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London, 1754

A letter occasioned by one of archibishop Tillotson's sermons.

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A
L E T T E R

Occasioned by one of

Archbishop TILLOTSON's SERMONS.

F. E. T. T. E. R.

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I COME from reading, in BARBEYRAC's translation of TILLOTSON's sermons, the discourse you mentioned on a late occasion ; and the effect of it has been to confirm me in this opinion, that the thief is a much more formidable enemy to the atheist than the divine. The former takes all the real advantages against a common adversary, which the latter has it in his power to take ; but he gives none against himself, as the latter is forced to do. When the divine writes or disputes on any subject, relative to his profession, he is always embarrassed by his theological system ; whether his mind be so : or not, his tongue and his pen cannot be otherwise. A thief is under no constraint of this kind. He may speak the truth, such as it appears to him, when the divine, tho it appears the same to him, must be silent. The thief may be silent, by regards of prudence, when the divine is obliged to speak, by the obligation of his profession, and to maintain what he cannot defend, as well as what he can : and thus, if he imposes

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on some, he exposes himself to the attacks of others. When the thief has demonstrated the existence of a supreme, all-perfect Being, and the moral obligations of his rational creatures, he stops, where the means of human knowledge stop, and makes no vain and presumptuous efforts to go beyond them, by the help of reason or revelation. Just so, when he has proved that the world had a beginning, on foundations of the highest probability tradition can give, he stops short likewise; because, in the nature of things, we can have no other proof of the fact. Not so the divine. His system drags him on. He attempts, most absurdly, to support, in the first case, a demonstrated truth by false arguments; and, in the second, to make tradition vouch for more than any receivable tradition does or can vouch. The Archbishop, himself, seems sensible of this in one place: for having asserted the universal assent of mankind to this great truth, that there is a God, and having ascribed the universality of this assent to the nature of the human mind, on which God has impressed an innate idea of himself, he tries to evade the absurdity by adding, "or which, that is the human mind, is so disposed, that men may discover, by the due use of it's faculties, the existence of God." He endeavours to evade the theological absurdity, which he could not maintain, but he endeavours it in vain: for it is evidently false, that the two propositions are in any sort the same. The difference between affirming that the mind of man is able, by a due use of it's faculties, to discover the existence of God, and that the mind of man has an innate idea of this existence, which prevents and excludes the use of any mental faculties, except that of bare perception, is too obvious to be insisted upon.

DIVINES reason, sometimes, on this subject with more precaution. They slide over the doctrine of innate ideas, without maintaining, or renouncing it directly, and think it sufficient

ficient to say, that the belief of a God is founded on a certain natural proportion, which there is, between this great truth and the conceptions of the human mind. I inclined, as you know, to think in the same manner, and to believe, that the first men, at least, who knew that they were such, and who saw the material world begin, would be led, by the natural conceptions of their minds, to acknowledge a first Cause of infinite wisdom and power, and far above all these conceptions. Thus it seemed to me, that the tradition of a fact, and of an opinion grounded on it, which are apt to be confounded, tho they should be always distinguished, might come down together. But I confess myself obliged, on further reflection, to abandon this hypothesis. I abandon it with the less regret, because, whatever the first men might think, nay, whether the world had a beginning in time, as I am firmly persuaded it had, or not, the demonstration of God's existence will remain unshaken. But I am obliged to abandon it, because a natural and intimate proportion between the existence of God, and the universal conceptions of the human mind may appear chimerical, and perhaps is so. It is, I doubt, chimerical, even when it is applied to the first men. The variety of the phenomena, which struck their senses, would lead the generality, most probably, to imagine a variety of causes, and more observations and deeper reflections, than the first men could make, were necessary to prove the unity of the first cause. That some made them, at least very early, can scarce be doubted. So that the orthodox belief and polytheism might grow up together, tho the latter might spread wider and faster than the former.

