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THE
Mysterious Language of St. Paul,
IN HIS DESCRIPTION
OF THE
MAN OF SIN,
PROVED
FROM THE GOSPEL HISTORY,
TO RELATE
Not to the Church of Rome,
BUT
TO THE TIMES IN WHICH IT WAS WRITTEN.
WITH SOME REMARKS UPON

BY N. NISBETT, M. A.,
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The evidences of Christianity have, with the most consummate wisdom, been transmitted to us in the form of histories, and as histories relating to the great controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, and whether he was the person who actually did sustain that character. From our Lord's original declaration, that the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah, was at hand, to his trial and crucifixion, as an Impostor, for assuming the character of the Messiah; it bears the most conspicuous and unequivocal marks of this controversy. He no sooner made use of this language, and went about teaching in their Synagogues, and preaching the good news of this kingdom, than the Historian says, there followed him great multi-
tudes of people, from Galilee, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea, and from beyond Jordan; most evidently from a belief that he was the person who, at that period, they anxiously expected under the character of the Messiah.

When, however, he had delivered to them his Sermon upon the Mount, the great object of which was to correct the prejudices of the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, the Historian says, they were astonished at his doctrine; probably from the difference of his instructions from those which they were accustomed to expect from one assuming the character of the Messiah.

When our Lord had chosen his twelve disciples to be with him as his constant companions, and had invested them with a commission to announce the near approach of the Messiah's kingdom, he gave them some general instructions how to conduct themselves in the execution of the duties of their office. And, as our Lord's disciples entertained, precisely, the same sentiments concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, with the rest of their countrymen, and naturally ex-
pected that they had nothing to do but to proclaim their message, to induce them to flock to his standard, he took this opportunity to undeceive them, and to tell them of the mighty opposition they would have to meet with. *Behold I send you forth, as sheep among wolves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they shall scourge you in their Synagogues, and ye shall be hated by all men for my name's sake.*

In these strong terms doth our Lord declare that his claims to the character of the Messiah would be controverted by his countrymen, and that it would require all their fortitude to withstand the opposition which they would meet with in the discharge of the duties of their office. Nevertheless, to encourage them to a faithful discharge of those duties, he tells them that *he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved*—That it would be lawful, when they were persecuted from one city, to flee to another; and that they should not have gone over the cities of Israel before the Son of Man came, i. e. before they would have satisfactory evidence that he was the Messiah.

The grand cause of this opposition is uni-
versally allowed to have been, that the Jews, one and all, expected that their Messiah was to be a temporal Prince, to rescue them from the yoke of the Romans, and to raise them to an universal Empire. Hence, in the conduct of this controversy, our Lord, having no such claim, was obliged to avoid declaring that he was the Messiah, and gradually to produce such evidences of his sustaining that character as they would be able to bear, and such as would ultimately be a rational foundation, not only of the faith of the Jews, but of all mankind, that he actually did sustain that character.

It being thus evident that the Gospel history is an history of the controversy concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, it will, I think, naturally and necessarily follow that, so far as this history agrees with the known sentiments and prejudices of the Jewish nation, concerning that character; it will, in the estimation of all who are judges of the nature of evidence, be entitled to the highest credit. It must also be acknowledged, that our Lord's extreme caution in not declaring that he was the Messiah—in refusing to give the Jews a sign from heaven that he was the
Messiah, and in charging those whom he had healed, *not to make him known*, *as such*, are among the brightest internal evidences of the truth of that history; though they have, from a strange inattention to the nature of the controversy, been considered as among the most formidable objections against it.

The Miracles of the Gospel, which make so conspicuous a figure in almost every page of it, seem with a peculiar propriety to have been introduced with a view to engage the attention of the Jews; and, if I may use the expression, gradually to soften down their prejudices against him. It has indeed been said, that Miracles are contradicted by universal experience, and that no testimony can make them credible. But, by whom has this been said? By one who has never seen a Miracle wrought, and whose scepticism has been such as even to deny the evidence of his own senses. Now, I will most readily admit that I have never seen a Miracle performed. I will admit that my father and my ancestors, for many generations, have never seen any. But will it follow that such an experience is *universal*? On the contrary, doth not the *very nature of a Miracle* preclude an *universal experience*?
And surely to argue from our want of experience, is to argue weakly; for, if the possibility of Miracles be admitted, I see not why they may not, by proper testimony, be as well authenticated as any other facts. And, in the case of the Miracles of the Gospel, the credibility of the history, and the importance of the subjects treated of in that history, stamp a credit upon them, which they would otherwise have wanted. The occasion of the Miracles of the Gospel, most certainly, were not like the lying wonders of Paganism and of Popery; unworthy of God: Christianity was intended to introduce a system of moral and religious truth, which even an Augustan age, an age the most celebrated in the annals of the antient world, would have exhausted all its powers of reasoning, in vain, to discover. I am at a loss to know how an history, possessed of all the authenticity about it, which we expect from other histories should, in these circumstances, be discredited.*

* "Many," says a good writer, "who reject the claims, and deny the Miracles of Jesus Christ, admit the moral excellence of his character. A greater inconsistency cannot be conceived. What! is there no offence against the laws of morality, to appeal to works never performed, and to
With respect to the preceptive parts of the Gospel history, they will stand the test of the pretend to the exercise of powers which never existed? Are deliberate falsehood, imposition, and hypocrisy, to be erased from the catalogue of crimes? Is impiety no stain? And to die with an obstinate and inflexible adherence to false pretensions—Is there nothing immoral in such behaviour? I confess I have very different views of right and wrong, and I feel a strong conviction that falsehood and deceit, for whatever purpose they may be employed, and to whatever ends they may be directed, are to the last degree criminal and disgraceful. Yet this accusation must be brought against Jesus Christ, if he did no Miracles, and was only a self-commissioned Reformer. He certainly did profess to work Miracles, and he did appeal to them as divine attestations to his sacred character. If he did insist that he was sent of God to enlighten and to save mankind, he was careful to add—*the works which I do bear witness of me*. I must therefore deny that he was that excellent person which some modern Unbelievers profess to esteem him, or I must admit the reality of those Miracles to which he so often, and with such solemnity, appealed. There is no other alternative. It cannot be that he was a splendid pattern of pure and sublime morality, while his mission and supernatural powers were an artful pretence.

Reduced then to the necessity of admitting together with the moral excellence, the Miracles of Jesus, or of rejecting both, I can, without difficulty, make up my judgment. However unphilosophical it may be thought, I am persuaded that he did such works as no man could perform unless God was with him. Yes, notwithstanding...
severest examination. They have, by the enemies of Christianity, been allowed to be most excellent—such as were never equalled by the collected wisdom of all the Philosophers of Greece and Rome, and what is more to our

the metaphysics of some, and the sneers of others, I do believe that he appealed to facts, when he said—*the blind see—the lame walk—the lepers are cleansed—the deaf hear—and the dead are raised.* God, who ordained the laws of nature, can certainly controul them. Nor is there any thing absurd in the supposition that occasions may offer, on which such an application of almighty power may be worthy of God, and reflect honour on his wisdom and benevolence.

The Miracles ascribed to Jesus Christ and the Apostles rest upon the same foundation with other articles which we find in the narration of his life. They have not come down to us through the channel of tradition, but by means of a formal record, made by persons who declared themselves witnesses of the scenes which they describe. Nor are they introduced into these records merely by way of ornament, or to animate a dull narration. They are essential parts of the work. In the same page we find the miracles and moral lessons of Jesus Christ: in the same artless manner they are both related; for which reason I feel myself unable to draw the line where truth ends, and where fiction begins. All my information concerning Jesus Christ is derived from the same source. Where testimony is so explicit and circumstantial, I must therefore admit the whole, or reject the whole." See a Pamphlet entitled—*Why are you a Christian?*
purpose, such as were admirably adapted to the great purpose of our Lord's ministry, of correcting the prejudices of the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, and to direct their ultimate views to a state of existence in another world.

