consequences, to themselves, as a Nation, of their neglecting to improve their advantages; telling them that if the salt had lost its savour, it would become of no use and fit only to be thrown away and trampled under foot of men. And, here; having seen all his labours thrown away upon them, and that they had treated all his kind attentions to their interests, with neglect and contempt, he breaks out, in the following pathetic language—O Jerusalem, Jerusalem—thou that killest the Prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee—How often would I have gathered thy Children as an Hen gathereth her Chickens under her wings and ye would not. Behold—Your house is left unto you desolate!

In the following chapter, you will observe that our Lord embraced the opportunity which the occasion of his visiting the Temple with his Disciples afforded him, of renewing the awful subject and of describing, more particularly, the calamities which were coming upon them. When the Disciples had expressed their admiration of the extraordinary magnificence of this celebrated building; which for art and beauty was esteemed the wonder of the world; our Lord told them that it would be so completely destroyed that there would not be
one stone left upon another which should not be thrown down.

You will here observe that though this prediction produced no such passionate exclamation, as they had made, when our Lord foretold his own sufferings and death; yet their surprise and astonishment are sufficiently marked by the questions which they did put to him upon the occasion—When shall these things be and if they must be; for that is evidently the Ellipsis to be supplied—What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world—or age?*

The Gospel history being, unquestionably, an history of the controversy concerning the first coming of Christ; it must appear evident to you that if there be any consistence in it—or any connection between its parts; the question of the Disciples—What shall be the sign of thy coming must relate to the first coming of Christ. The awful prediction which they had just heard, necessarily, led them to be most anxious to be satisfied upon this head, and you will, I am sure, most readily agree with me, that the manner in which they have expressed that anxiety is a strong mark of genuine history!

* It has been supposed, by many very respectable Writers, that the Disciples connected the end of the World with this coming—but as appears to me, in direct contradiction to all their known sentiments. What their real meaning was, it is perhaps difficult, precisely, to ascertain—but, it seems that our Lord, alludes to this question in several parts of his answer, particularly when he says—Then shall the end come; meaning, as appears to me, the end of the Jewish dispensation.

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Should there, however, exist a shadow of a doubt that this is the true meaning of this question—that doubt will be instantly removed by attending to our Lord's answer to their questions. Deeply sensible of the effect which so terrible a denunciation upon every thing which, as Jews, they held most dear upon earth, must necessarily have had upon their minds, and thoroughly satisfied how anxious they must have been to have their expectations of the coming of the Messiah, reconciled with such a prediction; he shewed his benevolent attention to the peculiarity of their situation, by making it, his first and principal care, to guard them against withdrawing their confidence from him, as the person who sustained that character. *Take heed lest any Man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying—I am the Christ—or the Messiah and shall deceive many.* Nay, so strongly does he appear to have been impressed with the necessity of this caution and so thoroughly to have entered into their views, upon this subject, that, having told them that the afflictions of those days would be such *as were not from the beginning of the world, nor ever should be again*; that you cannot fail to observe he is unable to proceed, in the dreadful detail, without again renewing, in the most earnest and affectionate manner, his caution to beware of their being drawn away from their steadfast attachment to him, by the arts and artifices of deceivers. *Then, if any Man shall say unto you—Lo here is the Christ or the Messiah—or there—believe him not; for there shall arise false Christs and false Prophets and shall shew great signs and wonders insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very Elect.* And,
that this caution, thus, repeatedly and energetically expressed, might make the deepest impression upon their minds—you observe that he adds the following very remarkable memento—Behold I have told you before—and then again repeats his caution in the following terms—Therefore if they shall say to you—Behold he, the Messiah, is in the desert—go not forth—Behold he is in the secret chambers—believe them not.

But, besides these cautions, repeated again and again, in different parts of the chapter; it can hardly escape your notice that our Lord is not less particular and earnest in giving them the assurance which he well knew they most wanted and was uppermost in their thoughts, namely—his coming in his Kingdom; at the same time, pointing out a particular sign of its approach. This Gospel—this good news of the Kingdom, that is, as I have before observed—if there is any consistency or connection in the history of the Kingdom of the Messiah, shall be preached in all the land, for a witness to all Nations and then shall the end come. When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the Prophet stand in the holy place—whoso readeth let him understand. Let him take the warning which this circumstance shall afford him to make his escape from the impending calamities and satisfy himself that his expectations concerning the coming of the Messiah shall soon be realized. So again; after having described the greatness of the calamities which were coming upon the land of Judea and repeated the cautions against being deceived by false Christs, and false Prophets, already mentioned, he says—
As the lightning cometh out of the East and shineth even unto the West; so conspicuous shall the coming of the Son of Man be; for wheresoever the carcase is—there shall the Eagles—the destroying army whose standard is the Eagle, be gathered together.

You will, my dear sir, at first view, perhaps, be somewhat staggered by the strong language in which the verse immediately following is expressed and be almost tempted to suspect that it can have a relation, only, to the final consummation of all things. Immediately after with the tribulation of those days, shall the Sun be darkened and the Moon shall not give her light and the Stars shall fall from Heaven and the powers of the Heavens shall be shaken. But, if you consult the language of ancient prophecy, in describing temporal calamities—you will find it, extremely similar, and you will, I am sure, agree with me, that it was very natural for our Lord, as a Jew, to adopt such language, in describing the awful event which he was predicting.

As to the following verse; you will if I mistake not, find it to be a direct answer to the question of the Disciples—What shall be the sign of thy coming? Then, says our Lord, shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven and then shall all the tribes of the land mourn and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory and he shall send his Angels—or rather his Messengers, with a great sound of a trumpet and they shall gather his Elect from the four winds, from the one end of Heaven to the other.
This language concerning the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of Heaven, you will observe, is the very language of the Prophet Daniel, when speaking of a Kingdom being given to one like a Son of Man and has, unquestionably, a reference to it. But lest it should be misunderstood, or misapplied to any other event—you will observe our Lord goes on, in the following manner. Now learn a parable, or instruction from the fig tree—or as St. Luke has it—from all the trees—When its branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh—So likewise, ye, when ye shall see all these things—the things which he had just been describing—know that it—or, as it is in the parallel chapter of St. Luke—that the Kingdom of God is near, even at the doors.

It would, my dear sir, be a most gross perversion of the whole tenor of the Gospel history, as well as of the chapter under consideration, to understand this language of any other Kingdom than of that which our Lord had originally declared to be at hand—which he had given his Disciples a special Commission to announce, as near approaching and which, on various occasions, as you have seen, he continued to repeat. In this sense you see an entire harmony and unity of design, completely established, and you cannot but observe, in what strong language, our Lord limits the accomplishment of it and of the prediction he had just been delivering. Verily I say unto you—this Generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled—Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But alas! What language is proof against human sophistry and human folly!
The plain meaning of the Evangelist has been perverted from its purpose, by men of the greatest name and a higher sense introduced, to which our Lord's language will not and, indeed, cannot apply!

But to proceed—in the 36th verse, you will observe that our Lord proceeds to answer the other question of the Disciples with respect to the time when his predictions should be accomplished—*When shall these things be?* Of that day and hour, knoweth no Man—no, not the Angels of Heaven, but my Father only. But this know; for that is evidently the Ellipsis to be supplied, that as the days of Noah were; which were days of great temporal calamity; so shall also the true nature of the coming of the Son of Man be; which is thus more fully illustrated, in the subsequent verses. For as in the days which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the *Ark* and knew not their danger, until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the true nature of the coming of the Son of Man be. Then shall two be in the field, the one shall be taken and the other left. Two shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left. Watch therefore; for ye know not at what hour your Lord cometh!

The importance of this watchfulness and the faithful regard of his Disciples to the trust reposed in them, is finely delineated, in the form of parable, to the close of the chapter, and continued in the same stile, through the greater part of the succeeding chapter; upon which I shall only make one single remark that from the 13th verse to the close of the chapter, there is not, as has generally been supposed, two parables, but one only; the
form former part of it, representing the conduct of the Traveller; between whom and the Son of Man, a resemblance is asserted; and the latter that of the Son of Man, when he shall come in his glory with his holy Angels.

And now, my dear sir, from the view which has thus been presented to you, of the chapter containing our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem; you will be able to perceive with the greatest clearness, that it was his first object to guard his Disciples against withdrawing their confidence from him, as the Messiah and in the next place to support their expectations of his coming in that character, by giving them some marks by which his coming would be known and by fixing a given period beyond which it would not be delayed. In a word, the whole of the chapter contains the most striking marks of the controversy concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, so visible throughout the whole of the preceding history and that the destruction of Jerusalem would be the final proof of it and shew how much it had been mistaken, when they supposed that he was to be a temporal prince to conduct them to conquest and to universal empire.

In the sequel of the history—the trial condemnation and crucifixion of our Lord, for having assumed the character of the Messiah, presents itself for consideration; which will afford ample matter for my next letter. In the mean time, I am,

Rev. Sir,

Very respectfully,

Yours,

N. NISBETT.

TUNSTALL, 7TH DEC. 1809.
LETTER VI.

UPON THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

REV. SIR,

The Crucifixion of Christ, besides its being an event which he had himself, particularly predicted, was, from the very nature of the controversy in which he was engaged, to be expected. He was the determined enemy and the severe reprover of vice, in all its forms—but his greatest crime, in the estimation of the Jewish Rulers, was, that he gave no countenance to their favourite maxim that he was to be a temporal Prince, to lead them to conquest and to universal Empire; but, on the contrary, denounced the most signal vengeance upon them as a Nation.

The first object of the Jewish Rulers was to accuse our Lord before Pilate the Roman Governor, of treason,
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for assuming the character of a King,—but failing of this, he was tried by the Jewish Sanhedrim for assuming that of the Messiah, without possessing those essential marks, which they had affixed to that character.

Their great object being to prove that our Lord had actually claimed the character of the Messiah; they, very properly, endeavoured to collect such evidences of this fact, as they could obtain—but it appears from the history of this trial, that after the most diligent enquiry, they were unable to produce any evidence sufficient to convict him; which you will observe, not only corroborates the truth of the preceding history, but the extreme wisdom and propriety of the language which our Lord, in the course of his Ministry, had adopted. In fact, so incapable were his judges of producing any such proof that it appears they were constrained to apply to our Lord himself that, if possible, they might extort from him, a confession that he was the Messiah; though in direct violation of a fundamental maxim in judicial proceedings, that a man should not be obliged to convict himself. When, however, the witnesses who appeared against him, had delivered their evidence, such as it was, the High Priest, you observe, addressed our Lord and asked him what he had to say in his defence. Answerest thou nothing.—what is it which these witness against thee? But he, according to the expressive language of the Evangelist, held his peace and could not be induced to make any reply, but by a most solemn adjuration from the high Priest. I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. The answer to this adjuration is deserving of your parti-
cular notice, as it resembles, most exactly, that which our Lord had before made use of, when predicting the destruction of Jerusalem and plainly alluded to the manner of his coming, as the Messiah. *Thou hast said*—or as it is in St. Mark—I am, i.e. I am the Messiah—the Son of God—and as a proof that the claim which I have now made to it, is justly founded.—*Henceforth*—or as the original word properly signifies—from this time, *shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power or of the power of God*, according to St. Luke and coming in the clouds of Heaven.

This language, I have just observed to you, is similar to that in the xxivth. of Matthew when the destruction of Jerusalem is described—but should it still be supposed, after what I have already said upon that passage, that there is any obscurity in it; you must, I think, allow there can be none here; for if there is any connection between the question of the Jewish High Priest and the reply which our Lord made to it—if a person’s meaning can be collected from the situation and circumstances of things, at the time when he spoke these words; his meaning could be no other than this, that though he was now in the hands of his enemies, degraded, contemned and reviled, as a notorious Malesfactor and Impostor for assuming the character of the Messiah; yet that the claim which he had now made to it, was justly founded and as a proof that it was so and that they had totally mistaken its true nature, *they should see the Son of Man coming*—not in the splendid manner in which they expected him to come, to raise them to great worldly grandeur and prosperity—but, *in the clouds of*
heaven, and that the vengeance which they had falsely imagined was to be executed upon their enemies, would be inflicted upon their own nation.

The effect which this declaration of our Lord had upon the minds of the Jewish rulers, you will observe, is an unequivocal proof, in what sense they understood it; for, as was naturally to be expected from men of their turn of mind, upon such an occasion; their resentment was instantaneous and their rage against him was immediately raised to the highest pitch of fury. Then, says the Evangelist, the High Priest rent his clothes saying—He hath spoken blasphemy—what farther need have we of witnesses of his being an Impostor? Behold now ye have heard his blasphemy—What think ye? They answered—He is guilty of a crime—which by the Jewish law is deserving of Death. Then did they spit in his face and buffeted him and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying Prophecy unto us, thou Christ—thou that pretendest to be the Messiah—Who is he that smote thee? What greater proofs of rage and indignation could they possibly have discovered—or how, in a stronger and more forcible manner, have expressed the extreme grief which the very idea of the disappointment of their worldly and ambitious views, produced upon their minds. He hath spoken blasphemy. It is not fit that he should live. Away with him—Crucify him—Crucify him, was the universal cry. Not this Man, but Barab'bas. No crime, in their estimation, could equal that which deprived them of hopes and prospects, so dear to their hearts and so flattering to their pride and which presented
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to their view, nothing but scenes of horror and desola-
tion, of misery and ruin.

The awful scene which followed—you are, my dear
sir, too well acquainted with, to render it necessary to
present it to you, in detail—Suffice it to say that when the
Jewish Rulers had accomplished their nefarious purpose,
by putting him to a most cruel and ignominious death,
they thought they had obtained a complete triumph over
him and proved him to be a notorious Impostor. And,
you will observe that even his own disciples—the con-
stant companions of his Ministry—the very Men who had
received from him, a Commission to announce the near
approach of the Messiah's Kingdom, shewed, as was na-
turally to be expected, no small anxiety at a fate so dis-
astrous and, as they seem to have imagined, so fatal to
their hopes. We trusted, said they, that it had been he
who should have redeemed Israel—who should have res-
cued us from our present degraded and dependent situa-
tion, under the yoke of the Romans, and have raised us,
as a nation, to the highest pitch of worldly grandeur.

In the midst of such distressing apprehensions and
such gloomy prospects—you perceive one only hope re-
mained to support them and that, as they seemed to have
imagined, almost a forlorn hope. After having related
the melancholy catastrophe to one whom they supposed
to be a stranger—they declared, in the words just cited,
their confidence that he was the person whom they had
expected, would have redeemed Israel—they said—Be-
sides all this—this is the third day—the day in which he
had said, he should rise again. No language could have
more strongly expressed the extreme anxiety and the painful solicitude of the Disciples with respect to the issue of an attachment which a few hours more were to produce—which were to decide the very interesting and important question, whether, in the person of Jesus, they had been following the true Messiah—or an Impostor.

Never, my dear sir, you will, I am sure, agree with me, was the display of infinite goodness and almighty power, so necessary as upon this occasion. He who had, by his original declaration that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, turned the eyes of all men to him, as the Messiah—who was invested with a power over all nature—who had been proclaimed by a voice from heaven, as the beloved Son of God, was now, apparently, the subdued victim of Jewish malice—deserted by heaven and found guilty, by the unanimous voice of his Judges, consisting of seventy two persons, of assuming a character to which he had no claim, i. e. of being a notorious Impostor. Had he, in such circumstances, remained under the power of death, there can be no question but that he and his pretensions to the character of the Messiah would have perished together—more especially as he had, with the utmost confidence in the perfect integrity of his own character and of his being the accredited Messenger of the most high, explicitly declared, not only that he should, by wicked hands be crucified and slain—but that he should, within the short period of three days be raised again from the dead. His enemies, you well know, were fully apprised of this prediction and took all possible precaution to prevent a fraud; for they went to Pilate and said to him—Sir, we remember that that Deceiver said
while he was yet alive. After three days, I will rise again. Pilate said to them—Ye have a Watch—or a Guard—Go your way and make it as sure as you can. So they went and made the Sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a Guard.

But, notwithstanding these precautions, so properly adapted to prevent a fraud and to give credibility to a real resurrection—the Sepulchre was commanded to yield up its prey—the guards, terrified by the appearance of an Angel, became as dead men and the dead body of Jesus, was reanimated and, by his Resurrection from the Dead, he was declared to be the Son of God with power. The offence of the cross was thus taken away; for though he was crucified, it was by wicked hands—and he could now, no longer appear in the odious light of an Impostor! To all who believe the reality of his Resurrection, that event must be a full and unequivocal proof that he was the Messiah, and consequently the worthy object of the faith and confidence of the Christian!

The subsequent conduct of the Apostles, you will agree with me, is not to be accounted for, but upon the supposition that they were thoroughly persuaded of the reality of the Resurrection of their Lord. They had had the fullest means of seeing and observing, during the whole of his Ministry, the effects of his preaching and instruction, when aided by a power which had the command of all nature. They had been witnesses to the powerful opposition which he everywhere met with and of the tragical issue of all his labours. In such circumstances—what possible motive, upon the common princi-
pleas of human nature, could they have had to carry on what they must have known to be a fraud, if there was no resurrection? Besides; What an hardiness of front, if the expression may be admitted, must the Disciples have been endued with, to have proclaimed, within a few days of his death and in the very City in which he had been crucified, that he was risen from the dead and that, not before a few, who might be supposed to have been in their interest—but before the Jewish Rulers who had been the principal authors and instigators of his Murder, if they knew that he was not risen! The Jewish Rulers, it is true, took offence at the boldness and intrepidity of the Apostles and they endeavoured to put a stop to their progress in preaching Jesus and the Resurrection; well knowing the effect it must necessarily have had in blasting their own characters—but, it is remarkable, they took no steps to invalidate their testimony—they adopted no measures to crush the rising religion, but what involved them, still, deeper in guilt and more fully evinced their consciousness that what the Apostles had asserted was not to be contradicted! The conduct of the Apostles, on the contrary, seems to have been the natural result of genuine integrity and a thorough conviction of the truth of what they had asserted; for, when the Jewish Rulers had commanded them not to speak at all—not to preach in the name of Jesus; it seems absolutely impossible not to admire the noble and intrepid firmness of their reply to this injunction. Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you, more than to God—judge ye—for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.
But, for argument's sake—let it be supposed that there really was no resurrection and that the Disciples of Jesus entertained hopes of success, in the execution of their plan of continuing to impose upon their countrymen. Upon what foundation, it is natural to enquire, could these hopes have been built? You know well that they have ingenuously recorded the fact that their original belief that the Messiah was to be a temporal Prince remained unshaken to the very last—not does there appear to have been a single exception to this, in the whole number of the Disciples of Jesus, whether Apostles, or others. As therefore, it was impossible for them not to have been thoroughly sensible of the strength of their own prejudices, upon this head—they must, consequently, have been fully aware of the mighty difficulties which they would have to encounter in correcting the like prejudices in their countrymen. If Jesus had not been able to remove these prejudices, in their own case—how could they expect to have been more successful? Nay; it must be obvious to you, that upon the supposition that there was no resurrection—the difficulties of their situation must have been wonderfully multiplied, even beyond those of our Lord. From the extensive view which has been taken of this subject it appears that the attachment of the Disciples was preserved by repeated assurances of the coming of the Messiah and by fixing a period beyond which, the commencement of his kingdom would not be deferred. Here was room for hope to build on and they, manifestly, and beyond all doubt, were supported by that hope. But how different was the situation of the Apostles upon the commencement of their undertaking? They had no such assurances to make, to keep hope alive—no prospects to
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hold out to them of *a Messiah to come.* On the contrary, the person whom they had to point out to them as *a Prince and a Saviour*, had been crucified, as a notorious Malefactor and Impostor for assuming the character of the *Messiah* and the only possible ground of hope of succeeding in the execution of their plan, was the evidence which they had to produce that *that same Jesus whom their Rulers had crucified was raised from the Dead* and that, consequently, by that solemn attestation from heaven, *the offence of the Cross was removed* and that thus he was declared to be *the Son of God with power.* Nothing less, it may be confidently affirmed than a firm conviction, in their own minds, that they had sufficient proofs of the reality of the resurrection of their Lord and of the utter inability of their adversaries to deny their validity, could possibly have afforded them the smallest hopes of success. And, even, with this advantage, it must have required an uncommon degree of fortitude and a thorough good will to the cause, to have engaged in the arduous undertaking, after the proofs which they had had, in their own persons, of the inveterate prejudices which they would have to encounter, independently of the character of the Jews; which at this period, must have appeared to them in all its deformity. It must, however, be observed that even the Apostles themselves were not yet qualified for their important office—but were particularly commanded to *tarry at Jerusalem till they received power from on high,* i.e. till they were more fully enlightened with respect to *the true nature of the Messiah's Kingdom* —when a mouth and wisdom would be given to them, *which all their adversaries would not be able to gainsay or resist* and when they *should be led into all truth*—or into
all the truth, so far as concerned the true nature of the Messiah's character and kingdom.

How far the Apostles were actually led into a knowledge of these important truths, you will see in the following letters upon the Epistles, in which I intend, περί πάντων, to take a large and comprehensive survey of the most difficult passages, where this subject is treated of. The task, I am well aware, is an arduous one, but I trust, not beyond the reach of cool and dispassionate inquiry; to which I have only to request as cool and dispassionate an attention. If Christianity be true, the Apostles, in their Epistles, must be of the same mind with their great master. They must imbibe his spirit, adopt his sentiments, and understand his predictions, particularly that grand prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, upon which he laid so much stress, as to stake the whole credit of his religion upon the accomplishment of it. In short, to be worthy of credit, the Epistles and Gospels must harmonize with each other and constitute one great whole. To shew that this is actually the case, you can want no other motive, than the importance of the subject, to induce you to favour me with that attention, which you have hitherto so kindly afforded me.

I am, Rev. Sir,

Very respectfully,

Your's,

N. NISBETT.

TUNSTALL, JAN. 12TH. 1810.

K
LETTERS
ON
THE EPISTLES.

LETTER VII.

Of the meaning of the phrases, the coming of the Lord—
the coming of Christ—the coming of the day of God, &c.

REV. SIR,

The connection of the Epistles with the Gospels is so evident and indisputable, and is of such importance to be attended to, in unravelling the genuine meaning of the former, that you will not, I trust, be displeased with a renewal of our correspondence upon a subject so interesting. In the view which I have presented to you, of the Gospel history, you perceive that it has been a principal object to obviate the objection of Mr. Gibbon,
that Christ foretold his second coming, in the generation in which he lived, to judge all mankind. But as he has likewise asserted, that the near approach of that wonderful event had been predicted by his Apostles, and that this tradition of it was preserved by their earliest disciples, you will perceive the necessity of examining with critical accuracy and attention, whether there is any foundation for this assertion, in the Epistles, which have been handed down to us, under their name.

You will very readily agree with me, that it is a material point gained, if it has been satisfactorily proved, that Christ himself taught no such doctrine—but while the other part of the objection remains in its full force, the credit of Christianity will still be materially and indeed essentially affected. Though it be in the fullest manner demonstrated, that Christ himself taught no such doctrine, yet, if his Apostles did, the blame will, upon every principle of sound reasoning, ultimately fall upon him. Nothing, you will perceive, can be more evident, than that the persons to whom our Lord gave a commission to communicate a knowledge of his religion to mankind, should themselves be properly qualified for the right discharge of the duties of their office, and particularly, that they should be made acquainted with the most essential and fundamental part of their commission, namely, the true nature of the Messiah's kingdom and the duration of it too; so far at least, as to guard them against falling into such errors upon the subject, as might, at any future period, materially affect the credit of his religion. It has indeed been said, by one of the most respectable
advocates for christianity, which this, or perhaps any age
has produced, that, though it should be true, that the
Apostles expected Christ would come in their time, it
will not follow, that this their error ought, in any wise,
to diminish their authority, as preachers of the Gospel—
that it can be no impeachment, either of their integrity
as men, their ability as historians, or honesty as preachers
of the Gospel, that they were unacquainted with what
had never been revealed to them—that they followed
their own understandings, where they had no better light
to guide them—speaking from conjecture, when they
could not speak from certainty;—of themselves when-
they had no commandment of the Lord;—that they
knew but in part and prophesied but in part, and that,
concerning this particular point, Jesus himself had told
them; just as he was about to leave them, that it was not
for them to know the times and the seasons, which the
Father had put in his own power, and that it is not to be
wondered at, that the Apostles were left in a state of
uncertainty concerning the time in which Christ should
appear; since beings, far more exalted and more highly
favoured of Heaven than they, were under an equal
degree of ignorance: Of that day, says our Saviour, and
of that hour, knoweth no man; no not the Angels which
are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only.

'\nIt was this language of the worthy prelate, which
probably led to the assertion of Dr. Edwards, that he did
not appear to be extremely solicitous to relieve the
Apostles from the accusation of error. And, most certain
it is, that no language could ever have been moro
properly applied, than to the Apostles; for, if they were unacquainted with what had never been relating to them, they might, at least, have been silent upon the subject. If they spoke from conjecture, when they could not speak from certainty—of themselves, when they had no commandment—should they not, upon so important an occasion, have apprized their readers of these circumstances? But so far, you will observe, were the Apostles from giving the slightest intimations of this nature, that they asserted, in the strongest terms, and without the least appearance of doubt or hesitation, that the Lord was at hand—that the coming of the Lord was drawing nigh, and that they even saw the day approaching. In short, you can hardly imagine any language more peremptory and decisive upon the subject, than that which the Apostles made use of. The authority of the Apostles, therefore, must appear to you, and to every impartial person, to be as materially concerned in this matter, as preachers of the Gospel, as that of our Lord himself.

But that the Apostles could not have supposed, that the end of the world was near at hand, must appear extremely probable, independent of a critical examination of their language. If they be considered merely as Jews, is it likely, or at all probable, that they should have been ignorant of the language of the antient prophets, with respect to the extensive and remote purposes of the Messiah's reign, and of their predictions of its happy effects upon the human race? With what eyes, my dear sir, must they have read the following beautiful description of those happy times, by the Prophet Isaiah,
Letters on the Epistles.

ch. xiv. v. 4: if they could have supposed that the day of judgment was to take place in their own time! They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not rise against nation—neither shall they learn war any more! Or how understand the picturesque language of the wonderful effects which this new order of things was, sooner or later, to produce, in the most savage and ungovernable natures, ch. xlv. v. 6. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid—and the calf, and the young lion, and the fattling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed together—their young ones shall also lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the dragon: they shall not hurt, nor destroy, in all my holy mountain. All this figurative language, you observe, the Prophet thus distinctly explains: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. With this also agrees the language of the Prophet Daniel, which, as the foundation of their expectations of the coming of the Messiah, no Jew can well be supposed to have been ignorant of, when he termed the Messiah's kingdom, an everlasting kingdom and as that which should never be destroyed, which could not have been understood otherwise, than as of long duration—and, need I add, that the adoption of this language, both by John the Baptist and by our Lord, in announcing the near approach of this kingdom, very naturally brought this idea of its duration to their recollection: nor was the description of our Lord himself, of the mighty progress which his
religion was to make in the world, in his parables of the
grain of mustard seed and of the leaves which was mixed
with three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened;
less calculated to confirm these expectations.

You will perhaps say that the Apostles might under-
stand this language, exclusively of the abundant temporal
prosperity of their nation and of their so completely
overcoming all opposition to that universal sway, which
they expected under the reign of their Messiah, that the
most perfect and absolute submission would ensue. And
it is far from improbable, that prior to the descent of the
holy spirit, this was actually the light in which they viewed
these prophecies: But, in whatever light they viewed
them, there is no ground whatever for supposing, that
after this event, they could have believed, that the day of
judgment was at hand. On the contrary, you perceive
that St. Peter, though with evident marks of reluctance,
was compelled to acknowledge, that God had granted to
the Gentiles, repentance unto life. And when, afterwards,
Paul and Barnabas rehearsed all that God had done, by
their means, and how he had opened the door of faith to
the Gentiles; they caused great joy to all the brethren.

Now, my dear sir, you will, from these premises,
readily admit, that it was extremely natural for such a
man as St. Paul, to have furnished himself with every
degree of information, which antient prophecy might
afford him, which, most certainly, was very considerable,
upon the subject of the call of the Gentiles; and more
especially, as he was, by way of eminence, the Apostle of
the Gentiles. And this upon examination of St. Paul's
writings, will be found to be the fact. Many passages might be produced, fully evincing how much he actually did turn his attention to this subject, and how deeply he was impressed with this important truth.* Among others, the following are particularly deserving of your attention—I will call them my people, which were not my people, and her beloved, which was not beloved. In the same Epistle, he dwells largely upon the call of the Gentiles, blending with it the rejection of the Jews, which, as a Jew, he, very naturally, terms a mystery, which he scarcely knew how to comprehend—or how to fathom the reasons of the divine conduct towards them. O the depths, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God—how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out—But, though he appears to have been thus deeply affected, at the thought of the rejection of the Jews, yet you observe, that he looks forward, and comforts himself with the animating expectation, that, though blindness in part had happened unto Israel, it would continue only, until the fulness of the Gentiles, and that

* This argument will be greatly strengthened, by the consideration, that St. Paul was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and from his having been selected to oppose the progress of Christianity, he must have been deemed well qualified for the undertaking, and of course, well acquainted with the history of the Old Testament, and with the prophecies concerning the Messiah, upon which our Lord's claims were founded. In this opposition, he was sincere; for he himself says, he verily thought he ought to oppose the pretensions of Jesus to the character of the Messiah, which seem plainly to imply, that he had turned his attention to the nature of his claims, but, with the rest of his countrymen, had conceived him to be a temporal prince.
then all Israel should be saved. With these enlarged views upon the subject, you will see how improbable it is, that St. Paul should have predicted the speedy approach of the day of judgment. Most certainly, he, of all the Apostles, was the most unlikely to have entertained such an idea! Yet he is the man, upon whom this imputation has been chiefly fixed! The late Rev. Newcome Capps has roundly asserted, that St. Paul had no conception even of the existence of the church on earth, after the abolition of the Mosaic Economy. (See his Crit. Remarks, v. 1. p. 187.)

But this is not all—for the Apostle has predicted some other very remarkable events, which were totally incompatible with his belief, that the end of the world would happen in his own time. I will produce you, Sir, a prophecy, says the bishop of Landaff, in his letters to Mr. Gibbons, (p. 58,) which the more closely you press it, the more reason you will have to believe, that the speedy coming of Christ, (i.e. to judge the world) could never have been predicted by the Apostles. Take it as translated by bishop Newton. But the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall apostatize from the faith, giving heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning Demons; through the hypocrisy of liars, having their conscience seared with a red hot iron— forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats. Here you have an express prophecy—the spirit hath spoken it—that in the latter times—not immediately—but at some distant period—some should apostatize, from the faith—some, who had been christians, should, in
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truth, be so no longer—but should give heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning Demons:—press this expression closely, and you may, perhaps, discover in it, the erroneous tenets and the Demon or Saint-worship of the church of Rome—through the hypocrisy of liars—you recognize, no doubt, the priesthood and the martyrophagists—having their conscience seared with a red hot iron—callous indeed must his conscience be, who traffics in indulgences—forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats. This language needs no pressing; it discovers, at once, the unhappy votaries of monastic life, and the mortal sin of eating flesh on fast days.

To this may be added, what the same learned prelate has very justly observed, that St. Peter speaks of putting off his tabernacle, as the Lord had shewn him. and of his endeavour, that the christians, after his decease, might be able to have these things in remembrance. And, as to St. Paul, upon a partial view of whose writings, the doctrine of the speedy coming of Christ to judge the world is principally founded, it is manifest, that he was conscious he should not live to see it, notwithstanding the expression—i.e. who are alive; for he foretels his own death, in express terms. The time of my departure is at hand: and he speaks of his reward, not as immediately to be conferred upon him, but as laid up and reserved for him till some future day. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course—henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day. (p. 54 of his letters to Gibbon.)
Equally deserving of your attention is; what another writer has observed upon this subject.—"Whoever," says Mr. Thomas, in his strictures upon Dr. Edwards's sermons, p. 41. "will be at the pains to examine their own simple history of themselves, will find, that by founding churches on constitutions adapted to endure for ages, and by the judicious appointment of successors, provided for the gradual propagation of a religion, which comprehended very remote ages, they discovered no apprehension of universal judgment to take place, nor any expectation of the last grand catastrophe of expiring nature." So far indeed from St. Paul's expecting the end of the world in his own time, that he plainly intimated, that it was to endure for ages. God, saith he, hath raised us up together, that, in the ages to come, he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace. Ephes. ch. II. v. 6, 7.

Thus various and accumulated are the evidences drawn from the sacred volume, that the Apostles taught no such doctrine, as has been imputed to them, respecting the speedy dissolution of the world. But what, you will say, signifies all this accumulation of evidence, when it is contradicted by evidence, which is, at least, equally strong; and by the Apostles asserting, in the clearest and most distinct terms, that the coming of the Lord was drawing nigh—that the Lord was at hand—that they saw the day approaching, and that the end of all things was at hand, with other expressions of a similar nature?

