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William Nicholson**

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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DOUBTS OF INFIDELS \*\*\*

**THE DOUBTS OF INFIDELS, OR,  
QUERIES RELATIVE TO  
SCRIPTURAL INCONSISTENCIES  
& CONTRADICTIONS.**

**SUBMITTED FOR ELUCIDATION TO THE  
BENCH OF BISHOPS BY A WEAK BUT  
SINCERE CHRISTIAN.**

**By Anonymous**

*.....Metus omnes et inexorabile fatum  
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari!  
Illum non populi fasces, non purpura regum  
Flexit et infidos agitans discordia fratres. Virg.*

*Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! ye blind  
guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Matt,  
xxiii. 23, 24.*

*The world is divided into two classes of men...the one have  
understanding but no religion; the other have religion but  
no understanding.*

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## THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

### TO THE RIGHT REVEREND AND REVEREND THE BISHOPS, CLERGY, AND ALL OTHER SUPPORTERS OF THE CHURCH MILITANT HERE ON EARTH.

REVEREND SIRS,

Your late zealous exertion against the infidels, in procuring the Sunday Bill to be passed, and prosecutions and pillory against infidel writers and publishers, must have convinced them that you are in earnest in your attempts to propagate and establish our holy faith. An act of parliament is an excellent engine for producing that kind of uniformity of opinions, which consists in holding the tongue; and, however unfair it may be in common transactions to suppress the arguments on one side of any question, yet, in religious matters, even the most cool and charitable must allow, that it is otherwise. When the salvation of men is concerned, every means is justifiable. What right has a man to complain, though by virtue of an act of parliament, by pains and penalties, fines, imprisonment, and the pillory, he may be sent to heaven whether he will or no? It is carrying the notion of liberty too far, to suppose, because we are free-born Englishmen, that we may choose our own faith and go to heaven *our own way!* What would become of the right reverend and reverend guides and turnpike-men, if people were permitted to avoid the strait gate and go to their journey's end without paying?

Foreigners are so sensible of this, and the priests of other countries are so tenacious of their rights of directing the intellects of the people, that they have invented and deposited in the inner chambers of the holy inquisition, a number of most ingenious machines, which, by means of whips, cords, pullies, screws, wheels, iron crows, red hot pincers, and the like, are found to be extremely serviceable in twisting and warping opinions to any settled models government may require.

Notwithstanding your Lordships' readiness\* "to oppose error of every kind by argument and persuasion," it happens unfortunately for us, that these mechanical and persuasive arguments are unknown in *Britain*. Instead of that most strong and logical argument, called the torture, we are obliged to adopt plain reason, or, at most, when that fails us, the *prison, fine, and pillory*. But, it is to be hoped, that the happy time is not far off, when the priests of *Britain* may be able to argue with as much force as the spiritual directors of other countries; when the Clergy may approach the throne, and avow their readiness to stop the mouths of men, without being under the shameful necessity of contradicting themselves, by "disavowing all violence in the cause of religion.\*"

*\* Vide Address of the Convocation presented to his Majesty the 17th of November, 1780.*

In those better days, the Lord Bishop of Chester may overthrow the arguments of an infidel peer, by declaring them "unworthy of a Reply;" and the Bishop of St. David may confirm the defeat, by affirming, that the arguments of unbelievers "deserve no answer;" for every one will then say, they "would not" answer them, not that they "could not," as they impiously affirm at present. But as those glorious times are not yet arrived, we must be contented, in the mean while, to proceed in the old method of reasoning upon even ground with our adversaries. The weak, though *zealous Christian*, who has the honour, to address your Lordships on the present occasion, has presumed to lay before you a few of the Doubts of the Infidels, and he hopes you will answer them to his entire satisfaction.\* He is happy in reflecting that the late act of parliament forbids them to speak; but his satisfaction is infinitely greater when he assures himself, that your Lordships' answer will convince them and make them ashamed even to *write, speak, or think*.

*\* Vide the same address.*

Thus fervently prays your Lordships' unworthy co-operator,  
The Author.

*\* The following are the chapters, with many others, which contain the most objectionable parts:—*

*Genesis, chap. 16, 18, 19, 30, 34, 35, 38, 30.*

*Numbers, 25.*

*Judges, 10, 19.*

*1 Samuel, 25.*

*2 Samuel, 11, 13, 16.*

*Ezekiel, 4, 10, 22, 23.*

*Hosea, 1, 2, 3.*

*The following are those chapters which contain instances of cruel and torturous executions, and unrelenting vindictiveness.*

*Genesis, chap. 34.*  
*Numbers, 31.*  
*Joshua, 8, 10.*  
*Judges, 4, 5, 21.*  
*1 Samuel, 15.*  
*2 Samuel, 12, 21.*  
*1 Kings, 2.*  
*2 Kings, 10.*

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## DOUBTS OF INFIDELS,

1. How can *the attributes* of God be vindicated, in having performed so great a number of miracles, for a long succession of very distant ages, and so few in *latter times*? If they were performed for the instruction of those times only, are they not equally necessary at present for us? or, if those ancient miracles were intended likewise for our instruction, are they adequate to the purpose? Can God, who gave us reason, act inconsistently with its dictates; and is it rational or fair to demand our belief of things, which are in their own nature far removed from common belief, or common sense, and require something more than the usual testimony of history for their support? When Livy affirms,\* that the Gauls conspired against Hannibal, we admit and believe the fact; but when in the same chapter he speaks of shields sweating blood, of its raining hot stones at Arpi, and the like, we justly reject and disbelieve these improbable assertions; neither is any credit given to the account of the wonderful method of curing diseases by the touch, said to be possessed by Mr. Greatrix,\* though we find it in the Philosophical Transactions. The miracles of the Old Testament were all performed in those ages of which we have no credible history; what reply then can be made to those who affirm, that miracles have always been confined to the early and fabulous times; that all nations have had them, but that they disappeared in proportion as men became enlightened, and capable of discovering *imposture and priestcraft*.