IF there was really such a proportion, or such a conformity, as is assumed, particular men, philosophers here and there, might have held polytheism notwithstanding this; but the ge-

neral opinion of mankind would have been the orthodox opinion, instead of which we know that polytheism and idolatry prevailed almost every where. Polytheism and idolatry, therefore, seem more conformable to human ideas, abstracted from the first appearances of things and better proportioned, by an analogy of human conceptions, to the uncultivated reason of mankind, and to understandings not sufficiently informed. Our archbishop supposes it objected to him, that the general consent of mankind in acknowledging one God does not prove that there is one, any more than the general consent of numberless nations in acknowledging several proves that there are several. He answers the objection by saying, that philosophers and wise men, in every nation and in every age, were of a different opinion from the vulgar, so that the heterodox opinion cannot pretend to have general consent on it's side, since the opinions of the vulgar, opposed to those of philosophers and wise men, can be received into this reckoning no otherwise than like a multitude of noughts without any figure. This is strange reasoning to fall from the pen of so great a man. It is certain, that the orthodox belief maintained itself in some minds, perhaps in some nations, and pierced thro all the darknesses of ignorant ages; but yet polytheism, and the consequence of it, idolatry, were avowed and taught by legislators and by philosophers. Neither will it avail any thing to say, that these men had their inward, as well as their outward doctrine, and that they taught, in private, the contrary of what they taught in public. On this very supposition it will still follow, that polytheism and idolatry prevailed more easily, because they were more conformable to the natural conceptions of the human mind, than the belief of one first intelligent cause, the sole creator, preserver, and governor of all things. It is absurd to say, that the consent of some wise men, and even of some nations, instructed and governed by them, in the acknowledgement

ment of one supreme Being, is a proof that this idea is innate in all men, or universally proportioned to the conceptions of all men, and to deny that the almost universal consent of mankind, in the acknowledgement of several gods, is a proof of the contrary.

IF you are not very well satisfied with these theological reasonings, as I think you are not, you will be no better satisfied with the manner in which our archbishop attempts to prove that the world had a beginning. The question, which is commonly put to those who maintain the eternity of it would be trifling, as well as trite, if it did not oblige the atheist to give an answer which implies, in his mouth, the greatest absurdity, and makes him pronounce, in effect, his own condemnation. TILLOTSON takes this advantage, as I have done; but he throws it away, when he has taken it, by applying it against those who may think the world more antient than the theological aera makes it to be, tho they do not believe it eternal. He asserts that the most antient histories were writ long after this aera, and quotes to prove it, some verses of LUCRETIUS, finely writ, but very little to the purpose, because of no authority in this case.

“ ——— Si nulla fuit genitælis origo
 “ Terrarum et coeli, semperque eterna fuere;
 “ Cur supra bellum Thebanum, et funera Trojæ,
 “ Non alias alii quoque res cecinere poëtae?”

MEN have been always fond, not only to carry the originals of their several nations as far back as they could, and to represent them, sometimes, as coeval with the world itself, but to establish their own, or the traditions which had come to them, as the most antient of all traditions. Thus the
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roman poet employed those of Greece to prove that the world had not begun very long before the wars of Thebes and of Troy. The world had a beginning, says the Jew; for there is neither history nor tradition more antient than MOSES; and we know by his writings how, and how long ago, the world was created. If we bring a Chinese into the scene, he will assure us that the world had a beginning; because the cycles, of three-score years each, in the chronological tables of his nation do not rise any higher than HOAM-TI, who reigned about four thousand four hundred years before our aera; that from him to XIN-NUM, the successor of FOHI, there are not more than three hundred and eighty years, and that FOHI was the first that civilised mankind. It was he, will the Chinese continue to say, who left us the adorable and hitherto incomprehensible Yekin, in the explication of which our learned men have labored these two thousand six hundred years. It was FOHI and XIN-NUM who taught men the use of the plough, who invented letters, and to whom all arts and sciences owe their original. Let a learned Mexican come forward next, and he will assure you, not only, that the world began, but that the time when it began is known; for we had but nine kings before MONTEZUMA, will this great chronologer say. TENUCH was the first of them, and the founder of our monarchy; our hieroglyphical annals rise no higher; we know nothing beyond him; this calculation is confirmed by that of our neighbours, whose traditions place the destruction of the last sun, and the beginning of this, but a little before our aera. Let a Peruvian follow the Mexican, he will assure us, that the inca MANCO-CAPAC preceded ATAHUALPA, about four hundred years; that he and his sister, COYA-MAMA-OELLO-HUACO, were sent, at that time, by their father, the sun, to civilise mankind, who could not have been long in being, since they had neither civil polity nor religion, since they knew neither how to build
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houses, spin wool or cotton to cover their nakedness, nor to till their lands. These are the traditions of the east and of the west. The former make the world more antient than those of the Jews, as they stand in the Hebrew, at least; the latter place the commencement of it about the beginning of the twelfth century of the christian aera, that is about the time of our king LOUIS LE GROS, and of our first norman princes. Our learned Europeans may laugh, as much as they please, at these learned Americans: but they must not be offended, if they are laughed at, in their turn, by those who think, that if CADMUS, the cook of a certain king of Sidon, carried the use of letters, and his son, or his grandson, BACCHUS, the culture of the vine, to the Greeks three thousand years before MANCA-CAPAC civilised the Peruvians, it may very well be, that the Atlantic, or some other nation still more unknown to us, had made all these improvements, by a long experience, three thousand years before the Greeks, or even their masters, who boasted of a much greater antiquity, the Egyptians.