If this language of the Apostles, was actually meant by them, to be applied to the final judgment of the world,
and is clearly incapable, as some have supposed, of any other meaning, you will think with me, that there will be an end to the controversy, and that it must be confessed without reserve, that they were either mistaken, or that they were guilty of the most manifest falsehood. In either case you will perceive, that it must necessarily make against the credit of the Apostles, and that Mr. Gibbon was certainly justified in his conclusion, that the records of seventeen centuries have instructed us not to press too closely the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation, and the adversaries of christianity will, upon every principle of sound reasoning, be entitled to the inference, which they have drawn from it—that it is an Imposture! But, as was said before, in the case of the like charge against the language adopted by our Lord, before a conclusion, so fatal to the interests of christianity, is permitted to be drawn, it ought certainly to be shewn, with a strong degree of evidence, that these passages were clearly intended by the Apostles, to be applied to the day of judgment, and that they are absolutely incapable, upon the principles of sound criticism and legitimate reasoning, of any other application; otherwise christianity may still be true, and the Apostles be fully vindicated from the charge, which has been laid against them. The question then is, and surely it is a very important one, whether, when the Apostles asserted, that the Lord was at hand, this and other expressions which have been mentioned, may not, with the strictest propriety, be applied to the destruction of Jerusalem, which, it is on all hands allowed, was to happen within a short distance from the time, when the Epistles, in which these expressions occur, were written.
To ascertain this matter with all the precision, of which the subject appears to be capable, and to give you all the satisfaction, which can reasonably be required, I must particularly request your attention to the language, which was in common use in the sacred writings of the Jewish nation, when the near approach of any remarkable temporal calamities was described. The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the destruction of Babylon, says, (ch. xiii. 6, 9.)—Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand: it shall come, as a destruction from the Almighty—Behold the day of the Lord cometh, to lay the land desolate. Joel i. 15. Alas for the day—for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty it shall come. Zeph. i. 7. Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand. Ezek. xxx. 2, 3. Son of man prophesy and say—thus saith the Lord God—howl ye—woe worth the day—for the day is near, even the day of the Lord is near—a cloudy day—it shall be the time of the heathen. And most remarkable, to the same purpose, is the expression of the prophet Amos, (ch. v. 18.) more particularly, when it is compared with our Lord’s description of the approach of the destruction of Jerusalem, in Luke xvii. 22. Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord—to what end is it for you to desire it? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light.

From these examples, you have that sort of evidence, which cannot be mistaken, that, in the description of any remarkable temporal calamities, it was the customary language of prophecy, as it was in fact of genuine piety
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and good sense, to represent that, as the Lord's doing, which was effected by human agency, and to point out their near approach by the very same phrases, which you find made use of in the Epistles.

Now, if you consider, that the destruction of Jerusalem was an event, which our Lord had particularly predicted, as the final proof of the true nature of his character, as the Messiah, in opposition to the general opinion which had been entertained of him, as a temporal prince, to conduct them to conquest and to universal empire; you will naturally conclude, that they would frequently have alluded to that event, in their epistolary correspondence with their Christian brethren. Indeed if they had not, their Epistles would have wanted one material—not to say essential, evidence of their genuine authenticity. When therefore they had occasion to speak of this event, nothing could have been more natural for them, both as Jews and as pious and good men, to adopt the language of the prophets, and it is particularly deserving of your attention, that it was a language, which they must have found particularly convenient, as it was too general to be laid hold of to their detriment—and this alone, in times like those in which the Apostles lived, was a matter of no trifling consequence.

Our own times have furnished a very striking instance of the propriety of the conduct of the Apostles. The noted Mr. Brothers, whether from political views or from a mental derangement is immaterial, predicted great calamities, as about to happen to this country. When
his predictions became the subject of much attention, they very properly attracted the notice of government, as no government can, with safety, be inattentive to such matters. It seems therefore impossible, not to admit that, in the use of such a language, the Apostles strictly conformed to the precepts of their divine master, to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

It was for the like purpose, that the Apostles adopted the phrase, the coming of Christ—not only as the prophet Daniel had particularly foretold, that his coming would be in clouds, or in the clouds of Heaven, which cannot, with any propriety, be understood otherwise, than of great temporal calamities—but as our Lord himself had particularly authorized the use of that phrase, to denote the destruction of Jerusalem. As the days of Noah were, so shall the coming of the son of man be. As it was in the days of Lot—even thus shall it be, in the day when the son of man is revealed. Hence it became a very significant, and at the same time, a much more convenient and less offensive form of expression, upon so very delicate and disagreeable a subject, than any other, which, in such circumstances, could have been adopted.

That the phrase, the coming of Christ, was sometimes used in this sense, by the Apostles in their Epistles, you are probably aware, has been acknowledged by commentators and divines of all descriptions, however much they may have differed from each other, with respect to the passages to be so applied. Bishop Halifax admits, without hesitation, that "the coming and the day of Christ,"
are sometimes used to denote nothing more than the final demolition of the Jewish polity" (See his sermons on the prophecies, p. 136.) Dr. Benson says expressly, that the coming of Christ does sometimes signify his coming to the destruction of Jerusalem, adding, that the Apostles very justly declared the coming of the Lord, to be then just at hand. But Dr. Macknight is very particular upon this head. "In the prophetic writings of the Jews," he observes, "great exertions of the divine power, whether for the salvation or destruction of nations, are called—the coming—the appearing and the presence of God." Hence it was natural, for the Apostles, who were Jews, to call any signal and evident interposition of Christ, as governor of the world, for the accomplishment of his purposes, his coming and his day. Accordingly those exertions of his power and providence, whereby he destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, abrogated the Mosaic institutions, and established the Gospel, are called by his Apostles, his coming and day, not only in allusion to the antient prophetic language, but because Christ himself, in his prophecy of the events recorded, Matt. xxiv. hath termed them the coming of the son of man.

And he further observes, that every passage of their Epistles, in which the Apostles have spoken of these things as at hand, may, with the greatest propriety, be interpreted of Christ's coming to establish his everlasting kingdom over all people, nations, and languages, by destroying Jerusalem, putting an end to the law of Moses, and spreading the Gospel through the world. (See his two Epistles to the Thessalonians, pp. 67, 8.—Quarto.)
The fact being thus fully admitted, that the phrases the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord, together with the coming of Christ, are sometimes made use of by the Apostles, to signify the destruction of Jerusalem; it will, you perceive, be absolutely necessary, to enter into a critical examination of the most material passages, where they occur, as the most learned commentators and divines have very much differed from each other, and have been extremely inattentive to those sources of information, which can alone lead to an accurate decision of their genuine meaning. But having already trespassed so much upon your attention, I must defer it to my next letter. In the mean time,

I am, Dear Sir,

Your's

Most truly,

N. NISBETT

TUNSTALL, Nov 25th. 1811.
LETTER VIII.

REV. SIR,

It has been very justly observed, by the learned Bishop Newton, that there are difficulties in the Epistles of the New Testament, which are common to all epistolary writings. Letters, he observes, can seldom be understood, but by those who write them, or by those to whom they are written. And the reason hereof is evident, because other people, perhaps, know little of the parties concerned—their dispositions, their circumstances, and what has been transacted between them. In letters many things are only hinted at, which to present and enscribe at large, would be tedious or perhaps offensive. Many things are said in answer to letters sent, and estimations proposed; which things may be open and easy to the persons to whom the letters are addressed, will without explanation to strangers. These difficulties, Bishop very properly adds, are to be found—not only in the Epistles of the New Testament, but are common to them, with all other epistolary writings. And, Mr. he has very justly observed, that, if we had those to addressed to the Apostles, and questions proposed them, they would much better clear those passages relate to them, than all the learned notes of critics
and commentators, who, in after times, fill us with their conjectures, for very often, as to the matter in hand, they are nothing else. (See Bishop Newton's Dissertation upon the difficulties of Scripture, v. 6 p. 214. and Mr. Locke's Preface to his Commentary upon the Epistles.)

However much these deficiencies are, in some instances, to be lamented, I have, I trust, in my last letter, referred you to such genuine sources of information, as to enable you to form a tolerably accurate judgment of the meaning of those passages, when considered in their connection, where the phrases, the coming of the Lord—the day of the Lord, and the coming of Christ, are made use of. Whatever might have been doubtful, or obscure in the Epistles, with respect to these passages, when taken by themselves, will, if I do not greatly mistake, be rendered perfectly clear and intelligible, by a careful attention to the language of the old Testament, and more particularly of the Gospel history.

With these then as our guide, let us, my dear sir, take a view of the fourth and fifth chapters of the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, in the latter of which, you discern some very strong language of this nature. Now, it is deserving of your particular notice, that the Apostle has stated three distinct cases, which have all the appearance, from the abrupt and unconnected manner in which they are introduced, of being answers to as many distinct questions: These, you will observe, are first ὑπὲρ ἡς ἐρωμένης ἐρωμένης; the matter concerning brotherly love, in the ninth verse of the fourth chapter—secondly the ὑπὲρ ἡς
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The matter concerning those who were fallen asleep, in the thirteenth verse of the same chapter, and the verb ὑπό τῶν γειων καὶ τῶν ἡμερῶν, the matter concerning the times and the seasons, in the first verse of the fifth chapter.

If you examine the matter concerning brotherly love, you immediately discern, that the subject is so completely different from that which immediately follows it, that it cannot admit of a shadow of a doubt, that it is entirely finished.

The matter concerning those who had departed this life in the faith of Christ, immediately follows, and you will hardly think, that it admits of a question, that it relates to the resurrection of the just at the last day. It has, however, you know, been inferred, from the expression of the apostle, in this animated description—συνάντησόν με όπως οἱ ζωντες καὶ των νεκρῶν—that he expected to live to see the final judgment of the world. But not to insist upon this Apostle's assertion, already noticed, that the time of his departure was at hand; you must be well aware, as Dr. Benson has very justly observed, that it was usual among the Jews to speak in the same manner of the persons of their nation, though they lived in very distant ages. Among other examples of the use of this kind of language, he gives the following, which I persuade myself will be sufficiently satisfactory to you. "When the Israelites should be settled in the land of Canaan, in future generations, Moses taught them to say—the Egyptians evil intreated us, and laid upon us hard bondage, and when
we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers; the Lord heard our voice and brought us forth out of Egypt." And how common, says bishop Horn, is it for us, when speaking of a society—an army—a nation to which we belong, to say,—we went, or came, or did such a thing, or shall do so and so, though we ourselves neither had, nor shall have any personal concern in the matter; though the event happened before we were born, or is to happen after our decease. (See Bishop Horn's letters on Inidelity.)

It is also deserving of your particular attention, that, the same Apostle, when describing the same awful event, in I. Cor. ch. xv. v. 51. which I suppose to be alluded to in I. Thess. ch. iv. 13, &c. makes use of a similar language—Behold we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. In this chapter, you perceive, that, though the Apostle enlarges with greater particularity and fulness upon the subject, than in any other part of the sacred writings; yet he is so far from giving any hint of its near approach; that he expressly tells the Corinthians, that Christ must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. It may, therefore, I think, very fairly be concluded, that St. Paul, in neither of the two cases, when he used the prophesi- wv, meant that they who were then living should see the day of judgment in their own time, but only intended to describe the persons, whoever they might be, who should happen to be alive, whenever that awful event should take place.
from the manner in which this matter, concerning those who were asleep in Christ, is concluded in the
ster under consideration, you would naturally suppose,
ject, as well as the former, was entirely missed, when he says in the eighteenth verse—Where-
comfort one another with these words—or with
considerations. But it has so happened that, be-
the following chapter is introduced by the phrase
times and the seasons, the Apostle has been supposed
ceed to answer an inquiry of the Thessalonians,
gen judgment, mentioned at the close of the
chapter, would take place. But it will
 upon consideration, appear to you far more
al and more agreeable to the subsequent context,
suppose that his Thessalonian brethren, by this phrase,
stead the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and
sequent establishment of the Messiah’s kingdom.
this was the sense in which this phrase was used
Lord, in answer to the question of the disciples—
who would restore the kingdom to Israel, is, I think,
ally evident, from the sense in which it appears to
been understood by commentators and divines,
hey had no other object in view, than to ascertain
signification. This will be the more neces-
some of them, in commenting upon I. Thess.
have given a very different interpretation of it.

learned Grotius, whose critical acumen has been
ly acknowledged, explains the words thus. Re-
locum Daniellis, ch. vii. v. 27. Re-
est, restituere paras in veterem dignitatem.
Dr. M'knight, in his note on Matt. ch. xvii. v. 2, says—by the restoration of all things, the Jews seem to have understood the revival of the kingdom of David in their nation, to be accomplished by the assistance of Elias. Hence the Apostle's question to Jesus before his ascension into Heaven, Acts ch. I. v. 26. *Lord wilt thou, at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel?*

There appears also to be much correctness and good sense in Dr. Doddridge's explanation of Acts ch. I. v. 6, 7. *Lord wilt thou, at this time, break the Roman yoke from our necks, and, after all this confusion, restore the kingdom to Israel?* But he, waving a direct answer to this curious question, and leaving it to the spirit, which was shortly to be given, to rectify the mistaken notions, on which they proceeded in it, only said to them—cease your inquiries, at present on this head, since it is not convenient for you now to know those times or seasons, in which many remarkable prophecies, concerning my kingdom, shall be fulfilled—for the Father hath reserved them in his own power, under his own direction and disposal.

But there is no one, who has given the sense of the question of the disciples and the answer of our Lord, with more accuracy and precision, than the late Bishop Pierce. Take the Jews from under the Roman yoke, and give them a king and kingdom of their own: they expected still that Jesus was to be a temporal king. On v. 7, he says—our Lord gives them no direct answer to their question; but his words seem to imply, that
when the holy ghost was come upon them, they should then know the nature of his kingdom, and till that time, they appear not to have known it.

You will, I am persuaded, admit that those learned men, who have referred to Acts ch. I. v. 6, 7. in the explanation of the phrase the times and seasons in I. Thess. ch. V. v. 1. ought to have adhered to their own sense of the farmer of these passages. But not to insist upon this, it appears to me in the highest degree improbable, that the Apostle should have made use of an ambiguous phrase, if he was referring to the day of judgment, and equally so, that he should have gratified their curiosity with respect to the time when that event was to take place, even if he had himself known any thing about it. But if you consider the circumstances of the times when St. Paul wrote this Epistle, you must, I think, acknowledge, that there was an extreme propriety in continuing the use of this phrase, to denote the destruction of Jerusalem, as most intimately connected with the full manifestation of the nature of the Messiah’s character and kingdom. That this was the sense in which the Apostle used this phrase, seems to be rendered very evident from the language which he adopts in the subsequent verses—Ye yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night; for when they, i.e. the unbelieving Jews, shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But ye brethren are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief; our Lord having particularly pointed out the signs of it,
which, you cannot but suppose, the Apostles must have informed them of; that it might not unexpectedly come upon them. How natural was all this and how perfectly analogous to the language of prophecy in predicting temporal calamities! On the contrary, there appears to be no reason for the supposition that the time of the final judgment was known to some, and hid from others.

As a further proof that this was the meaning of the Apostle, it may be observed, that almost all the commentators refer the language of the Apostle to Matthew xxiv. and the parallel chapters—Thus Dr. Macknight upon the expression—ye have no need that I write unto you, observes that he says this, because when he was with them, he had taught them that it was not for them to know the times or the seasons which the Father had put in his own power, and had repeated to them Christ's injunction to watch, because in such an hour as they thought not, the son of man cometh. So again, in his note on the words, so cometh as a thief in the night, he says—this is the comparison by which our Lord himself illustrated the unexpectedness of his coming, Matt. xxiv. 43: And in his note upon the third verse, he says, that St. Paul's description is the more affecting that the verbs are all in the present time—so cometh—sudden destruction cometh, representing the certainty and instantaneousness of its coming: and for proof of this, he quotes Luke, x. 34. which, most unquestionably, relates solely to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Again—you observe that Bishop Newton, in his dia
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...serfation on the general judgment, says, vol. 6. p. 319, that St. Paul, I. Thess. v. 2, to express the uncertainty of it, compares the coming of the day of the Lord, to the coming of a thief in the night, alluding probably to those words of our Saviour, Matt. xxiv. 43, 44. If the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to have been broken up. And a little lower, in the same page, he says—the scripture asserts, not only that we are ignorant of the time and season of the day of judgment, but that it is known only to God, Matt. xxiv. 36. Of that day and hour knoweth no man: In short, you can scarcely find a single commentator, who in his interpretation of the chapter under consideration does not refer to the language which our Lord adopted with respect to the destruction of Jerusalem, and yet, strange to tell, they almost all of them interpret St. Paul's language of the day of judgment, and the learned Dr. Herbert Marsh peremptorily asserts, that it cannot possibly allude to the destruction of Jerusalem. *

But there is, if I mistake not, still farther and more decisive evidence, that St. Paul, in the language which he adopted, and which has so strong a resemblance to

* Bishop Newton and Dr. Macknight, in their interpretations of Matt. xxiv. have made a distinction, as has been seen, in a former letter between a primary and secondary signification of our Lord's language—but in their interpretation of St. Paul's language, they entirely lose sight of this distinction. At least, no notice is taken of it, which appears to me altogether inexcusable in a commentator...
that of our Lord, had an allusion, not to the day of judgment, but to the destruction of Jerusalem. You well know, that it is agreed on all hands that the second ch. of the second Epistle was written to correct a mistaken notion of the Thessalonians, with respect to the near approach of the day of Christ. Now we beseech you concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ—that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand; for that day shall not come except there come a falling away, or Apostasy first. As this connection therefore is indisputable, it will be necessary to ascertain with critical accuracy and precision, the nature of the coming of Christ, &c. here spoken of, which will of course lead to a full investigation of the whole of this celebrated chapter—but this must be the subject for some future correspondence. In the mean time,

I am,

Very respectfully,

Your's,

N. NISBETT.

Funstall, Nov. 27th. 1811.
LETTER IX.

REV. SIR.

THE second chapter of the second Epistle to the Thessalonians, to which I have now to request your attention, has, you know, exercised the ingenuity and the critical abilities of the most enlightened men in the Christian world—yet, it may perhaps, with great truth, be said that there is no part of sacred writ, about which their opinions, at different periods, have been more divided, or a greater variety of interpretations indulged by fanciful men, in their endeavours to explain it.

Dr. Zouch, speaking of the man of sin and son of perdition, says—"These titles were given to different personages—to the leaders of the factious Jews, who revolted from the Romans before the destruction of Jerusalem—to Cadius Caligula, a merciless tyrant—to the emperor Titus, the delight of mankind—to Simon Magus—to the Gnostics—to Mahomet—nay, to the bright luminaries of the reformation, John Wickliff and Martin Luther. These different interpretations have had their allotted day. While the gloss of novelty shines fresh upon them, they are in vogue and flourish for a
time, but, at length, like the dreams of a sick man, they vanish into air." (See his Attempt, p. 20.)

You need not be informed that the application of St. Paul's man of sin, to the church of Rome has, since the reformation, very generally been adopted by protestant writers, and by none more zealously or more sincerely, than by Dr. Zouch himself. But there are, you know, some very learned men, even among them, who appear to have been by no means satisfied of the justness of this interpretation. The late Rev. Mr. Jones, it is well known, adopted an hypothesis, suited to the circumstances of the present awful times, and has applied "the prophecy of this great defection," to use the words of Dr. Zouch, "to a neighbouring country, where the christian religion has been renounced, not negatively, through corruption of manners or neglect of truth, but positively, publickly, and in solemn form; where the restraining power of government and the obligation of law, have not been interrupted and defied, but absolutely taken out of the way and abolished—where we see a portentous company risen up, who take to themselves the sublime denomination of Legislators—not under the authority of God, but in their own right, exclusively of his legislation and in opposition to his power;—where the churches have been shut up from the worship of God, and opened to admit the worship of reason—the reason of man, or man himself, who now as God, is actually seated in the temple of God, to be worshipped." Ibid. p. 3.

This hypothesis, Mr. Jones has so ingeniously support-
ed, as to have made, at least half a convert even of Mr. Kett; for he has expressly said, that it has been satisfactorily shewn by Mr. Jones, that St. Paul's man of sin is equally applicable to the infidel power, which we have lately seen in France. It has also been said to have excited some degree of surprise, that Bishop Horsley doth not seem to acknowledge the traits and lineaments of popery in the prophetic pages of Daniel, of St. Paul, and St. John. Whilst Mr. Kett, and almost all the protestant interpreters of scripture, intimate the decline and the approaching fall of Antichrist, he is fearful that his kingdom is not yet begun—that he is yet to rise, or, at least, that he is only now rising. And, it is a curious fact, that Mr. Kett has strongly marked his approbation of this opinion also. But, as Mr. Faber has very justly observed, a double accomplishment of the same prophecy is altogether untenable.

"It is," you will agree with me, "a fine observation of Dr. Zouch, that the adaptation of events to the prophetic parts of scripture requires great care and circumspection. A warm and lively fancy is apt to exceed the limits of moderation and judgment. If, in the vicissitudes of human affairs, any uncommon incidents occur, the pages of prophecy are unfolded, a fortunate occurrence of circumstances is remarked, and the reader, unwilling, or perhaps, unable to examine the subject with the serious diligence which it demands, too readily admits the accomplishment of a prediction. But, it must be observed, that the system of prophecy is not vague or uncertain—that it seldom derives any elucidation from the proposal
of hasty conjectures. The events, which constitute its completion, flow along the stream of time in a regular and uninterrupted succession. Predicted revolutions, which are yet future, will in due course be so decidedly fulfilled, as to leave no room for conjecture itself to fluctuate in suspense." *Ibid.*, p. 18, 19.

It would be extremely improper and unbecoming, previous to a critical examination of the meaning of St. Paul's man of sin, to say that, at the era of the reformation, its application to the church of Rome was an hasty conjecture. It certainly was a very natural one, and has, at different periods subsequent to that glorious and important event, had the ablest and best men for its supporters. Many of the features in St. Paul's description, have an evident and striking resemblance to that church, and I am very far from doubting, that the reformers who so applied it, or those who have since made this subject their study, were not seriously convinced that the Apostle had a particular view to it.

But you will, I am sure, allow, that however numerous and respectable the advocates for this opinion may have been, it would, as has been very justly observed, be highly improper, to place an implicit confidence in great names. —If there is sufficient evidence in the sacred writings and in the history of those times, that the Apostle's description has been mistaken—if it shall, by fair and legitimate reasoning, clearly appear that he had no reference to the corruptions of the church of Rome, how much soever it may resemble them, the opinion, however
Sanctioned by time and authority, ought to be abandoned. Nor let it be objected to the proposed inquiry, that it will have the appearance of the greatest presumption to endeavour to overthrow an opinion, so firmly established and so generally believed. Against such a charge I shall, I trust, be sheltered by the consideration, that a Grotius and a Hammond—a Le Clerc and a Whitby, have already deviated from the commonly received hypothesis, and that there are, as will hereafter be seen, still existing some very formidable objections against it. "If reason and argument," says the learned Archdeacon Balguy, "be allowed free access to the mind of man, they will seldom fail to make a due impression, and though checked for a time, by prejudice and passion, are almost sure to be triumpphant in the end." To these then be the appeal in the present instance.

It must be obvious to you, my dear sir, that when the Apostle, in the beginning of this celebrated chapter, says—now concerning the coming of Christ; the first object will be to endeavour to ascertain the genuine meaning of this phrase. Now, it has, I believe, on all hands been allowed, that this phrase has two meanings. It is sometimes made use of, with relation to the controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the true nature of his character as the Messiah. And it is sometimes used to denote his second coming, as the judge of the world. The former of these senses you will, however, observe is the original one, and that, upon which his character as the judge of the world, is founded, and for this plain reason, that, if there are not sufficient proofs of his being
the Messiah, he could have had no possible claim to the character of the judge of the world.

The proofs that our Lord rested his final claim to the character of the Messiah, upon the destruction of Jerusalem, lie within a very narrow compass. In Matt. xxiv. where this subject has been shewn in a former letter to be exclusively treated of, it is said, v. 27. As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the nature of the coming of the son of man be.

And, to render it perfectly clear that this coming had a relation to the destruction of Jerusalem; the historian says, in v. 37.—As the days of Noah were, which were days of temporal vengeance; so shall also the coming of the son of man be. So again it is said, Luke, xxi. As it was in the days of Lot—even thus shall it be when the son of man is revealed. As therefore this Epistle to the Thessalonians was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, and as our Lord had been very particular in directing his Apostles to attend to the signs of its approach, it was, you will allow, extremely natural for St. Paul to make this the subject, both of his conversation and of his correspondence and to adopt this phrase, as fully expressive of his allusion to that important event. At least, it must, I think, be admitted that there is nothing improbable in the supposition. And, that this was actually the Apostle's meaning, seems to be strongly confirmed by the very remarkable and striking resemblance, which you discern between our Lord's language in Matt. xxiv, and the parallel chapters, and that which is made use of, in
the three first verses of the chapter under consideration, which I beg leave to present to you, both in the original and in our own language.

Matt. xxiv. 3. Τι το σήμειον της συς παρουσίας;

II. Thess. ii. 1. ὑπερ τῆς παρουσίας του κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χρίστου.

Matt. xxiv. 6. Ἑρετέ, μη ΣροείςΣε;

II. Thess. ii. 2. Εἰς το μη ταχείως σαλευθηναι ὑμᾶς απὸ νοὸς, μητε ΣροείςΣε.

Mark, xiii. 7. Μη ΣροείςΣε.


Matt. xxiv. 4. Ἐλέετε μη της ὑμας ἀλαίηση.

II. Thess. ii. 3. Μητε ὑμας εξαπατήη σίστε μηδενα σωκον.

Mark, xiii. 5. Ἐλέετε μη της ὑμας ἀλαίηση.


Matt. xxiv. 31. Κανονιάζου τους ελέετος.

II. Thess. ii. 1. Και ἡμων επισυναγωγης επ' αυτον.
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Matt. xxiv. 3.
What shall be the sign of thy coming?

II. Thess. ii. 1.
Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Matt. xxiv. 6.
See that ye be not troubled.

Mark, xiii. 7.
Be ye not troubled.

Be not terrified.

Matt. xxiv. 4:
Take heed lest any man deceive you.

Mark, xiii. 6.
Take heed lest any man deceive you.

Take heed that ye be not deceived.

Matt. xxiv. 31.
They shall gather his elect from the four winds.

II. Thess. ii. 1.
Our gathering together with him.
Allowing for the different situations of our Apostles, and for the peculiar method, which every writer will adopt, of expressing himself upon the same subject; these co-incidences will appear sufficiently striking to induce you to think, that there is, at least very strong presumptive evidence that the Apostle Paul alluded to that coming, mentioned by our Lord. The cautions also, you will observe, both in the Epistle and Gospels, are almost verbatim the same, both, with respect to their not being troubled, and their being upon their guard against deception. And you no where find the expression of their being gathered together unto him, but in these two passages, which, most probably, have a relation to the antient prophecy, that when Shiloh came—unto him should the gathering of the people be, i.e. the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile should be broken down.

You are aware that Bishop Newton has expressly asserted, that our Lord's coming in glory to judge the world, is the proper signification in this place, as the context, he says, will evince beyond contradiction. But it must appear to you evident, that the meaning of the context, in this controversy, is as much a matter of dispute as the phrase the coming of Christ, and therefore cannot be appealed to, till that meaning is clearly ascertained. This context however, I apprehend, so far from countenancing the meaning adopted by the learned Bishop, will be found upon a critical examination, in the clearest manner, to confirm the sense of the phrase the coming of Christ, which is here contended for.
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The Apostle having, after the example of his great master, particularly cautioned the Thessalonians against being excessively agitated by the deceptive arts and false insinuations of their adversaries, respecting the coming of Christ, proceeds to enforce these cautions, by telling them, that, that day would not come except there came Ἄνωσασία the Apostasy—or, as it is in our translation, a falling away first.

Mr. Mede, Bishop Newton, Dr. Macknight, Dr. Benson, Bishop Halifax, Dr. Zouch, and, in short, all the advocates for the application of this chapter to the church of Rome, have, you know, asserted that the Apostasy here mentioned, was not of a civil, but of a religious nature—not a revolt from government, but a defection from the true religion and worship of God—a departing from the faith and from the living God. Upon this interpretation of the word apostasy they appear to have rested the chief merits of their cause, as decisive of the nature of the coming of Christ. But though they have, by an appeal to several other passages in the New Testament, where the word apostasy is made use of, endeavoured to prove that this was the genuine meaning of the Apostle in the passage under consideration, yet none of them appear to me to have given that critical attention to the meaning of that term, to warrant an implicit acquiescence in their opinion.

The term Ἄνωσασία Apostasy, you well know, when considered in the abstract and without any relation to a particular object, most unquestionably means a departure
from any thing. And there appears to be the most unequivocal and decisive evidence, that in all the passages where this word occurs, it is used in this abstract sense. Thus (Acts, xxii. 21.) it is said the Jews had been informed concerning Paul, that he taught their brethren who lived among the Gentiles ἀνοσοσατον Apostasy—but to describe the nature of that Apostasy, some addition was necessary, and therefore the historian, you observe, says—Then teachest thou Apostasy from Moses: St. Paul, in his first Epistle to Timothy, iv. 1. says—In the latter times, some shall depart—or as the original word may be rendered, shall apostatize, using the word in the abstract sense, to denote a departure from any thing. But the Apostle, you see, did not deem this sufficient to convey his meaning, without an addition; he therefore adds—Some shall depart from the faith. Once more—the writer to the Hebrews says (ch. iii. 12.) Take heed lest there be, in any of you, an evil heart of unbelief  εν καιρη σορας in departing, or apostatizing—but to shew the nature of this departure, he makes this addition, from

† Proper: Recessio, recessio, ab αποστολον discedo, abscendo, recedo. Such, according to Schleusner, is the original meaning and derivation of the word Apostasy. He however applies the passage under consideration, to a religious Apostasy, not however to Popery, but to Judaism and Paganism. Nisi præcesserit prædicta illa defectio a religione Christiana puriore ad Judaisnum et Paganismum. Conf. I. Tim. iv. 1.


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the living God; which at once, informs you of the nature of this Apostasy.

From these examples, which, you will observe, are all which are to be met with in the New Testament, it will, I think, appear to you evident, beyond the possibility of dispute, that the Apostle, in the passage under consideration, thought no addition necessary—but that his meaning was determined with sufficient accuracy, by the nature of the subject, of which he was treating, and that was the coming of Christ. That day—the day of Christ shall not come except there come the Apostasy first. And, if by the use of that phrase, the Apostle alluded to the destruction of Jerusalem, it will, I think, be allowed that it wanted no addition.

But, not to insist upon this, and allowing that no decisive inference can fairly be drawn from hence, in what sense the Apostle used the phrase, the coming of Christ, yet, from the very striking resemblance of St. Paul’s language to that of our Lord in his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, already noticed, you will think me justified in producing such farther evidence as that prediction affords, that the Apostasy mentioned by the Apostle was not of a religious, but of a civil nature, or a revolt from the Roman government.

Our Lord, it is true, does not, in his prediction of the signs of his coming, as the Messiah, make use of the word Apostasy—but it is deserving of your particular observation, that he ranks it amongst the foremost of those signs.
that they should hear of wars and rumours of wars, and that nation should rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; which, applied to the Jews, as a nation, necessarily supposes their Apostasy, or rebellion against the Romans. St. Luke’s language, you will perhaps think, is still stronger, ch. xxii. 9. *When ye shall hear of wars and commotions—or insurrections,* be not terrified. Our Lord likewise told his Disciples, that there would arise false Christs and false prophets, who would shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect; which plainly implies that the great body of the Jewish nation, as you know afterwards happened, would actually be deceived by them, and would, in consequence of their deceitful artifices, be induced to apostatize, or rebel against the Romans. You will likewise observe, that this sign, in our Lord’s estimation, was of such importance particularly to be attended to, in order to the safety of his Disciples, in the day of the awful calamity which he had predicted, as not only to merit a repetition, but to require a very strong and impressive memento to be added to it. Behold I have told you before, and that this memento might not be liable to be mistaken, as to its object— it is immediately added—wherefore if they, to wit, the false prophets, shall say unto you— behold he, the Messiah, is in the desert, go

* Scapula thus interprets Akarasacia Seditio, tumultuatio, agitatio, quä res in quiete aliqui inconsistere non potest. The law is also called kararsacia because it bringeth quietness to the commonwealth. (Leigh’s Crit. Sac.)
not forth—behold he is in the secret chambers, believe them not.

If it be true that scripture, when properly applied, is the best interpreter of scripture,† and in the history of the times, when this Epistle to the Thessalonians was written, be attentively considered, it will, I think, appear to you by no means unnatural or improbable, that, when the Apostle mentioned the Apostasy, in the closest connection with the coming of Christ, which is on all hands allowed, at least sometimes, to denote the destruction of Jerusalem, he used the word, in the sense in common use among the Greeks, of a rebellion against the governing powers.