\* *T. Livii, lib. xxii, cap. 1.*

2. Suppose a book to be published, containing assertions of historical facts long past, which had no collateral testimony of other authors; suppose those facts in general to be improbable and incredible; suppose the book to be anonymous, or, which is worse, ushered into the world under the name of a person who, from the internal evidence of the thing, could not have written it; can it be imagined, that such a book would find credit among people, who have the least pretensions to reason or common sense? Which, then, is the readiest way of confuting the enemies of our holy and only true religion, who do not scruple to affirm, that many books of canonical Scripture are in this predicament? They observe that the books of the Pentateuch bear many strong marks of an author long posterior to Moses; that the book of Numbers\*\* quotes the book of the Wars of the Lord, which, as first written, was most probably the book which Moses wrote; that Moses could not possibly have written the account of his own *death and burial* in Deuteronomy,\*\*\*\* which nevertheless has no mark to distinguish it from the rest of the book.

\* *Lowther's Abridgement, Vol. III. p. II. Greatrix published a pamphlet, to which the attestations of Boyle, Wilkins, Cud-worth, and many other great men were affixed. Vide Life of St. Evremont, printed with his works in English, 3 vols. 8vo.*

\*\* *Numb. xxi. 14.*

\*\*\* *Deut. xxxiv.*

And supposing these and other objections of the like nature to be removed, what must we say in reply to their remark, that the Scripture, which we believe to be dictated by the inspiration of the unerring God, is frequently\*\* contradictory with regard to facts, and very often represents the all-wise Creator\*\*\* as angry, repenting, unjust, arbitrary, &c. and that consequently we must either give up that dependence, which we naturally place on his goodness and rectitude, or reject those writings which represent him as a demon. Do not your Lordships apprehend, that, for want of better arguments, we shall be under the necessity of recurring to the *argumentum pillorii*, or of adopting some of those *gentle methods* which were lawfully used for the conversion of heretics in the mild and pious reign of Mary, Queen of England?

\*\* *Vide infra.*

\*\*\* *Genesis vi. 6, 7. also Exod. vii. 3. xi. 9, 10. and 1 Sam. xv. 35.*

3. Is the account of the creation and fall of man, in the book of Genesis, physical or allegorical? Did God create light before the sun? How could he divide the light from darkness, since darkness is nothing but the mere privation of light? How could time be divided into days, before the creation of the sun, since a day is the time between sun-rise and sun-rise? How could the firmament be created, since there is no *firmament*, and the false notion of its existence is no more than an imagination of the ancient Grecians?

4. The Scriptures were certainly written for the purpose of being understood, or for no purpose at all. A mystery, that is to say, an assertion or theorem, which the human understanding is incapable of

comprehending, must likewise be inexpressible in human speech; we cannot, therefore, avail ourselves of the short and elegant method of clearing and elucidating difficult parts of Scripture, by the use of the word mystery, but how shall we, without this *happy resource*, explain the business of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, of a speaking serpent, and of a tree of life, which God was obliged to guard by cherubim and a flaming sword, lest man should eat of the fruit and become immortal?

5. The serpent was afflicted with the curse of going upon his belly. The scoffers seem to think it no curse at all; for as they take it for granted that he went upon his back before this unfortunate transaction, they apprehended it was doing him a singular piece of service to reverse him, the latter position being evidently the most convenient. They also take notice, that no animal can subsist upon dust, and that whatever the individual serpent in question might have done, the serpents of modern times are so profane, that they universally reject so dry a food, and, by a second act of impiety, emancipate themselves from the consequences of the first.

*\* Gen. vi.—78.*

6. The account of the flood is very embarrassing. It is described as the effects of natural agents in the hands of God. It rained; no mention is made of waters created for the purpose. The deluge was universal; all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered; and it ceased, not by the annihilation of the waters, but they were evaporated by a wind. Now from whence came the water? The weight of the whole atmosphere, with all its vapours, is equal to no more than a hollow sphere of three or four and thirty feet thickness, environing the whole globe, and consequently the whole of its contents, if condensed into water, could not deluge the earth to the height of an ordinary house. It is to no purpose to break open the fountains of the abyss, or great deep, if any such fountains there are; for gravity would prevent the waters from issuing out; neither can we easily persuade infidels, that the windows of Heaven were opened, while they know it has no windows; so that we have but three or four and thirty feet of water to deluge the highest mountains, some of which are more than fifteen thousand feet high.\*

*\* The Indian Alps are 20,862 feet above the level of the ocean. Editor. See Col. Kirkpatrick's History of Nepal, and Asiatic Researches, Vol. VIII.*

7. The weak in faith find themselves equally at a loss respecting the ark. It seems strange to them, that so vast an assemblage of animals could be inclosed in an ark or chest, which had but one window, (which window was kept shut for more than five months,) without being stifled for want of air: it appears equally remarkable that Noah and his three sons could unstow and serve out the daily allowance of provisions and water to the passengers; and if their wives were supposed to help them, the work to be done is still prodigious. The lions and other carnivorous animals must have lived on salt provisions; which, no doubt, they were glad of, as seafaring people are not very nice, especially in long voyages.