These were, if I may so say, the preliminary steps, by which our Lord endeavoured to overcome the prejudices of his countrymen, and to establish his claims to the character of the Messiah. But they were far from being the only ones. He had already foretold the mighty opposition that both he and his Disciples would have to encounter in the course of their ministry. And this was all that, at that period, his Disciples themselves, were able to bear. But, at a more subsequent period, he proceeded a step farther, and foretold that he should go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the Elders and chief Priests and Scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Such a declaration was so contrary to all the pre-conceived ideas, even of his own Disciples, that Peter began to rebuke him, saying---Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee. But he turned and said unto Peter---Get thee be-
hind me Satan—Thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not \( \text{τὸ τὸν Θεὸν} \) the things of God—but \( \text{τὸ τὸν ἀνθρώπου} \) the things of Men; most evidently, by the former expression, alluding to the spiritual nature of his kingdom, and by the latter, to the worldly views which they had of it.

Here it is obvious, that our Lord put the credit of his character upon his prediction; and it is equally so, that it harmonizes most exactly with the clear foresight which he had formerly expressed, of the mighty opposition which he would have to meet with, in the assertion of his claims to the character of the Messiah. And, if he had not been crucified—or, if after he had been put to this cruel and ignominious death, he had remained its conquered victim—if he had not risen triumphant over the grave, he would, from his own mouth, have been proved to be an Impostor. If Christ be not risen, says an Apostle, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain—yea, and we are found false witnesses of God. It is hard to conceive that our Lord, even as a wise man, should have put the credit of his character upon an event that was to happen in so short a period of time,
but upon the supposition that he knew his prediction would be verified.

Besides this extraordinary proof of the truth of our Lord's character as the Messiah, (for it must be recollected he was put to death as an Impostor, for assuming that character), he gave another, which has deservedly been considered, in addition to those already mentioned, as an astonishing evidence of the truth of that character. It was so, merely as a prediction of an event that was clearly beyond the reach of human foresight—but it was more particularly so, as it was a decisive evidence that the Jews had totally mistaken the true nature of the Messiah's character, in supposing that he was to be a temporal Prince, to conduct them to conquest and to universal Empire.

The prediction here alluded to, the reader will readily perceive, is that of the destruction of Jerusalem; which was absolutely incompatible with all their pre-conceived ideas concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, and struck, so directly, at the root of their dearest hopes and fondest expectations, that when this awful event was predicted, in terms that they could not possibly misunderstand,
they very naturally asked—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? i. e. of the coming of the Messiah.

This prediction, as the last and crowning proof of the true nature of the Messiah's character, occupies, perhaps, the largest space of any one subject in the whole Gospel history. And the attention of the Disciples is therefore, very properly, directed to it, as the subject of their future observation. Thus our Lord, when the destruction which he had predicted should be about to take place, says, Matt. xxiv. 4. ---Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, or with my pretensions to the character of the Messiah, saying I am the Christ—or the Messiah, and shall deceive many. And having given a very particular account of the circumstances attending that awful event, and again repeated his caution against their being deceived by the false Christs and false prophets, he with great emphasis and energy says, v. 25.—Behold I have told you before—wherefore if they shall say—behold he is in the desert, go not forth—behold he is in the secret chambers, waiting
for a fit opportunity of declaring himself as the Messiah—believe them not. For as the lightning cometh out of the East, and shineth even unto the West, so conspicuous shall the nature of the coming of the Son of Man be. And the nature of this coming is still more distinctly explained in the 37th verse. As the days of Noah were, which, most unquestionably, were days of great temporal vengeance—so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

My principal object in giving this rapid, but, I trust, not inaccurate view of the Gospel history, as an history of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, and particularly of his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, is to enable the reader to judge, with the greater accuracy, of the force of the reasoning to be adopted in endeavouring to ascertain the genuine meaning of the Apostle Paul, in his celebrated description of the Man of Sin. This chapter has exercised the ingenuity, and the critical abilities of the most learned and 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 have been more divided, or a greater variety of interpretations been indulged by fanciful and speculative men, in their endeavours to explain it.

Dr. Zouch, when 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 Caius Caligula, a merciless tyrant—to the Emperor Titus, the delight of mankind—to Simon Magus—to the Gnostics—to Mahomet—nay to the bright luminaries of the Reformation, John Wickliff and Martin Luther. These different interpretations," he observes, "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."

The application of St. Paul's Man of Sin to the Church of Rome has, since the reformation, been very generally adopted by Protestant writers, and by none more zealously than by Dr. Zouch himself. But there are some very learned men, even among them, who appear to have been by no means satis-
fied of the justness of this interpretation. The late 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, publicly and in solemn form; where the restraining power of government, and the obligations 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."—See Dr. Zouch's Attempt, p. 3.

This hypothesis, Mr. Jones has so ingeniously supported, 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. And what is still more extraordinary, it has been said, that it excites 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.*

It is 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

* Mr. Faber very justly observes, that Mr. Kett's plan of a double accomplishment of the same prophecy is altogether untenable.
is apt to exceed the limits of moderation and judgment. If in the vicissitude of human affairs, any uncommon incidents occur, the pages of prophecy are unfolded—a fortunate occurrence of circumstances is remarked, and the reader, unwilling, and 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 scepticism itself to fluctuate in suspense.—Ibid. p. 18.

It would be extremely improper and unbecoming, previous to the examination of the meaning of St. Paul’s Man of Sin, to say that, at the æra of the reformation, its application to the Church of Rome was an hasty conjecture. It has, at different periods, subsequent to that glorious and important event, had the ablest and the best of men, as I have
already observed, for its supporters. Many of the features in St. Paul's description have an evident and striking resemblance to that church. And no one can be surprised that it has been so applied—or entertain a doubt that the reformers, or those who have since made this subject their study, were not seriously convinced that the Apostle had a particular view to them.

But, however numerous and respectable the advocates for this opinion may be; yet, as has been very justly observed, it would be highly improper to place an implicit confidence in the authority of great names.* If there is evidence in the sacred writings, and in the history of those times, that the Apostle's meaning has been mistaken—if it shall, by fair and legitimate reasoning, clearly appear that he had no reference, in this chapter, to the corruptions of the Church of Rome, however they may resemble them; the opinion, however sanctioned by time and authority, ought to be abandoned. Nor, let it be objected to the proposed enquiry, that it will have the appearance of the most presumptive arrogance to endeavour to overthrow an opinion, so firmly established and

* Dr. Zouch.
so generally believed. Against such a charge I shall, I trust, be sheltered by the consider-
ation that a Grotius and a Hammond—a Le Clerc and a Whitby, have already trodden nearly the same ground, and that there are still existing, some very formidable objec-
tions against the commonly received hypo-
thesis. "If reason and argument," says the late 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 triumphant in the end." To these then be the appeal, in the present instance.

It is obvious, when the Apostle, in the be-
ginning of this celebrated chapter, says—
Now concerning the coming of Christ; the first object will be to ascertain the genu-
ine meaning of this phrase. Bp. Newton has expressly asserted, that his coming in glory to judge the world is the proper signification in this place, as the context will evince beyond contradiction. But to this it may, I think, very fairly be replied, that the mean-
ing of the context must necessarily depend upon the meaning of the phrase the coming of
Christ; for that most indisputably is the subject treated of. Now it is, on all hands, allowed, that this phrase has two meanings. It is sometimes made use of with relation to the great controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character; and it is sometimes used to denote his second coming to judge all mankind. But the former of these senses 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 no possible claim to the character of the judge of the world.