Whatever may be the force of these arguments, they will probably appear to you to be much strengthened by an attentive consideration of the Apostle's subsequent language. Ye know, says he, (v. 6.) what with-holdeth that he—the man of sin, might be revealed in his time; for the mystery of iniquity—or as the original words τῆς ανομίας ought to have been rendered, of disobedience, or insubjection to law, doth already work, only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way—and then shall 'O ανομος the wicked, or lawless one be revealed. Whatever may have been the power which let, to which

† Scripture will ever, says Mr. Faber, be found the most satisfactory expositor of scripture, and such, to use his own words, I apprehend to be the case, in the present instance. (See his Disq. vol. 2. p. 54, 55.)
the Apostle alludes, of which more hereafter—you cannot but observe that the Apostle here makes use of terms which appear to have a singular propriety in them, if the Apostasy was intended to signify a rebellion against civil government, and with much clearness and precision defines his meaning.

If, on the other hand, you understand the word ἀναστασιαν ἀποστασία, in a religious sense—with what propriety, it may surely be asked, can it be applied to the church of Rome? The divine mission of our Lord is as much an article of her creed as it is of ours, and its very corruptions, of which we so justly complain, are, you well know, supported by an appeal to the authority of scripture.

And you are no stranger to the fact, that so far is she from abjuring christianity that she boasts, as is not uncommon with boasters, that she is the only true church, and that it was we, who, at the æra of the reformation, abjured the true faith. The late Bishop Horsley, speaking of this charge of the Apostasy of the Romish church, says—“It was a constructive Apostasy, never understood to be such, by those, to whom the guilt has been imputed.” And, most remarkable is the declaration of Mr. Faber, to the same purpose. “It is,” he says, “observable, that our reformers never thought of unchurching the church of Rome, though they freely declared it to have erred, not only in living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith.” (See his Dissertation, vol. 2. p. 127.) Again he says, “Impiously as the Bishops of Rome have sat in the temple of God, shewing themselves that they are Gods, this hath been done rather in con-
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junction with God than in opposition to him. In the height of their profane madness, they never thought of denying the Father or the Son, but rather affected to act by their commission and on their authority, considering themselves as a sort of gods upon earth, and claiming to be the vicar of Christ." (Ibid. v. 1. p. 109.*) It seems to me, however, a strange inference (Mr. Faber will pardon the expression) which he draws from this representation, when he says, immediately afterwards—"In short, the prophecy respecting the man of sin, has been accomplished in the Popes." For if the church of Rome is not properly and strictly speaking Apostate, the inference certainly should have been, according to his own principles—that the prophecy was not accomplished in the Popes; having laid it down as a rule, to allow no interpretation of a prophecy to be valid, except the prophecy agree in every particular with the event to which it is supposed to relate." (See his Preface to his Dissertation.) And, to this agrees the observation of Dr. Zouch, that "to form the completion of a prophecy it is necessary for every part to quadrature.

* It has been said that the phrase the man of sin is applicable only to one single person, in his official capacity, meaning thereby, the Bishop, or Pope of Rome, but this does not, by any means, appear to be evident, and can scarcely be reconciled with the observation of Bishop Hurd, that many of the Popes are said to have been, and says he, for any thing I know, may have been Saints in their private morals; the name of Ganganelli is famous among those who have been Popes, who have done honour to the Temple.

Archdeacon Woodhouse, in his notes on the Apocalypse, has some remarks similar to those of the Bishop. (See page 358.)
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Deficiency in one single point is fatal." (See his pt, p. 59.)

there is, if I mistake not, other evidence which ill perhaps think equally strong, that the Apostasy sned by the Apostle, had no relation to the church

Roman Catholic believes in the doctrine of Transubstantiation; however absurd this doctrine may appear to a Protestant, t be acknowledged, that he has for it the literal sense of, re, when it is said—This is my body and this is my blood, and e is expressly said to eat his body and drink his blood. And consistent, he ought also to believe that Christ is a door and -that God is an husbandman, and that all Christians are one body; for it is, as expressly said by St. Paul, that all ms are one body in Christ; which, by the way, may serve, in sessure, to explain the meaning of the expression—this is my Ve may indeed pity him for not understanding this language rely, but this surely cannot amount to an Apostasy from the in faith.

the Roman Catholic believes that the head of that church, successor of St. Peter, is invested with the power of forgiving vm whence has arisen the enormous and abominable traffic gences, at which the Roman Catholic himself has, someelt a glow of honest indignation. But he believes, as he es, upon the authority of scripture, that Christ delegated hority to St. Peter, and through him to all future Bishops of This, however, so far from being an Apostasy from the faith, is, if I may say so, an excess of faith, or rather of blind, y, as well as the other. In short—while the Roman Catholic edges the New Testament as the rule of his faith and practice, t see how he can be charged with an Apostasy from the faith, in the strict sense of the word, whatever may be his it, or into whatever corruptions he may have fallen.
of Rome, but to the times in which he lived. In his first Epistle he had told them, that wrath was coming upon the Jews to the uttermost—that the Thessalonians knew perfectly that the day of the Lord was so coming as a thief in the night—and that they were not in darkness that that day should come upon them unawares. In the ch. under consideration, however, you observe that he beseeches them not to be troubled or shaken in mind, by any artifices of their enemies, as if the day of Christ was at hand—i.e. as I understand the Apostle, as if it was directly to take place, before the signs of its approach had made their appearance. He therefore adds—Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there come the apostasy first—the principal sign of the approaching ruin of Jerusalem.

Not, however, feeling myself competent to say anything so much to the purpose, as has already been said by Dr. Edwards, with respect to the meaning of the Apostle, upon this passage, you will, I am sure, excuse my presenting it to you, in his own words. "Because," says he, "St. Paul assures his brethren, that the coming of Christ was not at hand, the commentators have rashly represented him as informing them that it was at a considerable distance; and, as one mistake frequently leads to another, they have considered the prophecy of the man of sin as describing a system of spiritual corruption which began to operate in the earliest ages of the church, and which the revolution of seventeen centuries has not been able to dispel. The former error has originated from not duly attending to the true meaning of the word.
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ἐνέγκειν, upon which, Mr. Alexander has left us the following very accurate observation; Paraphrase, &c. 90.
The word which is rendered at hand, is not the same which is rendered so, in other parts of scripture. And, without doubt, it should have been rendered differently here; if for no other reason, to avoid fixing a down right contradiction upon the doctrine of the New Testament. It is a much stronger expression than is used elsewhere of this event, and is applicable to none but a present event, or one so very near that, according to the common use of words, it may be said to be present, or just here.

If St. Paul had denied that the day of Christ was approaching, or that it might happen during the existence of the Thessalonians to whom he wrote, he would indeed have contradicted what he had plainly intimated in his first Epistle—but he means only to affirm that the day was not at hand;—that it would not happen within a week, a month, or a year; and the expressions ἡμέρα εἰς ἡμέραν and ἡμέρα ἐνεγκαίνης, would immediately excite, in the mind of a Grecian, such very different and distinct ideas, that they would require no comment or explanation whatever.—The latter error, which I noticed as occasioned by the former, is most decisively confuted by comparing the passage we are considering with the opening of the prediction; for, as in the one, our Apostle insinuates that the day of the Lord might possibly overtake his Thessalonian converts, yet afterwards asserts in the other, without the least hesitation, that that day shall not come except there come a falling away first; it necessarily and unavoidably follows, that this Apostasy must have sprung
up and arrived at its maturity within the compass of a few years, and that the application of it to the corruptions which have subsisted in the Romish Church must be abandoned as a defenceless and extravagant conjecture."

(See Dr. Edwards's Sermon on the Predictions of the Apostles concerning the End of the World, pp. 26, 27.)

But the contemplation of the meaning of the phrases the man of sin and the son of perdition, and the striking features annexed to this character, will probably still more fully confirm the supposition that the Apostasy mentioned by the Apostle, related not to the dereliction of christianity—but to the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans.

Much time and useless labour appears to have been bestowed, by critics and commentators, in applying the Apostle's description of this extraordinary character, to the schemes which they have severally adopted, and it may, perhaps, with truth be said, that none have erred more in the application of the characteristic features of the man of sin than those who, in one shape or another, have adopted the opinion here espoused. This has perhaps contributed, not a little to the rejection of it as indefensible. But a careful and undeviating attention to the same sources of evidence, to which an appeal has hitherto been made, and, I trust, not altogether without success, cannot fail to shew you, in a very striking point of view, that the features of the character of the man of sin and son of perdition, were applicable to none, with greater propriety than to the Jews as a nation, and that
in fact, it was the Apostle's object to describe them, though for obvious reasons, clothed in the garb of mystery.

It has already been observed that the Apostle, in his first Epistle, denominates the Jews, as a nation, the common enemies of mankind, and that by their flagitious conduct, in killing the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and forbidding them to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, they were proceeding to fill up the measure of their iniquities, as a vessel or measure is filled up, until it can hold no more, and that, in consequence of their extreme wickedness, wrath was coming upon them to the uttermost. In like manner, our Lord, with great particularity and minuteness, describes the extreme wickedness of the rulers of the Jews, charging them with crimes of the deepest dye; and in the close of the description, he has this remarkable expression, delivered in the form of a prediction—Ye will fill up yourselves the measure of your fathers, i.e. of the iniquities of your fathers. (See Matt. xxiii.)

The learned Dr. Beattie, speaking of the extreme depravity of the character of the Jews, as a nation, says—"The virtue of the Roman people was not, in those days, exemplary. Yet when we compare their manners, as they occasionally appear in the sacred history, with those of the Jews—how are we struck with the difference! The Romans are indeed Pagans, but they are not destitute of that good nature and love of justice,
which one expects to find in a civilized nation. The Jews are seldom seen in any other character than that of bloody barbarians. Pontius Pilate avowed our Lord’s innocence, and shewed an inclination to save his life. Gallio, Proconsul of Achaia, acted with good sense and moderation, when Paul was brought before him. Claudius Lysias, Restus, and Felix, in their treatment of the same Apostle, were not unmercifully severe. And the Centurion, whose prisoner he was in his voyage to Italy, was very much attached to him. But the Jewish Priests, Scribes, and Elders conspired to murder our Saviour without a trial—suborned persons to bear false witness against him, and the same assembly, or their successors in office, connived at a scheme and of course concurred in it, for the assassination of Paul. In a word, it appears that the greater part of what we call the better sort of the Jews of that age, when they had resolved on any measure, would not hesitate to employ any means; however unjust, cruel, or shameful, in the accomplishment of it.” (See Beattie’s Evidences, vol. 1. p. 140.

This account of the extreme enormity of the character of the Jews, as a nation, you will not, I am persuaded, suspect of partiality, as taken from the Christian records only; for Josephus, who had ample means of knowing them well, in the fullest manner confirms what has been there said of them: “To give a particular account,” he says, “of all their iniquities were endless. Thus much in general, may suffice to say, that there never was a city, which suffered such miseries, nor a race of men
from the beginning of the world, which so abounded in wickedness. I verily believe that, if the Romans had delayed to destroy these wicked wretches, the city would either have been swallowed up by the earth, or overwhelmed by the water, or struck with fire from Heaven, as another Sodom; for it produced a far more impious generation than those who suffered such punishments."

From this passage you observe, that Josephus was at a loss to express with sufficient strength of language, the extreme profligacy of their character as a nation. But the Apostle Paul, who most certainly was equally well acquainted with them, having been a severe sufferer by them, and who appears to have been deeply impressed with their unparalleled wickedness, has personified them, and without mentioning them by name, has represented them, as a man of sin—as one whose whole composition was sin and nothing else; and, if Josephus's account of them is not overcharged, as from the whole tenor of the Gospel history it evidently is not—this language, strong as it is, is not too strong. And it has this peculiar advantage, that it conveys, in a single sentence, all that could have been conveyed by the most accurate and masterly description. And, as sin and punishment are very naturally connected in the wise order of providence, especially when arrived to such an enormous pitch, the Apostle appears, with equal propriety and energy, to have carried on the personification, under the relative idea of a sea of perdition—one devoted to destruction and the natural offspring of such a parent, agreeably to what be
had said of them in his first Epistle—that wrath was coming upon them to the uttermost.

But the most important part of this subject still remains to be discussed, and that is—how this man of sin—this son of perdition, can be said to have exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. This, however, after such an exercise of your patience and attention, must be left to be discussed in my next letter. In the mean time,

I am,

Most truly,

Your's,

N. NISBETT.

TUNSTALL, NOV. 30TH. 1811.

* Dr. Zouch says—the son of perdition is an Hebrew idiom, to signify one who deserves to perish. A son of death, II. Sam. xii. 5.—a person who justly incurs the punishment of death. (See his Attempt, p. 179.)
LETTER X.

REV. SIR,

I am willing to believe, that I have in my last letter reduced the most satisfactory and decisive evidence of the genuine meaning of the phrases, the coming of Christ, the Apostasy, the man of sin, and son of perdition; and having succeeded thus far in my inquiry, I make no doubt that I shall soon, by the same careful and undeviating attention to the same sources of information, which the Gospel history has so amply provided, be enabled to throw sufficient light upon what has justly been deemed the most difficult part of the Apostle's description, in the chapter under consideration. Professing then to be guided by these, I once more request your attention, while I enquire, what evidence there is, from the history of those times either sacred or profane, that this man of sin, this son of perdition, exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, as applied to the Jewish nation.

In answer to this question, I scarcely need inform you, that the most able commentators are agreed that, by the man of sin exalting himself above all that is called God,
or that is worshipped, is meant his exalting himself above all other temporal dignities. You will not, I am sure, suspect me of being too partial to my own opinion, if I produce my authorities from the professed advocates for its being applied to the church of Rome.

Dr. Benson, you know, says—"Princes and magistrates are in scripture sometimes called Gods." (See Ps. lixxii. 1, 6, 7. cxxix. 1, &c. He farther says—"It is well known that in the Apostle's days, Σεβασμός was the Greek name, or title of the Roman Emperor."

Bishop Halifax, in his sermon on the man of sin, says that "by opposing and exalting himself above all that is called a God; or that is worshipped, may be only meant that the man of sin should exercise a super-eminent jurisdiction over the kings and princes of this world." In like manner, Dr. Duchal says—"This person is said to oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. These are in scripture called Gods, as they are clothed with dominion and authority over others, in which they bear a faint resemblance of that power that ruleth over all. To those Gods on earth the man of sin opposeth himself, and not only refuseth all submission to them, but exalteth himself above them, and above all that is worshipped, the very highest orders of mankind." (See his Presumptive Arguments, p. 276.

Mr. Faber says—"The Gods, that the man of sin was to oppose, were mere earthly Gods, in other words, kings
and emperors. He was to oppose himself to every one that is called God, and to every thing august and venerable, to every Sebasma, in allusion to Sebastos, or Augustus, the title of the Roman Emperor." (See his Diss. on the Prophecies, vol. 1. p. 109—second edit.)

These are all the authorities, which I think it necessary to lay before you, and from them it appears, that they all agree in the fundamental principle, that the man of sin’s exalting himself above all that is called God, means only the exercising a super- eminent jurisdiction over the great ones of the world.

That we differ in our application of this principle, I can attribute only to the little attention which has been paid, by these writers, to the Gospel history, as an history of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the true nature of the Messiah’s character and kingdom; for there is no one who is at all acquainted with the history of the Jews, as a nation, in our Saviour’s time, and with the account which the christian scriptures, as well as heathen writers, have given of them, who does not know, however it may have been overlooked, that it was a peculiar and distinguishing feature in their national character, that in looking for the coming of their Messiah, they one and all, expected him to appear as a temporal prince, to raise them, as a nation, to universal empire, and to exalt them above the majesty and dignity of Caesar himself, at that period, the highest of earthly Gods. This important fact is so clearly and so fully ascertained, that it is impossible for any one to deny and
much less to refute it. It is therefore submitted to your cool and deliberate judgment, to consider whether here is not the very characteristic feature of the Jewish nation, so strongly described; by the Apostle, of the man of sin exalting himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, the highest of earthly Gods; for you will carefully observe that this description of the Apostle is, in the closest manner, connected with the phrase the coming of Christ, which the Jews, as a nation, were most eagerly expecting, at the very time when the Apostle wrote this Epistle, and which, they supposed, though fallaciously, would lead to that universal empire, and which ultimately induced them to rebel against the Romans.

You may, I am well aware, object to this interpretation; that the Jews, though they grasped at this universal empire never did attain to it. But the same objection, you will be pleased to observe, has been made to the application of St. Paul’s language to the church of Rome: Mr. Faber, you know, has been at considerable pains to shew that the Popes of Rome never did attain an universal supremacy over the kings of the earth, and he expressly asserts that “the Popes have been sufficiently importunate in claiming the title and authority of king of kings”—but he says, “if we consult history, we shall find the claim has often been made, but it has never been allowed by the great European powers, but, on the contrary, strenuously resisted.” (See Faber’s Diss. v. 2. p p. 165, 166.) But, be this as it may—most certain it is, that the Apostle’s declaration, if critically examined, does not amount to
an assertion that the man of sin would actually obtain that universal empire. His words are Ο ἄνθρωπος, who is opposing and exalting himself; which, as I have just observed, precisely agrees with the prevailing disposition of the Jews, at the very time the Apostle wrote this Epistle. And, it is not a little remarkable that that able divine and accomplished scholar, Dr. Jortin, when referring to this very passage, says, that verbs active, sometimes signify a design and endeavour to perform a thing, whether it be accomplished or not—and for this he refers to Le Clerc, Whitby, and Groten, and to the latter, upon this very passage. (See his Christian Religion, p. 185.) And you may observe, that Dr. Benson is also of the same opinion. (See in Loc.)

"But allowing," says Bishop Halifax, "that by opposing and exalting himself above all, or every one, that is called a God, or that is worshipped, may be only meant that the man of sin should exercise a super-eminent jurisdiction over the kings and princes of this world; it must still be acknowledged, that, when it is said besides of this monster of iniquity, that he should assume to himself a sovereignty never before asserted, or so much as thought of, by any earthly monarch, however absolute in other instances,—should aspire to rule as God, in the temple or church of God, and in consequence of his usurped occupancy of that holy place, should presume to show himself that he is God, arrogating more than human power, and claiming to partake of the incommunicable attributes of the supreme being, by diabolical pretences to lying wonders, calculated to impose upon those who—
believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness, these things are utterly incompatible with all our notions of secular dominion, and must be conceived as the undoubted marks of an ecclesiastical tyranny." (See his Sermons on the Prophecies, p. 143, 144.)

The ecclesiastical tyranny of the Romish church, you will not suppose me inclined to dispute—but that the church assumed to itself a sovereignty never before asserted, or so much as thought of, by any earthly monarch, cannot so easily be granted. You are too well acquainted with the Gospel history not to know, that the church of Rome was not the first to exercise such an ecclesiastical tyranny. Were not the Jewish rulers, in our Saviour's time, actuated by the same intolerant and tyrannic spirit? Did he not tell them to their faces that, they bound heavy burthens upon men's shoulders, which they themselves would not touch with one of their fingers? Did they not shut up the kingdom of Heaven against men, and neither go in themselves, nor suffer those who were entering to go in? Was it not the same tyrannical spirit which led them to persecute our Lord himself, with such relentless fury, and at length to put him to a most cruel and ignominious death, after having subjected him to the most wanton barbarities which ever disgraced a court of judicature? Besides, it ought to be observed that these monstrous acts of ecclesiastical tyranny were committed in the very face of truth—in the face of miracles, attesting his divine mission, which no christian, with whom I am concerned in this argument, will be disposed to dispute and therefore the more enormous!
When they had effected their diabolical purpose upon the divine author of our religion, they continued to persecute his followers with a similar fury; beating some, and killing some, and hunting them about from city to city, and commanding them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus. And when St. Paul had informed the Jews of his having received a commission to go to the Gentiles, and to preach among them the glad tidings of salvation, they no sooner heard this declaration than they lifted up their voices and said—away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live! It was such a conduct as this, that led this Apostle to speak of them in such severe terms, as forbidding them to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, and as being, on this account, the common enemies of mankind. And, what was this but ecclesiastical tyranny and usurpation, in the extreme? What was sitting in the temple of God, and shewing themselves as if they were God, if dictating the terms of salvation and confining the divine favours to themselves were not? In a word, it is impossible not to perceive that the whole Gospel history, and particularly the history of the Acts of the Apostles, possess the most irrefragable proofs, that this characteristic feature of the man of sin belonged to none, with greater propriety, than to the Jewish nation. And, it is particularly deserving of your observation, that much of this ecclesiastical tyranny was literally carried on, in the very temple of God. This, you will see, is excellently well represented by the learned Dr. Whitby, in his notes upon the passage under consideration.
When the Apostles began to preach the word of life, he says, the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, Acts, iv. 1. and the whole order of the priesthood, v. 6. stiled το συνεδρια, the Sanhedrim, v. 15. commanded them not to speak, nor teach in the name of Jesus, v. 18. on which account, these rulers are said to be assembled against the Lord and against his Christ. And the answer of the Apostles to them is, that God was rather to be obeyed than man. After this, the high priest and all his associates place the Apostles, εν το συνεδρια, in the Sanhedrim, Acts, v. 17, 27. calling them to an account for disobeying their commands; and having received this answer from the Apostles that God must be obeyed rather than man, they beat them in the Sanhedrim, vi. 12. and the high priest, vii. 1. and they who sat εν το συνεδρια in the Sanhedrim, having examined him and the witnesses against him, they stoned Stephen, v. 59. which death could only be inflicted on him by the Sanhedrin. And thus, says Dr. Whitby very judiciously, they sat in the temple of God, as Gods. (See in Loc.)

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

This seems to be a very convenient way of getting rid of a difficulty, but too often practised by commentators and divines, for though it may perhaps, in some instances, be true, that the present tense may be put for the future, yet they should be perfectly clear and distinct, otherwise they may be made to speak a language which may suit our purposes, but which was never intended by the writer. But this surely is not an instance of the kind; for you will be pleased to observe, that the Apostle distinguishes, with great accuracy and precision, what was yet future from what had already taken place. Of the Apostasy, which was to precede the coming of Christ, he, most unquestionably, speaks, as being, as it really was, yet future; of the lawless or disobedient one, as yet to be revealed; but, as has already been observed, he speaks of the man of sin, as then actually opposing and exalting himself above all that is called a God, or that is worshipped, and as then sitting in the temple of God. You will therefore think with me that, in this instance at least, it is an unwarrantable assertion, that the Apostle is all along to be understood in the future tense, and an unjustifiable liberty taken with his language. I cannot therefore perceive any objection, of the smallest weight,
against the application here contended for, but it is, on
the contrary, in the strongest manner confirmed by
the whole tenor of the Gospel history.

The Apostle, having thus described the characteristic
features of the man of sin, immediately afterwards
addresses them in the following terms; *Remember ye
not that when I was yet with you I told you these things?*
which not only seem to convey a reproof for their
inattention to what he had said to them upon the subject,
but a very striking intimation of its great importance to
their particular interests. The same impression seems
necessarily to arise from the introduction of the subject.
*Now we beseech you concerning the coming of our Lord
Jesus Christ, &c.—that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or.
be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter,
as from us, as that the day of Christ, is at hand.* And he
seems as if he laboured under considerable apprehensions,
lest they should be led astray and entertain improper
ideas upon this subject. *Let no man, says he, deceive
you by any means.* How extremely natural was all
this, if St. Paul alluded to the destruction of Jerusalem,
and to the events connected therewith! It was precisely
such as that prediction would have led the reader of an

* Dr. Zouch says—"The Thessalonians had pleaded the autho-
riety of St. Paul, as favouring an opinion that the day of judgment
was hastily approaching." And this, it must be acknowledged,
has been the opinion of many other very respectable writers, but
I think, without any other foundation, than what has arisen from a
mistaken interpretation of the fifth chapter of the first Epistle to
the Thessalónians. (See my seventh letter.)
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apostolical Epistle upon this subject, to have expected! But, such earnestness is not, I think, so easily to be accounted for, upon the supposition that his language had a reference to the church of Rome.

But besides this earnestness of the Apostle, so strongly and affectionately expressed, the Apostle does not appear to be satisfied, till he had given them still farther information upon the subject. v. 6. But now ye know, from what I have been telling you, what with-holdeth that he, the man of sin, might be revealed in his time; for the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.†

† Here are distinctly specified two periods as to pass in an inverted order before the coming of the day of Christ; first, the duration of the man of sin, which shall be ended only by the appearance of the Lord; and then, the continuance of him, whose existence did, at the time the Apostle wrote, prevent the manifestation of the son of perdition; and who, he says, was known to those to whom he addressed this Epistle. Whether the first christians obtained the knowledge by an immediate revelation, or by some inspired interpreter's explanation of an ancient prophecy, is not at present known; but the power itself, which was then the obstacle to the rise of the man of sin, is said to have been the Roman Empire; and this tradition is handed down to us, not only by writers of high authority in the church, but particularly by one‡ of an age, in which it is scarcely in fairness to be supposed, that tradition on points so interesting as this could have perished.

‡ Tertullian, see the passages from his works quoted by Bishop Newton in v. 2. of his Dissertations on the Prophecies, p. 413. (See Whitaker's View of the Prophecies, p p. 9, 10.)
Mr. Faber, you know, has told his readers, that "the spirit of the Papacy was not working in the apostolic age," and from hence, he ought to have concluded that St. Paul's man of sin, was not applicable to the church of Rome.* He, however, has referred his readers to a far distant period for the removing of the let to the revelation of the man of sin. "The long line of the Caesars did not become extinct," he says, "till Constantinople became a prey to the martial fanaticism of the Turks. Thus was his let removed out of the way, and thus was an opening prepared for the man of sin and the western Apostasy. Constantine quitted the antient capital for the city of which he claimed to be the founder. Honorius, the first of the divided Italian Caesars, fixed his residence at Ravenna, and at length the empire was completely overthrown in the person of Augustulus. Nothing now impeded the growth of the little horn, except the three Gothic kingdoms, which were destined to be plucked up by the roots before it. During their eradication, it gradually increased, and before it had attained the summit of its temporal power, the saints were delivered into its hand, and it became a mighty spiritual persecuting empire. Then was the man of sin revealed, that son of

* "So long," says Mr. Faber, "as I acknowledge the authority of the Epistles of St. John, I must peremptorily deny that the Pope is the Antichrist; both because I am plainly taught, that the spirit of that liar was working even in the apostical age, which the spirit of the Papacy was not, and because I am no less plainly taught, that, when ever the monster should be publicly revealed, he should be known by his denial of the Father and the Son." (See his Dissertation upon Prophecy, vol. 1. p. 110.)
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Perdition, whose tyrannical reign and final destruction is described at large under the three last trumpets." (See his Dissertation, vol. 2, p. 23, 24.)

As the Apostle Paul has expressly asserted, that the Thessalonians knew what hindered the revelation of the man of sin, it will necessarily follow, upon Mr. Faber's hypothesis, that the Thessalonians were well acquainted with this part of the history of the Caesars, thus detailed by Mr. Faber—but this is a supposition which, I am persuaded, is in the highest degree improbable!

Bishop Hurd, you know, has very candidly acknowledged that, though the Thessalonians knew what this let, or hindrance to the revelation of the man of sin, was, we do not, and this is generally allowed to be the fact. But, if you think the Apostle's language has a relation to the destruction of Jerusalem, the conjecture of the learned Whitby will have much probability in it, and as such, I beg leave to present it to you.

After having mentioned the opinion which has been espoused by other commentators, he says—"My conjecture is this—He who letteth, i.e., the emperor Claudius, will let, till he be taken away—i.e., he will hinder the Jews from breaking into an open rebellion, in his time, they being so signal and particularly obliged by him, that they cannot for shame think of revolting from his government; for he had made two edicts in their favour; the one concerning the Alexandrian Jews, to this effect, that the just Jews should suffer nothing because of the
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madness of Caius, who would be worshipped as a God, and that they should have liberty to observe their own laws and customs. And that other edict, in which he gives them liberty over his whole empire, without molestation, to observe their own laws and customs, declaring he did it, because he judged them worthy of that favour, for their affection to the Roman Government.” (See Whitby in Loc.)

Having thus stated the conjecture of Dr. Whitby upon the cause of the let, or hinderance of the revelation of the man of sin; you will permit me to notice to you, that Dr. Benson, though a strenuous advocate for the application of St. Paul’s language to the church of Rome, yet, in his note, upon the phrase—the mystery of iniquity doth already work, refers his readers to Matt xxiv. 4, 24, which he had, in the most express terms, asserted to relate to what was to come to pass in that generation, and, consequently, must have a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. That these verses have an exclusive reference to that event, see my sixth letter.

Besides, if the original word, in the phrase the mystery of iniquity, signifies, as I think it evidently does, disobedience to law τῆς άνωτάτας, you will see, that it almost explains itself of the revolt of the Jews from the Roman government. Accordingly, Dr. Whitby has observed, upon this passage, that they had already imbibed their pernicious principles, that it is not lawful to pay tribute unto Cæsar, or to be subject to any other government under God—they had already made some seditions at-
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tempts, not only in Babylon, but in Judea, under Theudas and the Gaulonites.

In like manner, it is said, that when the let or hinderance should be taken out of the way—the Apostle says—then shall O aνωμος, the lawless one, be fully revealed, whom the Lord shall consume by the breath of his mouth, and shall destroy by the brightness of his coming.

The day of the Lord's coming to destroy Jerusalem, says Dr. Whitby, is styled by Joel, ii. 31. ημερα Κυριου και μεγαλη και επιφανης, the great and bright day of the Lord. And Mal. iv. 3. Behold I send you Elias the prophet, πριν ελθῃ την ημεραν του Κυριου την μεγαλην και επιφανην, before the coming of the great and bright day of the Lord. And that our Lord's coming in his day, after he had suffered, and been rejected of that age, or generation, in which he suffered, should be as lightning shining from one end of the heaven to the other, he expressly tells his disciples, Luke xvii. 24. And when this επιφανεια και παρουσια, brightness and appearance of the son of man was to happen, he sufficiently instructs in these words—as the lightning φαινεται, shineth from the East to the West, ουτως εσαι και η παρουσια του υπο του ανθρωπου so shall the coming of the son of man be:—St. Luke adds also, what Dr. Whitby has not noticed—Even thus shall it be, when the son of man is revealed. The Dr. then adds—ουκ ηγαρ, for wheresoever the carcass is, there shall the eagles be gathered together, which sensibly applies this matter to the destruction of the Jews, by the Roman army, whose ensign was the eagle. This, therefore, he
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says, is a further confirmation of our exposition. *How much is it to be lamented, that this able commentator should, with these judicious ideas, have stumbled at the very threshold of the temple of truth, by a perplexity and confusion, as Bishop Newton has observed, as if he was not satisfied with his own explication. But how much more is it to be lamented, that the Bishop possessing these advantages, should not have been able to clear away the rubbish, which disgraced his scheme, and prevented his entrance.*

If, upon mature consideration, you shall think that our Lord's language, in his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, has a close connection with the phrase made use of, by St. Paul—of the brightness of his coming, you will not think it difficult to ascertain, with tolerable precision, the true sense of the following verse. 'The Apostle, you know, had just said that 'O ἀνωμος, the lawless one, would be destroyed, by the brightness of his coming, i. e. of the coming of Christ, in the destruction of Jerusalem, and who was that? Even he, as the ellipsis is very properly supplied by our translators, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth.

This language of St. Paul, you will observe, appears to have so striking resemblance, not to say reference, to that of our Lord, in Matt. xxiv. and the parallel chapters, that there is scarcely a single commentator who has not
noticed it, Dr. Benson himself not excepted. Thus our Lord foretold that, there should arise false Christs and false prophets, who should deceive many, and who should shew great signs and wonders, to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. And, to render this prediction the more impressive, he says—Take heed—behold I have told you before. And, you will not be disposed to doubt, that there were such persons, as are here mentioned, which then arose among the Jews. Now, says Dr. Whitby, to these Josephus doth ascribe the beginning of the Apostasy from the Roman government—and by them, he informs us, that it was carried on to the last. The affairs of the Jews, says he, became worse daily, by reason γοηλων ανθρωπων αι των οχλων ηματων, of those impostors who deceived the people; of which, he immediately gives an instance in the Egyptian, who set up for a prophet. He adds that, in the beginning of the reign of Nero, impostors and deceivers, under a pretence of a divine impulse, endeavouring innovations and changes, made the people mad, and led them into the wilderness, promising there to them signs of liberty from God, and that γοητες πολλοις εις αποστασιν ενηγον—the impostors prevailed with many to revolt. And even when their temple was in flames, he saith, there were many prophets who encouraged them to expect την απο θεου ευελειαν, help from God, and that they gave credit to them. And, what is particularly deserving of your attention is, that Josephus makes use of the exact words σημεια και τερατα. signs and wonders, made use of, both by our Lord, and by the Apostle Paul.
In the tenth and eleventh verses the Apostle says that the working of Satan was with all deceitfulness of unrighteousness, in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie; that they all might be condemned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Dr. Macknight was of opinion that the lie here intended by the spirit of God, was the monstrous lie of transubstantiation—but you will perhaps think it much more probable that the lie, here, is opposed to the truth, which, in the tenth verse, it is said, they would not receive that they might be saved. This truth could be no other than that of which the Apostle was professedly treating, viz. concerning the coming of Christ, upon which the whole fabric of Christianity is founded. And their not believing the truth, but having pleasure in unrighteousness, were the principal causes of the destruction of the Jewish nation.*

* In Rom. ii. 8. it is said that they do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; upon which I shall transcribe the note of Dr. Whitby, a little varied and without the references. The Gospel, he says, is styled the truth of God—the word of truth—the knowledge of the truth—the belief of the truth—obedience to the truth—walking according to the truth—and the Gospel itself is emphatically styled the truth. To know it, is to know the truth—to profess it, is to be of the truth—to reject it, is not to believe the truth—and to err from it, is to err from the truth.
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There is one argument more, my dear sir, in favour of the application of St. Paul's language, in this celebrated chapter, to which I must request your attention, and that contained in the fifteenth verse, and appears to be the conclusion of the subject. Therefore stand fast brethren and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or by our Epistle. Here, you perceive, the standing fast is evidently opposed to their being shaken in mind, or troubled, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, mentioned in the beginning of the chapter. And the traditions, in which they were to stand fast, appear to me, to relate to our Lord's predictions concerning his coming, as the final proof of the truth of his character as the Messiah.