8. If God set his bow in the clouds, as a token of his covenant with mankind after the flood, ought we not to conclude, that he, at that time, established the law of the various refrangibility and reflexibility of the rays of light, and consequently, that before the flood many optical experiments, which are common with us, would not then have succeeded? For example, a man could not have made a rainbow by spouting water out of his mouth; Mr. Dollond's achromatic telescopes would have then been no better than common ones; natural bodies must have appeared all of one colour, &c. &c.

9. What answer must we give to those who are inclined to deny, that an all-powerful and just God could make use of the most unjustifiable means to attain his great purpose of aggrandizing the posterity of Abraham? Could this benevolent and just Being approve of the ungenerous advantage which Jacob took over his faint and hungry brother? Could this omnipotent and upright Spirit adopt no method of distinguishing his favourite Jacob, but that of fraud and lies, by which he deprived the same unsuspecting brother of his father's blessing? Or, in short, how shall we justify God for the continual distinction and favour he is said to have bestowed on a people, who from their own annals appear to have been unparalleled for cruelty,\* ingratitude, inurbanity, &c.?

*\* See the acts of Joshua; also 1 Sam. xv. &c.*

10. When the unbelievers affirm that a just God could not punish Pharaoh for an hardness of heart of which he himself (God) was evidently the cause, we usually answer, that the potter has power over the clay to fashion it as he lists; but when in reply, they take notice, that if the clay in the hands of the potter were capable of happiness or misery, according to the fashion impressed on it, the potter must be malevolent and cruel who can give the preference to inflicting pain instead of happiness, then we are obliged to be silent, in hopes that your Lordships will condescend to supply us with better arguments than any we are acquainted with at present.

11. Miracles must have been very common in Egypt, since there was a body of people whose trade it was to work them. When Aaron's rod was turned into a serpent,\* Pharaoh, instead of being surprised at it, as an unusual phænomenon, sends for his magicians, who immediately perform the like with their rods. Your Lordships owe us some little explanation concerning this business: we know it is our duty to believe, that Aaron's miracle was performed by the power of God, but are at a loss to discover by what power the magicians performed theirs.

19. When\*\* Aaron turned the waters of Egypt into blood, their streams, their rivers, their ponds, and all their pools, together with all the water throughout the land of Egypt, whether in Vessels of wood, or vessels of stone, the magicians of Egypt did so likewise with their enchantments. Here again our adversaries, who unfortunately have more curiosity than faith, take the liberty to enquire, whether the magicians formed water to practise their art upon, since Aaron had already turned it into blood?

*\* Exod vii. 3, 4. and ix. 9, 10.*

*\*\* Exod. vii. 10.*

13. Pharaoh still continuing inflexible, though successively exposed to the plagues of frogs, lice, and flies;\* his cattle, namely, the horses, the asses, the camels, the oxen, and the sheep, were afflicted with a very grievous murrain, and all the cattle of Egypt died, except those of the children of Israel.\*\* This producing no good effect with Pharaoh, the whole nation of Egyptians were plagued with boils and blains;\*\*\* notwithstanding which Pharaoh's heart continued as hard as ever.\*\*\*\* Moses was therefore sent early in the morning, to advise Pharaoh to send for his cattle, and all that he had in the field, and shelter them against a terrible hail storm, the approach of which he predicted. They among Pharaoh's servants who feared the word of the Lord, saved their cattle and servants, by removing them into houses; for the next day came on a storm of thunder, lightning, and hail, which broke the trees, destroyed the herbage, and killed every living creature that was in the field, excepting only that in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, there was no hail. *Divine truths* are so different from those which carnal minds are used to contemplate, that it must be very difficult by the force of mere human reason to persuade mankind in general, that Pharaoh's cattle were in any great danger from the hail storm, since they were all previously dead by the murrain; and some people are so stupid, that they think killing them a second time was no punishment at all. There are not wanting some amongst the present perverse generation; who are at a loss to conceive how those of Pharaoh's servants, who feared the word of the Lord, could make their Cattle flee into houses, since they pretend to maintain, that cattle already dead, whether by the murrain or otherwise, are incapable of fleeing. Notwithstanding those people are so obviously in the wrong, yet we depend upon your Lordships, that you will expose their errors in more glaring colours than any in which they have yet appeared.

\* Exod. viii.

\*\* Exod. ix. 3, 6.

\*\*\* Exod. ix.

\*\*\*\* Exod. ix. 13, &c.

14. Some weak believers are in doubts whether so mean, so ungenerous, and so dishonest an act, as borrowing the jewels of the Egyptians\* without any intention of returning them, did not rather originate in that disposition which characterizes the Jews to this day, than in the command of the just God, who certainly could need no such tricks to accomplish his intentions.

15. The plague of hail being succeeded by locusts, thick darkness, and the death of all the first-born of Egypt, cattle included, Pharaoh at length permitted the Israelites to depart; but afterwards repenting, he went in pursuit of them\*\* with six hundred chariots and all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them by the sea, near Baal Zephon. The Red Sea was parted in two to afford a passage for the Israelites, the Egyptians followed them, and were punished for their rashness by the return of the waters, which swallowed them up. Here again our petulant and unsatisfied opposers demand how Pharaoh could pursue with chariots and horsemen, since his horses were all slain twice over, once by the murrain and once by the hail; not to mention that the first born of cattle were slain even a third time. They likewise add, that Egypt, which, to facilitate the dispersion of the waters of the overflowing Nile, is intersected by numberless canals, must have always been a very improper country either for cavalry or chariots.