The proofs that our Lord rested the final evidence of his being the Messiah upon the destruction of Jerusalem, lie within a very narrow compass; for in the XXIVth of Matthew, where this subject is 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 coming of the Son of Man be. And to render it perfectly clear that this coming related to the destruction of Jerusalem, the historian says, in the 37th verse—As the days of Noah were, so shall also
the coming of the Son of Man be. As therefore this Epistle to the Thessalonians was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, it was extremely natural for the Apostle to make this prediction the subject both of his conversation and of his correspondence, and to adopt this phrase, as fully expressive of his allusion to that event. And that this was actually the Apostle's meaning, in the present instance will, I think, very fully appear, from the very remarkable and striking resemblance between our Lord's language and that which he made use of, in the three first verses of this Epistle, which I shall beg leave to present to the reader, both in the original and in our own language.

2 Thess. ii. 1. υπερ της παροιμίας των κυριών
κατά Ιησοῦν Χριστόν.

2 Thess. ii. 2. Εἰς τὸ μὲν ταχέως σαλώμαιναι
νυμφᾶς οὖσα τοῦ νους, μεταθεωρήσας.

2 Thess. ii. 3. Ματις νυμφᾶς εξαιτίας κατά
μηδὲ τρόπον.

2 Thess. ii. 1. Καὶ νυμφᾶς επισκοπῆς εἰς αὐτοῦ.
Allowing for the different situations of our Lord and his Apostle, and for the different ways which different writers will naturally have in writing upon the same subject, these coincidences are sufficiently striking to induce an attentive observer to think there is, at least, a very strong presumption, if not an absolute certainty, that the Apostle, in mentioning the coming of Christ, alluded to that coming, mentioned by our Lord. And the cautions, in both the Epistle and Gospels, are
almost verbatim the same, both with respect to their not being troubled, and their being upon their guard against being deceived.

There does not then appear to me to be any evidence that the Apostle meant by the phrase the coming of Christ, his coming in glory to judge all mankind, but what Bishop Newton supposes to arise from the context: But if this context be critically and impartially examined, it will, I think, be so far from countenancing such an idea, that it will, very strongly, corroborate the interpretation here adopted. When, in the first place, the Apostle connects the gathering together unto Christ with his coming, it may be observed that there can be nothing improper in the supposition, that by the gathering together unto Christ, the Apostle might mean what he elsewhere expresses by the breaking down of the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. This supposition is supported by the character which is given of the Messiah, in one of the most antient prophecies concerning him—that when Shiloh came, unto him should the gathering of the people be; and it is deserving of notice that, in the prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, it is said the
Son of Man, the Messiah, shall send his Angels—or his Ministers—and shall gather his Elect from the four winds.*

The Apostle having, in the 2d verse, particularly guarded the Thessalonians against being excessively agitated by the deceptive arts and false insinuations of their adversaries, respecting the coming of Christ, mentioned in the first verse, goes on, in the following verse, to guard them against these insinuations, by telling them that that day would not come except there came a Apostasy, the Apostasy—or, as it is in our translation—a falling away first.

Mr. Mede, Bp. Newton, Bp. Hallifax, Dr. Macknight, Dr. Zouch, and, in general, all the advocates for the application of this chapter to the Church of Rome, have 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. And, upon this interpretation of the word Apostasy, they appear to have rested

* Congregabunt viros Christi cultores. Schleusner.
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 all appear to me to have given that critical attention to the meaning of the word, to warrant an implicit acquiescence in their opinion.

The term ἀποστασία Apostasy, when considered in the abstract, and without any relation to any particular subject, 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 xxi. 21. It is said the Jews had been informed concerning Paul, that he taught their brethren who lived among the Gentiles ἀποστασία Apostasy—but to describe the nature of this Apostasy, some addition was necessary, and therefore the Historian says—Thou teachest an Apostasy from Moses. St. Paul, in his first Epistle to Timothy, ch. 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 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, chap. iii. 12.—Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing—but to shew the nature of this departing, he makes this addition, from the living God.

From these examples, which I think are all that are to be found in the New Testa-

* Proprie: Recessio, decessio, ab apponi discedo, abscedo, 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 purior ad Judais-

ment, it appears to me 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 unless there come the Apostasy—or falling away first.

Now though, perhaps, no inference can fairly be drawn from hence, in what sense the Apostle used the phrase the coming of Christ—yet, I am entitled, from the striking resemblance of St. Paul's language to that of our Lord, in his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, already laid before the reader, to produce 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 he ranks it among the foremost of those signs that they should hear of wars and ru-
mourns of wars, and that nation should rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; which as applied to the Jews, necessarily supposes their Apostasy—or rebellion against the Romans. St. Luke's language is—when ye hear of wars and insurrections—or seditions, be not terrified. Our Lord likewise told his Disciples that that there should 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; plainly implying that the great body of the Jewish nation would actually be deceived by them, and would in consequence of their deceitful artifices, be induced to Apostatize or rebel against the Romans. It must likewise be observed that this sign, in the estimation of our Lord, was of such importance to be attended to, in order to the safety of his followers, 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 mistake, our Lord immediately adds—wherefore if they, to wit, the false Prophets shall say unto you—Behold
he the Messiah is in the desert, go 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 if the history of the times when this Epistle was written, be carefully and attentively considered; it seems to be, by no means improbable or unnatural to suppose 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 appear to me to be much strengthened by an attentive consideration of the Apostle Paul's own language, in the subsequent part of the chapter, when in the 6th verse, he says to the Thessalonians—ye know what withholdeth that the Man of Sin might be revealed; for says he, the mystery of iniquity—or as the original words ought to have been rendered—of disobedience now worketh; only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way, and
then shall come the lawless one be revealed. Now it appears to me that the use of these words have a singular propriety in them, if the word *Apostasy*, was intended to be used in the sense of a rebellion against government, and, with much clearness, to define the sense of the Apostle.

Besides, if the word *Apostasy* be understood in a religious sense, in the passage in question; 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 supported by an appeal to the authority of Scripture. Nay, it is a well known 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 is, we that have 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 Mr. Faber says, "It is 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 matters of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith."* 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 conjunction 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 Vicars of Christ."† It seems to me,

* See Faber on the Prophecies, vol. ii. p. 127.
† A Roman Catholic believes in the doctrine of Transubstantiation—but, for this, he has the literal sense of Scripture, when it is said—This is my body. And, if he were consistent, he ought also to believe that Christ was a door, and a vine, and all Christians as literally one body; for it is, as expressly asserted by St. Paul, that all Christians are one body in Christ; which, by the way, fully explains the meaning of our Lord's language. We may, indeed, pity them for not understanding these expressions figuratively—but this, surely, cannot amount to an Apostasy from the Christian faith. Again, the Roman Catholic believes that the head of that Church is invested with the power of forgiving sins; from which has arisen the enormous and abominable traffic of Indulgences, at
however, a strange inference which Mr. Faber 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 should have been, according to Mr. Faber's own principles, that his prophecy was not accomplished in the Popes; having laid down this excellent rule, to allow no interpretation of a prophecy to be valid, except the prophecy agrees in every particular with the event.†

There is, if I mistake not, other evidence that the Apostasy, mentioned by the Apostle, which, Roman Catholics themselves have sometimes felt a glow of honest indignation. But, he believes, as he conceives, upon the authority of Scripture, that Christ delegated this authority to St. Peter, and through him, to all future Bishops of Rome. But this, so far from being an Apostasy from the Christian faith, is, if I may say so, an excess of faith—or rather of blind credulity, as well as the other. In a word—while the Roman Catholic acknowledges the New Testament to be a Revelation from God, and professes to regulate his belief by that Revelation, I do not see how he can be charged with an Apostasy from the Christian faith, in the strict sense of that word, whatever may be his ideas of it, or into whatever corruptions he may have fallen.

had a relation to the times in which he lived. — In the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, he told them that wrath was coming upon the Jews to the uttermost. But, in the chapter under consideration, he beseeches them not to be troubled, or shaken in mind, by any artifices, as if the day of Christ was at hand; i. e. as I understand the Apostle, as if it was directly to take place; for, he adds, let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come the Apostasy first.