This interpretation of the term tradition, you will readily perceive, is founded upon the supposition that the Gospel history was not published, at the time when the Epistle was written, and that, consequently, the predictions of our Lord concerning the destruction of Jerusalem were, in the strictest sense, traditions. As to the time when the Gospels were published, there is, as we well know, a very considerable difference of opinions among the learned. But, without entering into a critical examination of these opinions, there will, I doubt not, appear to you, to be very considerable weight in the observations of Dr. Paley upon this head. "Whilst the transaction was recent," says this venerable writer, "and no original witnesses were at hand to relate it, and whilst the Apostles were busied in preaching and travelling, in collecting Disciples, in forming and regulating societies
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and converts, in supporting themselves against opposition) whilst they exercised their ministry under the harrassing of frequent persecution, and in a state of almost continual alarm; it is not probable that in this engaged, anxious, and unsettled condition of life, they would think immediately of writing histories for the information of the public, or of posterity. But it is very probable that emergencies might draw from some of them, occasional letters upon the subject of their mission, to converts, or to societies of converts with which they were connected; or that they might address written discourses and exhortations to the disciples of the institution, at large, which would be read with a respect, proportioned to the character of the writer. (See Paley's Evidences, v. 1. p. 159.

Besides these general reasons for the not publishing of the Gospels, at an early period, you will easily discern some particular and special reasons for delaying the publishing of them, at least, for a considerable time. These reasons are most ably stated by Dr. Lardner. Speaking of the predictions of our Lord, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, he says—"It must have been difficult and hazardous to publish such things in writing. How offensive, these sayings must have been to the Jewish people, and perhaps to some others likewise, is easy to conceive from the nature of the things spoken of. And it may be confirmed, by divers instances. When our Lord had spoken the parable of the vineyard let out to husbandmen, recorded in Luke, xx. 9, 18, it is added, by the Evangelist, v. 19, 20. And the chief priests and the scribes, the same hour, sought to lay hands on him;
that they feared the people, for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them; and they watched him, and sent forth spies which should feign themselves as men, that they might take hold of his words, that they might deliver him to the power and authority of the governor. And among the odious charges brought against our Saviour, by false witnesses, this was one, that he said, I can destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days. With this lie was reproached likewise, when hanging on the cross, xxvii. 40. The less offensive charges were brought against Stephen, Acts, vi. 14: We have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered to us. And possibly he did say some what, not very different. So likewise St. Matthew and the other Apostles might repeat, in the hearing of many, what Christ had said to them, and in part, to others also, concerning the overthrow of the temple and the Jewish state. Yes, very probably, they had often repeated these things to attentive hearers. But speaking and writing are different. And, I apprehend, it could not have been safe, nor prudent, to record these predictions (many of which are very plain and intelligible) even after our Lord’s ascension. These prophecies therefore of our Lord, as recorded in the three first Gospels, afford at once an argument that they were written and published before the destruction of Jerusalem, and that they were not published, many years before it, or however, not many years before the commencement of the war.” (See Lardner’s History of the Apostles, vol. 1. p. 75, 76.)
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This reasoning of these learned writers, you will observe, is strongly corroborated by the observations of Dr. Herbert Marsh, who says that, "If the arguments in favour of a late date for the composition of St. Matthew's Gospel, be compared with those in favour of an early date, it will be found that the former greatly outweigh the latter. In the first place, the evidence in favour of a late date, is antient, whereas the evidence in favour of an early date, is modern. A writer of the second century, as Irenæus was, had surely better means of information, in respect to a fact in the first century, than any writer could have, who lived in a later age. And it is incredible, that Irenæus would have assigned to the composition of St. Matthew's Gospel, a later date than that which he had really heard, since he could have no motive for so doing; and if he had been instigated by any motive, to substitute his own conjecture to the report which had been made to him, it is probable, if we may judge from the practice of other ecclesiastical writers, that he would have endeavoured rather to augment, than to diminish the antiquity of St. Matthew's Gospel. To oppose these late opinions, for they are nothing more than mere opinions, to the assertion of Irenæus, who lived near the time of the fact in question, is surely to violate the laws of sound criticism." (See Marsh's Notes on Michaelis, vol. 3. part ii. p. 98.

To these observations of these learned men, permit me to add, my dear sir, that it appears to me impossible, that any of the Gospels, containing our Lord's predictions of the destruction of Jerusalem, could have been pub-
lished before St. Paul wrote his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, upon the supposition that he alluded to that event, in the chapter under consideration; for in that case, all caution would have been useless, as the predictions of our Lord could not have failed to have been publicly known, both by believers and unbelievers, and consequently, there would have been no occasion for his writing to them upon the subject.

I have now, my dear sir, laid before you my reasons for applying St. Paul's language, in this celebrated chapter, not to the church of Rome, but to the Jewish nation. And the principal objection to this hypothesis, which I think it necessary to take notice of, beyond what have already been replied to, seems to be that of the late Bishop Newton, which is thus branched out into a variety of questions. St. Paul, he says, had planted the church in Thessalonica, and it consisted principally of converts from among the Gentile idolaters, because it is said, I. Thess. i, 9. that they turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God. What occasion was there therefore to admonish them particularly of the destruction of Jerusalem? Or, why should they be under such agitations and terrors upon that account? What connection had Macedonia with Judea, or Thessalonica with Jerusalem? What share were the christian converts to have in the calamities of the rebellious and unbelieving Jews; and why should they not rather have been comforted than troubled at the punishment of their inveterate enemies? Besides, how could the Apostle deny that the destruction of the Jews was at hand, when it was at hand, as he saith

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herself, I. Thess. ii. 16. And the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost?

For a most complete answer to this last question I beg leave to refer you to a former letter, and in reply to the questions—What connection the Thessalonians had with the destruction of Jerusalem—Or why should they be under such agitations upon that account? It might be asked—What connection the Thessalonians had with the Apostasy, if it must be so called, of the church of Rome? And what occasion of alarm could it have been to them? But Bishop Newton, when he put the questions above recited, seems not to have been aware, that our Lord had put the credit of his religion upon the accomplishment of his prediction, and that the agitations and terrors of the Thessalonians are, very naturally, to be accounted for, from the suggestions that there were no signs of such an event taking place, and that consequently Christianity was an imposture. In this view, you will see that all christians, however distant from Jerusalem, were deeply interested in it, and if it had not taken place, the triumph of infidelity would have been complete.

Besides, if Bishop Newton had attended to facts which are unquestionable, the Thessalonian christians were, of all others, most deeply interested in the destruction of Jerusalem; for, distant as Thessalonica was from thence, he could not but have known, that there was a synagogue of the Jews, in that place, who were exceedingly troublesome to the Thessalonian christians, so much so indeed, as to create considerable alarm, not only to the
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Christians, but to the magistrates themselves! And no wonder; for it appears that they accused the Christians
of Thessalonians of crimes of the most atrocious nature—of such indeed as struck at the root of the existing
government, by setting up a king of their own, Acts, xvii. 7. These all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying
that there is another king, one Jesus. And it is the
remark of the historian, upon this accusation, that they
troubled both the people and the rulers of the city when
they heard these things; nay, so exceedingly violent were
they, that the Thessalonian Christians were obliged to
send away Paul and Silas by night to Berea, to avoid
their fury. It is moreover added that so violent was their
rage against them, that they even followed them thither;
and stirred up the people against them.

With these facts in view, you will think it by no
means improbable, that the Apostle Paul alluded to them,
when he says—Now we beseech you that ye be not trou-
bled, or shaken in mind, and that he denominates the
Jews as the common enemies of mankind; giving this as
a reason for it, that they persecuted the Apostles and
forbad them to speak to the Gentiles that they might be
saved. In short, in no place whatever, does it appear
that the unbelieving Jews were so extremely active and
vindictive against the Christians, as at Thessalonica: This
distance therefore of Jerusalem from Thessalonica, seems
to have been no reason why the Apostle might not, with
the utmost propriety, have introduced the subject of the
destruction of Jerusalem, as an event, which would be
extremely interesting to them, and the mysterious man-
mer, in which he speaks upon the subject, was a most striking mark of his prudence, and very naturally to be accounted for, from the peculiar circumstances of the times.

With respect to the Bishop's other questions, why the Thessalonians should be under such agitations and terrors, and why they should not rather have been comforted, than troubled, at the punishment of their inveterate enemies? there certainly is no improbability in the supposition, that the ground of their trouble originated in the unfounded suggestions, which were given out concerning the coming of Christ. It cannot be doubted that, whilst Jerusalem continued in any degree of prosperity, the unbelieving Jews would urge the opinion, which they held, that their Messiah would soon appear, to raise them to their expected superiority over the nations of the world, and that then the Christians would be fully convicted of the absurdity of believing in one, who had been crucified as a notorious malefactor and impostor. Many, as our Lord had foretold, would start up and say—Lo here is the Christ—or the Messiah—or lo he is there. And some, it was predicted, would shew great signs and wonders; which, from the distance of Jerusalem from Thessalonica, might be greatly magnified, and create no small agitation and trouble to the Christians, against which it was the duty of their teachers to guard them. In a word, while Jerusalem was standing, the controversy, whether our Lord actually sustained the character of the Messiah, was not fully decided, and the door was still open for impostors to lay claim to that character, which would naturally
afford room for suggestions, unfavourable to the christian cause; which, from the known character of the unbelieving Jews, they would not fail to avail themselves of, to the great annoyance of the christians at Thessalonica.

You will not, I am sure, be displeased with the following observations of the late Rev. Newcome Cappe, upon this subject; particularly, as he does not appear to have differed from the commonly received opinion respecting St. Paul's man of sin.

The unbelieving Jews, he says, were the great enemies of the christian name. They considered their converted countrymen as Apostates, and the converted Gentiles as encouragers and supporters of their Apostasy. By the visitation coming on Jerusalem and Judea, the power and confidence of the Jews everywhere, would be considerably shaken and impaired; their reverence for the Mosaic institution, and their malignity against the Gospel, by this event, must both of them be considerably abated. Crest-fallen and confounded, they would have less spirit and less inclination too, to meditate mischief against the converts of the Gospel; and indeed they would probably find less offence in any thing disparaging to Judaism and its peculiarities.

Christians therefore, of the Gentiles, as well as of the Jews, were interested in the coming of Christ to the destruction of Jerusalem, as a day of redemption to themselves; it was an object of hope for them, the removal of a great impediment, by which the progress of
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the Gospel was obstructed, a triumph over their persecutors, of much importance as to themselves; so also to their cause, for hereby it had free course and was glorified. The first christians, it is manifest, whether Jewish or Gentile converts, had much interest in this event, and the expectation of it was of importance to them; as it would help, and they needed such aid, to support and cheer them under the heavy sufferings they drew upon themselves by their adherence to Jesus and his Gospel; it was wise therefore, that this hope should be set before them, and by repeated admonitions, references, and allusions, kept alive and active in their minds. (See his Critical Remarks, vol. 2. p. 252.

I have now, my dear sir, laid before you an explanation of a part of scripture, which, Dr. Paley has expressly acknowledged, has "hitherto been unexplained, and perhaps inexplicable," drawn from sources which no christian will be inclined to dispute, and upon principles, which every page of the Gospel history renders indisputable. What encouragement then does this afford to further inquiry, and for a rational expectation that even the errors of popery may, by a patient attention and dispassionate inquiry, be gradually dispersed, as the mist of the morning, by the meridian sun. Mr. Faber has indeed said that, "we must not look for any further reformation from popery; for, he says, the vials are instruments of God's wrath, not of his mercy." (See his Dissertation upon Prophecy, vol. 2. p. 375.) But, this is so discouraging an idea, that it ought not, for a
moment, to be admitted, but upon the strongest evidence—evidence which I am confident cannot be produced. On the contrary—a greater authority* than that of Mr. Faber, has led us to expect that the fulness of the Gentiles would come in, when the blindness of the Jews should be removed. And the prophecies, with which Mr. Faber has been so conversant, might have afforded him a more cheering prospect. For my own part, I hesitate not to say, that I have the fullest confidence, founded upon the history of past times, and particularly upon that of the reformation, that, if we are faithful to ourselves, and make a proper use of the means, which are put into our hands, a farther reformation must necessarily follow. What these means are, it has, you know, long been my object to recommend, and it is to these means that, I frankly acknowledge, I owe whatever success I have had in investigating and ascertaining the genuine meaning of St. Paul in his description of the man of sin, and any claim I may have to public attention.

In my next letter I shall lay before you my thoughts upon the term Antichrist, which, you know, has been

* When I say a greater authority than that of Mr. Faber, I beg it may be understood, that, upon the supposition that the book of Revelations is authentic, he must have mistaken the passage which he has quoted. Admitting that the vials are instruments of God's wrath—it certainly is not a justifiable conclusion that mercy may not fail. His observation would have been as conclusive before as since the reformation!
equally applied to the church of Rome, and, as will appear, with as little reason. In the mean time,

I am,

Rev. Sir,

Most truly,

Your's,

N. NISBET

TUNSTALL, Dec. 6th. 1814.
LETTER XI.

Upon the Antichrist of St. John.

REV. SIR,

As the term Antichrist has generally been supposed, by protestant divines, to be synonymous with the phrase the man of sin, and is, as generally, applied by them to the church of Rome; you will readily discern the propriety and the importance of an inquiry, whether it is justly to be applied to that church, or to any other power at a period, far distant from that, in which the term was originally made use of, in the two first Epistles of St. John, where alone it is to be found.

There is, you know, some difference of opinions, among the learned, respecting the time when these Epistles were written; some supposing that they were written a short time before the destruction of Jerusalem, and others, that they were not written till some years afterwards. Should this latter opinion, upon inquiry, prove to be correct, it would not, I think, be very easy to understand what the Apostle could mean, by the term Antichrist, particularly when connected with his declara-
tion that it was *the last time*, and that Antichrist was then actually existing, *whereby they knew that it was the last time*. It seems, however, to be now pretty generally understood, that these expressions contain sufficient indications, that they were written prior to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and that they had, at least in their original meaning, a particular reference to the near approach of that awful calamity.

Bishop Hurd says—"The time, that elapsed from Christ's ascension to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, is called *the latter times*, and the eve of its destruction, *is called the last hour*." Again, he says,—"The appearance of false Christs and false prophets, of which there were many, according to our Lord's prediction, in St. John's time, indicated the arrival of that hour, that was to be fatal to the Jewish state." Archbishop Newcome, having observed that Grotius's note upon I. John, ii. 18, is well worth considering, adds, with great propriety, that the words, *whereby we know that it is the last time*, have much force, if we suppose that they refer to our Lord's prophecies of *the destruction of Jerusalem*. And, he might, with equal propriety, have added, that they appear to have none at all, if they do not refer to that event. And, to mention no more, the present Bishop of Lincoln says—"The Apostle seems to allude to the approaching dissolution of the Jewish state; and to

† Ultima hora, i.e. ultimum tempus, ubi ad Judaeos sermo et significat tempus proximum excidio urbis ac templi et reipublicae Judaeorum. (See Archbishop Newcome's Observations, p. 192.)
Christ’s predictions concerning the false teachers, who were to appear before the destruction of Jerusalem."

These observations of these learned men appear to me to be perfectly correct—but it does not appear that Bishop Hurd was warranted in applying the Apostle’s language, as in fact he has done—"to the reign of Antichrist—to the Millennium—to the day of judgment, on the ground that the false prophets were, at the same time, the types and forerunners of a still more dreadful power, which should be revealed in the latter times, in a future period, when that calamity was past." For such an assertion, you will, as will hereafter fully appear, in vain look in the Epistles of St. John. "On the contrary, he evidently appears, by the Bishop’s own acknowledgment, to have been speaking of the coming of false Christs and false prophets, which would indicate the arrival of that hour, which would be fatal to the Jewish state. The Bishop, however, says—that, for the truth of the assertion that such a power should arise in the Christian church, the Apostle appeals to a tradition then current among the disciples; but, for such a tradition you will also search in vain. He does indeed say—Ye have heard that Antichrist shall come—but if St. John is permitted to explain his own meaning, he will tell you that it was the false Christs and false prophets, predicted by our Lord, who were to appear before the destruction of Jerusalem, and which, the Bishop himself acknowledges, were to be among the signs, by which that hour was to be distinguished. You will not, therefore, as appears to me, find the slightest evidence of the truth of the Bishop’s asser-
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...tion, that "his hated name of Antichrist is here applied, by way of anticipation, to the false Christs of that time, as possessing much of his character, and acting with his spirit."*

Bishop Hurd, you will perceive, is at great pains to shew, that the more early intelligent christian writers of the three first centuries had no idea of the Roman emperor, as such, having any concern in the predictions concerning Antichrist, while yet they held, very unanimously, that some future power was to arise in the church, in which those predictions would be completed. When the reformation took place, the doctrine of Antichrist, as applicable to the church of Rome, was very naturally adopted by the supporters of that glorious work, and far be it from me to assert that it had, in their estimation, no better, or other foundation than in their interests or passions. They probably thought, as the Bishop has endeavoured to prove, that some future power was to arise, to whom this title belonged—but, says the Bishop, "we argue not from their authority, but from the Prophecies themselves, which are much better understood by us than they were by them, and are still maintained to speak the sense they put upon them.

That Luther, indeed, heated in the controversy with the church of Rome, and smoking, as I may say, from the recent blast of the papal thunders, should cry out, aye,*

* It does not, I think, appear that the learned Bishop enter more particularly into a consideration of the connection, in which the term Antichrist stands with the rest of the Epistle.
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CHRIST, shall pass, if you will, for a Sally of rage and desperation. But that we, at this day, who revolve the prophecies at our ease, and are in little more dread of modern Rome, than of antient Babylon, should still find the resemblance so striking as to fall upon the same idea, is a consideration of another sort."† vol. 2.

† Bishop Hurd has been somewhat hard upon Grotius, for having endeavoured to prove, that the Pope was not Antichrist. The character of Hugo Grotius, he says, is well known. He is justly esteemed among the ablest and most learned men of an age, that abounded in ability and learning. Besides his other shining talents, his acquaintance with history was extensive, and his knowledge of scripture profound. And yet, with two such requisites for unlocking the true sense of the prophetic writings, this excellent man undertook to prove, in form, that the Pope was not Antichrist.

The account of this mischance is as extraordinary as the mischance itself. The moral qualities of Grotius were still more admirable than his intellectual, and in these qualities we shall find the true spring of his unhappy and misapplied pains on the subject before us.

He was in his own nature just, candid, benevolent to a supreme degree; and the experience of an active turbulent life had but fortified him the more in a love of these pacific virtues. He was, in principle, a sincere and zealous Christian, and consequently impressed with a due sense of that exalted charity, which is the characteristic of that religion; but he had seen and felt much of the mischiefs, which proceed from Theological quarrels, and thus every thing concurred to make him a friend to peace, and, above all, to peace among Christians.

An union of the catholic and protestant churches seemed necce-
You have, my dear sir, seen upon what grounds the learned Bishop has, at his ease, applied the term Antichrist to the papacy—but, instead of proofs, you find nothing but assertions that "the false prophets were the types and forerunners of a still more dreadful power, which should be revealed in the latter times, in a future period."

Mr. Faber says—"The title of Antichrist has usually been applied to the pope by protestant expositors, and

sary to this end, and the apparent candour, whether real or affected, of some learned persons, whom he had long known and valued in the church of Rome, drew him into the belief, that such a project was not impracticable. Henceforth it became the ruling object of his life, and permitting himself too easily to conclude that the protestant doctrine of Antichrist was the sole, or principal obstruction to the union desired, he bent all the efforts of his wit and learning to discredit and overthrow that doctrine.

Thus was this virtuous man betrayed by the wisdom and equity of his own character, and I know not if the observation of the moral poet can be so justly applied to any other

Insani sapiens nomen ferat, sequus iniqui,
Ultra quam sadis est, virtutem ei petat ipsam.

Hor. I. Ep. vi. 15.

This is a most curious account of the origin of Grotius's attempt to prove that the Pope was not Antichrist, particularly as the Bishop himself is unable, only by the help of a type, for which there does not appear to be the least foundation, to prove that the Pope was Antichrist. How hardly would the Bishop have thought himself treated, if the observation of the moral poet had been applied to himself! But, fortunately for him, Grotius was no more.
by the Waldenses and Albigenses before the era of the reformation, but, he says, I cannot find that they have any warrant from scripture for so doing." And he has expressly charged Mr. Whitaker with "having exceeded his commission, in branding the Papacy with the title of Antichrist." Nay he asserts, that "it answers in no particular to the character of Antichrist, as delineated by St. John." Again he says—So long as I acknowledge the authority of the Epistles of St. John, I must peremptorily deny that the pope is the Antichrist."

In thus endeavouring to set aside the commonly received hypothesis, that the pope is the Antichrist of St. John, he does not fail to set up one of his own in its room. "The opinions of Antichrist," he says, "were secretly lurking in the church, even in the earliest ages; it has been our lot to behold them embodied, without disguise, by a whole nation. The beginning of the monster was in the Apostolic age; for it were easy to trace the pedigree of French philosophy, Jacobinism, and Bavarian illumination, up to the first heresies. But it is now we see his Adolescence.† The Antichrist, about to be revealed in distant times, about to rise out of the ruins of the old Roman empire, is certainly not the Papacy, as Bishop Hurd supposes, but a tyrannical state of a very different nature. The Papacy arose out of the ruins of the empire, but it never denied either the Father

† It appears that Bishop Horsley had adopted the same opinion concerning Antichrist. (See a former letter.) But whether he founds his opinion on the same ground with Mr. Faber, I know not.
or the son. Antichrist is likewise to arise out of the ruins of the empire, and is to be known by his denial both of the Father and the son."

Mr. Faber further says—"From the language of St. John, who is the only inspired writer that uses the term, I am much inclined to think, that Antichrist, strictly speaking, is a sort of generic term, including all persons, who answer to the description given of that character. Now the special badge assigned to the character is a denial of the Father and the son; a denial of the son positively, a denial of the Father either positively, or by implication. All therefore, who answer to this description, are members of Antichrist. The existence of his blasphemous principles is commensurate with the whole period of the Christian dispensation; but his peculiar reign, his open development, is confined to the last days of the last time." (See his Diss. vol. 1.)

This, my dear sir, is a faithful relation, in Mr. Faber's own words, of his hypothesis—but that he has discovered a meaning in St. John's language which has as little concord with it, as with the Papacy, will, I am persuaded, appear to you perfectly clear, from the following critical and impartial examination of the Epistles themselves, in their connection.*

* I have, in a former note, intimated that Bishop Hurd has not been very particular in his criticisms upon the connection of the term Antichrist with the rest of the Epistles. The same, I think, may be said of Mr. Faber—but it must be obvious, that without such criticisms, all their reasonings must be fallacious in the extreme.
In the beginning of his first Epistle, he tells those, to whom he wrote, of the stability of their faith in Jesus, the Messiah; having received, from the Apostles, an accurate account of whatever they had the fullest opportunity of knowing concerning him. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have attentively observed, and our hands have handled of the word of life—that declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy, arising from the evidence of our senses, may be full.

Having thus distinctly stated the evidences of their belief, that Jesus was the Messiah, the Apostle, you observe, gives them the following exhortation, founded, as I conceive, upon the principle, so manifest throughout the Gospel history, that the chief ground of opposition to the claims of Jesus to the character of the Messiah, was, that the Jews in general expected, in the person of their Messiah, a temporal prince to raise them to universal empire. Love not the world, neither the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but of the world; and the

1 There is a feebleness in the translation which is not in the original.
world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever.*

I scarcely need inform you, that Dr. Lardner has considered these, "as no more than general expressions, representing the uncertainty of all earthly things, and that, therefore, they afford no argument that the Apostle had therein, a regard to affairs in Judea, for," he says, "if he had, his expressions would have been more distinct and particular." But this does not appear to have been said with his usual judgment; for besides that the Apostle appears to have been very careful, as you will presently see, again and again to repeat it, there seems to have been no occasion for his being more particular, than to connect it with the verse which immediately follows it. v. 18. Little children, it is the last time, and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists, whereby ye know that it is the last time.

* Some have supposed that the abiding for ever has a reference to the enjoyment of happiness in a future state, and among others Dr. Benson; but I rather think that the Apostle has fully explained his own meaning in ver. 24. Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning; if it shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father. And it is not a little remarkable that Dr. Benson himself thus paraphrases the last sentence—"you will continue to be true and faithful to both." As a corroboration of this idea—the abiding, and remaining, and continuing, in the original, are all expressed by the same word.

If this be admitted to be the true sense of the seventeenth verse, it is a strong instance, among many others, of the very limited sense in which the word always is sometimes used.
That this language has a peculiar reference to the great controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the coming of the Messiah, or whether he was the person who actually sustained that character, seems abundantly evident, not only from the introduction to this Epistle, already laid before you, and from the general tenor of the Gospel history, but, from what the Apostle says, in the following verses—Who is a liar, or a deceiver, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ. He is the Antichrist—the opposer of Christ, as the word properly signifies, who denieth the Father and the son. This, you observe, the Apostle immediately explains, by saying—Whosoever denieth the son, the same hath not the Father; which will, very naturally, remind you of our Lord's declaration to his disciples, upon his giving them a commission, to announce the near approach of the kingdom of Heaven, or of the Messiah. He that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. But the more effectually to ascertain his meaning, he again refers, in the next verse, to what he had said in the beginning of the first chapter, already cited—Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning, shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the son and in the Father. He then says—These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you, i.e. who are endeavouring to persuade you, that Jesus is not the Christ, and that he is not yet come. And now, adds the Apostle, little children, abide in him that when he was manifested, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him in the day of judgment, at his coming.
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What could have led any one to interpret this language, either of the Papacy, or of the power, which, Mr. Faber says, has now risen to Adolescence, except it be that the Apostle refers in the last passage to the coming of Christ, it is not easy to imagine. But this, so far from giving countenance to either of these suppositions, appears to me, most decidedly, to confine his language to the destruction of Jerusalem. In Matt. xxiv. so often referred to, our Lord predicts that there would be false Christs and false prophets who should arise before the destruction of Jerusalem, which he emphatically terms his coming. v. 27. As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west so shall also the coming of the son of man be. And v. 37. As were the days of Noah so shall also the coming of the son of man be. And you recollect that Bishop Hurd has expressly said, that the appearance of false Christs and false prophets indicated the arrival of that hour, that was to be fatal to the Jewish state.†

In the fourth chapter, you observe, the Apostle again renews the subject, with a view to caution those, whom

† It must not be concealed, that I suspect all the commentators refer the coming, here mentioned by St. John, to Christ's second coming to judge the world, but with them I cannot agree for the reason, above assigned. And my interpretation appears to me to add greatly to the credibility of the book, while it diminishes nothing from the certainty of a future state. In fact, I do not hesitate to give it as my decided opinion, that Christianity is founded upon, and hath an invariable reference to, the doctrine of a future state. But more of this hereafter.
Beloved, believe not every spirit, or every person, but try the spirits whether they are of God. And, the reason, which the Apostle gives for the trial of the spirits, is precisely such, as you would naturally have expected from what he had already said—because, says he, many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye—or ye may know the spirit which is of God. Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God, and every spirit, on the contrary, which confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God. And this is that spirit of Antichrist, or of opposition to Christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world. The Apostle then breaks out, in terms of high commendation, on the conduct of those, who had firmly withstand the artifices of the false prophets—Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them—you have seen through, and got the better of their artifices—because greater is the influence that he has that is in you, than he has, that is in the world.

That all this relates, exclusively, to the controversy concerning the coming of the Messiah, is so extremely evident, that you will, I am confident, readily admit, that it is scarcely to be controverted. But were there still any doubt remaining upon the subject, the Apostle's subsequent language would immediately remove it. They, viz. the false prophets are of the world—they proclaim a temporal Messiah, as yet to come, and therefore the world heareth them. They savoured not, as our Lord had formerly told his disciples—the things of God.
or spiritual things, _but those of men,_ or temporal things. Hence the Apostle again repeats the excellent advice, so peculiarly suited to their situation, and to the temptations, to which they would be subjected from the deceivers, who were gone out into the world. _Love not the world, neither the things of the world._ If any man so love the world, as to reject him whom the Father hath sent, the love of the Father is not in him.* And, to render this advice the more effectual, you observe that, in the fourteenth verse, the Apostle repeats the assertion which he had made in the beginning of his Epistle. _We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son, the Saviour of the world._ And, as he had before said, that his object in writing was, that _they might have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,_ so he says here, though in language somewhat different—_Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him; and he in God._ And, in the following chapter, the Apostle again renews the subject with an earnestness, which shews his sense of the dangers, to which they were exposed by the wily arts of their adversaries, and the great importance of their steadfast belief that Jesus was the true Messiah. ch. v. 1. _Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God; and from hence he draws_ 

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* This observation, though peculiarly applicable to the Jews, expecting, in the person of their Messiah, a _temporal prince,_ is worthy of attention in the present day. If it had been our Lord's purpose to have set up a _temporal kingdom_ and to invite men to strive, which should possess most of the honours and emoluments, which he had to bestow, it can hardly be conceived, that men could have been more eager to obtain them than they now are!
this conclusion—that every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that isbegotten of him. And, in the fifth verse, it is well worthy of your remark, that the Apostle again refers to the worldly allurements, which were held out to seduce them from their stedfast adherence to the faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the son of God? In the eleventh verse, the Apostle points out the great advantage of their believing in Jesus, as the son of God. This is the testimony that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his son. He that hath the son hath life, and he that hath not the son of God hath not life. And having, so often in the course of his Epistle, referred to this subject, he, in the twentieth verse, sums up the whole in these remarkable terms. We know that the son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, from him who is a deceiver, and we are in him that is true, viz. in his son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.†

From the impression, which the whole of this language has made upon my own mind, I should, my dear sir,

† Dr. Doddridge, speaking of this passage, says—"It is an argument of the Deity of Christ, which almost all who have wrote in its defence have urged; and which, I think, none who have opposed it, have so much as appeared to answer." And, if the true reading be as here stated, it seems to admit of no reply. At the same time, I must frankly acknowledge, I should rather have supposed, and so I think must the reader too, from the whole tenor of the Epistle, that the conclusion would have been—This is the true Messiah and eternal life.
consider it as almost an insult upon your understanding to attempt to adduce any farther evidence, that it has a most direct and exclusive reference to the great controversy, not then finished, whether Jesus was the true Messiah, or whether, as St. Luke expresses it, they were to look for another, and consequently, that there cannot be a doubt of St. John's meaning, in his second Epistle, couched nearly in the same terms, and supposed to have been addressed to a lady of distinction, who had embraced Christianity. v. 7. Many deceivers are entered into the world who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. He is a deceiver and an Antichrist, an opposer of Christ, who doth not.

If now, my dear sir, you compare these things, as represented in these Epistles of St. John, with the account which is given in the Gospel history, and particularly in Matt. xxiv. and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, you immediately perceive how beautifully they harmonize with, and corroborate each other. You see, likewise, in a very striking point of view, in the case of St. John, how completely the sentiments of the Apostles were altered, concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, from those which they possessed, during the life of their great master, and of course, you cannot fail to discern, how much all this redounds to the credit of that history, and multiplies the evidences of the truth of Christianity. And, will you permit me to add that, by such a view, you see that the Epistles and Gospels are so far, at least, restored to their original simplicity, and the Christian inquirer is freed from a load of perplexity and doubt, is.
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looking for meanings, in the occurrences of this fleeting world, which have no sort of connection with them?

It has been admirably well observed by Dr. Zouch, and is particularly deserving of the serious attention of all who write upon the subject of prophecy, that "it must be a very arduous attempt, to frame a system of prophetic interpretation from the events of the present times, however awful and tremendous. The effervescence of popular fury, the ferocity of democratic phrenzy, the paroxysms of Atheism and Infidelity, the vanity of unprincipled ambition, can supply no firm foundation whereon to raise any solid exposition. One revolutionary plan rapidly succeeds another. Like the kings, who appear before the amazed Macbeth, pass along the stage, and then vanish into nothing, the democratic despots of France have been quickly hurled from their seat of power, to make room for others, who in their turn have experienced the same fate. A new constitution has recently commenced, totally regardless of the forms and boasted principles of representation and political equality, excluding the people from all share in the government, and establishing a despotism, absolute and degrading in the extreme. How long the exercise of this tyranny will sustain itself, it is not easy to conjecture." (See Dr. Zouch's Attempt, p. 63, &c.)