\* Exod. xi.

\*\* Exod. xiv.

16. God came to Balaam at night and said unto him, "If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them."\* Balaam accordingly rose up, saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. "But God's anger was kindled because he went," insomuch that he sent an angel to oppose him, who would certainly have slain him, if the ass he rode on had not exhibited a specimen of penetration and prudence, of which the asses of modern times seem to be divested. The infidels here insist, that it is better to reject the whole story, than to believe that the Supreme Being could be angry with Balaam, merely because he obeyed his command; but the true believers, the sons of the church, who think there would be no exercise for our faith, if we were required to admit nothing but what can be supported by argument, are not at all concerned in this difficulty; the more improbable the doctrine, the greater must be the merit in believing.

\* Numb. xxi. 20, &c.

17. "The Lord was with Judah,\*\* and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountains, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." It is difficult to conceive, how the Lord of heaven and earth, who had so often changed the order, and suspended the established laws of nature in favour of his people the Jews, could not succeed against the inhabitants of a valley, because they had chariots of iron! Or ought we not rather to infer that the book in which this passage is found, has nothing of divine inspiration in it, but was written by one of the Jews who considered the God of Israel their protector as a local divinity; who was in some instances more, and in others less powerful, than the gods of their enemies. Thus David in many places compares the Lord with other gods "The Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods," &c. and Jephtha says to the king of the children of Ammon, "Wilt thou not possess that which Chemosh thy God giveth thee, to possess? So whomsoever the Lord our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess."

\*\* Judges i. 19.

18. How unjustly are the Spaniards stigmatised for the zeal they exhibited in converting the natives of Peru and Mexico to the Christian religion!\*\*\* It is true, they ripped up women with child, dashed infants to pieces against the rocks, and broiled men to death with slow fires; but as their pious intention was purely that of delivering these uninstructed and ignorant people from the more horrible pains of futurity, the truly compassionate can not but approve their conduct. How can we enough admire the mild and humane



transaction of hanging up thirteen Indians in honour of Christ and the twelve apostles!

\*\*\* See *Marmoutel's Preface to the Incas*, and the authors there cited.

While the rest of the world admired the Greeks and Romans, they wisely assumed the heroes of sacred story as models for their imitation! Poor Las Casas! His weak and effeminate heart bled at the scene of misery! He wanted zeal to join in the pious work, and even wished to leave the Indians in possession of certain imaginary blessings which he pretended to call "the rights of humanity!" But the holy ardour of his associates frustrated his impious attempts; he could do no more than write, yet his writings, so far from producing the effect he intended, only served to increase our admiration of those great characters he meant to stigmatize. If the comparison might be allowed, we may affirm that the Spaniards were inferior to the Jews in this only circumstance, that they had a Las Casas among them. The Jews were obdurate to a man, and hardened with holy cruelty. We hear of no tergiversation when Jericho was to be destroyed; "Man and woman, young and old, ox, sheep, and ass, were put to the edge of the sword."\* What a philosophical command over the tender passions must Joshua have acquired, to have enabled him to smite with the sword,\*\* and utterly destroy the inhabitants of Ai, Libnah, Lachish, Hebron, Debir, &c. &c. &c. especially\*\*\* as the hardness of their heart was no fault of theirs, but proceeded from the Lord! How truly great, how far above the common weakness of humanity, appears the man after God's own heart, at the taking of the city of Rabbah!\*\*\*\* "He brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln!" O ye greatly inexorable heroes! ye Jews! ye Spaniards! ye firm and zealous of ancient and modern times, if any such exist! pity the wretch who admires your virtues, but whose pen trembles, and whose eye overflows at the recital of your deeds! And thou, O mighty and benevolent Power, forgive the heart that, shocked at the tortures inflicted on thy creatures, is unwilling to acknowledge thee as the author of them!

\* *Joshua vi. 21.*

\*\* *Joshua x. 10.*

\*\*\* *Joshua xi. 20.*

\*\*\*\* *2 Sam. xii. 29, 31.*

19. The most rational men reject the science of magic or witchcraft, as a silly imposition on the credulity of mankind; but we believers, who have nothing to do with reason, but are guided by the indefinable faculty called *faith*, are perfectly ready to admit it, and deplore the infidelity of that parliament, which repealed the acts by which so many of that profession lost their lives.

The witch of Endor,\*\* and the Jewish law, both prove by divine argument, the existence of such professors, though, like miracles, they have now ceased to appear. But notwithstanding this, we should be glad of an argument or two from you, our spiritual directors, which might establish this important point of doctrine, as well in the minds of reasonable men, as in the minds of men, who, by means of the additional faculty *faith*, are above reason.

\*\* *Sam. xxviii.*

20. In the last battle of Saul with the Philistines\* near Gilboa, Saul being sorely wounded, requested his armour-bearer to draw his sword, and run him through, but his armour-bearer would not; therefore Saul took a sword and fell upon it; and when his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him.\*\* David was at this time returned from the pursuit of the Amalekites, when, on the third day after Saul's death, a young man came out of the camp from Saul, with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head. He brought the news of Saul's death, the circumstances of which, upon David's enquiry, he reported to be, that coming by chance upon Mount Gilboa, he beheld that Saul leaned on his spear, and that the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. Saul looking behind him, called the young man, and requested him to slay him: so I stood upon him, said the young man, and slew him, because I was sure he could not live after he was fallen; and I took the crown that was on his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord. David rewarded the mistaken compassion of this young man, by commanding him to be put to death.