As I feel myself incompetent to say anything so much to the purpose, as Dr. Edwards has done, with respect to the meaning of the Apostle upon this passage, no apology for presenting it to my readers will be necessary. " Because," says he, " St. Paul assures his Brethren that the coming of Christ was not at hand, they (the Commentators) have rashly represented him as informing them that it was therefore 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 corruptions, 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 here rendered *at hand*, upon which Mr. Alexander has left us the following very accurate observation. Paraphrase, &c. page 90. *The word which is rendered *at hand*, is not the same with that 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 downright 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 directly 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
And the expressions ἕως ἡμέρας and ἕως χρόνου 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, p. 28.

But the contemplation of the meaning of the phrases, the Son of Man, and the Son of Perdition, and the striking features annexed
to this character, will probably more fully prove 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 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: Nor have any of them all steered perfectly clear of difficulties; and perhaps it may, with great truth, be said, that none have erred more in the application of the characteristic features of the Man of Sin, than those who have espoused the opinion, that the Apostle spoke exclusively of some person or persons then existing. This has, not improbably, contributed not a little to the rejection of this opinion, as indefensible. But a careful attention to the same sources of evidence to which an appeal has hitherto been made, cannot fail to shew, in a very striking point of view, that the features 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, the Apostle's object was to de-
scribe them, though, for obvious reasons, clothed in mystery.

It is a remarkable fact, that the Apostle, in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, denominates the Jews as a nation, as the common enemies of mankind; and that by their flagitious conduct in killing the Lord Jesus and their own Prophets, and their forbidding them to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, they were proceeding completely to fill up the measure of their iniquities, as a vessel or measure is filled up till it can hold no more; and that, in consequence of their extreme wickedness, wrath was coming upon them to the uttermost. So, in the xxiiid. of Matthew, our Lord describes, with great particularity and minuteness, the flagitious character of the Rulers of the Jews, charging them with crimes of the deepest dye, and towards the close of the chapter, he has this remarkably striking 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.

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, pro-consul of Achaia, acted with good sense and moderation when Paul was brought before him. Claudius, Lysias, Festus and Felix, in their treatment of the same Apostle, were not unmercifully severe; and the Centurion, whose prisoner he was, in his voyage to Italy, was very much attached to him. But the Jewish Priests, Scribes, and Elders, conspired to murder our Saviour without a trial—suborned persons to bear false witness against him; and the same assembly, or their successors in office, connived at a scheme, and of course concurred in it, for the assassination of Paul. In a word, it appears that the greater part of what we call the better
sort of the Jews of that age, when they had resolved on any measure, would not hesitate to employ any means, however unjust, cruel or shameful, in the accomplishment of it."*

Nor doth the extreme enormity of the character of the Jews, as a nation, appear 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," says he, "of all their iniquities were endless. Thus much, in general, it may suffice to say, that there never was a city which suffered such miseries, nor a race of men, from the beginning of the world, which so abounded in wickedness. I verily believe, that if the Romans had delayed to destroy these wicked wretches, the city would either have been swallowed up by the earth, or overwhelmed by the water, or struck with fire from heaven, as another Sodom; for it produced a far more impious generation than those who suffered such punishments."

From this passage, it appears that Josephus was at a loss how to express with sufficient

* See Beattie's Evidences, vol. i. p. 140, &c.
strength of language, the extreme enormity of the character of the Jews, as a nation. But the Apostle Paul, who certainly was no stranger to them, having himself been a severe sufferer by them, and who appears to have been equally impressed with a deep sense of 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 it is evident, from the whole tenor of the Gospel history it is not, this language, strong as it is, is not too strong. And, it has this advantage, that it conveys in a single sentence, all that could have been conveyed by the most masterly and accurate description. And as Sin and punishment are very naturally connected together, 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 Son of Perdition—as one devoted to destruction, and the natural offspring of such a parent, agreeably to what he had said of them in his first Epistle, that wrath was coming upon them to the utmost.
But how, it will be said, is the Apostle's subsequent language to be applied to the Jews as a nation? What evidence is there, from the history of those times, either sacred or prophane, that this Man of Sin—this Son of Perdition, exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God sat in the Temple of God, shewing himself that he was God? In answer to this question, let it be replied 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. I shall not be suspected 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 says, "Princes and Magistrates are in Scripture sometimes called Gods. See Psalm lxxxii. 1. 6. 7. cxxxix. 1. &c. And he farther says—"Tis well known that, in the Apostles days, Βασιλεὺς was the Greek name, or title of the Roman Emperor. See Acts xxv. 21. 25. If therefore we understand Βασιλεὺς, of the Imperial dignity, then the Apostle rises in his discourse, and prophecies
that the Man of Sin would exalt himself, not only above every one that is called a God or temporal potentate, but even above the Majesty and dignity of Caesar, the Roman Emperor himself, the highest of earthly Gods.

—Accordingly it is in the singular number θεὰς, and not θεῶν. The Apostle has not spoken out so plainly as to say θεῶν, but, as he has connected θεὰς with every one that is called a God, he has directed us how to understand him, and spoken as plainly as it was then proper for him to do."

Bp. Newton having quoted this passage—

who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, &c. says—" This is manifestly copied from Daniel—He shall exalt and magnify himself above every God, and speak marvellous things against the God of Gods. The features, you see, exactly resemble each other.† He opposeth and exalteth

* See Benson in loc.

† Mr. Faber, in my opinion, very properly controverts the opinion of Mr. Mede and Bishop Newton, that the Man of Sin is the exact transcript of the King predicted by Daniel, and that St. Paul, when he wrote to the Thessalonians, had this very prophecy in his eye. "I can," he says, "discover no sort of resemblance between them, either chronological or circumstantial. It is said, indeed, that the King would
himself above all above every one that is called God, or that is worshipped, alluding to the title of the Roman Emperor speak marvellous things against the God of Gods, and should magnify himself above every God; and it is likewise said, that the Man of Sin should exalt himself above every one that is called a God, or that is worshipped; whence it might appear, at first sight, that in this particular, at least, there was a strong resemblance between their characters. But the resemblance is altogether imaginary and not real. The King was to magnify himself above all Gods, both true and false; whereas the Man of Sin was only to exalt himself above every one that is called God, or August, in other words (as Bishop Newton justly observes) those mere earthly Gods, (as they are frequently termed in Scripture) Kings and Emperors. Both the Man of Sin indeed and the King were to be notorious enemies of the true God and his religion; a point in which the wicked all agree; but they were to be his enemies in two modes, as different from each other, as it is almost possible to conceive. The King was to speak marvellous things against the God of Gods—to magnify himself above every God; to regard neither the God of his Fathers, nor the desire of Women, nor any other God. These expressions, than which nothing can be at once more definite and more comprehensive, plainly intimate, that the King should make an open and undisguised profession of Atheism. He should neither regard the true God, nor any false God; neither the God of his Fathers (whoever his Fathers were), nor Messiah, the desire of Women, nor any other God: but he should at once speak marvellous things against the God of Gods, and magnify himself above all the vanities of the Gentiles. Now it is utterly impossible to conceive
**august or venerable.** He shall oppose, for the Prophets speak of things future as present; shall oppose and exalt himself, not only above inferior magistrates, who are