A CROWD of reflections presents itself; but these may serve to shew how ridiculous it is, whilst we receive on the faith of universal tradition this fact, "the world had a beginning," to go about to fix the aera of it according to those of any particular nations. The negative argument, "we have no memoirs beyond such a time," proves nothing but our ignorance; and the positive argument, that, "we have relations of the beginning of arts and sciences in several countries;" proves nothing more than what it is very needless to prove; I mean, that there was a time, when every one of these nations began to be civilised. Neither of these arguments is of weight against the atheist who asserts the eternity of the world. But they give him an advantage, such as it is, which bad arguments give frequently in polemical writings; and having refuted these,

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he may triumph, as if he had refuted all the rest, which is a practice very common among his adversaries the divines.

If the divine had not more at heart to establish the credit of jewish traditions than the commencement of the world, he would not proceed as he does. He would not neglect the universal tradition of a naked fact, such as tradition may preserve, to insist on particular traditions of a fact so complicated with circumstances, that no tradition could preserve it. These circumstances might make the fact doubtful; the fact will never make them probable. Even that of the time, when the present system of things began, has been supported weakly, I will not, tho, I think, I might say fraudulently, by jewish rabbins and by christian doctors, from JULIUS AFRICANUS, and EUSEBIUS, and GEORGE the monk, down to STILLINGFLEET, whom I mention, particularly, because TILLOTSON ventures to assert, that he has proved, in his *Origines Sacrae*, the chronological traditions of the Egyptians, and the Chaldaeans, to agree with those of the Bible. If he had proved this, which he has not, most certainly, he would have proved nothing more than what the Mexicans assert, that the traditions of two or three neighbouring nations, all derived probably enough from one original, are conformable to one another. But it is, indeed, too bold an imposition to pretend to prove, by descending into particulars of facts and dates, any thing of this kind. Our learned antiquaries have no other materials than a certain number of broken, incoherent, and precarious traditions. These they make to cohere, for the most part, by guess, and then drag them to a seeming conformity with the mosaical system, which they assume, all along, to be true, whilst they pretend to prove it to be so by collateral evidence. I will only add, to shew how impertinent all this admired learning ought to be deemed, that
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by little differences, in the arrangement of the same materials, and by a no greater liberty of gueffing, diftinct, oppofite, and yet equal probabilities may be made to result from them. I affirm this the more confidently, becaufe I tried it once, as you may remember, and we both thought that the trial fucceeded very plaufibly.

BUT without infifting any longer on this head ; to fhew how divines weaken the fhort and plain proof that we have of the beginning of the world, let us grant, for argument's fake, that the moft antient traditions are the mofaical, and that arts and fciences have not been invented more than four or five thousand years, or more or lefs as they think fit. Will they prove, even by this confeffion, that the world has had a beginning? They cannot: for the atheift will object that he may have reafon to think the world eternal, without being obliged to think the arts and fciences eternal likewise. He will maintain it to be indifferent, in his hypothefis, when or where they began; fince at whatever aera the divine places this beginning, an eternity muft have preceded this aera. The divine, therefore, will be obliged to fhew that it implies contradiction to affert that the world is from eternity, and not to affert that arts and fciences are fo likewise. He will endeavour this by affuming, as TILLOTSON does, that arts and fciences are neceffary to the well-being of mankind, and even to their being; that neceffity, the great mother of induftry and of invention, fet mankind to work as foon, and as faft, as the fpecies began and multiplied, in fome places with more, in others with lefs, of thefe, but in all with as much as their real wants required. Since you agree then, will the divine fay to the atheift, that arts and fciences began about the time we have fixed, the world muft have begun about the time we have fixed likewise. This reafoning is commonly employed againft thofe atheifts who affume that the world is eternal. But