If the observations, which I have made in this and my two last letters, shall, upon examination, be found to be accurate, the inference must necessarily be, that, when the reformers applied the language of St. Paul in the
second chapter of his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, and that of St. John to the Papacy, and when writers of celebrity in the present day, rejecting this opinion, have transferred it to what is now passing in the world, they have mistaken the sense of the sacred writers. For the former error an excuse very naturally offers itself, from the circumstances of the times, when, just emerging from the gross ignorance and superstition, in which centuries upon centuries had involved them, they had not leisure to examine, with critical attention, into the genuine meaning of the sacred writers, in the passages referred to. But I must, my dear sir, confess, that it does appear to me somewhat extraordinary that, with the quiet we have for centuries enjoyed, and with such a spirit of inquiry, which has lately arisen, the genuine meaning of these writers, upon these subjects, has not been better understood. But, without meaning to throw the smallest impeachment, either upon the integrity or the ability of those, who have gone before me, compared with whom, I am but the being of a summer's day, I know from the experience of many years, that it could not have occurred to me to differ from them so much as I have done, had I not, in the strongest manner, been affected, by the objection of Mr. Gibbon, that Christ foretold his second coming in the generation in which he lived. That objection, you will readily suppose, very naturally led me to the inquiry, upon what foundation it was built, and whether he had not mistaken his second, for his first coming. The first coming of Christ, I found, to be the object of controversy, throughout the Gospel history—This, upon farther inquiry, still appeared to be
the case in the Epistles, and particularly in St. Paul's description of the man of sin, and in the Epistles of St. John. Here then, my dear sir, you have the genuine and unsophisticated account of the origin of my difference of opinion, upon these subjects, from the generality of christians.* I do not, however, mention these circumstances, with a view to depurate censure, or to check inquiry into the rectitude of my opinions. I have thought for myself, and it is your province to judge of the force of my reasoning, and the impartiality of my investigation. In fact, I most cordially agree with Mr. Faber, that every person, that attempts to unfold the sacred oracles of God, ought, not only to expect, but to desire that his writings should be even severely scrutinized. He may indeed fairly demand, that he should be treated with civility; but while he deprecates the offensive illiberality of sarcasm, and the disgusting coarseness of vulgar scurrility, by some esteemed the very acme of wit, and perfection of criticism, he ought never to shrink from the manly sincerity of calm and dispassionate investigation. Truth, in this important research, is, I hope, as it ought to be my principal concern, and I shall rejoice to see these sacred prophecies truly interpreted, though the correction of my mistakes, should lay the foundation of so desirable

* However much I may have been compelled to view the New Testament in a controversial point of view, it has been, it may well be supposed, a very painful, as well as a laborious employment, to encounter and to succeed in removing the numerous difficulties, which have impeded my progress.
I am not ambitious of entering into controversy with any one; neither, upon these principles, do I think that I have any just cause to fear it, from whatever quarter it may come.

I have only to add that, if I am right in my interpretation of the language of St. Paul and of St. John, you will perceive that we are, at least, advanced one step towards converting the Roman Catholics from the error of their ways; for you will, I am sure, agree with me, that of all methods of conversion, that of crying out Heretic, on the one side, and Antichrist and Apostate, on the other, is the very worst that can possibly be imagined.† And sure I am that the Christian records

† See Faber’s Diss. vol. 2, p. 502.

‡ Bishop Hurd has put in the mouth of an objector to the application of the term Antichrist to the Church of Rome, that although there be not the same evident necessity for bringing this odious charge against the Papacy, as there was formerly in the infancy of the reformation; yet obvious reasons are not wanting, which may possibly induce the Protestant churches of our times, to repeat and enforce it. So long as the separation is kept up, the partizans of the cause will not scruple to lay hold on every popular topic, by which it may be promoted. But an ill name is the readiest of all expedients, and generally the most effectual for this service. And as Heretic is the term in use when the Church of Rome would discredit the reformation, so Antichrist serves just as well, in the mouth of a Protestant, to disgrace the Catholic party. Hence, the people are gratified in a low spite against the person of the Pope, the better sort are confirmed in their religious or politi
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give not the smallest countenance to such practices, in either party. If any man among you seemeth to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man’s religion is vain.

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your’s respectfully,

N. NISBETT,

STANSTALL, Dec. 28th. 1811.

...aversion to the church of Rome; and princes themselves are invited to come in aid of the prophecies, by turning their arms and councils against a godless antichristian tyranny; and all this, to the ruin of public peace, and in defiance of christian charity.

To this objection this learned prelate very properly replies, that “the question is not, what use has been, or may be made of this doctrine concerning Antichrist, but whether there be reason to believe that such doctrine is really contained in sacred scripture. If there be, it will become us to treat it with respect, how much soever it may have been misapplied or perverted.” (See Hard on the Prophecies, vol. 2. p. 58, &c.)
LETTER XI.

REV. SIR,

In my last letter I engaged to make a few observations upon the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which you find the writer of it alluding to some awful and tremendous calamity; telling his readers that they saw the day approaching—that vengeance belonged unto God—that the Lord would judge his people—that it was a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and that yet a little while and he that should come, would come, and would not tarry. That these expressions all relate to one and the same event, you will think highly probable from their standing in the clearest connexion with each other, and that this event was no other than the destruction of Jerusalem, you will think highly probable from the general tenor of the writer's argument, in the connection where these phrases occur.

Dr. Lardner, you know, has quoted many authorities to prove, that this Epistle was written to Jewish christians, and the whole turn of thought throughout the Epistle renders it evident, that this was the fact. The attachment of the Jews to the Mosaic institution being of the
strongest kind, it was of the utmost importance to satisfy them, that the great purposes of that institution were fully answered in Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, and more particularly, in the important doctrine of atonement for sin. Under that institution, you know that numerous offerings and sacrifices were appointed for the special purpose of inspiring confidence in the offerer, in the divine forgiveness of the sins which he had committed, and more especially, to direct his attention to a better and more perfect state of things, when these sacrifices would be no longer necessary; being fully answered by the sacrifice of him, of whom the sacrifices of the law were typical. This, you evidently perceive to have been the writer’s design, in the tenth chapter, when, in the first verse he says, that the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the substance of them, can never, with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect. In the thirteenth verse, as a farther illustration of the subject, he says—Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering, oftentimes the same sacrifices which can never take away sin. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his foot-stool—that is, as I understand his argument, until the abolition of the Jewish ritual would make way for the establishment of that more perfect sacrifice in the room of those under the mosaic law; for, says he—by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified—that is, those that submit to the terms of the christian institution.
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Having, in this manner, asserted the superior excellence and permanent efficacy of the sacrifice offered by Christ, hereby rendering all other sacrifices useless and unnecessary; the writer, with great propriety, appeals to a prediction of this more perfect state of things. v. 15. *Moreover also, the Holy Ghost beareth witness to us, that is, confirms what I have said—This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days—*I will put my laws into their hearts and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now, says he, where there is a remission of these, that is, such a remission as, by the conditions of the new covenant, shall be remembered no more—there needeth not any more, or farther offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, &c.—let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering; for he is faithful who hath promised, and let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, and so much the more is this necessary, as ye see the day approaching—that is, as the argument seems to require—the day when the destruction, predicted by our Lord, would put an end to the Mosaic institution, and establish that new and living way, so decisively preferred to that institution.

In the verse, which immediately follows, the writer adduces, as you may observe, a most powerful argument for their holding fast the profession of their faith without wavering; for, says he, if we sin wilfully—that is, if we Apostatize from the faith after that we have received,
the knowledge of the truth—there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. Having before said that the sacrifice of the law could not take away sin, and that Jesus Christ, by one offering had perfected for ever them that were sanctified, they therefore who apostatized from christianity renounced the benefits of that sacrifice, and there remained for them nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which should devour those, who were adversaries to christianity.

Still farther to enforce their stedfastness in the faith, the author of the Epistle states, in very strong and expressive language, the consequence of rejecting the Mosaic institution. v. 28. He that despised the law of Moses, was put to death, without mercy, upon the testimony of two or three witnesses—Of how much sorcer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace.

This language, you will carefully observe, is addressed to Jews, whom he particularly cautions against Apostasy from christianity, and to deter them from it, he reminds them, that they were under the divine administration, of which they had had many signal proofs in the history of their nation, and of which they had been fully apprized. We know him that hath said—Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord. And again—The Lord shall judge his people; which applies peculiarly to the Jews, as a
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vination, and, to render it still more impressive, he adds—

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living

God.

Having thus pointed out to them the awful fate, which
awaited the Jews, in which they themselves might be
involved by renouncing their faith in Christ, he parti-
cularly exhorts them, for their encouragement, to call to
remembrance the former days, in which, after they were
illuminated—after they had embraced christianity, they
endured a great fight of afflictions, &c. He therefore
says, v. 35. Cast not away your confidence which hath
great recompence of reward; for ye have need of patience,
that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive
the promise; for he that shall come, will come, and will
not tarry.*

* Mr. Taylor (of Norwich) has the following note upon Rom.
v. 14. "τον μελλόντος, of him that was to come, that is, of
Christ, the Messiah; for this is one of the marks or names by which
the Jews signified the expected Messiah. Luke, xxiv. 21. But we
trusted that it had been he, 'Ο μελλόν, which should have
redeemed Israel. John Baptist calls him, 'Ο ἔρχομενος, Luke,
vii. 20. So John, vi. 14, 15. xi. 27. xii. 13. And he still bears
this name with regard to his second coming, Heb. x. 37. 'Ο
ἔρχομενος, he that comes."

But why should this last have been applied to his second coming,
when he acknowledges the others relate to his first coming—parti-
cularly as the preceding verses evidently relate to the destruction of
Jerusalem, called by the Evangelist, his coming?
What this promise was, it will not be difficult with tolerable precision to ascertain, and fully confirm you in the opinion that the day approaching, and his coming who would not tarry, alluded to the destruction of Jerusalem. In the eleventh chapter, you observe that numerous examples are adduced, taken from the history of the Old Testament, of men who had obtained a good report through faith—but the writer observes, that they had not received the promise, God having provided—or as the original word might have been rendered, looked forward to, something better for us, that they, without us, should not be made perfect.

It had, as you have seen already, been alledged that the punishment annexed to despising the law of Moses was death, but, to keep them firm in their adherence to the faith, the subject is again renewed, in ch xii. 25. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for, if they escaped not, who refused him that spake upon earth—much rather shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from Heaven; whose voice then shook the earth, but now, he hath promised, saying—Yet once more, I shook not the earth only, but also Heaven; and this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain; wherefore we receiving the promise of a kingdom—of that kingdom which our Lord had originally announced to be at hand, which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire.
For a critical inquiry into the distinction, which this writer makes between him that spake on earth and him that speaketh from Heaven, I must refer you to Mr. Pierce—but, from the bare perusal of the writer's language, of the shaking of Heaven and earth, you will naturally be reminded of that which you meet with in the old Testament, when any great and remarkable temporal calamities are predicted. Thus, in the prophecy of Joel, ch. ii. 10, it is said—The earth shall quake before them—the heavens shall tremble—the sun shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Prophet Isaiah says, ch. ii. 19.—They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In ch. xiii. 13. he makes use of the same expression—I will shake the Heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. The Prophet Haggai, likewise, has a very remarkable passage to the same purpose, ch. ii. 21. I will shake the Heavens and the earth—which he more fully illustrates in v. 22. where he says—I will move Heaven and earth and overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and destroy the mighty realms of the nations. Here says Mr. Michaelis, in his explanation of the passage under consideration, it is quite impossible to take the moving of Heaven and earth, otherwise than of wars and a political shaking, by which kingdoms shall sink and kingdoms rise. Great wars are sometimes compared with a Heaven and shaking storms, and sometimes with an earthquake.
And the oriental poet, in the description of it, sometimes makes even the Heavens to fall.*

To this language of the Prophets our Lord, you know, has given his unequivocal and decisive sanction, by adopting it in his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, as particularly recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matt. xxiv. 29. Mark, xiii. 25. Luke, xxii. 26. There seems therefore to be all the evidence, which can reasonably be required, that the language, which is made use of in the tenth and twelfth chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews, alluded, not to the near approach of the end of the world, but to the destruction of Jerusalem.

In presenting you with this view of the subject, I have been wholly guided by my own judgment, constantly adhering to the plan, which I have all along adopted, of referring to our Lord's original language, and to what you afterwards find him saying in illustration of it. I am however very happy to say, that it is strongly corroborated by Mr. Pierce, whose paraphrase and notes upon this Epistle have been well received.

"The sense, in which our author explains this promise, mentioned ch. xii. 26, is manifestly this, that God would

* I know not whether the whole, or only a part of this quotation, is from Michaelis, it being taken from the notes of a German translation of my first publication, by Mr. Dillenger of Nuremberg; from which notes, translated by Dr. Rainier, at the request of my late excellent friend, the Rev. Mr. Conant, this quotation is taken.
shake, dissolve, and put an end to earthly and heavenly authorities, or kingdoms, and set up, himself a kingdom under the Messiah, that should prevail against all others, and should not be abolished, but continue to the end of the world. He shews this to be the sense of the place, when he immediately adds, according to our translation—And this word, once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of those things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Now what those things are, which cannot be shaken, he shews plainly in the next words—Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved. And what kingdom can that be, which Christians receive, but the kingdom of the Messiah? And, if this kingdom that cannot be shaken is set up, upon the shaking of the things that are made, that is, the Heavens and the earth—must not the Heavens and the earth signify some kingdoms that are removed and put down?"

Before I finish this letter, I must beg leave to make a few observations upon some expressions, which are made use of in the latter part of the Epistle of St. James, indicating, as some have erroneously supposed, the near approach of the end of the world. This Epistle, as St. James himself informs us, was addressed to the twelve tribes which were scattered abroad. "No expression," says Dr. Lardner, "can be more general, than the twelve tribes. There is not any limitation, restraining it to Christians, or believers in Jesus. Nor does he wish them grace or peace from Jesus Christ. Indeed he does not dissemble his own character. He calls himself a
servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He takes upon himself the character of a christian, and, perhaps, of an Apostle. But he does not so characterize those to whom he writes. Nor is there any christian benediction at the end of the Epistle.

Nor can I see, why the twelve tribes scattered abroad should not comprehend those of them in Judea, which were the peculiar charge of the writer. And divers things in the Epistle seem to belong to them especially. He means therefore the people of the twelve tribes everywhere, in Judea, and out of it.

A large part of the Epistle is suitable to christians. But there are divers paragraphs, that must be understood to be addressed to unbelieving Jews, particularly ch. v. 1—6. as is generally allowed. I think likewise, that the first ten verses of ch. iv. are addressed to unbelieving Jews—Where it is said, whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not. Ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain. Ye fight and war. These things could not be said to christians. They must relate to those disturbances, which, some while before the Roman war broke out, were everywhere among the unbelieving Jews.

I am of opinion, that this way of writing was chosen, to abate the offence which the reproofs, and exhortations, and warnings of the Epistle, were likely to occasion. St. James writes in a general way. Let all apply to
themselves those things which belong to them." (See Lardner's History of the Apostles.)

I have been thus large in transcribing what Dr. Lardner has said upon this Epistle, not only because I think his remarks are very judicious, but because I think they tend to throw considerable light upon the passages, which it is my principal object to comment upon.

In what a manly manner he censures the vices of the times, you have already seen in the quotation which I have made from Dr. Lardner. But it is no where more conspicuous than in the fifth chapter. Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl, for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh, as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure for the last days.

Dr. Doddridge, whose piety has never been questioned, has paraphrased this last expression of the Apostle, in the following manner. "The last days are now coming, and the enemy shall seize and dissipate them all, to your infinite vexation and distress." And in his note upon it, he says—"This phrase does not merely signify for the time to come, but for that period, when the whole Jewish economy was to close, and when those awful judgments, threatened in the Prophets to be poured out upon wicked men in the last days, are just coming."
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As a confirmation of this interpretation, you observe the Apostle immediately proceeds to exhort his Christian brethren to a patient endurance of their sufferings from their persecutors, from the consideration that these last days were approaching. Be patient therefore brethren unto the coming of the Lord; recommending it from the example of the husbandman, in waiting for the fruits of the earth. v. 7. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious produce of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain; be ye also patient—establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh; and, in the following verse, he tells them that the judge was standing at the door.

That these expressions were intended to point out the near approach of the destruction of Jerusalem, seems in the highest degree probable; not only from the time when this Epistle was written, which is supposed to have been about a year before the war broke out, which ended in that awful catastrophe, but because it agrees so exactly with the language which our Lord himself made use of, in predicting it. In Matt. xxiv. 27: it is said—As the lightning cometh out of the east, &c. so shall also ἡ ἐκκοίμησις the coming of the son of man be.† St. James says ἡ ἐκκοίμησις the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. So again our Lord says of the destruction of Jerusalem, Mark xiii. 29—When ye see all these things, know ye that ἐγγὺς ἐστὶν ὁ θρόας, it is nigh, even at the doors.

† See also v. 37, 38.
St. James's expression, you observe, is ὑπὸ τῶν συνωνίων ἐγέρεται. Before the doors.* And you find the word translated at hand, made use of, both by the Evangelist and by St. James. The former says, Luke xxii. 20. When ye shall see Jerusalem encompassed with armies, then know that its desolation is at hand. The latter says—The coming of the Lord is at hand.

* It had not been my fortune to meet with Mr. Taylor's paraphrase and notes on the Epistle to the Romans, until I had finished this letter, or I should have taken earlier notice of his extraordinary hypothesis, that "the time of our Lord's coming coincides, or happens at the same time, with the time of our death; how near to, or how far soever from, his coming we happen to die." His reference, however, to 1. Thess. v. 2, 3, 4. to Hebr. x. 27. and to James v. 7, 8, 9. as proofs of this have already, I trust, been fully considered. Other passages, to which he refers, will be attended to, as they occur. In the mean time, it is obvious to remark that his hypothesis rests wholly upon a mistaken idea of the language of our Lord, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which he has particularly quoted, and supposed to relate to the end of the world—but which I have, in my fifth letter, shewn to relate exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem! He has collected a number of passages; some of which, doubtless, relate to the day of judgment—some of them, as certainly, relate to the destruction of Jerusalem, and of others, perhaps, it may not be so easy to decide to which they belong. I think however that whenever Christians are exhorted to watch for the coming of the Lord, it never means the day of death, but refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. The New Testament, much to its credit, never exhorts men to prepare for death, as it requires that which is the only proper preparation for it; a regular and constant observance of the laws of Christ. It is extraordinary that a writer, who was so well acquainted with scripture phraseology, should have known so little of that, which relates to the coming of Christ, and which is fundamental to the New Testament.
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You will not, I am sure, think it necessary, that I should add a single word more to prove that St. James, in the expressions which he makes use of, alluded to the destruction of Jerusalem. This, therefore, being my principal object in making these few remarks upon this Epistle, I shall for the present take my leave of you, with the intention of again taking up my pen to examine the two Epistles of St. Peter. In the mean time,

I am,

Very respectfully,

Yours,

N. NISBETT.

TUNSTALL, Jan. 12th. 1812.
LETTER. XII.

REV. SIR,

In my last letter I engaged again to request your attention, while I examine the two Epistles of St. Peter, in both which there are some expressions, which have led to the supposition that he expected, that the end of the world was at no great distance. And certain it is, that they have a very strong appearance of having a relation to that event, and there are besides some other things in these Epistles, which have exceedingly puzzled commentators of all descriptions, accurately to understand. It will therefore be necessary to give particular attention to them.

The first of these Epistles has been allowed, by all antiquity, to be the genuine work of St. Peter—but not so the second—yet I think with Dr. Lardner that the internal evidence for its being written by the same hand, is very conclusive. I shall take the liberty of presenting you with what he has said upon this head. "It bears," he observes, "in the inscription the name of the same Apostle; for so it begins—Simon Peter, a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ. And in ch. i. 14, are these
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**Words—Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has shewed me.**

The writer of this Epistle may have had a particular revelation concerning the time of his death, not long before writing this. But it is probable, that here is a reference to our Lord's predictions concerning St. Peter's death, and the manner of it, which are recorded in John xxi. 18, 19." (See Lardner's History of the Apostles.)

From ch. i. 16, 17, 18. it appears that the writer was one of the Disciples, who were with Jesus on the mount, when he was transfigured in a glorious manner. This certainly leads us to Peter, who was there, and whose name the Epistle bears in the inscription.

Ch. iii. 1. *This second Epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance;* plainly referring to the former Epistle, which has been always acknowledged for Peter's. These words are express. But it might have been argued with some degree of probability from ch. i. 12—15, that he had before writ to the same persons.

Once more, ch. iii. 15, 16. he calls Paul brother, and otherwise so speaks of him and his Epistles, as must needs be reckoned most suitable to an Apostle.

The writer therefore is the Apostle Peter, whose name the Epistle bears in the inscription." *(Ibid.)*

The authenticity of the Epistles of St. Peter being
thus, as I apprehend, clearly established upon the most satisfactory grounds,—the next question is—to whom were they addressed? In answer to this question, it is scarcely necessary to inform you, that they were addressed to Christian converts from among the Gentiles; it being so evident, from what is said in different parts of them, and particularly of the two first chapters of the first Epistle, that it may be said to be unquestionable. Thus they are styled elect according to the foreknowledge of God, and are exhorted not to fashion themselves according to their former lusts, in their ignorance, that is, in the state of heathen darkness, in which they were involved prior to their conversion to Christianity. Again it is said—The time past of our life may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries. And, with equal decision, he says that formerly they were not a people, but were now the people of God—that they had not obtained mercy, but that now they had obtained mercy.

Dr. Sykes's sentiments upon this head, as quoted with approbation by Dr. Lardner, are well worth your attention, and as such I present them to you. "This Epistle of Peter," says he, "was writ to the strangers scattered through several parts of the Lesser Asia. And it is plain, that he meant by them Gentiles converted in those parts of the world to Christ. He does not mean Jews, but such as were elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Such, of whose salvation the Prophets inquired, who prophesied of the grace that
should come unto them. ch. i. 10. such, for whom Christ was manifested in these last times. v. 20. such as were ἡεροиς ἀνακριβούμενοι, an acquired people, who had not obtained mercy. ch. ii. 9, 10; as sheep going astray, but now returned, v. 25; as men, who in the time past of their lives had wrought the will of the Gentiles, iv. 3. These are marks sufficient to describe the people, to whom St. Peter wrote. The Gentiles were now begotten in Christ to a lively hope. They were become now, what the Jews formerly were, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, &c.

It was, you will allow my dear sir, extremely natural for the Apostle, when writing to persons of this description, thus to remind them of the blessings which, in the purpose of Heaven, were to be bestowed on them as a nation, but he appears to me to address them, in the first instance, as individuals, upon whom these inestimable blessings were conferred—but which were, in due time, to be extended to them more abundantly as a people. This, you perceive, he does in the most energetic and animated terms, in the third and following verses. Bless be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us to a lively hope, or to a hope of life, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven—or in the Heavens, for you who are kept by the power of God, to the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
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Here you will observe that, though the persons to whom he wrote were believers in Christ, the Apostle tells them that they were kept by the power of God to the salvation—not yet but only ready to be revealed. In the following verse, therefore, he tells them, that it was in this salvation, thus ready to be revealed, that they greatly rejoiced though now for a season, or for a short time, they were in heaviness through manifold temptations, or persecutions, that the trial of their faith in this salvation, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing—or as the original word should have been translated, as had already been done in the fifth verse—at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Most commentators, you know my dear sir, have thought that the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, in the fifth verse, and the revelation of Jesus Christ, at the close of the seventh verse, relate to the final salvation of mankind in a future state, but though, in whatever sense it be understood, this unquestionably was intended to be the final result—yet it will be deserving of your consideration, whether the course of the Apostle's argument does not necessarily require it to be understood of the salvation to which the Gentiles as a nation were to be introduced, at the full revelation, by the destruction of the Jewish polity, of the extensive designs which were connected with the coming of the Messiah, with respect to the Gentile world. In this sense our Lord's language is, I think, to be understood—When ye see these things come to pass, lift up your head, for your redemption draweth nigh—and that of the
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Apostle—Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. And what is more remarkable, St. Luke, when speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, says, ch. xvii.—As it was in the days of Lot—even thus shall it be when the son of man is revealed—that is, when it will fully appear that the great object of his mission, as the Messiah, was not, as the Jews fondly imagined, exclusively to benefit themselves, by raising them to universal empire, but to include within his benevolent purposes the whole human race. And how natural was it for the Apostle, in addressing a few strangers, scattered throughout a large extent of country, to hold out to them the pleasing prospect, that the benefits, which they themselves enjoyed, would be extended to their countrymen, who were still sitting in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death.

To show that this was really the Apostle's object, permit me again to return to the Apostle's argument. He had said that they were kept through faith to a salvation ready to be revealed—the good effects of which, as far as related to themselves individually, he explains in the four following verses. He then says, v. 10.—Of which salvation the Prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace or favour which shall come unto you; searching to whom, or to what time the spirit of Christ which was in them, referred, when it testified before hand, the sufferings of Christ, and the glories—the glorious things which should follow those sufferings—Unto whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us, not surely as individuals but as a nation, they did minister the things which are now
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reported unto you, as individuals, by them, that have preached the Gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven; which things the Angels desire to look into.

By grace, or favour, here Dr. Benson understands the favour of having the Gospel preached unto them, and being admitted to the privileges of christians, the elect people of God, under the Messiah, in order to their everlasting salvation, and he says, that St. Peter very properly mentions it to the honour of christians that the antient Prophets ministered, not unto themselves but unto them, and that it was a great confirmation to them, to compare the prediction and event, and observe the harmony between them. With this view therefore, the Apostle adds, in the thirteenth verse—Wherefore gird up the loins of your minds,† be upon the watch, and have a perfect confidence, with respect to the grace which is to be brought unto you, at the revelation of Jesus Christ, mentioned in the fifth verse, as not yet completed; but which, in his second Epistle he assures them, would, by a proper conduct, on their part, be accomplished, that is, by giving diligence to make their calling and election sure;

† Dr. Benson supposes, with much probability, that when the Apostle exhorted his christian brethren to gird up the loins of their minds, &c. he alluded to Luke, xii. 35, &c. Let your loins be girt about, and your lamps burning, and be you like unto men that wait for their Lord’s coming from the marriage, that whenever he cometh he may find you watching; for blessed are those servants whom their Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.
for so the entrance, or way into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, would be abundantly enlarged. Here, you will carefully observe, grace had already been brought to them as individuals—but the Apostle directs them confidently to expect that the period would come, when it would no longer be confined to a few individuals, scattered over a large extent of country, but that the important benefits, which they enjoyed personally, would be bestowed upon them nationally, agreeable to the prophecies predicting this happy change.

To effect this change they would contribute greatly by the purity of their own lives—by not fashioning themselves, as the Apostle expresses it, according to their former lusts, in their ignorance, but by having their conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they spake against them as evil doers, they might by their good works glorify God in the day of visitation. It was with this particular view that throughout the remainder of the Epistle he gives them directions for the regulation of their conduct in the grand relations of life, and enforces them by the motives best calculated to influence them to pay all due attention to them; at the same time holding out to them the example of their great master, as the pattern which they were always to have principally in view.

In the second Epistle the Apostle, you observe, again reminds them of the honorable station to which, they
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were advanced, and renew his exhortation to adorn their profession by a suitable conduct—to give all diligence to add to their faith virtue—to virtue knowledge—to knowledge temperance—to temperance patience—to patience godliness—to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity—for, if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These were the things, about which Christianity was chiefly conversant, which constituted its greatest glory, and therefore the Apostle exhorts them to give diligence to make their calling and election to the inestimable blessings of this religion sure, or firm, for, says he, if ye do these things, ye shall never fall, for so ἐρωταίσθαι the entrance, or way shall be richly administered—shall be made plain, wide, smooth, and easy to you, as Gentiles, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Dr. Benson conceived, that the kingdom here mentioned by St. Peter was the kingdom of glory in a future state, but it appears to me from the general tenor of his argument, that he meant the kingdom of the Messiah, which our Lord had originally, and throughout the whole of the Gospel history, declared to be at hand, and which, you have in several instances seen, from the language of the Apostles was still considered to be so, and you well know that the kingdom of the Messiah was, by the Prophet Daniel, denominated an everlasting kingdom, and as that which should never be destroyed.
In the following verses, you observe, the Apostle considers their diligence in making their calling and election sure, and the extensive enlargement of the Messiah's kingdom, as matters of great importance, particularly to be attended to by them. v. 12—15. Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and are established in the present truth; yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this tabernacle. even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me; moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance.

This extraordinary earnestness of the Apostle is very remarkable, and is not easy to be accounted for, but upon the supposition, that great efforts were made by their adversaries to unsettle their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and from what the Apostle says immediately afterwards, no doubt I think can be entertained that this was the fact. We have not, says the Apostle, as some may have artfully suggested to you, followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you ὁ ὑψωμένος ἡμᾶς τὸ θαυμαστήριον τῆς κυρίας ὑποδοτείκων ἡμᾶς πρὸς τὴν σωτηρίαν ὑποδοτείκων ἡμᾶς πρὸς τὴν σωτηρίαν; for he received from God the Father honour and glory, saying—This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased; and this voice which came from Heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.
This language, I scarce need observe to you, most decisively relates to the witness from Heaven, to the truth of our Lord's character as the Messiah; as recorded in the history of the transfiguration. The Apostle therefore, having given his testimony to the truth of this important fact, of which, he says, he and his fellow-apostles had been personal witnesses, goes on, in ver. 19, and says—

'We have also the prophetic word concerning his coming, for that, unquestionably, is the subject treated of, more confirmed. But how, it has been asked, more confirmed? What evidence can be better than that of the senses? But the question, you will observe, is not whether other evidence is better than that of the senses—but whether additional evidence may not, very properly, be produced, in confirmation of Jesus's being the Messiah, and especially to those who had not the testimony of their senses, but received it from the report of others, in confirmation of their evidence? What additional evidence was, to which the Apostle alludes, cannot, to an attentive reader of the Gospel, history, require much sagacity to discover. It has often, in the course of these letters, been observed to you, that our Lord predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, under the idea of his coming, using the very same word to express it, which the Apostle makes use of here, in the sixteenth verse, and particularly pointing out the signs of its approach, with this particular memento—Behold I have told you before, attended with particular directions, to watch for it. He had also said that when they saw these things they were to lift up their
heads—to take courage, for their redemption was drawing nigh." St. Peter also mentions a salvation ready to be revealed—a revelation of Jesus Christ, and a day of visitation. "Now all these circumstances considered, how extremely natural was it for the Apostle, in speaking of the coming of Christ, to say, when any of these signs appeared, which it is probable they did about this time—Ye have the word of prophecy more confirmed by them; whereas ye do well that ye take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and perfect that which bringeth light—the sun arise upon your hearts—i.e., when his coming will be as visible as the lightning, which shineth from one end of Heaven to the other.

This argument of the truth of the Apostle’s assertion, that they had not followed cunningly devised fables, he still farther enforces by referring to what was the foundation of their faith in prophecy in general. Knowing this apuros first, * that no prophecy of scripture is of private invention—or as Bowyer proposes to read it, of private impulse—or the effect of any human agency, and that this is the precise meaning of the Apostle is most evident from the definition, which he himself gives of it in the following verse; for he says that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and consequently, were to be fully relied on.

* ἀπορῶν, says Dr. Benson, means the last, in order, as a premise to the proper conclusion.
If, my dear sir, I have been thus far successful in tracing out the genuine meaning of the Apostle, upon the subjects already noticed, you will readily attend me while I endeavour to explain his language in the third chapter of this Epistle, which will, if I mistake not, in the strongest manner confirm the ideas, which I have adopted.

In this chapter, you will observe that he begins with repeating what had been his principal object in both his Epistles. It was, he says, to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance, that they might be mindful of the words which were spoken before, by the holy Prophets, and of the commandments of us the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour; knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts and saying—Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

Dr. Beasley, upon this last verse, says—"The Prophets had foretold Christ's second coming; the Apostles had commanded the Christians to look, and diligently to prepare for that day. But I can, by no means, acquiesce in his opinion, that this was the Apostle's meaning. As, however, St. Peter has referred to his own account of what the Prophets had foretold, we are at liberty, in order to ascertain his meaning, to look back to what he has said concerning their Prophecies. Now, my dear sir, it does not appear to me, that St. Peter has produced
any declarations from the Prophets respecting his second coming. So far was this from being the case, St. Peter's object in mentioning the Prophets was to shew, for the encouragement of his christian brethren, that they predicted the glorious change which was to take place at the 

revelation of Jesus Christ; which cannot, as I have already endeavoured to shew, with any propriety be understood of the second coming of Christ. If there is any force in this remark, it will be absolutely impossible to understand the coming here mentioned, otherwise than of his first coming, as the Messiah. And the very time, when these scoffers put the question, ought, of itself, to lead to this interpretation; for, it cannot be denied without denying the clearest evidence, that the controversy concerning the coming of the Messiah, was then on foot, and that the Jews, as a body, still continued to expect that some one would appear, who would assume that character." Accordingly, we are informed by Josephus," says Mr. Faber, "that in his days, it was no uncommon thing to hear his hardened countrymen ridicule the oracles of their antient Prophets, which they had already defied, by crucifying the Messiah.