\* *1 Sam. xxxi.*

\*\* *2 Sam. i.*

How do our adversaries, the infidels, exclaim against the barbarity of David, when they read this melancholy history! What! say they, is this the mild, the merciful David? Is this the man after God's own heart? Is he not rather the tyrant—the inhuman despot? What effort of holy zeal could stimulate him to murder the young man, who had performed the last offices of humanity to Saul; who, in the agonies of death, had himself besought him to put an end to his lingering miseries? Why should this idol of the Christians, this man after God's own heart, embrue his hands in the blood of the youth, who supposed he had done a charitable office to the deserted and expiring monarch, whom this David pretended to lament, and who, at the same time, gave such endearing proofs of loyalty to him himself, by presenting him with the regal ornaments? But we, the faithful, who can easily explain all scripture mysteries, say, that though David was really one of the greatest of sinners, yet he truly repented him before he died. Our enemies, the unbelievers, say no; that it is false, and they quote the very Book of Books\* against us for their authority.

\* *1 Kings ii. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.*

They say if David ever repented, or was ever truly pious, we shall certainly perceive it, in his behaviour during his last moments, on his death bed. There, say they, it is to be hoped, we shall find him forgiving his enemies, and dying in charity with all mankind. This is what all mankind in general make a point of doing, from the saint to the malefactor. David, therefore, must certainly give us an extraordinary instance of his

attention to this important evidence of contrition.

But what shall we think, say these enemies of our holy religion, when we see this Nero of the Hebrews, this man after God's own heart, this idol of the Christians, die in a manner uniform and consistent with the whole course of his life? What will be our reflections, when we find him, with his last accents, delivering two cruel and inhuman murders in charge to his son Solomon? Murders still farther aggravated by the included crimes of ingratitude and perjury! One of them to be executed on his old and faithful general, Joab, who powerfully assisted him on all occasions, and who adhered to him in all his extremities; till at the last, when he had justifiable cause of chagrin, but who, notwithstanding, had not appeared in actual hostility against him, but only drank a glass of wine with the malcontents. His other charge was against Shimea, who reviled David at his retreat from Jerusalem, during his son Absalom's rebellion; but who made his submission to him when he returned victorious, and whose pardon David had sealed with a solemn oath. All these commands, say the infidels, were executed in a manner truly worthy the son of such a father! These, Christians, say our enemies, are the outlines of the life of a Jew, whom, according to the Book of Books, or, more properly speaking, priestcraft, you are not ashamed' to continue extolling as a man after *God's own heart!* What an impiety, say the infidels, to the Majesty of Heaven!

Wherefore we, the true believers, pray that your Lordships will satisfactorily answer and explain all those doubts and objections brought forward against us by infidel philosophers and writers; and if unanswerable, that your Lordships will, with true Christian zeal, procure an act of parliament to be passed, in order to prevent any more doubts whatever being entertained by the enemies of our holy faith and religion, as by law established.

None but infidels, it is true, would utter impieties like the above; but, alas, 'the infidels of our days have become formidable to the true believers, by an attention to morality, and the mild and gentle offices of pity, and by warning their fellow-citizens to avoid and detest the cruelties of religious persecution: how egregiously they mistake! Your Lordships will rectify their notions, it is to be hoped, in these as well as in other respects.

They have an argument still more formidable against the truth of the foregoing accounts, concerning the death of Saul, which is, that they are so very different, that one of them must be false. To this we can only answer, as it becomes the faithful in all such cases of seeming contradiction; namely, that they were both written by the pen of inspiration, consequently must both be true, however contradictory or absurd they may seem to mere human reason.

21. David commanded that the children of Judah should be taught the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the Book of Jasher.\* Many difficulties arise here about the Book of Jasher. It was extant previous to the writing the Book of Joshua,\*\* the author of that book quoting it, and by the foregoing text it appears, it was not finished till after the accession of David to the throne of Israel. Now, if Joshua wrote the account of his own transactions, as is generally believed, the author of Jasher must have lived upwards of four hundred years; and if the Book of Joshua was not written till after the time of David, and by an unknown author, the infidels will affirm, that it comes under the description which is at the beginning of the second of these questions. And the misfortune is, we do not know how to confute them, but we hope your Lordships will easily remove this, among many Other very great difficulties, now your long dormant seal is at length awakened. Our enemies have reproached us with the examples of the primitive church; they observe, that the priests were poor and indefatigable, but are now pampered and lazy. Fat benefices and lordly bishoprics, they say, cause a total eclipse of the light of religion, by obtruding, their opaque substances between the eye of the priest and the kingdom of Heaven. But, alas, how palpably they mistake!

\* 2 Sara. i. 18.

\*\* Josh. x. 13.