without being one of their number, I venture to say that this reasoning is frivolous, and founded on a supposition which the men, who make it, must know to be false. The different aeras of arts and sciences, invented in some countries, and carried into others, are so distant, even according to the received chronology, that the men who dispensed with the want of them, during such long intervals, might have dispensed with it longer, and in many cases, always. Are there not nations, at this hour, whose originals are unknown to us, who may be the Aborigines of the countries they inhabit, and who are ignorant, not only of all science, but of many arts supposed necessary; not only of letters, for instance, but of those, which serve to defend us against the inclemency of the air and the rigor of the seasons, by making cloaths and building houses sufficient for this purpose? These arts must have their place, surely, among those which TILLOTSON reckons so necessary, or, at least, so useful to mankind, that they could not fail to be invented, nor when they were invented, to be preserved. But his reasoning will not hold here neither; for if these arts were ever known to the people, to whom they are now unknown, they may be totally lost, after having been once found: nay, they may have been found, lost, and found anew, an infinite number of times, in an eternal duration. If these arts were never known to the people, to whom they are now unknown, it follows that mankind may dispense with the want of them during many ages, and therefore, always. We may easily conceive that Samojedes, Hottentots, and other notions as barbarous and ignorant as these, have always been, and will always remain, in the same state of barbarity and ignorance.

TILLOTSON was led by his prejudices, and by the examples of men, much inferior to him, in the herd of divines, into the two absurdities I have observed to you already; into that of proving the commencement of the world by the authority
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of particular traditions, which considered separately amount to no proof at all, instead of resting his proofs solely on the authority of universal tradition: and into that of confounding traditions of opinion with traditions of fact. He insists not only on traditions which concur in affirming that the world began, but on those which enter into a detail of circumstances, concerning the manner in which it began. Nay more, he joins the existence of God and the commencement of the world together, as if tradition was proper alike to prove both these truths. His proceeding is much the same with that of MAXIMUS of Tyre, whom he cites, after GROTIUS. Both he and GROTIUS might have quoted this rhetor, tho they were far from doing so, against EUSEBIUS, who was unwilling to allow that the supreme Being was acknowledged by the heathens before christianity had enlightened the world, but the quotation of him, on this occasion, proves nothing, and serves only to shew that our divines declaim as loosely as the heathen philosopher. MAXIMUS of Tyre alledges the universal consent of mankind in one law or tradition, so I believe those words *Νομον & Λογον*, should be translated; "legem famamque," and not, as TILLOTSON translates them, "law and principle." Now this law and tradition, according to MAXIMUS of Tyre, declares, that there is one God, the king and father of all things, and several other Gods, the sons of the Supreme, who take their parts with him in the government of the world. MAXIMUS was a platonician, and he meant, no doubt, to give reputation to the dogmas of his sect, by assuming them all to be received in one general tradition by the Greek and the Barbarian; by those who inhabit the continent, and by those who live on the coasts of the sea; by those who have wisdom, and by those who have none. TILLOTSON was a christian, and he meant to make the dogmas of his sect, as well concerning the beginning of the world, as concerning the creator of it,

to pass for those of universal tradition. If we suppose that the first men were led, instantly, by the phaenomena, and without any other demonstration, to acknowledge a supreme intelligent cause, the opinion rose from the fact, of which they were witnesses; but it was opinion still in them, tho it became afterwards demonstrated knowledge. Now divines transpose this order, and make the creation of the world, which tradition vouches primarily, to be, as it were, a secondary tradition; that is, they make the tradition of fact to follow the opinion, instead of making the opinion to be founded on the fact. They give great advantage to the atheist, by blending all these things together, for the atheist will not, tho the theist will, distinguish what they have confounded. He will look on all these different propositions alike, and as traditions only of different opinions.