But, however strong this reasoning may be, the subsequent context, it may be said, will not admit of any other interpretation than of the final dissolution of the world, and that consequently the coming here mentioned, must be his second coming as the judge of the world. And indeed it must be acknowledged that it is expressed in such very strong language, that it has been thought to
be altogether inapplicable to any other event. But Dr. Maltby, who is himself a very able judge, has quoted Dr. Lightfoot, as throwing more light upon the language and allusions of the sacred volume than almost all other commentators whatsoever. To me it appears that he has been particularly successful in shewing that the language which St. Peter has adopted, strong as it is, was in common use, in antient prophecy in describing temporal calamities.

What he has said upon this subject you will permit me to present to you, with some slight variations in the style, being persuaded that it cannot but be as satisfactory to you, as it has been to me. Speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, he says—"It is set forth in such expressions as if it were the destruction of the whole world. Moses begins this style in Deut. xxxii. 22. where he is speaking of that divine vengeance. A fire is kindled in mine anger, and it shall burn to the lowest hell, and it shall consume the earth with its increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. So again, Jer. iv. 23. I beheld the earth, and lo it was without form and void, and the Heavens, and they had no light; I beheld and there was no man, and all the birds of the Heavens were fled. From the use of this language, says Dr. Lightfoot, you would imagine that the whole universe were dissolving—but, if you look at the twenty-seventh verse, you will see that it speaks of nothing more than the dissolution of that people; thus hath the Lord said—The whole land shall be desolate.

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In Matt. xxiv. 29. our Saviour says—The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the Heavens shall be shaken, and then shall appear the sign of the son of man in Heaven. From these expressions you would conclude, that nothing less is meant than the dissolution of the world, and Christ’s coming to judgment—yet if you will consult the context, it plainly shews that it means only the dissolution of the Jewish city and state; for Christ says—This generation shall not pass away till all these things are fulfilled.

The beloved Disciple follows his master’s style upon the very same subject, in the sixth chapter of the Revelations, where, having described the means of the destruction of that wretched people, under the opening of certain seals, by sword, famine, and plague, he comes at last, to speak of their final dissolution itself in similar terms. The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood, and the stars of Heaven fell to the earth, and the Heavens departed as a scroll that is rolled together, and every mountain and island were removed out of their places.* Here you would think

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* Mr. Lowman, in his note upon this passage, mentions Bossuet, as remarking that great publick calamities are described in the Prophets, as if the order of nature was overturned, the earthquakes, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars fall from Heaven. This observation will give a plain and just sense to this part of prophetic vision. There is no need, with some, to understand
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that the final dissolution of the whole world was spoken of— but if you look into the sixteenth verse, you will find the very same words that our Saviour applies to the destruction of that people. Luke, xxiii. 30. *They said unto the mountains, fall on us and hide us,* &c.

From these examples Dr. Lightfoot, you observe, concludes, that the Apostle's meaning is the same when he speaks of the *Heavens being dissolved by fire, the works that are therein burnt up, and the elements melting with fervent heat*; viz. the dissolving of their church and economy by fiery vengeance—the consumption of their state, by the flame of God's indignation, and the ruin of their elements by God's fury—not the elements, in Aristotle's sense, of fire, air, earth, and water—but the elements, in his brother Paul's sense—the carnal and beggarly elements of their Mosaic rites and traditional institutions.*

A much more modern writer, the celebrated author

*these expressions, of real earthquakes and eclipses, the prophetic style plainly shews they are figurative expressions, describing great calamities and changes, which the judgments of God would bring upon the earth.*

Mr. Archdeacon Woodhouse also has referred this language to *temporal calamities*, but contends that it applies to some greater events. To the dreadful time of universal vengeance they all, he says, appear to look forward, beyond their first and more immediate object. And, he has said, though I think without proof, that they are thus applied by our Lord and his Apostles.

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of Ben Mordecai's letters to Elisha Levi, having quoted several passages, besides those cited by Dr. Lightfoot, says—they all plainly relate to the destruction of particular nations, and not to the consummation of the world. And he adds—the same must be our judgment of those texts which relate to *the new Heavens, and the new earth, and the dissolution of the old ones*.

Mr. Archdeacon Woodhouse, in his note upon Rev. xxi. 1. *I saw a new Heaven and a new earth*, says that the general judgment having taken place, and the Heavens and earth passed away, as described in ch. xx. 11. and also by St. Peter, there follow, as mentioned also by the same Apostle, *new Heavens, and a new earth, for ever!* likewise by Isaiah, to which St. Peter seems to refer, as to a prophecy unfulfilled. The *Heaven and the earth, and the sea, with sometimes the rivers and fountains, he says, in scripture idea, compose the world. These all pass away—all things are made new.*

I do not profess to understand the book of Revelations—but the observation of Mr. Lowman, upon this place, appears to me to be deserving of your attention—that all the other parts of the description, are *figurative.*† And

† Mr. Lowman adduces the following as instances of this figurative language—The beast with seven heads and ten horns, *rose out of the sea.* And the same tyrannical oppressive power, under the figure of the great whore, is described as sitting on many waters. And in scripture, any great collection of waters is called a sea, and these waters are interpreted to signify *people, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.*
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remarks, that the most judicious Jewish writers understand new Heavens and new earth, to mean a new state of happiness, in which former sorrows and troubles all be remembered no more.

But that St. Peter alluded to temporal calamities only, but speaking of the Heavens being dissolved by fire, c. and not to the day of judgment, as the Archdeacon opposes, you will, perhaps, think very evident, from its sing introduced, both in the tenth and twelfth verses, the usual language of prophecy upon similar occasions, represented in my seventh letter. In the former verse, is said—The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in e’night; which is the very expression used by St. Paul, I. Thess. v. In the latter, they are said to be looking r and hastening to the coming of the day of God; or as any manuscripts and antient versions have it, the day the Lord, wherein the Heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved.* Now it is deserving of your particular notice

* I have felt great difficulty to satisfy myself of St. Peter’s meaning in his first Epistle, cch. iv. 7. where he says that the end all is at hand, particularly as it had been said, in the fifth verse, as the Gentiles should give account to him who was ready to judge quick and dead—but whatever may be the precise meaning of the passage, if the interpretation here given, of the Heavens being on fire, etc. be the true one, St. Peter’s meaning, when he says—the end of all is at hand, must be of the same import.

With respect to the other passage, I have strongly suspected, that the Apostle meant to declare that those, who committed the excesses mentioned in the third verse, would give account to him.
that it is in the closest connection with this dissolution of the old Heavens and earth here described, that a new Heaven and a new earth are predicted, wherein dwelleth

who was ready to give an example of his vengeance upon the Jewish nation, and punish in their offspring the iniquities of their fathers, who had contributed largely towards filling up the measure of them. If the punishment was national, there seems to be no impropriety in the declaration that he was ready to judge the quick and dead.

A learned friend, who I believe had not seen Dr. Benson's interpretation, and is not satisfied with that given above, has favoured me with the following. I doubt if the phrase τιν ετοιμασε εξωνται signifies one coming immediately, or very speedily, but rather not prepared for that office, as being endowed with sufficient power and authority—Ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead, Acts, x. 42. Conf. Acts, xvii. 31. Rom. xiv. 10. The same phrase occurs in two more passages of the New Testament. 1st. Acts, xxi. 13. I am ready ετοιμασον εξω not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem—not that he was going to immediate death, but that he was ready, disposed, determined to discharge his duty in going up to Jerusalem, not only at the hazard of bonds, but of death itself, and. We have these words again, II. Cor. xii. 14. The third time I am ready ετοιμασον εξω to come to you; not that he was going immediately, for his third visit was not till some years after—or before he had travelled through a vast extent of country—but as he had hitherto forborne to be burdensome to them, so he was ready, whenever his duty called, to go a third time, upon the same terms. So here, he that is ready to judge the quick and dead, has no reference to the time when—but to the fitness of the person. They shall give account to the judge of all the earth. Jude quotes a prophecy of Enoch—Behold the Lord cometh, &c. not immediately, nor at any particular time, but assuredly.
righteousness—or of which righteousness is the characteristic feature of its laws. This prediction cannot fail to bring to your recollection the language of the Prophet Isaiah, in a connection which, I am sure you will allow, is most remarkable.

In the beginning of the sixty-fifth chapter, the Prophet, speaking in the name of the Almighty, says—*I am sought of them that asked not for me—I am found of them that sought me not*; which, you will allow, is a language that was intended to be applied to the Gentile world. In the fifteenth verse, therefore, speaking of the Jews, as a nation, he says—*Ye shall leave your name for a curse to my chosen, or, as the original word properly signifies—to my elect; for the Lord God shall slay thee, and shall call his servants by another name,* &c. for behold I create new Heavens and a new earth. This language scarcely requires any comment, and can hardly be understood, but of the rejection of the Jews, as a people, and of the establishment of christianity.

Upon the expectation of this new Heavens and new earth, you observe, the Apostle builds the following very pertinent exhortation. *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless, and account that the long suffering of the Lord is salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given him hath written unto you; as also in all his Epistles, speaking of these things, in which there are some things hard to be understood, which they that are*
unlearned and unstable; unrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction.

The things, of which St. Paul speaks, you observe, St. Peter asserts, are those very things of which he himself treats, viz. the rejection of the Jews, and the call of the Gentiles; and, if the observations of Dr. Lightfoot, and the remarks, which I have made upon the phrases—the coming of the day of the Lord, and of the day of God, are well founded; a plain and easy interpretation of the things which are hard to be understood very naturally presents itself, and is, I have no doubt, St. Peter’s genuine meaning; for, if you consult St. Paul’s writings, with anything like critical accuracy, you will find, that in all of them, and more especially, in the Epistle to the Romans, he dwells largely upon the call of the Gentiles, and the rejection of the Jews. The latter, you observe, he, very naturally as a Jew, calls a mystery, telling those to whom he wrote, that he would not that they should be wise in their own conceits, that blindness, in part had happened unto Israel,

† This blindness was, most evidently, their own fault, for they had the first offers of salvation made to them; the Apostles were directed to begin at Jerusalem. And St Peter says, expressly, in this very chapter, that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; upon which Dr. Sam. Clark has made the following very judicious remarks. Some writers, he says, have contended that the words all men must be understood to signify only some of all sorts of men, some from among the Jews, some from among the Gentiles, some from among the rich, some from among the poor, and the like. But this interpretation aris—
until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. (See Rom. xi, 25.) And it is remarkable that, in the subsequent part of the chapter, he appears to have been unable to contemplate the subject without using a language expressive of extreme astonishment. v. 33. O the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out; for who hath known the mind of the Lord— or who hath been his counsellor?

When, my dear sir, you consider the strong and almost invincible prejudices which the Jews, as a nation, had against the admission of the Gentiles to the privileges and blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, so remarkably exemplified in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, and that the casting away of the Jews, so used an expression of St. Paul, would be the riches of the Gentiles; you can hardly avoid concluding, that these were the very things which must have chiefly occupied the attention of the Apostles, and particularly of the Apostle Paul, who

from a great unskilfulness in language. For though the words all men, do indeed in scripture, as in vulgar speech, signify very frequently, not all men absolutely, but in a limited sense, all against whom no exception is plainly understood, yet in no language, according to any vulgar manner of speaking, can they mean some only out of every sort of men. But the sense plainly is, that God really and sincerely intends the salvation of all men, and that it is for his own fault only, for wickedness only, and deliberate unrighteousness that any man shall be condemned. (See Dr. Clark's Sermons.)
was, by way of eminence, the Apostle of the Gentiles, and how hard they must have appeared to those who were unlearned and unstable—who still retained their Jewish prejudices, of their being the peculiar favourites of Heaven, and that it was for their sakes principally, if not exclusively, that the Messiah was to make his appearance. In fact, you can scarcely for a moment contemplate the circumstances of the times, when the Apostles wrote their Epistles, without perceiving that their dwelling upon these topics, so much as they have done, must be among the strongest proofs of their authenticity. And, you will permit me to add, very naturally accounts for the use of the terms election—reprobation, predestination, calling, and the like, which have been the source of so much controversy, and of opinions so dishonourable to the character of the supreme being.

If these observations are correct, you will be inclined to think that the conclusion necessarily follows, that the promise of his coming, ridiculed by the scoffers mentioned in the third verse of the chapter under consideration, cannot fairly, or by strict reasoning, be understood of any other coming than of the coming of the Messiah, and that when he did come, it would be very different, in its consequences, from what the Jews had been accustomed to expect. That this was really the Apostle Peter's meaning, you will probably think still more evident, from the manner in which he concludes the subject in the seventeenth verse—Ye therefore brethren, seeing that ye know these things before—beware lest ye
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Also, being led away by the error of the wicked, that is of the scoffers, mentioned in the third verse, fall from your own steadfastness.

What must contribute, in the strongest manner, to confirm the interpretation, which I have presented to you, of this chapter, and particularly of the phrase—*the new Heavens and the new earth*, is the language which the Apostle Paul makes use of, to describe this glorious change in the moral and religious state of the world. Dr. Lightfoot was too well versed in this language, not to notice this, and to perceive how well it accorded with his interpretation. In fact, what he had said upon the subject is so much to the purpose, and is so far superior to any thing that I can say, that I shall make no apology for presenting it to you, as it will, I am sure, be highly gratifying to you.

The state of the church and Gospel, after the dissolution of the old world, he says, is called, sometimes the world to come—sometimes new Heavens and new earth, and sometimes all things new; so that by this time, you plainly see the meaning of the Apostle in the third chapter of the second Epistle of Peter. In the seventh, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth verses, St. Peter speaks of the dissolution of the Jewish state in such terms, as the scripture uses to express it by, as if it were the dissolution of the whole world. And, in the thirteenth verse, he speaks of the new face and state of the church and world, upon that dissolution, when a new people and a new economy should take place. We according to his promise;
which promise is contained in Isaiah, lxv. 17. Behold I create new Heavens and a new earth. As if he had said—though you are gone, yet all the world shall not be gone with you; for though I destroy my old people—the old Heavens and earth, and the old economy, yet I will provide myself a new people of the Gentiles, when the Jews shall be a people no more, and when that old world is destroyed, I will create new Heavens and a new earth.

Such another passage is that of our Saviour, Matt. xxiv. 31, where, having described the ruin of the Jewish nation in terms already mentioned; it might be questioned—what then shall become of a church, and where shall it be? He says—The son of man shall send his Angels, or ministers, with the sound of a trumpet, in the Gospel, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to another, among all nations. Thus, says Dr. Lightfoot, had Peter read this great promise, in the Evangelical Prophet, Isaiah—thus had he heard it from the great Prophet, his sacred master, and therefore it is no wonder that being confirmed by the mouth of two such witnesses, he looked for new Heavens and a new earth, according to such a promise. (See Bishop Lowth on Isaiah lxvi.)

Mr. Richard Baxter has expressed his surprize that any one should interpret this language of St. Peter of the destruction of Jerusalem; which will very naturally lead to an inquiry of considerable importance, and that is, whether the application of his language to the end of
the world, or to the destruction of Jerusalem, will have the most favourable influence upon the vital interests of Christianity; which no one, it is presumed, will deny. Mr. Baxter had at heart, in an eminent degree.†

In answer to this interesting question you will permit me to observe, that, in whatever sense St. Peter's language is to be understood, he has taken care, throughout his two Epistles, effectually to secure the essential interests of Christianity, by recommending a practice which is every way worthy of it, and by setting forth the example of Christ, as the great model of our conduct.

We are, it is true, accustomed to consider the dissolution of this world, founded, perhaps, solely upon this passage of St. Peter, as intimately connected with the day of the final judgment—but; if the records of Christianity contain intimations of a future state, sufficient to deter its professors from the practice of vice, and to animate them to the practice of whatever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, it does not appear to me, to be of the slightest consequence to the great purposes of religion, whether this globe, on which

† One of the greatest crimes, that a writer can commit against society, is, hastily and without due consideration, to endeavour to subvert established opinions, upon any subject of importance to the welfare of mankind, but more especially in what affects the interests of religion. This observation, however, cannot fairly be supposed as meant to check freedom of inquiry; for religion will flourish most, when reason most approves.
we live, is to be destroyed by fire, or is to be continued in existence, in its present state, through endless ages. In other words—there seems to be no natural connection between the existence, or non-existence of this material world, in its present form, and the doctrine of a future state, and, consequently, there cannot, upon this ground, be any objection to Dr. Lightfoot's interpretation.*

* The justly celebrated Dr. Blair has a sermon upon the dissolution of the world, and his text is in II. Pet. iii. The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night, &c. in which he has displayed much oratory, but no criticism. He tells his readers that the dissolution of the material system is an article of our faith, often alluded to in the Old Testament, clearly predicted in the new. But it is remarkable, that he does not produce one instance, which at all relates to it. "The race of men living in that last age shall see the approaches of the fatal day." And for proof of this, he cites Luke, xxi. 95.—There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, which language, most evidently relates, exclusively, to the destruction of Jerusalem. Again he says—"This day of the Lord, it is foretold in the text, will come as a thief in the night." For proof of this also, he says—Our saviour tells us that, as in the days of Noah before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the son of man be. And he adds, "In what strong colours is their dismay painted, when they are represented in the book of Revelations, as calling to the hills and mountains to fall on them and cover them? But unfortunately for the Doctor's argument, all this relates, not to the dissolution of the world, but to temporal calamities only. These therefore, in addition to his text, it may be fairly presumed, were the best evidences which he had to produce of the dissolution of the world!
If you consult the sacred oracles upon the subject of the doctrine of a future state, they tell you that it is appointed unto men once to die, and after death, the judgment, and that every man shall receive according to whatever he has done in the body, whether it be good, or evil, and upon this foundation, they address the hopes and fears of mankind. This appears to be quite sufficient for all the purposes of religion, without mixing matters, which have no natural connection with it, and which, in fact, do not appear to have been intended to be connected with it. The most pious and zealous Christian, therefore, need not to be alarmed in the least degree, though it should, upon inquiry, appear that he has been mistaken in supposing that the Apostle Peter had led him to expect the destruction of the world by fire.

While I am upon this subject, I must beg leave to observe to you, that, though you are told by the Apostle Paul that the Gospel hath brought life and immortality to life, you will not suppose that the doctrine of a future state was wholly unknown before the coming of Christ. The original word certainly does not signify to bring to light, but to throw light upon, or to diffuse it more widely — or perhaps, as Dr. Gray has observed, the text means that Christ having abolished death, opened to us a prospect of immortality, and unfolded the doctrine to the Gentile world, which sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death.

This learned writer further observes, in illustration of this subject, that, though Moses annexed only temporal
sanctions to his laws, yet the Prophets, in their addresses to the hopes and fears of their countrymen, unquestionably held out the encouragement of eternal happiness, and the terrors of eternal misery. The Prophets did not, it is true, so fully reveal the assurance and character of a future judgment, as did our Saviour, who brought life and immortality distinctly to view, and whose Gospel was entirely grounded on those higher and better promises; but they nevertheless did apply to these cogent motives, and more forcibly so, as that covenant approached, to which immortality was annexed as a positive and declared condition.† (See Dr. Grey's Key to the Old Testament, p. 349.)

I have, my dear sir, said thus much upon the subject of a future state, to show that the interpretation which I have adopted does not, in the smallest degree, interfere with it, and therefore cannot, upon that account, be liable to the slightest objection. It may, however, by some be thought to be totally inapplicable to the actual state of things since the introduction of Christianity—or

† There is much good sense in the following observations of Dr. Paley upon this subject. “May it not,” he says, “be asked, whether the secret display of a future state of existence would be compatible with the activity of civil life, and with the success of human affairs? I can easily conceive that this impression may be overdone; that it may so seize and fill the thoughts, as to leave no place for the cares and offices of men’s several stations, no anxiety for worldly prosperity, or even for a worldly provision, and, by consequence, no sufficient stimulus to secular industry. (See his Existences, v. ii. p. 372.)
in other words that new Heavens and a new earth imply an extent of dominion, and a degree of perfection to which it has never yet attained; especially as it is said that therein dwelleth righteousness.

In order to answer this objection satisfactorily, it will be necessary to consider attentively, to what these new Heavens and new earth are opposed. Now if Dr. Lightfoot's ideas be accurate, they are, most evidently, opposed to the old Heavens and earth, which were to be destroyed by the fire of God's vengeance, that is to the Jewish dispensation, which was to be superseded, and to make way for that of the christian—If therefore that dispensation had the denomination, and was considered by the Apostle as the old Heavens and earth, which were then ready to vanish away, there seems to have been a great propriety in denoting the new dispensation, by the terms new Heavens and a new earth, as the great object of it was to introduce a total alteration in the moral and religious state of the world. And it seems to be no overstrained declaration that therein dwelleth righteousness, that its laws are, in an eminent degree, calculated to promote righteousness among mankind, and that, in fact, it contains nothing but what has that tendency. That it has not had all the influence upon mankind, which it is calculated to produce, even among

† Mr. Taylor, in his preface to his Paraphrase on the Epistle to the Romans, thought that the Jewish dispensation was called the Heavens, in opposition to the earth, or Gentile world, which Heaven was to be shaken, or altered. (Page 194. in the note.)
those who have embraced it, must be acknowledged, however it may be regretted—but still it cannot, I think, be denied, that it was very natural in those, who were accustomed to the strong figurative language of the east, especially when sanctioned by antient prophecy, to speak of it in the most glowing and animated terms. In fact, you cannot but perceive in perusing the Epistles, that the Apostles labour for expressions sufficiently strong to express their sense of the value and importance of this new dispensation. They all, as has already been observed, concur in representing it as a new creation, and that all who were influenced by it, were new creatures. And could you, for a moment, have placed yourself in their situation, viewing, on one side, Polytheism and idolatry, and the grossest superstition universally prevalent, and these united with all the vices which can disgrace human nature, and on the other, the remarkable change which was then taking place under their own eye; you would not have been able, unaccustomed as you are to the figurative language of the east, to have much blamed the Apostles for saying that old things were past away, and that all things were become new—or, if they had even said, that there was a new Heaven and a new earth, and that therein dwelleth righteousness!

We see not these things in the strong light, in which the Apostles did—but their reality is well attested by history sacred and profane. And if christianity hath lost much of its natural influence—if we are so blind as not to see its value and importance—where is the fault? Surely, not with the institution, which hath evinced its
power in circumstances the most unfavourable to its progress,† but in us, upon whom it has, to so considerable

† "To establish a new religion, even amongst a few people, or in one single nation," says Dr. Jortin, "is a thing in itself exceedingly difficult. To reform some corruptions, which may have spread in a religion, or to make new regulations in it, is not, perhaps, so hard, when the main and principal part of that religion is preserved entire and unshaken; and yet this very often cannot be accomplished, without an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances, and may be attempted a thousand times without success. But to introduce a new faith, a new way of thinking and acting, and to persuade many nations to quit the religion in which their ancestors had lived and died, which had been delivered down to them from time immemorial, to make them forsake and despise the Deities, which they had been accustomed to reverence and worship; this is a work of still greater difficulty. The resistance of education, worldly policy, and superstition; is almost invincible."

"If men in these days," says Dr. Paley, "be christians in consequence of their education, in submission to authority, or in compliance with fashion, let us recollect that the very contrary of this, at the beginning, was the case. The first race of christians, as well as millions who succeeded them, became such in formal opposition to all these motives; to the whole power and strength of this influence. And that, as the same learned writer has observed, without force, without power, without support, without one natural source or circumstance of attraction, influence, or success."

Among the Jews, the Gospel was first preached—"The Jews still remain," says Dr. Bryant, "but how seldom is it that we can make a single proselyte! There is reason to think, that there were more converted by the Apostles in one day, than have since been won over in the last thousand years." (See Bryant on the Truth of the Christian Religion, p. 112.)
a degree, lost that influence! Still however, even the present state of things, compared with the state of things before the promulgation of the Gospel in the Gentile world, is totally different from what it was then, and that, in consequence of the introduction of Christianity. Its laws, its customs, its manners are different, and it may yet be said, if we choose to adhere to the phraseology of the east, that it is a new Heaven and a new earth, and that righteousness is the general character of the laws, however imperfectly they are obeyed.

With respect to the effects, which Christianity has had upon mankind, I cannot resist presenting you with the following observations of Dr. Paley. "The influence of religion," he says, and says but too truly, "is not to be sought in the councils of princes, in the debates or resolutions of popular assemblies, in the conduct of governments towards their subjects, or of states and sovereigns towards one another; of conquerors at the head of their armies, or of parties intriguing for power at home (topics which alone almost occupy the attention, and fill the pages of history,) but must be perceived, if perceived at all, in the silent course of private and domestic life. Nay more; even there its influence may not be very obvious to observation. If it check, in some degree, personal dissoluteness, if it beget a general probity in the transaction of business, if it produce soft and humane manners in the mass of the community, and occasional exertions of laborious or expensive benevolence in a few individuals, it is all the effect which can offer itself to external notice. The kingdom of Heaven is
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within us. That which is the substance of the religion, its hopes and consolations, its intermixture with the thoughts by day and by night, the devotion of the heart, the control of appetite, the steady direction of the will to the commands of God, is necessarily invisible. Yet upon these depend the virtue and the happiness of millions. This cause renders the representations of history, with respect to religion, defective and fallacious, in a greater degree than they are upon any other subject. Religion operates most upon those of whom history knows the least; upon fathers and mothers in their families, upon men servants and maid servants, upon the orderly tradesman, the quiet villager, the manufacturer at his loom, the husbandman in his fields. Amongst such its influence collectively may be of inestimable value, yet its effects in the mean time little, upon those who figure on the stage of the world. They may know nothing of it; they may believe nothing of it; they may be actuated by motives more impetuous than those which religion is able to excite. It cannot therefore be thought strange, that this influence should elude the grasp and touch of public history; for what is public history, but a register of the successes and disappointments, the vices, the follies, and the quarrels, of those who engage in contentions for power?

The christian religion also acts upon public usages and institutions, by an operation which is only secondary and indirect. Christiapity is not a code of civil law. It can only reach public institutions through private character. Now its influence upon private character may be con-
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considerable, yet many public usages and institutions, repugnant to its principles, may remain. To get rid of these, the reigning part of the community must act, and act together. But it may be long before the persons who compose this body, be sufficiently touched with the christian character, to join in the suppression of practices, to which they and the public have been reconciled by causes which will reconcile the human mind to any thing by habit and interest. Nevertheless, the effects of christianity, even in this view, have been important. It has mitigated the conduct of war, and the treatment of captives. It has softened the administration of despotic, or of nominally despotic governments. It has abolished polygamy. It has restrained the licentiousness of divorces. It has put an end to the exposure of children, and the immolation of slaves. It has suppressed the combats of gladiators, and the impurities of religious rites. It has banished, if not unnatural vices, at least the toleration of them. It has greatly ameliorated the condition of the laborious part, that is to say, of the mass of the community, by procuring for them a day of weekly rest. In all countries, in which it is professed, it has produced numerous establishments for the relief of sickness and poverty; and in some, a regular and general provision by law. It has triumphed over the slavery established in the Roman empire; it is contending, and I trust, will one day prevail, against the worse slavery of the West Indies.

But the argument to which I recur is, that the benefit of religion, being felt chiefly in the obscurity of private
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stations, necessarily escapes the observation of history. From the first general notification of Christianity to the present day, there have been in every age millions, whose names were never heard of, made better by it, not only in their conduct, but in their disposition; and happier, not so much in their external circumstances, as in that which is inter praecordia, in that which alone deserves the name of happiness, the tranquillity and consolation of their thoughts. It has been, since its commencement, the author of happiness and virtue to millions and millions of the human race. Who is there that would not wish his son to be a Christian?

Christianity also, in every country, in which it is professed, hath obtained a sensible, although not a complete influence, upon the public judgment of morals. And this is very important. For without the occasional correction, which public opinion receives, by referring to some fixed standard of morality, no man can foretell into what extravagancies it might wander. Assassination might become as honourable as duelling; unnatural crimes be accounted as venial; as fornication is wont to be accounted. In this way it is possible, that many may be kept in order by Christianity, who are not themselves Christians. They may be guided by the rectitude which it communicates to public opinion. Their consciences may suggest their duty truly; and they may ascribe these suggestions to a moral sense, or to the native capacity of the human intellect, when in fact they are nothing more than the public opinion reflected from their
own minds; an opinion, in a considerable degree, modified by the lessons of Christianity.

If it be objected, as I apprehend it will be, that Christianity is chargeable with every mischief of which it has been the occasion, though not the motive; I answer that, if the malevolent passions be there, the world will never want occasions. The noxious element will always find a conductor. Any point will produce an explosion.

The differences of opinion, that have in all ages prevailed amongst Christians, fall very much within the alternative which has been stated. If we possessed the disposition which Christianity labours, above all other qualities, to inculcate, these differences would do little harm. If that disposition be wanting, other causes, even were these absent, would continually rise up, to call forth the malevolent passions into action. Differences of opinion, when accompanied with mutual charity, which Christianity forbids them to violate, are for the most part innocent, and for some purposes useful. They promote inquiry, discussion, and knowledge. They help to keep up an attention to religious subjects, and a concern about them, which might be apt to die away in the calm and silence of universal agreement. I do not know that it is in any degree true, that the influence of religion is the greatest when there are the fewest dissenters. (See Dr. Paley's Evidences, vol. 2, p. 376, &c.)
This, my dear sir, to some may appear a long quotation, but, if you think with me, you have, like a traveller through a champaign country, been so beguiled by the landscape as not to be sensible of the distance.

I am,

Very respectfully,

Your's,

N. NISBETT.

TUNSTALL, March 1st. 1812.
LETTER XIII.

Of Election and Reprobation.

REV. SIR,

In the view which I have already taken, in the preceding letters, of the Gospel history and of the Epistles, I have, my dear sir, as much as possible, permitted myself to be carried back into ancient times. I have imagined myself placed in the situation of our Lord and his Apostles. I have, as it were, conveyed myself amongst their countrymen, adopted their manners, glowed with their sentiments, and even imbued their prejudices.* In doing this, I have, if I mistake not, been enabled to disentangle myself from the prepossessions of modern times, and to detect some errors, into which learned men of the greatest eminence have inadvertently fallen.

If this has been necessary upon the subjects, which have hitherto been discussed, it will certainly not be less so, in this and a succeeding letter, in which I intend

* Richards's Bampton Lectures, p. 170.
taking some notice of so much of the Epistle to the Romans, as to give you a tolerably correct idea, from actual investigation, of the hard things, which St. Peter says, his brother Paul, as well as himself treated of, and which I have, in my preceding letter, supposed to relate to the dissolution of the old Heavens and earth, and to the establishment of new ones—in other words, to the rejection of the Jews, and to the call of the Gentiles.

It is a remark of Mr. Taylor, who hath written upon this Epistle, that both ancients and moderns make heavy complaints of its obscurity, and he even ventures to intimate that, if he had not had the assistance of Mr. Locke, he should not have engaged in the work, which he hath conducted with such great ability and success. Still however there are some difficulties, which have escaped even the penetration of this learned writer, with all the assistance which he could derive from the able commentary and notes of his predecessor, thoroughly to remove; which hath probably led the amiable Mr. Fellowes to "think it most safe, as well as wise, in considering any disputed point of doctrine, to confine our attention solely and exclusively to those points of doctrine, which Jesus himself plainly and unequivocally sanctioned by his authority." (See Fellowes's Picture of Christian Philosophy, p. 129.) You will not, however, be inclined to think that in the present state of things, even if it were in other respects safe or wise, we are at liberty to give up a writer, who is constantly appealed to, in support of opinions, which appear to be subversive of the most amiable attributes of the divine being, by a large
portion of these, who call themselves Christians.† Much has been done by the learned men above mentioned towards illustrating his writings, which certainly should stimulate others, who have leisure and abilities, to follow their example.

But whatever obscurities there may be in St. Paul’s writings, certain it is, that the leading objects of them, and particularly of the Epistle to the Romans, with which I am at present chiefly concerned, are stated with a distinctness and precision, which ought to exclude all doubt, and which are in perfect harmony with the general tenor of the New Testament. These I shall endeavour to state with all the perspicuity and impartiality I am capable of, at the same time, freely and without reserve, availing myself of the advantages of the labours of Mr. Locke, and particularly of Mr. Taylor.