how such strong, such varied, and yet such determinate language, could ever have been intended to describe the conduct of the Popes. They doubtless, in strict harmony with the prophecy of the Man of Sin, did exalt themselves above all laws divine and human, dispense with the most solemn and sacred obligations, and in many respects enjoin what God had forbidden, and forbid what God had commanded. "They have, moreover, still in harmony with the prophecy, advanced a step further; have blasphemously assumed the divine titles and attributes; and have sat as God in the very temple of God. But when we consider the manner in which they thus conducted themselves, we shall discover no great resemblance between their behaviour and that of the King predicted by Daniel. Instead of speaking marvellous things against the God of Gods; they professed to do all to his honour and glory. Instead of disowning his authority; they affected, with much impor-

tunity, to act in his name. Instead of throwing off their allegiance to the desire of women, and totally disregarding him; they delighted to style themselves the Vicars of Christ, the husband of the church, the representative of God upon earth, the immediate delegate of heaven. Highly tyrannical as their actions were, and utterly offensive in the eyes of God; still they were not done professedly to affront him to his face. The thin garb of piety with which they were clothed, but ill concealed their native deformity: yet, throughout all the papal persecutions, the saints were never put to death as the saints of God, but as his enemies. The preaching of the bloody crusades against the Waldenses
sometimes called *Gods* in holy writ, but even above the greatest Emperors, and shall arrogate to himself divine honours." To this account Mr. Faber also has given his express approbation, so far as relates to the subject here treated of.*

Bp. Hallifax, 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

was termed, in a perverted sense indeed, the *preaching of the cross of Christ*; and even the diabolical murders of the Inquisition are dignified with the Christian appellation of *acts of faith*. See Faber on the Prophecies, pp. 339, &c. Vol. I. and what follows.

* The Gods that the *Man of Sin* was to oppose were merely earthly Gods; in other words, kings and emperors. Vol. I. p. 109.
only refuseth all submission to them, but exalteth himself above them, and above all that is worshipped—the very highest orders of mankind."

These are all the authorities which I think necessary to lay before my readers, and from them it appears that they all agree that the Man of Sin's exalting himself above all that is called God, means only the exercising a super-eminent jurisdiction over the Kings and Princes of this world. Now 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 can possibly be ignorant that it was a peculiar 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, the highest of earthly Gods. This being a fact which cannot be disputed, it is submitted to the cool and deliberate judgment of the reader, whether here is not the very characteristic feature described by the Apostle, of the Man of Sin exalting himself.
above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; for it must carefully be noted that this description of the Apostle is, in the closest manner, connected with the phrase the coming of Christ, which the Jews, though fallaciously, supposed would lead to that universal empire, and which induced them ultimately to rebel against the Romans.

It may, I am well aware, be objected to this interpretation, that the Jews, though they grasped at this universal empire, never did attain to it. But the same objection may be made to the application of St. Paul's language to the Church of Rome. Mr. Faber has been at considerable pains to show that the Popes of Rome never did attain an universal supremacy over the Kings of the earth.* But be this as it may, most certain it is, that the Apostle's language does not amount to a declaration that the Man of Sin would actually obtain that universal empire; for his words are o antipastos kai apisthos who is opposing and exalting himself; which precisely

* The Popes, says Mr. F. have been sufficiently impertunate in claiming the title and authority of king of kings—but if we consult history, we shall find that the claim has often been made, but it has never been allowed by the great European powers; but, on the contrary, strenuously resisted. Vol. II. p. 165-6.
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 Grotius, and to the latter on this very passage. Dr. Benson is also of the same opinion.*

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

* See Jortin on the Christian Religion, p. 185, and Benson in loc:
occupancy of that holy place, should presume to shew 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 on 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. P. 143-4.

But granting all this, it appears to me indisputable that the Church of Rome was not the first to arrogate such an Ecclesiastical Dominion. Were not the Jewish Rulers, in our Saviour's time, actuated by the same intolerant spirit? Did not he himself tell them, in express terms, that they bound heavy burdens 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?

When they had effected their diabolical purpose upon the divine author of our religion, they continued to persecute his followers with 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 conduct as this that led him to denominate them as 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 short, the whole Gos-
pel history, and particularly the history of the Acts of the Apostles, is an irrefragable proof that this characteristic feature of the Man of Sin belonged to none, with greater propriety, than to the Jewish nation, and more particularly as their Ecclesiastical tyranny was literally carried on in the very temple of God.

This is well represented by Dr. Whitby—

"When," says he, "the Apostles began to preach the word of life, the High Priest, the Captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees, Acts iv. i. and the whole order of the Priesthood, v. 6. styled ἄνδραπα, 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, v. 26. And the answer of the Apostles to them is, that God was rather to be obeyed than Man. After this the High Priest, and all his associates place the Apostles ἐν τῷ σεβασμῷ 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, and
again command them *not to speak* in the name of Jesus, v. 40. 41. Soon after we find Stephen brought before the Scribes and Elders *unto the Sanhedrim*, ch. vi. 12. and the High Priest, ch. vii. 1. and they who sat *in the Sanhedrim* having examined him, and the witnesses against him, *they stoned Stephen*, ver. 59. which death could only be inflicted on him by the Sanhedrim. And thus, says Dr. Whitby; *they sat in the temple of Gods, as Gods.*” See Whitby on 2 Thess. ii. 4.

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, he says, the Apostle could not foretel that as a future event. They did so already, and for some time they had done so. And he mentions Dr. Whitby as alledging that the Apostle does not 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; for though it may, in some instances, be true that the present may be put for the future tense, yet they should be perfectly clear, to be admitted. But this, I think, is not an instance of the kind. The Apostle appears to me, with great accuracy, to have distinguished what was yet future from what had already been, or was then taking place. Of the Apostasy which was to precede the coming of Christ, he most unquestionably speaks as being 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 sitting in the Temple of God. It seems therefore, in this instance, at
least, to be an unwarrantable assertion that the Apostle is all along to be understood in the future tense, and an unjustifiable liberty taken with his language.

The Apostle having described the characteristic features of the Man of Sin, thus addresses the Thessalonians:—Remember ye not that when I was yet with you, I told you these things; which seems to convey something like a reproof to them for not attending to what he had said to them upon the subject: But now, says he, ye know, from what I have just said, what withholdeth that he 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.

From these verses it appears that the subject he was upon; was of great importance to the Thessalonians, and that he was very earnest to engage their attention to it. In the first verse he says—Now we beseech you concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He seems too, as if he laboured under considerable apprehensions lest they should be led astray, and entertain improper ideas upon the subject; for, in the 3d verse,
he says—Let no man deceive you by any means. All this was extremely natural, if the Apostle alluded to our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem. It was precisely such as that prediction would have led a reader of an Apostolic Epistle, to have expected—but such earnestness is not so easily to be accounted for, upon the supposition that his language had a reference to the Church of Rome. It is likewise deserving of attention that the Thessalonians were well acquainted with the lett, or hinderance of the revelation of the Man of Sin, and that the mystery of Iniquity was then working. These appear to me to be strong evidences, in addition to those already mentioned, that the Apostle's description related exclusively to the times then existing.*

But though the Thessalonians were well acquainted with the lett, or hinderance of the full revelation of the Man of Sin, we certainly are not. This, however, can be no objection to the interpretation which is here adopted; for Bp. Hurd has very candidly

* It may justly be queried, whether there is a single instance of such a knowledge of any very distant predicted events throughout the whole system of prophecy.
acknowledged that that information has not been transmitted to us. And this I believe is, on all hands, allowed to be the fact. But if the Apostle's language has a relation to the destruction of Jerusalem—the conjecture of the learned Whitby, upon this subject, will appear to have much probability in it, and as such, I present it to my readers. 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 lett, till he be taken away, i.e. he will hinder the Jews from breaking out into an open rebellion in his time, they being so signally 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 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, de-
elaring that he did it, because he judged
them worthy of that favour, for their affec-
tion and fidelity to the Roman government.”*

Having thus stated the conjecture of Dr.
Whitby on the cause of the lett— or hind-
rance of the revelation of the Man of Sin,
I cannot forbear noticing here, 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.