AFTER having said, what has been here said, concerning the advantage which, I apprehend, that divines give to atheists by the absurd manner in which they employ tradition, I will observe another advantage, which the atheist may take, from some abstract reasonings that they employ to support this tradition. The theist is modest. He is content to know what God has done, and he acknowledges it, for that very reason, wise and good, right and fit to be done. But the divine is not so modest. It is not enough for him to know, that God made the world, and to fix the time when it was made, he presumes, with much theological ostentation, to explain the motives that determined the supreme Being, to create the world and the inhabitants of it, men at least. The atheist objects that these motives must have been eternal, since the divine attributes, from which they are deduced, are certainly eternal, in the system of the divine, and that it is impossible, therefore, to conceive that the supreme Being should neglect doing, during an

an eternity, what it was conformable to his wisdom and goodness, and suitable to his power from all eternity to do. The divine may say, and he will say, no doubt, that whenever God, who is himself eternal, had created the world, an eternity must have preceded this creation, and that the objection, the atheist makes, would be just as strong, if he assumed that the world began six millions of years sooner, as it is when he places the aera of it according to the jewish and christian chronology. He will employ the same sort of reasoning, in this case, against the atheist, which the atheist employed against him in another; that is, in the case of the commencement of arts and sciences; he will put the atheist on proving that it implies contradiction to believe God eternal, and not to believe the eternity of the world. To this, it may be, the atheist would reply, that the contradiction in believing one and not believing the other arises, like a self-evident truth, from what the divine himself affirms, and that the evidence is too great to need any demonstration and therefore incapable of any, like many other truths of which we have an immediate intuitive perception. From hence the atheist would insist that all the motives, which the divine asserts a supreme Being had to create the world in time, are unanswerable reasons to prove it eternal; arguments for his system, in part at least, and, as far as the eternity of the world is concerned, in the whole.

A THEIST, who stood by, might, perhaps, suggest to the divine an expedient whereby to get out of the difficulty wherein he has involved himself by presuming to specify the motives which the supreme Being had to create the world in time. The theist would advise him, like a good ally, (for such he is sometimes to the divine, tho he is never such to the atheist, as the divine is on some occasions) he would advise, I say, the divine to keep a little more precision in the use of words. Sometimes the world stands
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for the whole universe, and sometimes for our planet only. The divine must understand it, as *MOSES* does, and believe by consequence that the whole universe began to exist, when *MOSES* tells him, that the sun, our earth, the other planets, in short our solar system, began to exist: for the legislator of the Jews included no other in his idea of the universe. He would advise the divine, therefore, to distinguish better between the universe and the world; to affirm that our planet, or, at most, our solar system, began in time, which is the utmost that *MOSES* can be understood to have meant, and to affirm nothing of the universe, of which *MOSES* knew nothing, and he only knows that it is. Thus the reasons he gives, why God created the world, we inhabit, no sooner, may be a little better supported than they can be on the supposition that he created nothing before it, and was the eternal cause of no such effects, as his physical attributes enabled, and his moral attributes required him to produce. The theist might add, that, tho we should suppose the universe to be eternal, like it's Author, the eternal effect of an eternal cause, nothing will hinder us from assuming at the same time, on the faith of tradition, as he does, or on this and other foundations, as the divine does, that our world, and even our solar system began in time. A constant rotation from existence to non-existence or from generation to dissolution, and so back again, maintains our world and the inhabitants of it in being. Why should not such a rotation of worlds and systems of worlds maintain the universe in being?

BUT it is time to consider the historical, as we have considered the traditional proofs, which the archbishop brings of the beginning of the world. I will quote his own words, as they stand in *BARBEYRAC*'s translation; for if I did not quote them, you would hardly believe that I make him say no more than he

did say. He says then, " We have likewise an history of the
 " commencement of the world, the most antient and the
 " most credible that could be desired. This history is that of
 " MOSES, an author so antient that no other can stand in com-
 " petition with him, in this respect. I might add, that this
 " writer has all the characters of a divine authority, and prove
 " it by such good reasons, as would give a great weight to his
 " testimony in the minds of all those who believe a God. But
 " such arguments are not proper to be employed against the
 " atheist with whom we dispute at present. I ask no more,
 " than that the same credit may be given to MOSES, as we
 " give to every other historian. Now this cannot be refused
 " him reasonably, since he is quoted by the most antient hea-
 " then historians, and since the antiquity of his writings has
 " never been contested by any of them, as JOSEPHUS main-
 " tains."