The ancient priests were ignorant of their business; they despised riches, because they knew no better, or, perhaps, because they could not get them. But how are the understandings of men enlightened! how great the wisdom of the modern times! how are the sciences improved! Has it not been for many centuries discovered, that pain and mortification are fit companions for the devil, and therefore totally improper for saints? Can a poor wretch, inured to penury and the scourge, be suddenly reconciled to happiness and Heaven? Instead of enjoying the manna of the promised land, would he not be prescribing himself a fast; and when it became him to sleep recumbent on his couch of blessedness, would he not envy the damned their whips and scorpions? So difficult it is to eradicate long confirmed habits. But wherefore dwell on so unprofitable a subject? The wisdom of our divines has taught them to avoid such absurdities, to detest such errors. They will not lose their relish for pleasure, for want of practice.

29. David, by the instigation of the Lord, numbered the people of Israel and Judah;\* but afterwards, being probably ignorant by whose instigation he had acted, he repented of the deed. This repentance did not excuse him in the sight of the Lord, who offered him to chuse either, "seven years" famine, three months defeat before his enemies, or three days pestilence.

David chose the latter, and seventy thousand men died. This memorable event has not escaped the inspired penman of the Book of Chronicles,\*\* who affirms, "that Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number them;" but God was displeased with this thing, and therefore smote Israel. David repenting, was offered from God his choice, either "three years famine, three months destruction before his enemies, or three days pestilence the latter of which he chose, and there died of Israel seventy thousand men.

Our too curious and inquisitive opposers, who are unwilling to believe "cunningly devised fables,"\*\*\* enquire how it could be a crime in David to number the people, especially as it was by the instigation of the Lord. They beg to be informed, whether the Lord, and Satan, be one and the same person; and if not, which of the two was the instigator of this unhappy, business, and likewise which of the two "infallible" and "inspired" writers tells the lie? Lastly, they cannot conceive how the seven years famine in the Book of Samuel is dwindled into three in the Chronicles. To all these questions we answer, that it was sufficient to make this action of David's criminal, that the Lord disliked it after it was done; and as to its being done by his

instigation, we must observe, that it is no uncommon thing for the Lord to be angry with his servants for obeying his commands.

\* 2 Sam. xxiv.

\*\*1 Chron. xxi.

\*\*\* 2 Pet. i. 10.

23. The instance of Balaam is a case in point.\* Hence we infer, that, in the commands of the Lord, there is always a clause implied or understood, which leaves it to the discretion of the faithful to act as they think proper. It is true, that this position leads immediately to the doctrines of the Jesuits, which have been so universally abhorred: but why need we regard the abhorrence of the world, while we are convinced that our tenets are scriptural? With regard to the affairs of Satan and the Lord, we leave it to your Lordships' management; but cannot help observing with derision, the futility of the objections respecting the three and seven years' famine. They have little skill in divine arithmetic, if this affords them any embarrassment. They know nothing of the sublime logic by which divines prove three to be one, and one to be three. For example, if it were affirmed that Eldon is a Lord, Castlereagh is a Lord, and Sidmouth is a Lord, and yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord, this would be termed absolute and ridiculous nonsense, notwithstanding their close Ministerial union. But in holy matters it is quite otherwise,\*\* as might easily be elucidated by instances too sacred to be commented upon by any unconsecrated individual.

\* Qu. 16.

\*\* See an excellent specimen of this in the Creed commonly ascribed to St. Athanasius.

94. Another instance of the imperfection of the art of arithmetic, as it is erroneously taught in our schools, appears in its affording no rule by which the two genealogies of Jesus Christ may be reconciled to each other. Matthew reckons twenty-seven generations from David to Christ. Luke reckons forty-two; and the names totally disagree. Matthew traces the descent from Solomon, and Luke from Nathan, both sons of David. According to our feeble notions, twenty-seven cannot be equal to forty-two, neither can Nathan, &c. be imagined to be Solomon, &c. The infidels suppose, that the two evangelists, rather than the church should be without the genealogy of its founder, chose to invent them; but we good Christians, who know that both writers were infallible and inspired, are ready to reject the clearest axioms of mere human science, and allow that, in sacred matters, the greater number may be equal to the less. These cavillers and infidels also demand how these genealogies of Joseph prove, that Jesus was the son of David, when it is avowed that Joseph was not his father? But they do not consider, that a married man is obliged to father all the children his wife may produce; and if this answer does not satisfy them, they must at all events confess, that Joseph was father-in-law to Jesus, by being married to his mother; consequently Jesus was son (in-law) to Joseph, Q. E. D. As there is no answering for the perverseness of men, there may perhaps be some, whom even this demonstration will not satisfy. To these we offer an argument discovered by the truly profound Mr. Pascal.\* He justly observes, that when two witnesses disagree in the circumstances of a fact, we ought to believe them so much the more readily on that account, as it shews that they did not contrive the story in concert. This remark, it is to be hoped, will likewise put an end to the absurd custom which prevails in our courts of justice, of discrediting evidences, which, contradict each other, such contradictions being in reality a mark of truth, "*a ceux qui prennent bien les choses.*"

\* Les "faiblesses" les plus apparentes sont des "forces" à ceux qui prennent bien les choses, Par exemple les deux genealogies de St. Matthieu, et de St. Luc, il est visible, que cela n'a pas été fait de concert. Voyez remarques sur les Pensees de Pascal Ed. Geneve, 1773.

25. It is much to be wished, that some of our spiritual directors, who have leisure time and large incomes, would be at the pains to rectify and adjust to the standard of holy writ, the many errors and omissions of profane historians.