* Mr. Faber says— “The four first trumpets describe
the removal of that power which in the days of St. Paul
letted, or prevented the developement of the Man of Sin,
namely, the Western imperial dignity of Rome.” And
in the following pages, he gives a detailed history of these
trumpets, and of the extinction of the long line of the
Caesars, and then says— “Thus was he that letted removed
out of the way, and thus was an opening prepared for the
Man of Sin and the Western Apostasy.” Vol. II. p. 7.
and 23. But, as Mr. Faber has throughout his elaborate
work denied that the Church of Rome was an Apostate
Church, and has moreover denied the identity of Daniel’s
King with the Man of Sin’s exalting himself above all that
is called God, it is deserving his consideration whether
he has not marred the symmetry of his system, by connect-
ing St. Paul’s description with the prophecies of the
Revelations, without a shadow of a proof that they are
so connected.
which he had, in the most express terms, asserted, relates to what was to come to pass during that generation, and consequently must have a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem only. Had this learned Commentator attended closely to his own most excellent rule of Scripture criticism, that "no text of Scripture has more than one meaning," he would either not have referred to it, or he would have interpreted St. Paul's language differently. I am sorry to add, that most, if not all the advocates for the application of St. Paul's language to the Church of Rome, have referred to our Lord's prediction in the xxivth. of Matthew, and the paralleled chapters, but with this material difference, that they conceived those chapters, though erroneously, to relate both to the destruction of Jerusalem, and to the end of the world. It is obviously of the utmost importance, that the sense of these chapters should be accurately ascertained, before they can safely be produced as proofs of the meaning of any other parts of Scripture; for it, most evidently, is the loose quotation of Scripture, which is the grand
cause of that infinite variety of opinions existing among Christians. *

But to proceed.—With respect to the Apostle's declaration that the mystery of iniquity was already working, it appears to me that if the original word signifies disobedience, 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 was not lawful to pay tribute unto Caesar—or to be subject to any other government under God; and that they had already made some seditious attempts, not only in Babylon, but in Judea, under Theudas Gaulonites, and also had been incited farther to do so by one Dortus and his associates, who persuaded the multitude to revolt from the Romans. Josephus also doth inform us, that before that time, there were many tumults in Judea, and that the time prevailed with many to usurp the kingdom.

* For the full meaning of these chapters, see my work entitled The coming of the Messiah, the true Key to the right understanding of the New Testament, where it is proved that all double meanings of the New Testament Writers are ill founded.
When the lett, or hindrance, whatever it was, should be taken out of the way, the Apostle says—Then shall o ἀναμφίβολος 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. This coming, as it related to the destruction of Jerusalem, our Lord had frequently asserted would be the crowning and final proof of the true nature of his character as the Messiah. And it has, with great propriety, been said, by Dr. Jortin, that he had foretold it so expressly, that if he had failed, his Religion could not have supported itself. The controversy between our Lord and the Jews would, in that case, have been at an end, and he would have been convicted out of his own mouth, of his having predicted an event which never came to pass. And, to give every possible importance to this prediction, our Lord is very particular in stating that it would be displayed in a remarkably bright and splendid manner. Matt. xxiv. 27. As the lightning cometh out of the East, and shineth even unto the West, so conspicuous shall also the coming of the Son of Man be; which he more fully explains, by saying that
it would be as in the days of Noah, v. 37. St. Luke likewise gives a similar representation, with this difference only—Even thus shall it be when the Son of man is revealed. And Dr. Whitby has well observed upon this verse, that “the day of the Lord's coming to destroy Jerusalem is styled, ch. ii. 31.

τίθουσαι τὸν Κηρὸν τὴν μεγάλην καὶ εὐφανήν, the great and bright day of the Lord: and Mal. iv. 5. Behold I send you Elias the Prophet, (i.e. the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elias, Luke i. 17.)

τίθουσαι τὸν Κηρὸν τὴν μεγάλην καὶ εὐφανήν before the coming of the great and bright day of the Lord.” And having quoted Luke, xvii. 24. and the concluding verse of that chapter—for wheresoever the carcase is, there shall the eagles be gathered together, he says it “sensibly applies this matter to the destruction of the Jews by the Roman army, whose ensign was the eagle. This, therefore, he adds, is a further confirmation of our exposition.”

If, upon mature consideration, our Lord’s language in his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, shall be found clearly to ascertain the genuine meaning of the Apostle Paul’s phrase, the brightness of his coming; it will not be very difficult to ascertain with
tolerable precision, the true sense of the following verse. The Apostle had just said that the lawless one—the Man of Sin, would be destroyed by the brightness of the coming of Christ, in the destruction of Jerusalem; even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceitfulness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

This language of St. Paul appears to have so decided and striking a reference to that of our Lord in the xxivth. of Matthew, and the parallel chapters, that there is scarcely a single Commentator who has not referred to it, Dr. Benson himself not excepted. Dr. Whitby, in his note on this passage says—"This our Lord foretold, that before his advent to destroy Jerusalem, there should appear false Christs and false Prophets, who should deceive many. Matt. xxiv. ii. who should shew signs and wonders to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect, v. 24. Now that these false Prophets, v. 11. and 24. were the same, we learn from St. Luke, who sums up both in one, ch. xxi. 8. and from the work of
both, which was to deceive many; that they were all to appear in the same age, in which his Disciples, to whom he spake these words, lived, is also evident from Christ's caution to them, in respect of both.—See to it, least any man deceive you, Matt. xxiv. 4. See to it —behold I have foretold you all things, Mark xiii. 23. Matt. xxiv. 25. It cannot then be doubted but that there were such persons as are here mentioned, which then arose among the Jews. Now 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, saith he, became worse daily, by reason 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 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 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 ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἰδρύματα—help from God, and that they gave credit to them.”

Mr. Le Clerc’s translation of St. Paul’s language is as follows—Pour soutenir le mensonge—to support deception; and for this he refers to Matt. xxiv. 24. where our Lord foretells the lying wonders which would be practised by the false Christs and false Prophets who would appear before the destruction of Jerusalem. And Mr. Kett says, in a note at the foot of page 230. Vol. I. that Josephus makes use of the exact words signs and wonders, σημεῖα καὶ τερατα when speaking of the false Prophets foretold by our Saviour. If they shall say he is in the desert, go not forth: Josephus says, they drew many people after them into the desert. I shall only add that St. Paul makes use of the same words as our Saviour and Josephus—lying wonders, σημεῖα καὶ τερατα τοῖνος.

Thus various and accumulated are the evidences that St. Paul, in the whole of his description of the coming of Christ—the Apostasy—the Man of Sin, together with the whole of his characteristic features, had
a reference, not as has generally been sup-
posed, to the corruptions of the Church of
Rome, and to that enormous spiritual tyranny
which has been exercised by the heads of
that church, but to the Jewish nation, and to
that destruction which our Lord had, in so
particular a manner, predicted, as coming
upon it. And it must be particularly gra-
tifying to the friend of Christianity, that the
chief of these evidences are derived from the
Gospel history, and consequently constitute
a most delightful harmony between the
Epistles and Gospels, equally creditable to
them both. And that very obscurity in which
the former are involved, so far from being
objectionable, is really a powerful and con-
vincing argument of its authenticity; for as
it was our Lord's original instruction to his
Apostles to be wise as serpents and harmless
as doves; it was upon no occasion more essen-
tially necessary than when writing upon the
subject of the destruction of Jerusalem. His
object, most evidently, was to give the Thes-
salonians the necessary instructions respect-
ing the approaching event, and to conceal
his meaning, as much as possible, from the
unbelieving Jews. It may therefore be af-
firmed, that the mystery in which the Apostle's language is clothed is highly creditable to his character.