THIS is my text. I shall make some few remarks upon it,
 and this general remark in the first place. It has been said,
 truly enough, that the court of Rome has established many
 maxims and claims of right, by affirming them constantly
 and boldly against evident existing proofs of the contrary. The
 jewish and the christian church have proceeded by the same rule
 of policy, and the authority of the pentateuch, to say no-
 thing here of the other books of the old testament, has been
 established entirely and solely on the affirmation of the Jews, or,
 at best, on seeming and equivocal proofs, such as JOSEPHUS brings
 against such evident marks of falshood as can be objected to
 no other writings, except to professed romances, nor even al-
 ways to them.

It was the pride of the Jews to believe themselves, and to
 make others believe if they could, not only that their nation
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was the elect people of God, but that it was of an immense antiquity, and that they possessed the most antient of all authentic records. JOSEPHUS (who had as much of this pride about him as any Jew or Pharisee of them all, and who stuck, as little, at any absurdity, as any antient or modern rabbin) endeavoured to promote these opinions among the Greeks and the Romans by his writings, tho with very little success. TILLOTSON, like other christian doctors, had a better motive than that of mere ambition, tho it was not quite foreign from ambition neither, to support the authority of the pentateuch. Whether JESUS CHRIST, or St. PAUL, abolished the ceremonial law of MOSES, or whether the former grafted on this law, as the latter thought fit to graft on his gospel, let us leave it to divines to decide. In all cases christianity was founded on judaism, and the new testament supposes the truth of the old. Our divines, therefore, are obliged to support the old, as well as they can, in order to support the new. The authority of these books is maintained, in some countries, by inquisitors and hangmen. In a country like ours where arguments alone can be employed, divines may be indulged in the use of all the good and the bad indifferently, that they may give up nothing; for where every part may be alike attacked, every part may be alike defended. Two cautions, however, these reverend persons would do well to observe. One to insist chiefly on the external proofs of the divine authenticity of the scriptures and to pour forth, on that head, all their stock of Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, and Latin, but to dwell very little on the internal marks of a divine character. They might silence those perhaps, on the first kind of proof, by their translations and commentaries, whom they will never convince, on the second, by fair reasoning; and might avoid a great deal of that blasphemy, which they talk on both; a circumstance, surely, that deserves some regard from them. Another caution is this, that

that they should make war rather defensively than offensively, that they should take the only true advantage of the discretion of their adversaries, which would be to return it with discretion; for their adversaries seldom speak out, nor push the instances and arguments they bring, as far as they might be carried. Instead of which these orthodox bullies affect to triumph over men, who employ but a part of their strength; tire them with impertinent paradoxes; and provoke them by unjust reflections, and, often, by the foulest language.

AFTER this long, and, I hope, charitable remark, it is time to consider how TILLOTSON proves that we have historical, as well as traditional, evidence of the beginning of the world. This evidence is that of MOSES: and to give it the more weight, he insists on the great antiquity of the historian. This antiquity will not be disputed, perhaps, and it will be allowed that no other history of the same assumed antiquity has come down to us. But then it will be asked, what materials MOSES could have before him when he writ the book of Genesis, which is in some sort a preface to the pentateuch, or at least, the first chapters of it, wherein he relates most circumstantially the creation of the world, and the whole progress of that great event? Divines have their answer ready. MOSES was not a cotemporary author, but he might write upon cotemporary authority. Twenty-five centuries passed indeed between the creation and him, but his materials were, notwithstanding that, extremely fresh and authentic, since they must have gone thro very few hands, in ages when men lived so long, to come into his, whether we suppose them written or unwritten. This may be said, it has been often said, and always very weakly, to the purpose that is mentioned here; for if MOSES had taken his materials from the mouth of ADAM, himself, they would not have been sufficient vouchers

of all that he relates. ADAM might have related to him the passages of the sixth day, something even of his own creation, at least from the moment that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life : but ADAM could have told him nothing that preceded this, even on the sixth day, nor, by consequence, on the other five, wherein the whole material world was created. MOSES therefore, notwithstanding his antiquity, may afford an instance in proof of the universality of the tradition, but no more. His writings afford no historical evidence.