In the first chapter, the Apostle having expressed an earnest desire, which he had long cherished, but which circumstances had hitherto prevented, of going to Rome, to impart some spiritual blessings to the Christians dwelling there, and in return to receive some advantages from an intercourse with them, acknowledges himself to be a debtor, as the Apostle of the Gentiles, both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, to the wise and to the unwise, and

† I by no means think that they see these doctrines in such an unfavourable light; for there have been and still are multitudes, who hold these opinions, whose conduct is most honourable to their profession.
that he was ready, to the utmost of his power, to preach the Gospel to them that were at Rome also; for, says he, I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone that believeth—to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

The Apostle, having asserted the excellence of the Gospel, as a scheme of grace eminently calculated for the salvation of mankind, shows at large the need the Gentiles had of a revelation from Heaven, to give them information concerning the fundamental doctrine of all religion; for though the wisest of their philosophers knew God, yet they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful for the bounties of his providence; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish hearts were darkened. Though they arrogated to themselves the name of wise men, they evinced their extreme folly by changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Nor was their practice less hateful and abominable, as they not only gave themselves up to the most detestable vices, but took delight in them, and were pleased with all who joined in the practice of them.*

* In the twenty-eighth verse, it is said that as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, &c. This reprobate mind, says the Bishop of Lincoln, is not represented as the consequence of any antecedent decree of God, but as resulting from their own wilful blindness and voluntary desertion of the worship of the creator for that of the creature, although they knew the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death. (Refutation of Calvinism, p. 220.)
That St. Paul's description of the state of the heathen world, black as it is, was not exaggerated, the faithful page of history will inform you, and it seems to have been his object to place the horrid picture, in its darkest shade, before the mind of the Jew; well knowing, that his peculiar hatred against the Gentiles would induce him to turn it into an argument against their being admitted to the enjoyment of the privileges and blessings of the Messiah's kingdom.

The Apostle, having thus raised the contempt of the Jew against the Gentile, and given him the fullest opportunity to condemn him, as utterly unworthy of the divine favour, proceeds, in the second chapter, to shew that he had no pretensions to arrogate all the divine mercy to himself; for that he had, in a most aggravated manner, despised the goodness, and broken the laws of God, and was as obnoxious to the wrath of God as the Gentiles, and would be equally subject to the just judgment of God, when, with the most impartial equity, he would render to every man according to his works.

As a proof of the equity of the divine proceedings, he lays it down as a fundamental principle, that every man should be judged according to the advantages which he enjoyed, and the privileges which he possessed. As many, says the Apostle, as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law; for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers
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of the law shall be justified. This, you observe, he applies in the remaining part of the chapter, to the case both of the Jew and of the Gentile, shewing with great force of argument, that privileges enjoyed, without a due improvement, would only be an aggravation of the guilt of the possessor. Behold thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law. q. d. What signify your pretensions to superior knowledge, and the honourable office of teaching others, if you do not practice your own precepts? What the better are you for preaching against theft, if you are yourself a thief—or for declaring adultery unlawful, if you live in the practice of it, or for representing idolatry, as abominable, if you are guilty of sacrilege? What honours or singular privileges do you deserve if, while you glory in the law and your religious principles, you dishonour God and discredit his religion, by living in open contradiction to your profession? Wherefore, concludes the Apostle, if the uncircumcised heathen, whom you so much despise, in his natural state, and having no other guide but his own reason and understanding, fulfil the law, by a sober and upright behaviour, shall he not condemn you, as not worthy to be called a Jew, or to enjoy any longer the privileges of the kingdom of God, who wickedly indulge yourself in the open violation of the law of God; for he is not a Jew, who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh—but he is a Jew who is one inwardly—who is pure and upright and cir-
Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter—whose praise is not of men but of God.

When, my dear sir, you consider the high opinion, which the Jews entertained of themselves as the peculiar people of God, and their utter contempt, so fully displayed in the Gospel history, and particularly in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, of the Gentile world; you cannot but see that it was the great object of the Apostle in this chapter, to humble their pride, and to shew them that they had no greater title to the divine favour, than the Gentiles whom they so much despised.†

But if this were the case, the Apostle knew that the Jew would be ready to ask—what peculiar advantage he had—or what was the profit of circumcision? In answer to this question, you observe, he hesitates not to allow that he had many advantages, the principal of which was, that to him had been entrusted the oracles of God—the revelation of his will by Moses and the Prophets, a treasure of inestimable value, if rightly improved, while the rest of mankind had lost all traces of any such communication from God.

Well, but says the Jew again—what if some of our nation have abused their advantages, and acted contrary

† They were, says Mr. Richards, represented by the Roman historian, as actuated, previously to their dispersion, by a spirit of hatred to the whole human race. (See Mr. Richards’s Bampton Lectures, p. 141.)
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to their obligations—shall their wickedness disannul the promise expressly delivered in those oracles made to Abraham, that he would, by an everlasting covenant, be a God to him and to his seed after him? No, says the Apostle—By no means, rejected with abhorrence be the thought—Let God be true and every man a liar—He is righteous in all his dealings with mankind, whatever may perversely be said to the contrary! Here, again, you observe, the Jew replies—But if the unrighteousness with which you charge us, commend and enhance the faithfulness of God, in keeping his promise to our forefathers—is it not unjust that God should punish us for our wickedness? No, says the Apostle, by no means; for how then would he be qualified to judge the world? But says the Jew—if the faithfulness of God in keeping his promise is, through our wickedness, made far more glorious than otherwise it would have been—why should we be condemned for that, which so much redounds to the glory of God? To which the Apostle again replies with indignation—Why dont you rather say: what this language naturally imports, and as some unjustly affirm: that we say—Let us do evil because God can, one way or other, turn it to his own glory?

The Jew having, as you perceive, used these arguments to support his own claims to the exclusive character of the people of God, and completely failed, once more returns to the attack, and says—What then—we are, at any rate, better than the Gentiles—No, says the Apostle—not at all—for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles to be all under the guilt of sin, and that conse-
quantity both are equally unworthy of the blessings of the Messiah’s kingdom, and must equally be indebted for them to the free grace and mercy of God. In support of this evidence, you observe the Apostle appeals to the sacred writings of the Jews, in a variety of instances, from whence he draws this unanswerable conclusion, that every mouth must be stoped and that all the world, Jews as well as Gentiles, must be acknowledged to be guilty before God. Under these circumstances, the conclusion is obvious, that, upon the footing of obedience to law, no flesh can put in any claim to justification in the sight of God. But now the Gospel opens to us more happy and encouraging prospects, as it discovers a way of salvation, not founded upon the right or claim, which results from obedience to law, but upon the grace or favour of the law-giver, and is spoken of in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets—even the righteousness—or mercy of God by faith in Jesus Christ, which extends to all that believe; for in this respect there is no difference between Jew and Gentile; all having sinned and come short of the glory of God.

The Apostle in some following verses, you observe, dilates, more at large, upon this interesting topic, and thence, as the Jew—what foundation had for boasting? and declares that it was excluded not by the law of works, but by the law of faith, and therefore says he, I conclude that man is justified through faith, i.e. that all men may be interested in the blessings of the Messiah’s kingdom, only by faith in his mercy, without the plea of entire obedience to law. And why may not any part of man-
kind be interested in those blessings? Why should the Jews engraft the favour of God wholly, to themselves? Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not of the Gentiles also? Most assuredly he is, and has an undoubted right of extending his favour to them; as well as to the Jews, in the way which he hath appointed, by faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

It seems to me, my dear sir, impossible to contemplate this language of the Apostle, without observing how admirably it applies to the known sentiments of the Jews, as delineated in the Acts of the Apostles, and with what irresistible force, he combats the high pretensions, upon which they valued themselves, and the absurdity of their prejudices against all, who were not within the pale of their church! But lest a wrong use should be made of this doctrine of faith, as the foundation of a title to the blessings of God’s covenant, the Apostle asks—Do we then make void the law through faith? No, says he—on the contrary, we establish it, upon its true foundation. This the Apostle urges, very strenuously in the sixth chapter, where he shews at large, how he establishes the law through faith.

The Apostle having proved that neither Jew nor Gentile had a right to the blessings of the Messiah’s kingdom, otherwise than by grace, which is free to the one, as well as to the other, in the fourth chapter, advances to a new argument, admirably adapted to convince the Jew, and to show the believing Gentile, in a clear point of view, the high value, and the firm security of the mercy freely
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bestowed upon him in the Gospel, and at the same time to display the scheme of divine providence, as laid in the divine councils and purposes of God. His argument, you observe, is taken from the case of Abraham, who was the acknowledged father and head of the Jewish nation. He had been an idolater, but God had pardoned him, and took him and his seed into his special covenant, and bestowed upon him many extraordinary blessings above the rest of mankind. Thus was he justified; not, however, upon the footing of obedience to law, or the rule of right conduct, but in the only way in which a sinner can be justified, by prerogative, or by the favour of the law-giver. Now, says the Apostle, this is the very same way, in which the Gospel saves the believing Gentiles, and gives them a part in the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom. Why then should the Jews so violently oppose the admission of the Gentiles to a participati-on of those blessings? especially if it be farther observed, that the believing Gentiles were actually included in the promise made to Abraham that in him and in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, and consequently that all, in any nation, who believed, would be interested in the promise made to him. But he stood only upon the footing of faith in the mercy of God, pardoning his idolatry, and graciously bestowing upon him extraordinary blessings. Upon this footing also the believing Gentiles stand in the Gospel, and therefore they are included in the promise made to Abraham.

But to all this, the Apostle well knew, it would be objected by the Jew, that it was not faith alone, which
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gave Abraham a right to the blessings of the covenant, but his obedience to the law of circumcision, which being peculiar to the Jewish nation, gave them also, and them alone, an interest in the Abrahamic covenant, and that consequently, whoever among the Gentiles wished to be interested in that covenant, ought to embrace Judaism, to be circumcised and become obedient to this whole of the Mosaic law.

With this objection, you observe, the Apostle introduces his argument, in ch. iv. 1. and shews that, according to the scripture account, Abraham was justified by faith and explains the nature of that justification by a quotation from scripture, from the fifth to the ninth verse. In the ninth, tenth, and eleventh verses, he proves that Abraham was justified long before he was circumcised, and in the twelfth to the seventeenth verse, he shews, that the believing Gentiles are those to whom the promise belonged, as well as the believing Jews, and from thence to the end he describes the faith of Abraham, in order more fully to explain the faith of the Gospel.

In the foregoing chapters having examined the grounds of the Jews valuing themselves so highly above the Gentiles, and having shewn the vanity of their boasting in circumcision and the law, since neither they, nor their father Abraham, were justified, or accepted by God, by their circumcision, or the deeds of the law, and that therefore they had no reason to press circumcision upon the Gentiles, or to exclude those, who were not circumcised, from being the people of God. In this fifth
chapter, he begins, with declaring, that the Gentiles, being justified by faith, had the most substantial grounds for concluding that, they had peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom they had access to the grace wherein they stood, and rejoiced in the hope of the glory, which God had in store for them. And although the tribulations which they endured, were not, for the present, joyous but grievous, yet they gloried even in them, from the good effects which they produced in them, and particularly, from the hope of a better state of things; of which the gift of the Holy Ghost, was an earnest and pledge, as well as a proof, of their interest in the favour of God, and being in a state of reconciliation with him.

From the eleventh verse to the end of the chapter, the Apostle advances his third and last argument, to prove the extensiveness of the divine grace—or that it reached to all mankind as well as to the Jews. This argument is stated, as you will observe, as follows.

† St. Paul here speaks, says the Bishop of Lincoln, in his Reformation of Calvinism, p. 100, of living Christians, who, in consequence of having been justified from their former sins through faith in Christ, have now peace with God. The ninth verse, he says, is still more clear, and points out the difference between justification and salvation—Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him—Here also justification is spoken of as having already taken place, salvation as being future; that is, justification is in this world, salvation in the next.

2 A 2
The consequence of Christ's obedience, the Apostle says, extended as far as the consequences of Adam's disobedience—but as they extended to all mankind, so do those of Christ's obedience. Now if the Jews will not allow the Gentiles any interest in Abraham, as not being his natural descendants, they must at least admit that the Gentiles were the descendants of Adam as well as themselves. And as they were all equally involved in the consequences of his sin, they could not deny the Gentiles a share in the consequences of Christ's obedience.

The Apostle having now proved by three distinct arguments, that both Jews and Gentiles were pardoned, and made partakers of the privileges and blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, no otherwise, than by the grace of God through faith alone, next proceeds, as you will observe, in proper order, to show the obligations that both Jews and Gentiles were under, to a life of virtue and holiness, in this new state of things, and the means and advantages which they enjoyed for this purpose. This he does, not only to instruct the Christians in their duty, but likewise to wipe away a calumny industriously propagated, as if, in asserting justification by grace without works, he had taught that they were under no obligation to obedience. Against this objection, you recollect, he had already put in a caveat expressed in terms of indignation—Do we then make void the law? God forbid—yen, we establish the law. But here, you see, he handles the important subject, more at large, and considers it with reference to the believing Gentiles,
and argues upon it in an easy and familiar manner throughout the chapter, and well adapted to their case and capacities.

In the seventh chapter, you find the Apostle addresses himself upon the same subject, but to a very different sort of people. The Gentiles had nothing to oppose to the Gospel. They were, as you know, just emerged out of the darkness and impurity of an idolatrous state, and therefore they wanted no arguments to convince them of the necessity of a farther dispensation, for their instruction and sanctification. And, what any of their philosophers had taught, they found transcribed and incorporated in the Gospel, and indeed every moral truth which human reason could discover, with the addition of a surprising degree of light and information, beyond the unassisted reach of the human understanding.

The Jewish Christian, on the other hand, either from his own prejudices, or from the suggestions of his unbelieving countrymen, might be diverted from a due improvement of the Gospel. It might be suggested, that he could not own the Gospel, as a rule of life, or put himself under it, without renouncing the law of Moses, which, it would be said, was renouncing his obligations to God, whose authority had established it, and laid him under an obligation to adhere to it. Besides—it might be suggested that they did not want the Gospel—the law was, in all points holy, just, and good, and was acknowledged and esteemed to be such. What occasion therefore had they for the Gospel? To confirm the believing.

2 A 3
Jew against such suggestions, you will perceive is the design, particularly of the first part of this chapter.† And in the latter part of it, it seems to me not improbable, that he is still speaking in the person of a Jew, who is under the ceremonial law; which, instead of offering pardon to the transgressor, denounced death to him. Hence he is made to cry out, v. 24. _O wretched man that I am—who shall deliver me from the body of this death—or from the curse of the law which subjects me to death?_ And to thank God for his deliverance from his miserable condition by Jesus Christ.

But whatever may be the precise meaning of the latter part of this chapter; of which, I must acknowledge I have but an imperfect conception, yet it appears, from the first verse of the following chapter, that it relates to the law which the Jew had been under, and from which the Apostle asserts that he was set free by the Gospel. There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus—to them that walk not after the flesh, i.e. after the law of carnal ordinances—but after the life and spirit of the Gospel.

I have here adopted the opinion of a very learned and much respected friend and neighbour, in preference to that of Mess. Locke and Taylor, and it appears to me, not improbable, that he is perfectly correct in supposing,

† In our translation, the law is said to have dominion over a man as long as he liveth—but it would, perhaps, suit the Apostle's arguments better, to translate it—as long as the law exists.
that the Apostle in Gal. vii. 12., institutes a comparison, or contrast, between the two covenants, with a view to point out the superior excellence of the covenant of the Gospel, to that of the law.

Thus, the Apostle says, as paraphrased by my friend, Luke xvi. 24. For the new covenant, here emphatically termed the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath delivered us from the penalties of the old covenant, called the law of sin and death, whose sanction is—transgress and die. v. 3. For what the covenant of the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, or from our inability to fulfill its condition of perfect obedience, God sending his own son to be made flesh, and in all things like unto his brethren, to make reconcilement for the sins of the people, by being himself a sacrifice for sin, entered into a new covenant with us, that of repentance and remission of sins, and justified us from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses. v. 4. That Christ Jesus, being made unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption, imperfect obedience may be accepted in us, who walk not after the flesh, i.e. not after the law of carnal ordinances, but after the spirit—or after the Gospel. ver. 5. For they that are under the law, necessarily being after the flesh, seek for justification by carnal ordinances—but they that are after the spirit are of the spirit. 

* To observe the ceremonies of the law of Moses, says Dr. Clark, is by St. Paul, styled the flesh, in opposition to the doctrine of Christ, which he styles the spirit. 'Thus Gal. iv. 9. Are ye so foolish—having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? (See his second sermon, vol. 8.)
the spirit—or who receive the Gospel, are justified by faith, without the works of the law, ver. 6. For the mind† of the law, requiring perfect obedience which we cannot perform, subjects us to death, but the mind of the Gospel, which offereth repentance and remission of sins, giveth life and peace. v. 7. Because the works of the law, have a tendency, through our manifold transgressions, to render us enemies with God, as we are wholly unable to perform the conditions of it. v. 8. They therefore that are in the flesh—that is under covenant of the law, or trust in carnal ordinances, cannot please God.‡ v. 9. But ye are not in the flesh, or under

† ὁρνύμα quod quis sapit. Henry Stephens. What any one relishes. But I rather think the word is meant to express the nature of the thing, to which it is applied. Hierychius, interprets it, if I mistake not, by Ἰηνημα βουλήμα. Perhaps a person conversant in law might suggest a more expressive word than mind.

‡ Mr. Locke was of opinion that they, that are in the flesh, is applied, ch. vii. 5. to the Jews as resting in the bare literal, or carnal sense, and observance of the law; and that it ought to be so interpreted here. And, he further observes, that St. Paul makes it the chief business of this Epistle, (and he seldom forgets the design he is upon) to persuade both Jew and Gentile from a subjection to the law, and that the argument he is upon here, is the weakness and insufficiency of the law to deliver men from the power of sin, and then perhaps, it will not be judged that the interpretation here given of these words, is altogether remote from the Apostle’s sense—It seems a little extraordinary that this great man should not have interpreted the other passages in this chapter, where similar phrases are used, in the same manner.
the covenant of the law—but in the spirit or under the covenant of the Gospel, to which the law, as a school master, leads you. Now if any man hath not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his—he is not under the Gospel covenant. v. 10. And if Christ be in you—if you are under the Gospel covenant the body indeed, with respect to the old covenant, is dead, because of sin, but the spirit is life, because of that righteousness, which the Gospel has substituted instead of perfect obedience. v. 11. But if the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you—he that raised him up from the dead, shall also, by his spirit, that dwelleth in you, quicken you together with him. v. 12. Hence therefore, my brethren, the conclusion is evident, that we are no longer debtors to the flesh, to live under the covenant of the law and to obey it. v. 13. For if ye live after the flesh—if ye trust to the law for justification, ye shall die; for, as was before observed—the sentence of the law is—transgress and die—but if through the spirit—or in obedience to the Gospel, ye do mortify the deeds of the body, by repentance—ye shall live, and shall receive remission of your sins. v. 14. For as many as are led by the spirit of God—or are obedient to the Gospel covenant—they are the sons of God. v. 15. For, in the Gospel covenant, ye have not a yoke imposed upon you, which neither ye, nor your fathers were able to bear, in submission to which ye were filled with daily fear of transgressing—but ye have received the spirit of those who are adopted, as his dear children; so that ye come before God—not as a strict and severe judge, but as a kind and merciful father. v. 16. For the earnest of the spirit, which God hath already given us, and by which
we are sealed, confirmeth the testimony of our conscience, that we are adopted, and become the children of God. v. 17. And since, from such unquestionable evidence, we are children, it follows of course, that we are heirs—heirs of God—of the promise made to Abraham that in him and in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, and co-heirs with Christ, whom he hath appointed heir of all; if we partake of Christ's sufferings, that we may be sharers of his glory, and be glad also with exceeding joy. v. 18. For I reckon that the persecutions, to which we are now exposed, are not worthy to be compared with the glorious state of things, which we shall hereafter witness and enjoy. v. 19. For, as a proof of this—the whole Gentile world is now lifting up the head and looking for that happy time, when it shall be fully revealed that they also shall be numbered among the sons of God. v. 20. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but through him who brought it into this state. v. 21. In hope of being delivered from the bondage of corruption, in which they were entangled, and introduced into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. v. 22. For we know that the whole Gentile world mourneth and languisheth like a woman in travail,* looking for the hour of her delivery. v. 23. And

*"To be in pangs," says Dr. Doddridge, "like a woman in travail, sometimes only signifies being in great distress, where there is no reference to any expected birth—but, he says, it seems very probable that the Apostle in these metaphors, here alludes to what he had been saying before (v. 14, 17, 19, 21.) In all which places he describes christians as the children of God, and so here
not only they, but we also, who have received the first fruits of the spirit, as an earnest of a still more glorious state of things, are groaning within ourselves and waiting for the adoption, when God shall gather his elect from all nations, and we shall be delivered from the persecutions, which we are now enduring, from the unbelieving Jews. v. 24. For our salvation, for which we are so earnestly looking, is still an object of hope only, though nearer than when we believed; for what a man sees, or is in possession of, why does he yet hope for? v. 25. But if we hope for what we see not, or do not yet possess, then ought we patiently to wait for it, remaining, at the same time, faithful to our duty, under all the difficulties of our present situation. v. 26. And, for this important purpose, the spirit also, of which we have already had the first fruits, helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what is most fit for us to ask of God—but the spirit maketh intercession for us with silent aspirations. v. 27. And he who searcheth the hearts, knoweth the mind of the spirit, because he maketh intercession for us, according to the will of God. And, as a farther proof of his kindness towards us, we know that all things, even our afflictions, work together for good to all, of every nation, Jew or Gentile, who love God—who are the called according to his purpose and grace, as foretold by the ancient prophets. v. 29. For whom he did foreknow, as persons who should be called according to his purpose,

expresses the general prevalency of the Gospel by the birth of many more, with which nature was pregnant, and of which it longed to be delivered." This very judicious.
he before appointed,† as the means of their salvation, to be conformed to the image of his son, to follow his example, that he might be the first born among many brethren. v. 30. Now, whom God had before appointed, to be partakers of the Gospel—to them he commanded the good news to be preached and invited them to become the subjects of the Messiah's kingdom—those who accepted of the invitation he justified—and whom he justified them he also glorified by putting them in the full possession of all the privileges of the sons of God. v. 31. What shall we then say to these representations? What but that if God be for us—if he hath thus fore-known, fore-appointed, called, justified, and glorified us, who can be against us—or, who is there that can pretend to deprive us of his favour? He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all—how shall he not after this display of his superabundant goodness to us, also, freely, give us all things? v. 32. What have we who are now the elect of God—the called according to his purpose to fear from any charge, which can be brought against us? God, who hath called; hath also justified us, and hath published forgiveness of sins to all that believe, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. v. 33. What have we to fear from the condemnation of any

† In our translation it is—he did predestinate—Now predestination is always used in scripture in a good sense—No persons are said to be predestinated to death, or to punishment, or to unbelief. Nefas est dicere Deum aliquid nisi benum præ destinare. Aug. de Præd. cap. 2. And undoubtedly it is used in a good sense, here. This remark is well deserving of observation.
man? There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus—or who believe his Gospel. Christ was delivered for our offences—raised again for our justification—purged our sins—reconciled us to God—is seated at his right hand and ever liveth to make intercession for us. v. 35. Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? What though, as the Psalmist says—we are killed all the day long and are accounted as sheep for the slaughter? In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. v. 38. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life—nor Angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come—nor height nor depth, nor any thing else, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You will, my dear sir, see enough in this commentary, if you think with me, to convince you of the important fact, that it comports with the general design of the whole Epistle, and that the Apostle contrasts the two dispensations with each other, with a view to establish the superior excellence of the Gospel, and looks forward to the establishment of it in the Gentile world. And, with respect to the conclusion of it, you will agree with me that it is a most elegant and sublime piece of writing, founded upon the grand and solid principles of the Gospel, breathing the true spirit of magnanimity; raising our minds far above all created things, and shewing in the brightest colours the greatness of soul, and the strong consolation, which the Gospel inspires, and, consequently,
that they who despise it, despise all that is great, glorious and happy!

In my next letter I shall endeavour to lay before you the genuine meaning of the three following chapters, which will, I trust, enable you more fully to understand the meaning of the Apostle, in the twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth, and thirtieth verses of this chapter, with which the doctrine of election and reprobation appears to be more particularly connected. In the meantime:

I am,

Very respectfully,

Your s.,

N. NISBETT.

Tunstall, March 20th, 1812.
THE Apostle having, as appears to me, contrasted the two covenants with each other, with a view to shew the superior excellence of that of the Gospel, in the manner stated in my last letter and, upon this principle, challenged the whole world to lay any thing to the charge of God's elect, whether Jews or Gentiles, and boldly affirmed the perfect security of the ground, upon which they stood for justification in the sight of God, if they complied with the conditions of that covenant, proceeds in this chapter to state at large the proper foundation, upon which their election was built.

But, before he enters upon the subject, you perceive how naturally, as a Jew, he expresses his deep concern at the prospect of his countrymen losing the inestimable advantages, which he had been enumerating, and his earnest wish for their happiness. But no language can more fully express the patriotic feelings of the Apostle, upon this occasion, than his own. v. 1, &c. I say the truth in Christ—I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in conjunction with the witness of the holy spirit.
that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart, at the very thought of the rejection of the Jewish nation. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

It appears to have been no small aggravation of the Apostle's concern at the rejection of the Jews, that from them emanated the principal blessings of the Gospel covenant, and that from them also came Christ himself, the great mediator of that covenant. But however much the rejection of the Jews as a nation was to be regretted; yet the Apostle asserts that God had not failed of his promise to Abraham, that he would establish his covenant between him and his seed after him, for an everlasting covenant, to be their God; for, says he; they are not all Israel which are of Israel, q. d. The whole body of natural born Jews are not the whole of the Israel of God, comprehended in the promise. Neither because they are the seed, the natural descendants of Abraham; therefore are they all of them, without exception, the children in whom the promise was to be fulfilled. The Apostle's

* Mr. Tāylor paraphrases it, that "he could even wish that the exclusion from the visible church, which would happen to the Jewish nation, might fall to his own share, if thereby they might be kept in it." But this appears to me to be unnatural. I should interpret the Anathema of his suffering death ως του ναζαβων after the manner of Christ. This seems to be the use of the preposition in another passage—I thank God whom I serve ας του τοτων after the manner of my ancestors.
argument, you observe, is, that the promise was confined to one branch of natural descent, but might have been accomplished in any part of Abraham's seed, as God in his sovereign wisdom should choose; for Abraham had several sons besides Isaac, particularly Ishmael, who was circumcised before Isaac was born, and in whom Abraham was desirous the promise might be fulfilled, and in him God might, if he had pleased, have fulfilled it, and yet he said to Abraham, as the Apostle observes, that in Isaac his seed should be called—that is, that not the children who descend from Abraham's loins—not those who are circumcised as he was, nor even those whom he might expect and desire, were therefore the people of God; but those, who are made children by the good pleasure and promise of God, as Isaac was, were alone to be accounted for the seed, with whom the covenant was established. 

For this, you observe, as the Apostle says, is evidently implied in the word of promise, recorded in Gen. xviii. 18.—At this time will I come, saith God, and Sarah though four score and ten years of age shall have a son; which clearly shews that it was the sovereign will and act of God alone, which singled out, and constituted the peculiar seed, that was to inherit the promise.

In the tenth verse, you observe, the Apostle adduces another strong case, that of Isaac and Rebecca in support of his argument. Before Esau and Jacob were born, and consequently before they had done good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election might stand, and that it might, in the clearest manner, appear to be, not of works, but solely of the good pleasure of him that

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calleth—It was said unto Rebecca, that the elder should serve the younger*—that is, that the posterity of the younger, should be more prosperous and happy than the posterity of the elder; which agrees most exactly with what the spirit of God speaks by the Prophet Malachi. Was not Esau Jacob's brother, saith the Lord? Yet I loved, or preferred Jacob, and bestowed peculiar favours and blessings upon his posterity, making them a special people unto myself, above all the people that were upon the face of the earth—but Esau and his posterity have I comparatively† hated and have not been so liberal of my favours to them, but laid his mountains and his heritage waste, for the dragons of the wilderness.

These being clear and incontestable facts drawn from the early history of the Jewish nation—the Apostle puts the question, which would very naturally arise upon God's bestowing privileges in so unequal a manner upon those, who otherwise were in equal circumstances.

* These are the words which signify the purpose of God according to election, and consequently can relate only to Jacob's posterity—or to the whole nation of Israel. And to serve, unquestionably, in this passage, can only mean being in a subordinate situation, with respect to certain privileges.

† The Bishop of Lincoln, upon this passage says, very properly—the purpose of election here spoken of, has no relation to a future life, but refers to the election of the descendants of Jacob to be God's peculiar people, in preference to the descendants of Esau. (See his Refutation of Calvinism, p. 216, &c.)
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What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?—No, says he, by no means; for he saith to Moses—I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion upon whom I will have compassion. q. d. I will make such a display of my perfections as shall convince you, I am of a kind and beneficent nature—but know, that I am a debtor to none of my creatures. My benefits and blessings are merely from my own good will, nor can any people, much less a rebellious people, challenge them as their due in justice and equity. So then, to refer to the cases already stated, it was not of Abraham, who wished the blessings to be bestowed upon his eldest son Ishmael—nor of Esau, who ran for the venison, in order to obtain it—but of the mere good pleasure of God, that it was given, in the first case to Isaac, and afterwards confirmed to Jacob.

The exercise of the absolute power of the Almighty, in the instances here mentioned, you cannot fail to observe, relates to them only as the heads of nations, or bodies politic, incorporated in civil society, and as feeling the effects of it only in the prosperity or calamity, which they meet with in this world, but extends not to their eternal state, in another world, considered as individuals; for in this respect they, as the Apostle had before observed, who were without law, would be judged without law, and they, that were under the law, would be judged by the law—or in other words—every man would be judged according to what he had, and not according to what he had not.
In the seventeenth verse, you observe, the Apostle introduces another instance to the same purpose, and draws a similar conclusion from it. For the scripture saith to Pharaoh—for this very same purpose—heav I exalted thee to the high station which thou possessed; that I might shew to thee my power, which thou hast defied, in saying, I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go; and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.†

† I have translated ἐκ τοῦ σώλος instead of ἐκ τῆς, and it appears to me to be justified by what we read in the history of Pharaoh Exod. ix. 14. where God says that he would send all his plagues upon him and his people, that he might know that there was none like him in all the earth. Several remarkable instances of the preposition ἐκ signify how to be seen in 2 Peter ch. i. v. 5, 6, †

† It ought, I think, to be observed, that whatever objections may be made against the conduct of God, as displayed in this passage, and in that, to which it has a reference, in the ninth chapter of the book of Exodus, will equally apply to the conduct of God in the ordinary administration of his providence. He taketh up the beggar from the dunghill and setteth him among princes. And when thus raised, he is frequently found to abuse his power—and to turn the favours which God has bestowed upon him, into the most wanton outrages against the power, that has placed him in so exalted a situation. But who is there that will attempt to exonerate such a one from guilt—of who will assert that he had no power to act, otherwise?

It has been well observed by the Bishop of Lincoln, that the prescience of God is to be considered as perfectly distinct from his
That the Almighty maketh use of wicked men to effect his own great purposes, will, I presume, require no proof, as we see it strongly confirmed in our own times, and that Pharaoh was a person of this description, the history of his life sufficiently evinces—but that same history, you will, I think, agree with me, compels us to understand the hardening of his heart, of the effect which the exhibition of the divine power had upon his mind—not of any arbitrary act of the supreme being. This seems to be most evident from the manner in which it is stated Exod. viii. 15. *When Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart and heartened not unto them, as the Lord had said.* And again, ch. ix. 34, 35. *When Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more and hardened his heart, he and his servants; and the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the people go, as the Lord had spoken by Moses.* The sense therefore of the phrase whom he will he hardeneth, is, that God permits men to abuse his forbearance, which ought to lead them to repentance, to their own destruction.

It must be owned that this interpretation seems to militate against the question, which the Apostle puts into the mouth of an objector, and the answer which

will. He foresees all the actions of men, both those which are conformable, and those which are contrary to his will; but this prescience of God does not affect the free agency of men. Freedom of will and liberty of action are the essential qualities of men, as moral responsible beings. (*Reformation of Calvinism*, p. 229, &c.)
he gives to that objection. v. 19, 20. Thou wilt then say to me—Why doth he get that fault, for who hath resisted his will? Nay but O man who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it—why hast thou made me thus? But I submit it to your consideration, whether this does not relate simply to the placing men in certain situations—not to any compulsion to act wrong—in those situations! This seems evident from the example of the potter. v. 20. Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump to make one vessel to dishonour, and another to honour? or to a less honourable use, as his own skill shall direct him?

This case of the potter the Prophet Jeremiah so fully explains with reference to the Apostle’s argument, that it is only necessary to present it to you, to enable you to see the force of the conclusion drawn from it. Go down saith the Lord, to the potter’s house, and there will I cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter’s house, and behold he wrought a work on the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay, was marred in the hand of the potter—so he made again, another vessel of it. Then the word of the Lord came to me saying—O house of Israel—can I do with you as this potter? Behold, saith the Lord—as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are

* St. Paul answers this question, says the Bishop of Lincoln, by reproving the presumption of it, as urged by a creature against his creator, who has the same power over his creatures, which a potter has over the vessels he forms.
ye, in my hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil which I thought to do unto them. And, at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them. Now, says the Apostle, to apply this to the case of the Jews—what if God willing to shew his wrath against them, and to make his power known, hath endured, with much long-suffering, the vessels of wrath, made such by their extreme wickedness, and thereby fitted for destruction? And, what if he hath suspended their destruction, with this farther view, that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, whom he hath, before that judgment be executed, already prepared for the honour of being his people, instead of the Jewish nation?† Even us, adds the Apostle, in order that his meaning might not be mistaken, whom he hath called—not only of the Jews—but also of the Gentiles. But, still farther to confirm this meaning, he applies a prophecy which can not be mistaken, from the Prophet Hosea—I will call them my people, which were not my people, and her beloved which was not beloved.