When Christ was baptized by John, the heavens were, opened, and a voice was heard, declaring his divine origin. Such a prodigy must have awakened the attention of all Judea; yet we find the historians totally silent on the matter. It is strange, that the horrid massacre of the children by the command of Herod should be totally unnoticed by Josephus, and even by the evangelists, Mark, Luke, and John.\* Matthew alone mentions it; but his authority is fully sufficient to justify an interpolation (like many others) into the text of the other three evangelists, who are defective in that particular.

\* If such an act of cruelty had been committed, it could not by any contrivance have been concealed, and Josephus, the inveterate enemy of Herod, and many of the most impartial historians of the Romans, living at that period, would have taken care to record such a public act of barbarity on the part of Herod.

Editor.

It is well known with what success the primitive Christians began the holy work of interpolating, suppressing, forging, and altering profane histories; but as we believe their piety always prevented their meddling with the sacred text, notwithstanding the arguments of infidels, who attempt to prove the contrary, these holy frauds have been found of infinite service in establishing the cause of Christianity. Why do we forbear to pursue their great and laudable example? The modesty or the mistaken candour of these antients\* have allowed them to interpolate no more than one paragraph concerning Jesus into the text of Josephus. Would it not shew our superior zeal, and be of infinite service to posterity, if some divine of the present age would incorporate the whole narrative of Matthew into the same text? But, alas, the sneers of our adversaries, the unbelievers, have prevailed too much, and good works, like these, are now no more!



26. About eighteen centuries ago, (according to the prophecy of Christ and his apostle Paul,\*\* the sun was darkened, the moon ceased to give light, and the stars fell from heaven; the sign of the Son of Man was seen, the Lord himself descended from heaven with a shout, the trumpets of the archangels were heard, the dead in Christ arose, St. Paul and others of the elect, who were then living, were caught up in the clouds, went to meet the Lord in the air, and have been with him ever since. It is truly astonishing, that a phenomenon so awful as the destruction of the system of nature should have made no interruption in the state of nations and affairs at that time, that all the historians should omit to record so dreadful an event, nay, that they should survive it; and that the primitive fathers should forbear to mention a circumstance which was so well calculated to establish the Christian religion, and confute all the arguments of the Jews, heathens, and unbelievers. When your Lordships set about the great work of rectifying antient histories, you will doubtless be careful to insert an account of this tremendous occurrence; for Christians can have no doubt but that it really happened, since it was so directly foretold both in time and circumstances, by Christ and his apostle Paul.

*\* Josephus, de Antiq. Jud. lib. xviii. cap. 4.*

*\*\* Matt. xvi. 27, 28.—Matt. xxiv. 29, 34.—Mark xiii. 24, 31.—Lukexxi. 25, 33.—1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.*

27. The oracles of Delphos were obscure and capable of various interpretations, but the prophecies of sacred writ are all so clear and obvious, they shine so bright by their own native lustre, that no one has ever pretended to doubt their divine origin, except those infidels who are unfortunately blinded by the too great suffusion of light, which the Scriptures so continually emit. If the gift of curing the blind be not entirely lost among the apostles of the present day, it must be Christian charity to describe the symptoms of their disorder, that your Lordships may attempt the cure. These unfortunate people observe, that God said to Adam concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil,\* "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die;" he transgressed, and, nevertheless, lived at least eight hundred years afterwards. They observe, that the great evangelical prophet Isaiah,\* could foresee the downfall of Babylon by Cyrus, but could not tell the name of the Messiah, though his coming was an event of infinitely greater consequence; nay, they even charge him with a blunder, if we admit the opinion, that Christ was intended by the names, Mahershalal-hash-baz and Immanuel,\*\* since he was never called by them. But they impiously solve this, difficulty, by affirming, that Isaiah might take the advantage of writing his prophecy concerning Cyrus after the events took place, but could not avail himself of the same pious cunning in the affair of the Messiah. And, in fact, we, the true believers, are in great want of evidence to overthrow their supposition. They demand, if the prophecies be so evident and clear, so different from those of the Heathens, how happened it that the whole Jewish nation, then living, together with the angel Gabriel, should mistake, and suppose the kingdom of the Messiah to be temporal; and that it should not be discovered that his kingdom was not of this world, until his enemies, the unbelievers, had prevailed and sent him out of it? They ask, whether those inspired writers who prophesied concerning things of no consequence, as the thirty pieces of silver, and the casting lots for his garments, could not, with equal certainty, have predicted the more important circumstances of his death and resurrection? In short, they beg to be shewn a single prophecy concerning which divines are agreed, and desire to know why, in the days of gospel light, the great prophecy of John the Divine should be more obscure and enigmatical than any which was written during the typical and shadowy dispensation of Moses? All which absurd questions your Lordships will, no doubt, answer, overthrow, and expose in the most palpable manner, to the great joy of us weak Christians.

*\* Isaiah xiv. and xlv.*

*\*\* Iaiah*

*\*\*\* Luke i. 32.*

28. How came it to pass, say our enemies, the cavillers and unbelievers, that Jesus, the Son of God, should curse a fig-tree\* for being without fruit in March; was he, by whom the world was made,\*\* ignorant that it was not the season for figs? They likewise demand, whether it was by design or mistake that he affirmed\*\*\* that wheat does not produce fruit unless it first die? If Scripture was not meant to instruct philosophers, yet why should it mislead them? But though these infidels may please to assert, that wheat in our days is governed by laws directly contrary to these, as all naturalists indeed acknowledge, yet who can affirm that it was so eighteen hundred years ago? On the contrary, since these things are recorded in the sacred writings, we ought to submit and believe that the system of Nature is changed from what it was in ancient times. This event probably came to pass when the sun was darkened, and the stars fell from Heaven, as mentioned in a former question.