There is, however, one argument more in favour of the application of St. Paul's language to the Jewish nation, which I must not omit, and that is contained in the 15th verse, and appears to be the conclusion of the subject. Therefore stand fast brethren, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether in conversation or by our Epistle. Here, it is evident, that the standing fast is 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 with respect to the nature of his coming, as the final proof of his being the Messiah.

It will readily be perceived that this interpretation of the term tradition is founded upon the supposition that the Gospel history was not published at the time when this 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, it must be acknowledged, a very considerable difference among the learned—but, without entering into a critical examination of those opinions; there appears to me to be very considerable weight in the observations of Dr. Paley upon this subject. "Whilst the transaction was recent," says this venerable and respectable writer, "and the 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 and converts, in supporting themselves against opposition; whilst they exercised their ministry under the harrassings 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, he adds, 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 writ-
ten 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, Vol. I. p. 159.

But, besides these general reasons for the not publishing the Gospels at an early period; there appear to have been some very 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; for 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, verse 19. 20. *And the chief Priests and the Scribes, the same hour, sought to lay hands on him; but 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 just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so 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 am able to destroy the Temple of God, and to build it in three days.* Matt. xxvi. 61. With this he was reproached likewise, when hanging on the cross. xxvii. 40. The like 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 somewhat 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. Yea, 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 all intelligible) soon 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."

It has, likewise, been observed by Mr. Herbert Marsh, 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 incroyable, 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 later Ecclesiastical writers, that he would have endeavoured rather to augment, than to diminish the antiquity of St. Matthew’s Gospel.” See Mr. Marsh’s notes on Michaelis, Vol. III. p. 98.

To these observations of these learned men, I must beg leave to add that it appears to me impossible, upon the supposition that St. Paul alluded to the destruction of Jerusalem, that either the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, or Luke, were published when he wrote his 2d Epistle to the Thessalonians; for in that case, all caution was unnecessary, as the predictions of our Lord could not, have, failed to have been publickly known, both by Believers and Unbelievers, and consequently the necessity of his writing upon the subject, would have been superseded. I feel no repugnance in putting the issue of the controversy concerning the meaning of the chapter which has now been the subject of consideration upon the late publications of the Gospels; for, upon no other grounds is the mysterious language of the Apostle to be accounted for.
There is, however, one objection to the application of St. Paul's language to the destruction of Jerusalem, which it will be necessary to attend to, particularly as it has been urged with much confidence and earnestness, and supported by a person now living, whose name I am not at liberty to mention, who appears by no means destitute of candor or of judgment.

This objection is thus branched out into a variety of questions by Bp. Newton.—"St. Paul," he says, "had planted the Church in Thessalonica, and it principally consisted of converts from among the Gentiles, because it is said, 1 Thess. i. 9. that they turned from Idols to serve the living 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? But it might, I conceive, with full as much propriety be asked—What connection had the Thessalonians with the Apostasy, if it must be so called, of the Church of Rome? The real fact is, that as our Lord had put the credit
of his Religion, and the full proof of his being the Messiah upon the accomplishment of his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem; all Christians, however distant from Jerusalem, were deeply interested in the matter, and if it had not been accomplished, the triumphs of Infidelity would have been complete. It may also be observed that the Thessalonian Christians were, of all others, most deeply interested in the destruction of Jerusalem; for, distant as Thessalonica was from thence, the historian of the Acts of the Apostles states it as a fact, that there was a synagogue of the Jews in that place, and that those of them who believed not, were exceedingly troublesome to the Thessalonian Christians—so much so indeed, as to create considerable alarm, not only to the Christians—but to the Magistrates themselves. And no wonder; for it appears that they accused the Christians of Thessalonica 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 persecutions. And it is moreover added, that they even followed them thither, and stirred up the people against them.

It seems to me by no means improbable, that it was with a particular view to these facts that St. Paul so emphatically denominates them as *παραλαβόμενοι τὴν τοῦ πολυπροσόν τοῦ φαραώ τὰς τοῦ ποιομένου τοῦ οίκου τῆς καταστροφῆς τῆς Ιερουσαλήμ τὴν τοῦ κατῴκων τῆς Ἰουδαίας* the common enemies of mankind; giving this particular reason for his so denominating them, that they persecuted the Apostles, forbidding them to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved. See 1 Thess. ii. In short, in no place, whatever does it appear that the unbelieving Jews were so extremely active and violent against the Christians as at Thessalonica. The 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.
Very much to the purpose is what the late Mr. Newcome Cappe has said upon this subject. "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 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."*

With respect to the Bp.'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

while Jerusalem continued in prosperity, the unbelieving Jews would urge the opinion which they held, that their Messiah would soon appear, and that then the Christians would be 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 show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they would deceive even the Elect. From the distance of Jerusalem from Thessalonica these signs and wonders 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 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 which, from the known character of the unbelieving Jews, they would not fail to avail themselves of, to the great annoyance of the Christians.
I have now laid before the reader the principal arguments in favour of the application of St. Paul's language in this celebrated chapter, to the Jewish nation. That I have availed myself of all the arguments in favour of this application, I do not presume to say. That it is the genuine meaning of the Apostle, I do not myself entertain a doubt. To others it may appear in a very different light, and it is my most earnest wish that the subject may be canvassed with the utmost freedom; for I dare assert that freedom of enquiry upon every subject is essential to the acquisition of truth. And whoever opposes this freedom of enquiry, either directly or indirectly, is so far an enemy to truth—an enemy to the best, and the most important interests of mankind!

To ascertain the genuine meaning of the Apostle has been my principle object, without regard to any preconceived opinions. That which I have adopted will not be less deserving of attention from its connection with the whole of the Gospel history—from its connection with the grand controversy, not then determined, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character.
When my enquiries were originally directed to the controversy concerning the coming of Christ, in consequence of the objection of Mr. Gibbon, that he foretold his second coming in the generation then existing, I had not the most distant idea that the commonly received hypothesis concerning St. Paul's Man of Sin was vulnerable—or indeed, had any connection with it. A retrospect of my writings, for more than twenty years, will prove beyond a doubt, that the knowledge I have gained upon the subject has been gradual, and that I am not conscious, to use the language of Mr. Faber, of ever having been guilty of the worse than childish vanity, of introducing a new exposition (if a new one in this instance it may be called) merely because it is a new one. The Scriptures contain, as he very justly observes, subjects much too solemn to be trifled with; and a Commentator upon the Prophecies (or indeed upon any passage of Scripture) ought never to displace any interpretation of his predecessors, without assigning very weighty reasons for it.