† The Bishop of Lincoln says this passage relates to God's gracious offer of the blessings of the Gospel to those, who, he fore-knew, would accept them, as appears from the verse immediately following.
I shall not, my dear sir, pursue the train of the Apostle's argument farther, as it appears to me unnecessary; the whole, of what the Apostle has hitherto said, having so decided and unequivocal a reference—not to the eternal salvation of mankind in a future world, but to the bestowing of certain privileges upon some, which were not conferred upon others—or which, in the present instance, were taken away from some, and bestowed upon others. You will not, however, I am persuaded, be displeased if I select some out of many of those passages in the ninth and following chapters, which in the strongest manner confirm the grand fact, that the whole of the argumentative part of the Epistle relates, as might have been expected from the circumstances of the times, when the Apostle wrote, to the rejection of the Jews, and to the call of the Gentiles. Thus it is said of the Jews, that blindness in part had happened to them—that they were the natural branches, which were broken off from the olive tree—that they were cast away—that they were ignorant of God's righteousness, which he had established in the Gospel, and instead of it went about to establish their own righteousness, which is of the law—and that they sought it not by faith—but by the works of the law, and therefore had not attained to the law of righteousness. It was these same people, spoken of in all these places, that were the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, and for whom St. Paul had continual heaviness and sorrow of heart. In short, they were the unbelieving nation, or people of the Jews, of whose rejection and reprobation he treats, and from their own
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Original election vindicates the truth, justice and wisdom of God.†

† "In an early age of the world," says Mr. Richards, "the leader of the Jews, the acknowledged minister of Heaven, at the conclusion of long and successful labours, and the close of a holy life, presented to their view an affecting picture of their future condition, when they should have incurred the just displeasure of their God. With a vigour of expression, which has never been exceeded, and with a minuteness of detail, which has seldom been equalled, even by the most accurate historian, he represented to them, that they should be scattered among all people from the one end of the earth even unto the other; that among these nations they should find no ease, neither should the sole of their feet have rest; that they should be smitten by the Lord with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart; that they should have a trembling of heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind; that they should become an astonishment, a proverb, and a bye-word; that they should be oppressed evermore, and that no man should save them. It is added, that their life should hang in doubt, and that they should fear night and day, and should have none assurance of their life; that in the bitterness of anguish, in the morning they should say—would God it were even! and at even they should say—would God it were morning!

From the description of the Prophet let us turn to the annals of the historian. When the holy city of David had yielded to the victorious arms of Rome, the inhabitants were expelled from their native territory, and scattered through all the kingdoms of the world. Since the time of that calamitous event, they have wandered over every portion of the globe, without national possessions, an acknowledged constitution, or independent laws. Though generally submissive to the laws, and strangers to political intrigue, they have frequently been exposed to persecution and plunder, even with the connivance of governments, which, in all other instances
If, on the other hand, you carefully peruse this Epistle and especially the ninth and following chapters, you will find that the people, who in times past believed not God, but had now obtained mercy, were the whole body of the believing Gentiles—who were cut out of the olive tree which was wild by nature, and were grafted into the good olive tree—who had not been God's people, nor beloved—but were now his people—that the call was extended—

have guarded as sacred the property of individuals. Though abundantly possessed of riches, which usually command the respect of mankind, and elevate even ignorance and folly, they have been generally treated with contempt by the powerful, and sometimes even followed with insult by the populace.

Such is the faithful though melancholy picture of a people, once distinguished by the peculiar favour of the Almighty; for whom the sea was divided in Egypt, and the sun stood still upon Gibeon; whose laws were brought down from Heaven, and whose ancestors walked with God.

Yet amidst multiplied instances of oppression, misery, and contempt, they have resolutely continued through seventeen hundred years a separate and distinct people. Their God hath not cast them away nor abhorred them, to destroy them utterly; their great and wonderful plagues, which were to be of long continuance, still remain; the curses are yet upon them, which, in the strong language of scripture, were to be for a sign and for a wonder upon them and their seed for ever. Not mingled and lost among the kingdoms, over which they are scattered, they retain the means upon their returning obedience of beholding their captivity turned, and of being gathered from the nations, and restored to the land of their fathers.” (See Richards's Bampton Lectures, p. p. 128, &c.)
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not to the Jews only, but also to the Gentiles—and that they were the vessels of mercy, to whom God had made known the riches of his grace and made vessels unto honour. In all these places, he speaks of the same body of men, that is of the Gentiles principally, yet not excluding the believing Jews, who were incorporated with them. It was, in short, this body of Men, whose calling and election the Apostle has been proving; which he affirmed was according to the purpose of God, and who were the children of the promise, that were accounted for the seed of Abraham according to that promise.

If my dear sir you place yourself in the Apostle's situation, when he wrote this Epistle, you cannot but admire how exactly all this language, both with respect to the rejection of the Jews, and the call of the Gentiles, tally with what might have been expected from him, and you can hardly entertain a doubt of his genuine meaning—but, as if the Apostle was determined that his meaning should not be mistaken—he looks forward, evidently with the sensations of a true lover of his country, to the period when the Jews should be restored to favour. He not only prays that this reprobated and rejected people might be saved—but he affirms that they had not so stumbled as to fall, finally and irrecoverably—that blindness had happened unto them only for a time, till the fulness of the Gentiles should be come in, and that then all Israel, the whole Jewish nation, at present under blindness, should be saved. All these several things and many more are spoken of Israel, or of that body of
people, concerning whose rejection the Apostle argues in the ninth chapter. It seems therefore that the conclusion arising from hence is in the highest degree probable, and that the Apostle's argument in the ninth chapter, relates not to absolute election to eternal life, but to the present privileges of the church—the honours and advantages of God's peculiar people—but which, through unbelief or misimprovement, might be of no avail to eternal salvation. Some difficulties may possibly be started with respect to particular passages, but the general sense of the Apostle appears to be what I have just stated, and if so, he will be completely rescued from the odious charge of having taught a doctrine which evidently appears to be subversive of all religion, and divests the deity of the most essential attributes of his nature. The only merit, which I can claim in performing this service, is that of having endeavoured to arrange the thoughts of others, intermixed with a few which occurred to me, in such a manner as to render them impressive, and to make it evident to every impartial inquirer what the hard things were, which St. Peter says are contained in St. Paul's Epistles.

And now, my dear sir, having completed the plan which I had adopted, of presenting you with my thoughts on the Epistles and Gospels, and their con-
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connection with each other; nothing remains but to make a few remarks, which naturally arise upon so interesting a subject. But these I shall leave to be laid before you in my concluding letter. In the mean time,

I am,

Rev. Sir,

Yours,

Most truly,

N. NISBETT.

TUNSTALL, March 24th, 1812.
LETTER XV.

REV. SIR,

In my last letter I expressed my design, by way of conclusion, of presenting you with a few remarks upon the interesting topics, which have been the subject of discussion in the preceding pages, and upon which, I trust, the attention you have so kindly afforded me, has not been bestowed in vain.

The first and leading topic, and what I conceive to be the foundation of all the rest, to which I have directed your thoughts, has been, the scripture doctrine of the coming of Christ, in answer to the objection of Mr. Gibbon that it related to the end of the world, and that it was foretold that it was to take place in the generation in which he lived upon earth. That this objection arose from his misunderstanding his first for his second coming—or in other words—from his not considering the Gospel history as an history of the controversy concerning his first coming—or whether he was the Messiah, whom the Jewish nation were at that period expecting. Has, I think, been very satisfactorily shewn—and I should have thought it unnecessary to have said any more upon the.
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subject, had not a learned writer of eminence most strenuously opposed the interpretation, which I have given of the passages, upon which Mr. Gibbon has founded his objection.

The late Bishop Horsley, after a professed examination of the subject, has ventured to conclude, that the phrase of our Lord's coming, wherever it occurs in his prediction of the Jewish war, as well as in most other passages of the New Testament, is to be taken in its literal meaning, as denoting his coming in person, in visible pomp and glory to the general judgment.

In order to support his opinion, as it respects the prediction of the Jewish war, he ridicules the expositions of expositors, that by the end of the world the Apostles meant the end of that particular age, during which the Jewish church and state were destined to endure, calling them puerile refinements of verbal criticisms, and idioms of rabbinical divines. But the learned Bishop seems to have overlooked the language of St. Paul, who, at least in his sense of the word, was no Rabbin, which cannot possibly be interpreted of the end of the world, in the strict sense of that expression. Thus I. Cor. x. 11, he says— the things he had been mentioning happened for examples, and were written for their admonition upon whom the ends of the world were come. So again, he says—that once in the end of the world Christ had appeared to take away sin. How improper then is it for the Bishop to say, that it is not to be believed that the end of the world, in the language of the Apostles,
may signify the end of any thing else, or carry any other
meaning than what the words must naturally convey to
every one, who believes that the world shall have an end,
and has never bewildered his understanding in the schools
of the Rabbins.

With respect to his interpretation of the meaning of
this phrase, as it occurs in most other passages of the
New Testament, the learned Bishop, you know, is
supported in his opinion by a numerous host of divines
of all denominations, but, I think, I may venture to
assert that I have, in the course of my observations upon
the Epistles, produced evidence which renders it in the
highest degree probable, if not absolutely certain, that
in most instances, it has no such meaning, but relates
exclusively to the first coming of Christ, as the Messiah.*

The following questions, put by the very learned and
excellent father of the present venerable Bishop of Dur-
ham, will afford me a favourable opportunity of shewing-

* The late Dr. Pearson, in his Warburtonian Lectures, appears
to me to have advanced one of the most extraordinary and ill-founded
opinions, upon the subject, that ever I met with. “I do not,” he
says, “conceive that any one (not even of his Apostles) who lived
before the destruction of Jerusalem, either had, or could have any
idea of that distinction which we are now enabled to make, between
the first coming of our Saviour to take vengeance on the Jews, at
the destruction of Jerusalem, and his second coming to take ven-
geance on all his enemies, at the general judgment of the world.”
(See p. 329 and 337.) From the nature of things they could not
possibly have been ignorant of this distinction.
this still more forcibly, and in a very short compass. Dissatisfied with Bishop Sherlock's discourses on prophecy, which, it must be acknowledged, are not so clear and luminous, as might have been expected from so great a man, he asks—does the παρουσία του χριστοῦ (the coming of Christ) II. Pet. i. 16. ever certainly signify Christ's coming to take vengeance on the Jewish nation? If there be two places in St. James (ch. v. 7, 8.) where it possibly may be so understood, are there not above fifteen where it can scarce be understood of any thing but his coming in his future glory to judgment? And may not then his transfiguration on the mount, be very fairly supposed to be called his power and coming by St. Peter in this verse, as it is a resemblance of the glory which shall attend that coming? (See Miscellanea Sacra, vol. 1. p. 51.)

The answer to these queries has, you know my dear sir, been already, in the preceding letters, in a great measure anticipated, and particularly in this very passage of St. Peter, in its connection with the history of the transfiguration. (See my fourth letter.) And it has, I think, been very satisfactorily shewn that the phrase the coming of Christ, has an exclusive reference to his first coming as the Messiah; of which the destruction of Jerusalem was to be the final proof. I have also shewn this to be the meaning of the question of the scoffers, in ch. iii. 4. when they insultingly inquire—where is the promise of his coming? And if I have succeeded in proving this, it will appear to be a fair inference from hence, that it is used in the same sense, in the twelfth
verse, where it is said that those, to whom the Apostle wrote, were waiting for the coming of the day of God. With respect to the phrase the coming of Christ, as it is connected with St. Paul's description of the man of sin, in the first and eighth verses, you will, I think, agree with me, that I have produced a body of evidence, scarcely to be resisted, that it relates to his first coming, as the Messiah.† There appears also to be much pro-

† It must be acknowledged that this evidence has had a contrary effect upon Mr. Faber; for he has expressly said that "after carefully comparing together my exposition, and that of Bishop Newton, he is even more firmly persuaded than ever he was, that his Lordship's views of the subject are perfectly accurate."

As however Mr. Faber has stated an objection to my hypothesis, which Dr. Pearson considered as having some weight, I beg leave here to reply to it, though I cannot help considering it as a very futile objection. "According to Mr. Nisbett's interpretation," says Mr. Faber, "the man of sin, that is the body of the Jewish nation, did not come with lying wonders to deceive others; but was himself, deceived by the lying wonders; or rather, the promised lying wonders of certain impostors. Here I can discover nothing like any accomplishment of prophecy." Now, to this objection, it may, I think, fairly be replied that there seems to be no impropriety in the supposition, that some individuals of that body, might, by their superior address, in the arts of deception, impose upon the rest, and being themselves so imposed on by them, they joined in promoting the deception. In what other sense, our Lord's prophecy is to be understood, I am at a loss to determine. There shall, he says, arise false Christs and false prophets, who shall, if it be possible, deceive the very elect; plainly implying that the great body of the Jews were deceived by them, and consequently became the supporters of these lying wonders.
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bability, in the supposition, that the same is the case in 1 Thess. ii 19. for having, in the fifteenth verse, asserted that the Jews had killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, &c. the Apostle says, in the sixteenth verse, that wrath was coming upon them to the uttermost; which, most evidently, relates to the destruction which was coming upon them. There are two other passages, in this Epistle, in which this phrase occurs, and which appear to me to have been intended by the Apostle to be applied to the same awful event—the first is ch. iii. 13. where the Apostle speaks of the establishing of the hearts of the Thessalonian christians, which they much needed, that they might be unblameable before God, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all his saints. (See Matt. xxvii.) The other is ch. v. 23. where the Apostle prays that they might be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, for, if my interpretation of St. Paul's man of sin be correct, this chapter, and particularly the former part of it, will be allowed to have a most evident and striking allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem.

In the Epistles of St. John, the phrase the coming of Christ, is only once used 1 John ii. 28. and the whole connection, beyond all question, necessarily leads you to understand it of the first coming of Christ; so that now there

With respect to Bishop Newton's unconstrained ease, and my painful laboriousness, I certainly feel no reluctance to their being compared together, but it would have done no discredit to Mr. Faber, if he had not called for such a comparison, as it can have nothing to do with the argument.
remain only four passages to be considered, where the phrase is at all ambiguous; two of which, the learned writer, above mentioned, seems but little disposed to dispute, and which, in fact, have an unquestionable reference to the destruction coming upon the Jews, as a nation. With respect to the other two, viz. I. Thess. iv. 15. and I. Cor. xv. 23. I do not, at present, I must frankly acknowledge, see how they can, with any propriety, be applied to any other event, than to the final judgment, although I find the learned Mr. Cappe has applied the former of them, to the destruction of Jerusalem:

But the argument in favour of the interpretation of the phrase the coming of Christ, here attempted to be established, which makes the strongest impression upon my own mind, and which appears to me to be particularly deserving of your attention, is that the παροιμία τοῦ Χριστοῦ the coming of Christ is never made use of, in the Gospel history, but in the closest connection with our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, and in all those passages, most unquestionably relates to the first coming of Christ, in answer to the question of the Disciples—what shall be the sign of thy coming? For the

† Should Mr. Cappe's interpretation of this verse be correct, it would, I think, lead to a very fair query whether I. Cor. xv. 23. has not the same meaning, and then all the passages where the parousia is mentioned would harmonize, as relating to the same subject—but at present I cannot, as I have said, see how they can be so interpreted.

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fullest proofs of this, see my fifth letter. (See also Matt. xxiv. considered in a distinct publication.) You will also see, from what I have said upon those passages in the Epistles, which are perpetually occurring, and which have so much puzzled commentators of all denominations to understand, and to reconcile to matters of fact—that the day of the Lord was at hand—that the coming of the Lord was drawing near, and that they even saw the day approaching, with other expressions of a similar nature, have an exclusive relation to the near approach of the destruction of Jerusalem, and, if the meaning of the sacred writers is to be regarded, cannot, with any propriety, be applied to any other event. (See my seventh letter.)

With respect to the most obscure parts of the Epistles, which have hitherto eluded the penetration of men of the greatest genius, piety, and learning;* it must, I am sure, be peculiarly gratifying to find that they are not only capable of being rendered perfectly clear and intelligible—but of adding, most materially to the general

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* Dr. Gerard, in his institutes of biblical criticism, dedicated to Dr. Herbert Marsh, has observed that, "where commentators are so numerous, it is astonishing that so little can be learned from them; one copies merely from another. The best of them often dwell on what has little difficulty, or is of little moment; and points, on which you would wish most to be satisfied, you will often find passed over by them all. The best have their prejudices and nostrums; and for supporting them, distort and wrest many passages." p. 469. (See a like complaint of Bishop Newton in his Posthumous Works, vol. vi.)
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evidence of the truth of christianity. St. Paul's man of sin—St. John's doctrines of Antichrist—St. Peter's new Heavens and new earth, and the doctrines of election and reprobation, about which so many controversies have

("Personal predestination," says the Bishop of Landaff, "appears to many to be a doctrine full of impiety and despair. They think it impious, as it represents God to be a blind, or malignant being—blind, if he doom a man to eternal destruction, without knowing whether he will do good or evil; malignant, if knowing, he make no distinction, in his decrees, between them who obey, and them who disobey him. They think it a doctrine pregnant with despair—for now to be persuaded that you are inevitably doomed to everlasting punishment, that no future rectitude of conduct, no penitence for what is past, no supplication, no intercession, nothing which can be done by yourself, or by any other for you, can in the least avail to the altering of your fate, what is this, say they, but to overwhelm the soul with the blackness of despicable horror? Is it not, they ask, a more impious doctrine than that of Epicurus? for that represented God, as not troubling himself in the government of the world—as making no distinction between the righteous and the wicked, as sucking both to die and become extinct; but this represents him as consigning to everlasting torments those, whom he had from all eternity determined to condemn. This doctrine, which St. Chrysostom amongst the ancients, and Arminius amongst the moderns, represented as unworthy of God, has been zealously maintained by Calvin and St. Austin. In my humble judgment, they have done great service to christianity, who have endeavoured to show that it is not founded in scripture. For nothing has contributed more to the propagation of Deism, than the making doctrines abhorrent from reason, parts of the christian system. There may be doctrines above reason, but nothing which is evidently contrary to reason, can ever be justly considered as a part of the christian dispensation." (See two discourses preached at Landaff, p. 66, &c.)

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...arisep, to the great annoyance of the peace of the christian church, now appear, with almost irresistible evidence, to have arisen out of the peculiar circumstances of the times, and of the controversies which were then on foot, concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, and the extent of his mission. In fact, there appears, from the survey of the book, as a whole, to be an intimate connection, and a close bond of union between all its parts, founded upon our Lord's original language that the kingdom of Heaven, or of the Messiah, was at hand.

That St. Paul's doctrine of predestination and election arose out of the controversy concerning the admission of the Gentiles to participation of the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom can, I think, admit of no doubt in the mind of any candid and impartial person, who will read the history of the Acts of the Apostles with attention. Thus when St. Paul told the Jews that he should go and preach the glad tidings of salvation to the Gentiles, they cried out—away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live. And when the same Apostle, while at Rome, declared that the salvation of God was sent unto the Gentiles, and that they would hear it—the Jews are said, when they heard these words, to have had great reasonings among themselves, upon the subject. In short, the whole of scripture language respecting the coming of Christ—the man of sin—the Antichrist—the new Heavens and the new earth, and predestination and election, appear to me, to emanate from, and to have the closest connection with our Lord's original language that the kingdom of Heaven, or the Messiah was at hand. If I have failed of shewing this, in a satisfactory manner, I shall think my labour to have been, in a great measure, if not entirely thrown away, for the New Testament must, according to my ideas, be considered as a whole, to do it full justice.
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which must be particularly attended to, to do it full justice; and to render it perfectly clear and intelligible! Here then, my dear sir, you cannot fail to perceive, in a very strong point of view, the immense importance of studying the Christian records in the manner recommended in the course of these letters, in order that the evidences of their truth may be seen in their native brightness, and that Christianity may appear in all its pristine lustre!

To effect this, to the extent here presented to you, a more than common perseverance, and great sacrifices have been indispensable, and you will readily imagine that, in so arduous a pursuit, it has been matter of no trifling anxiety to satisfy my own mind, when opposing the opinions of men, so much my superiors in abilities, both natural and acquired. Some encouragement, it is true, amidst numerous discouragements, have been kindly held out to me by a few, whose judgment and impartiality are unquestionable, and whose names will be ever dear to me, while recollection lasts; or my fortitude must have been put to too severe a test—but chiefly am I indebted to that good providence, which has preserved my life thus long, and enabled me to bring my inquiries to the state, in which they are here presented to you. Persuaded, however imperfect they may be, that they are calculated to afford satisfaction to the inquiring mind, in these awful days of enthusiasm and infidelity, and to stimulate it to still further exertions, I feel a pleasure in the result which will, in some measure, compen-
I cannot, however, conclude without endeavouring in the most earnest manner, to impress upon your mind, the extreme importance of guarding against two pernicious practices, which are but too much in vogue, among all denominations of Christians and are the bane of all real knowledge of the genuine meaning of the sacred writings—the adopting of double meanings, and the founding of any doctrines upon detached passages of scripture.

Had I, my dear sir, in my inquiries, had to encounter these supposed double meanings, I must, as you may easily imagine, have been impeded in every step of my progress, and have completely failed in my endeavours to obtain any accurate ideas of the genuine meaning of the sacred writings.† It would not have been possible;

† How Dr. Pearson could have satisfied himself of the meaning of those passages, where the phrase the coming of Christ is mentioned, I cannot imagine, as, according to him, the Apostles had no means of knowing the distinction between his first and his second coming. I am sorry to disapprove when I wish to commend, but by adopting an opinion so ill founded, he evidently took the most effectual method to involve himself in difficulties, from which he could not easily be extricated. E.g. He has given an interpretation of the word apostasy, which is entirely subversive of the meaning of St. Paul, respecting the man of sin, which he set out to defend. It is, most evident, that the nature of the apostasy, must be determined by the nature of the coming of Christ, which is the subject which the
for instance, to have thrown the light which I am persuaded I have done, upon the xxiv of Matthew and the parallel chapters, and upon various parts of the Epistles, which most evidently appear to be connected with, and are by commentators generally referred to them, if I had not entirely discarded all double meanings and confined myself to one simple sense of the sacred Historians.

The learned Bishop Newton, among many others who might be mentioned, is a remarkable instance of the pernicious effects of having recourse to double meanings in his interpretation of scripture; for having spoken of our Lord's declaration that that generation should not pass away till all the things which he had been predicting should be fulfilled, &c.—he was so strongly impressed with the emphasis and energy of this language, that he thus forcibly expresses himself upon it. "It is to me a wonder how any man can refer part of the foregoing discourse to the destruction of Jerusalem, and part to the end of the world, or to any other distant event, when it

Apostle professedly treats of, and to suppose that he did not know what that coming was, is too absurd to be admitted. I make these remarks, because truth obliges me to do so, for he has made too honourable mention of me, were I capable of it, to make them from any improper motives, especially as Dr. Pearson was a total stranger to me. Had he been living he would probably have thanked me for them.

I cannot but lament not having seen his lectures before, but I cannot withhold my cordial approbation of what he has said respecting the manner of propagating Christianity.
It is said so positively in the conclusion—*All these things shall be fulfilled in this generation.* It seemeth as if our Saviour had been aware of some such misapplication of his words, by adding yet greater force and emphasis to his affirmation. *Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away.* And yet this learned prelate, almost immediately afterwards, has asserted that some of these passages, particularly verse 29, 30, 31. in a figurative sense, may be understood of the *destruction of Jerusalem*—but in their literal sense, they can be meant only of the *end of the world.* Again, speaking of our Lord's declaration, in the 36th verse—*Of that day and hour knoweth no man,* &c. he says, "the consistence and connection of the discourse, oblige us to understand it, as spoken of the time of the *destruction of Jerusalem*—but in a higher sense, it may be true also of the *end of the world,* and the general judgment. All the subsequent discourse too, we may observe, does not relate, so properly to the *destruction of Jerusalem,* as to the *end of the world* and the general judgment. Our Saviour loseth sight, as it were, of his former subject and adopts the latter."

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

With respect to the loose quotations of Scripture, against which you cannot be too much upon your guard, when examining the meaning of the sacred writings,—you must be very sensible, how extremely convenient they are for the establishment of any hypothesis, which a writer may be inclined to adopt, however foreign to the sense of the sacred penmen. “When men,” says the venerable Bishop of Landaff, “are desirous of forming systems, they are apt to collect together a number of texts, which, being taken as abstract propositions, seem to establish the point, but which, when interpreted by the context, appear to have no relation to it. There is no greater

† See this subject treated at large in my Triumphs of Christianity over infidelity, from page 116 to 120.

It is well observed by Dr. Benson, that “we justly condemn the answers of the Heathen Oracles, as riddles, dark and obscure, vague and indeterminate; capable of being turned many ways without knowing certainly which sense was intended. But divine prophecies should be intelligible, and have one determinate meaning; that it may be known when and how they are accomplished. We admire it as an excellence in Homer, and other celebrated writers of antiquity, that their meaning is expressed clearly; and may we not expect, when God speaks to men, that his meaning should be expressed in as clear and determinate a manner? See his Essay on the Unity of Sense of Scripture in Bishop Watson’s Theological Tracts.
source of error than this practice, it has prevailed in the
Christian church from the earliest ages, and it still pre-
vails. We owe to it the corruptions of popery, and that
infinity of heresies which have so much debased the sim-
plicity of gospel truth, and driven so many men of sense
from embracing Christianity. Every one, who will well
weigh the subject, must perceive the unfairness with
which men usually proceed in forming systems of the-
ology. By stringing detached sentences, an Ausonius
may compel the chaste Virgil to furnish materials for an
indecent poem and from the Bible itself a system of
impiety might, by such means, be extracted." (See also
Mr. Locke's excellent Preface to his Commentary upon
the Epistles.

To be able to understand a book professing to be a
revelation from God, and with which our present and
future happiness are so intimately connected,† every man,

† It has been excellently well observed by the Bishop of Landaff,
that "the age we live in, has been called the age of philosophy
and the age of reason. If by reason and philosophy irreligion be
understood, it undoubtedly merits the appellation; for there never
was an age, since the death of Christ; never one since the com-
 mencement of the history of the world, in which atheism and
infidelity have been more generally professed. Nature and reason
have been proclaimed as Gods—Festivals have been instituted in
honour of abstract ideas, and all religion has been scoffingly re-
jected as a system of statecraft and priestcraft, as a gross imposi-
tion on the understanding of mankind.

This impious fever of the mind, this paralysis of human intellect,
who has the least pretensions to the character of a Christian, will readily agree with me, is a matter of the utmost importance. To lay a more solid foundation for effecting this great end, has been, it will be allowed, the undeviating object of these letters! What their effect upon the public mind may be, time alone can discover—but of this there can, I think, be no doubt, that the result of the severest scrutiny into the foundation of our faith, if conducted upon the genuine principles of sound criticism, must be such as must be most advantageous to

originated in a neighbouring nation; its contagion has been industriously introduced, and is rapidly spreading in our own. It becomes us all in our several stations to endeavour to stop its progress; for of this we may be well assured, that when religion shall have lost its hold on men’s consciences, government will lose its authority over their persons, and a state of barbarous anarchy will ensue. He, who removes from the mind of man the hopes and fears of futurity, opens the flood-gates of immorality, and lets in a deluge of vices and crimes, destructive alike of the dignity of human nature, and of the tranquillity of the world. There never yet hath existed, and there never can exist a nation without religion. If Christianity be abolished; Paganism, Mahometism, some religious imposture or other, must be introduced in its stead, or civil society must be given up. But, in the opinion of Bacon, (a philosopher with whom our modern philosophers cannot be compared) there hath not in any age, been discovered any philosophy, opinion, religion, law, or discipline, which so greatly exalts the common, and lessens individual interest, as the Christian religion, doth; so that I know not which most to admire and deplore, their wickedness, as men, or their weakness as statesmen, who have attempted to govern mankind without religion, and to establish society on the ruins of Christianity.”
Letters on the Epistles.

it, and such as the Bishop of Landaff has expressly said that he expects from it—"that catholic countries will become protestant, and that protestant countries will admit a farther reformation." Such an issue, whether considered in a political or religious view, it seems impossible to contemplate, even in imagination, without an ardent wish that it may be realized, particularly at a period when the union of all hearts would be of such importance to the welfare of our country—not to say of the world.

That neither catholics nor protestants have hitherto attained to an accurate knowledge of the christian records,

To a like purpose, a learned Frenchman Mr. Barthélemy, seeing the rapid progress of infidelity in his own country, observes that to disturb the order of society, is not the only effect of indecent declamations against religion, they taint with despair the minds of the unfortunate! No country or condition is without virtuous people, who weep in secret from the outrages of fortune, the injustice of the wicked, or the natural evils of life. And who is he that would tear from them the only consolation that remains—that of believing that all is conducted by the hand of God, who sees their tears, is full of compassion for them, and has, in store for them, blessings to compensate for all their sufferings.

The christian religion, detached from extraneous things with which men have confounded it, is the purest system of morals, and the best source of happiness; it enriches the mind with all virtue; it enlarges the circle of virtues; it expands the soul, filling it with sweet and lasting peace—the peace which the world cannot give nor take away, and which makes us at peace with ourselves, and with all mankind.
is, I think, so evident, as to require no other proof than what these letters afford! And that these records never will nor can be so understood till recourse is had to that method of studying them, which is here recommended, and which is so plainly pointed out in every page of the Gospel history, and of the Epistles, as harmonizing with it, I will venture to predict, without pretending to any extraordinary sagacity. To this method, I most certainly owe, whatever success I have met with, in my enquiries—but I am far from supposing that I have exhausted the subject. If I have been enabled to point out the true foundation, it will behove every man to take heed how he builds thereupon.

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your's,

N. NISBETT.

TUNSTALL, April 15th. 1812.

N. B. It will be necessary in order to account for the difference of dates, between the Letters upon the Gospel History, and those upon the Epistles, to observe, that the former were originally published by themselves, but met with no encouragement. The idea of calling them in, and adding those upon the Epistles, fool hardy as it may appear, after such a decided proof of inattention to my labours, met with the approbation of some persons, whose judgment I value. I have, however, for the present, withdrawn some observations upon St. John's Gospel,
which appeared to me not easy to be reconciled to the other three. In making these observations, I trust I shall be entitled to some credit, when I say, that they did not arise from licentiousness of thinking, but from a wish for farther information from the learned upon a subject, upon which I could not satisfy myself. If it be asked, why I have withdrawn them, I reply that it is for the purpose of more maturely considering the contents of the whole of that Gospel.

The reader is requested to excuse an anachronism, in addressing my Letters on the Epistles to a much valued friend, whom I had announced as now no more. But the substance of the whole of them, with the exception of the observations upon St. John, had his decided approbation, and he was the constant and zealous advocate for my persevering in a pursuit, which he considered, and he was no flatterer, as eminently calculated to promote the cause of truth.* Indeed it may be said of Mr. Conant, if ever it could be said of any human being, that he was a man without guile, and he passed through a long life with as few enemies, as ever fell to the lot of humanity. Nor could it well have been otherwise; for his benevolence was too visible to escape the notice of any who approached him.

* The reader has already been informed that it was to a conversation with my friend, upon the objection of Mr. Gibbon, that my subsequent inquiries were owing; for till then, I must acknowledge I was a total stranger to it. The copy of my original letter to him, containing my first thoughts upon the subject, is still in my possession.
Letters on the Epistles.

I must beg leave to observe that in page 141 I have produced a quotation from Mr. Whitaker, without prefacing it with a remark, though perhaps, sufficiently obvious, that his opinion is altogether, according to my ideas, ill founded.

POSTSCRIPT.

In my observations upon the concluding passage of St. John's first Epistle, I have conjectured that the phrase, this is the true God and eternal life, might have been expected, according to the course of the argument, to have been, this is the true Messiah and eternal life. This conjecture I find supported, according to Mill, by the Codex Baroccianus. But I prefer the Apostle's reasoning to all authorities.

Should these Letters meet with the public approbation, the author wishes to republish them with large additions, in two handsome volumes, by subscription. The price to be regulated by the size.

ERRATA.

p. 1.

10. 2. for seminate read disseminate.
11. 4. for marked read remarked.
102. 95. for Pierce read Pearce.
105. 2. in the note, dele as has been seen in a former letter.
115. 1. for our Apostles read our Lord and his Apostles.
121. 6. for defines read define.
128. 1. for civilized read civilised.
140. 1. after but read that.
168. 1. in the note, for intimated read intimated.
163. 11. for clearest read closest.

Warren, Printer, Faversham.