*\* Matt. xxi. 18. Mark xi. 13, 20.*

*\*\* John i. 3.*

*\*\*\* John xii. 24. |*

*\*\*\*\* Quest. 26.*

29. Your Lordships, no doubt, will readily explain and settle the mysterious disagreement between John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.\* John being asked if he was Elias, answered, I am not; but Jesus\*\* affirms, the contrary. As few even of the Christians have faith enough to believe that John was and was not Elias at the same time, a word or two of explanation would afford them infinite satisfaction. Commentators in divinity can do miracles in the way of explaining; but, unfortunately for us, all other miracles have long ceased, though at no time so much wanted as at present.

30. Out of forty Gospels we receive four as canonical; the rest are the fruitful produce of that spirit of forgery which the Christian world has always been celebrated for. Their piety was indefatigable in burning the books of the heretics and unbelievers, and the same piety was not sparing in furnishing apocryphal books.

It is for the salvation of mankind that Christianity should prevail; and how can its propagation be advanced, and its dominion confirmed, more than by preventing the arguments against it from being exposed to view? Some may indeed pretend, that this mode of proceeding is tyrannical, and destructive of the rights of mankind; but we, the faithful, insist that it is zealous and politic. How can a man be said to be injured, even if we allow that he is cheated, since he is cheated into salvation, though perhaps against his will? Yet it will be doing a singular service to us weaker Christians, if your Lordships will point out by what particular emanation of the Holy Spirit the Church was enabled to select the divine out of such a number of apocryphal writings.

\* *John i. 21.*

\*\* *Matt. xi. 14.*

Our enemies, the infidels, say, that time has obliterated the primitive disputes on this subject, and that the sanction of custom has confirmed the authority of the four Gospels, which, so far from external and historical, have not even the internal evidence of truth. They observe, that the gospel of Mark, though evidently an abridgement of that of Matthew, yet differs from it in many very material particulars; that the grand circumstance of the conspiracy by which Christ lost his life, is told differently and discordantly by all the four. They express the highest astonishment that the sending of Jesus to Herod by Pilate should be related by Luke, and that the other three Evangelists should not only omit that occurrence, but relate the proceedings in this affair so as entirely to exclude the possibility of its insertion. They think it also impossible that an earthquake should rend rocks, and that many saints should arise from the dead, and go into the holy city, as Matthew relates; and yet that these great events should not only have escaped contemporary historians, but even the other three Evangelists. And to this they add, that it is particularly strange and amazing that John, who was present at the crucifixion,\* should not only forbear to mention any one of the terrible appearances recorded in Matthew on that occasion, but that even the darkness of three hours' duration, which must have made the most lasting impression on every individual in Judea, should also be by him totally unnoticed.

\* *Such as we behold even in the present enlightened day by that great prophetess, Joanna Southcott, and her followers! who are now deceiving the people of this kingdom with her prophecies. Edit.*

31. The malevolence and incredulity of our adversaries, the unbelievers, are visible in nothing so much as the criticisms they make on the resurrection. They complain, and with some degree of reason, that this most miraculous and important event, instead of possessing that extraordinary and uncommonly clear evidence, which its incredible nature requires, bears, on the contrary, every mark of a forgery. Instead of Christ's re-appearing to all the world, that the world might believe, he is said to have appeared to his disciples, who were the only men on earth whose evidence could be exceptionable in the case; men who already engaged in the attempt of forming a sect or party,\* could by no means be disinterested in their report; the only men on earth who could be suspected of forgery in the present instance. These are the men, say our enemies, who were to preach Jesus Christ to the world, and to find arguments to support the fact, which Christ might have *uncontrovertibly* established by appearing again in public. But the generation was unworthy of that condescension, we reply, which they wickedly paraphrase thus: "God, who desireth: not the death of a sinner, left them in their sins, that they might die—God, who spared not his beloved Son, but gave him to the bitterness of death, that *sinner's might be saved*, chose, nevertheless, to deprive all mankind of the proper *evidence of the resurrection*, because the Jews of that age were *sinner's!*" Mercy is the character of the first act, but how shall we characterize the latter? Is the God of the *Christians* inconsistent with himself? Did the great and merciful Being act thus? Did he inspire four men to write accounts of the *resurrection*,\* which disagree with each other in almost every circumstance? Does his divine truth bear the resemblance of forgery and invention, that we may shew our faith and reliance on him, by making a sacrifice of our reason; and believing by an act, not of the understanding but of the will? But why, O thou Supreme Governor! why hast thou given us reason, if reason be the accursed thing which we ought to cast from us? Or rather, is not reason the first and only revelation from thee; and are not those enthusiasts accursed, who, promulgating vile systems unworthy of thee, find their base purposes are not to be accomplished, till they have first deprived us of thy best gift?

\* *See the concluding chapters of the four Evangelists.*

These, my Lords, are the reflections of infidels and unbelievers; reflections which our truly Christian zeal and detestation would have prevented us from repeating, if we had not been supported by a pleasing anticipation of the glorious and satisfactory manner in which they will be answered, explained, and overthrown by your Lordships, to the entire satisfaction and conviction of us weak Christians. Not by persecution, pains, penalties, fines and imprisonment, otherwise the unbelievers will then sneeringly say, that your Lordships are incapable of answering them, or, what is more unfortunate, that they are really unanswerable.

FINIS.

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