Many weighty reasons for the interpretation which I have adopted have been pre-
sent to the reader—so weighty, that I feel no anxiety whatever as to the issue of the controversy—but I must confess my labours have been but ill employed, if I have not established, beyond contradiction, the vast importance, and even the absolute necessity, of considering the Gospel history as an history of facts, and particularly as an history of the controversy, concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character. No part of the New Testament has been esteemed so obscure as that which has been the subject of this enquiry. No part of it appears to be capable of a clearer, or more accurate interpretation.*

It most certainly is a serious imputation, either upon the character of the book itself, which professes to be a revelation from God—or upon those who have studied it, that in the nineteenth century from its first publication, such an infinite variety, and such opposite opinions, should be formed from it. And it appears to me no otherwise to be accounted for, but from an unaccountable

* The late Dr. Paley, speaking of this passage, says, "It has hitherto been unexplained, and perhaps inexplicable." See Horæ Paulinæ upon 2 Thess. ii.
inattention to the first principles upon which it is founded. Fundamental principles, it must be allowed, there are in all sciences, without a strict and undeviating attention to which, little or no progress can be made in them. An Apostle has declared, what the whole of the Gospel history, in the fullest and most unequivocal manner, corroborates that no other foundation of the Christian system can any man lay than that which is laid, viz. that Jesus is the Messiah.

In investigating the nature of our Lord's character, as displayed in the course of the history; it soon appears that his mission, as the Messiah was very different from what the Jewish nation expected it to be; from whence arose that violent opposition to his claims to the character of the Messiah, which appears in every part of that history. His kingdom, which he announced to be at hand, was not to be of a temporal, but a spiritual nature. His divine mission was not to be confined within the narrow limits of Judea---but his benevolent views of mercy and salvation were to be extended to the whole human race. The wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was to be broken down,
and the ceremonial law, which originally was intended to distinguish the former from the latter was to cease, and from thence forward there was to be but one law, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.—

These, unquestionably, were the principal subjects of controversy between Jew and Gentile, in consequence of the claims of our Lord to the character of the Messiah, and of the different ideas which the Jews had formed of it, from what was, in fact, the true nature of it. They are largely dwelt upon by the Apostles, in their Epistles, and more especially by the Apostle Paul; and if a careful and undeviating attention be paid to the source of these controversies, they will not be found extremely difficult to be understood. In a word, we have, if I am not greatly mistaken, in the fundamental principle that Jesus is the Messiah, and that the Gospel history is an history of the grand controversy concerning the true nature of his character and office, a sure and unerring guide to direct our enquiries into the genuine meaning both of the Epistles and Gospels, which, if followed with steadiness and fidelity, cannot fail to remove much of that odium which has
been attached to them, on account of the difficulty of understanding them. One cause of the perplexity that has subsisted in ascertaining the genuine meaning of the sacred writers has been the unwarrantable introduction of double meanings, against which every man who has a just value for the credit of Christianity will firmly set his face, as perverting the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ.

I cannot but lament, notwithstanding what I have advanced upon this subject, that it is still countenanced by men of great name, particularly by the present Bishop of London, and, more recently, by the author of Boyle's Lectures.* It can never be too often repeated, to use the language of Mr. Richards in his very excellent Bampton Lectures, that "the Gospel Dispensation was final. It prepared not the way, nor looked forward to any other. It was not necessary, therefore, to have recourse to typical ceremonies, or secondary senses, either in the institutions, or in the predictions delivered by its Holy Founder, or his inspired Apostles; consequently no traces of them will be found in the New Testament, if we except the re-

* Mr. Van Milderts.
markable instance of a double meaning in the prophecy of our Lord, in which he intermingles the destruction of Jerusalem with the general judgment." This, I have, I trust, so effectually proved not to be an exception, in my last and former publications, that Mr. Richards himself will probably be induced, in the next edition of his Sermons, to acknowledge that his excellent observation will hold universally.*

* After this sheet had been sent me for correction, I discovered that Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood had just appeared as the strenuous advocate for the application of the xxivth. of Matthew, to the end of the world, as well as to the destruction of Jerusalem. His text, which is v. 14. And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come, he applies to the end of the world.—But let the Reader attend to the verse immediately following, and form his own judgment of this opinion. When ye shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the Prophet, standing in the holy place, whosoever readeth, let him understand: Then let them which be in Judea flee to the mountains. Here it is evident that the words ο ἐκτροπή should have been translated, not the whole world, but the whole land, that is, the land of Judea, agreeable to the sense in which it is used in the parallel chapter of St. Luke, ch. xxi. 26. Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth:
Of my labours, in this and my former publications upon this subject, the public...

The whole discourse, says Dr. Lardner, relates to the calamities that were coming, not upon the whole world, or the whole Roman Empire—but the land of Judea; v. 21. Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains. Out of Judea, therefore, there would be safety. See Lardner’s Credibility of the Gospel History, vol. I. p. 522—3.

Besides the phrases, the end, and the coming of the end, plainly have no relation to the end of the world, as will be seen by the following examples. Mark xiii. 7. When ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled; for such things must needs be, but the end is not yet. Luke xxi. 9. When ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified; for these things must first come to pass, but the end is not immediately.

Again, Sir Henry says, that though in their natural signification the words immediately afterwards convey the idea of future events, at no great distance, the same phraseology is very commonly applied in the New Testament, to the end of the world. But it may be observed, that the very examples which Sir Henry has produced have, by very judicious Commentators, been applied to the destruction of Jerusalem. And Dr. Macknight has very justly observed, that to say that immediately after, signifies two or three thousand years after, is a liberty which cannot safely be taken with his words. It is, in fact, rendering language altogether useless.

Sir Henry likewise says, it is scarcely conceivable that any event, of less magnitude, than the dissolution of the
will of course form their own judgment. The steadiness with which I have persevered in

world, can be connected with the description in verses 29.

30. 31. But surely Sir Henry cannot be unacquainted with the phraseology of the antient Prophets in describing *temporal calamities*, so strongly resembling that of our Lord, which Bp. Warburton, Bp. Newton, Arch-Bp. Newcome, Bp. Porteus, Dr. Macknight, and many others have noticed in explaining these verses. But, not to insist upon this striking resemblance, does not Sir Henry, by such an interpretation manifestly injure the cause which he means to support? For as our Lord, almost immediately afterwards, in the strongest language which he could adopt, asserts *that that generation should not pass away till all the things he had been describing were fulfilled*; the description here given, must of necessity be *among those things*—or he prophesied a direct falsehood, which Sir Henry appears to me to have no means of avoiding; for he does not pretend to interpret this verse, as some do, of the extinction of the *Jewish nation*—but of the *generation then alive.*—See p. 412.

Perhaps I ought to apologize to my Readers for saying so much upon a subject upon which I have formerly dwelt so largely—but Sir Henry has been at great pains to establish an hypothesis that appears to me to be most injurious to the cause of Christianity, and to militate against the rules of sound criticism; for he has expressly acknowledged "two different subjects, to be mixed together in the same discourse, and he represents our Lord as passing frequently from one to the other," as appears to me, without any regard to connection, and in defiance of the strongest language which could be used to confine his
this enquiry, will be a full proof of my own opinion of its importance. That alone, however, is no proof of the rectitude of the system which I have adopted. The age of literary domination is, I trust, passing away. Dogmatism in matters of religion, as well as in matters of taste or science, will not now stand for argument, nor supposition for facts. On a subject like the present, the unprejudiced and the liberal will decide for themselves, according to the laws of evidence, and the principles of sound and genuine criticism; which are the only rules by which an accurate judgment can be formed of the truth or falsehood of any system.

Should my labours unfortunately pass unnoticed by those whose situations and influence peculiarly qualify them for promoting the cause of truth, I shall console myself with having performed what appears to me an imperious and important duty to my country, in an age when Christianity is rapidly losing its influence, and with having the pleasing suffrage of the first literary ch-
atters to the justness of the principles which
I have adopted, and the general accuracy of
my reasonings. Religion, I conceive to be
the grand bond of connection between man
and the Deity—between man and man—be-
tween this world and another; and those
who are engaged in the promotion of the
knowledge of its genuine principles, as deli-
neated in the sacred records have a just
claim to the support and encouragement of
all who wish well to the present, or the fu-
ture interests of mankind.

FINIS.