OUR archbishop assures us, that he could have added to the antiquity of this historian certain characters of a divine authority, and have supported them by reasons which would give great weight to his testimony in the minds of all those who acknowledge the existence of God. It is pity he did not think fit to give these characters and reasons ; since however improper it might have been to urge them against an atheist, who denies the existence of God, as well as the commencement of the world, they would certainly have been urged very properly against a theist, who acknowledging both, believes nothing of the divine character of MOSES. But he was too much attached to a rigorous precision, and used too much candor, in his reasoning, to mingle the atheist and the theist together in this dispute. All he desires is, what, he thinks, cannot be reasonably refused him, that we give the same credit to MOSES, as we should give to any other historian. We will consider then, in the last place, what characters of a divine authority may be found in the writings of MOSES, and, from this consideration, we shall find reason, perhaps, to be the less concerned that we have not those which TILLOTSON kept to himself on this occasion. In the mean time, let us continue to judge of MOSES, as we

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we should do of any other historian, since it is all that is desired of us.

Now to constitute the authenticity of any history, these are some of the conditions necessary. It must be writ by a contemporary author, or by one who had cotemporary materials in his hands. It must have been published among men who were able to judge of the capacity of the author, and of the authenticity of the memorials on which he writ. Nothing repugnant to the universal experience of mankind must be contained in it. The principal facts, at least, which it contains, must be confirmed by collateral testimony, that is by the testimony of those who had no common interest of country, of religion, or of profession, to disguise or falsify the truth. That MOSES was not a cotemporary author is allowed, and that he could have no cotemporary authority, for the greatest part of what he advanced concerning the creation, is proved. Thus far then his writings have no historical authenticity. Let us see whether they have it in any of the other respects which I have mentioned. Were they published among people able to judge of them and of their author? HUETIUS, who writ an evangelical demonstration, and died a sceptic, admits, in his demonstration, that a book, to be deemed authentic, must have been received, as such, in the age which followed immediately the publication of it, and in all the ages which followed this. Has it been sufficiently proved, that the mosaical history was so received? I believe not. There was, it is said, by ABBADIE, I think, a law of MOSES, before ESDRAS, before JOSTAH, and even before DAVID, since this famous prophet and king speaks continually of the law of God, and since all the other prophets quote the most important passages of Deuteronomy. The pentateuch too must have been in their hands, since they shew, very clearly, that they had an exact know-

ledge of the facts contained in Genesis, the least circumstances of which are referred to by them as circumstances that no man could be ignorant of. If MOSES writ the history contained in the book of Genesis, he writ all the other books that compose the pentateuch. ABBADIE assumes that this cannot be denied, and that MOSES must needs have been a good scribe, since it was he who recorded, in writing, the words of the covenant made at Horeb.

It would be hard to find an example of greater trifling: for when we have allowed that the authors of the old testament, from DAVID down to ESDRAS, speak not only of the law, but refer to many of the facts related in the pentateuch, it will not follow necessarily that the pentateuch, which we have in our hands, was published in the time of MOSES or immediately after it. Much of the history, and some of the law, perhaps, contained in the writings ascribed to MOSES, came down to those who quote them, by traditions of uncertain original, tho they were all alike ascribed, by the Jews, to the same legislator. This cannot appear improbable to any one who considers, that establishments said to be made according to the law of MOSES, when the custom of reading this law once in seven years to the people was neglected, and when they had actually no body of law extant amongst them, are mentioned sometimes in the bible. This had been the case when HILKIAH found the law in the temple, which had been lost long before, and continued to be so, during the first eighteen or twenty years of good JOSIAH's reign. That the book, thus found, contained nothing but the law of MOSES, strictly so called, or than the recapitulation of it, made in Deuteronomy, not the mosaical history, we may, nay we must conclude, from the little time that the reading the book in the presence of the king,

king, and before it was sent by his order to the prophetess HULDAH, took up.

THE Jews had an oral, as well as a written law, and the former has been deemed even more important than the latter. The former however consisted of nothing more than traditions, which the rabbin JUDA HAKKODOSH, of the holy, compiled, six or seven centuries after ESDRAS had compiled the canon of the scriptures. In short, there seems to have been two collections of antient jewish traditions made at different times; and the authors, who preceded ESDRAS, might quote those of one sort, as authentic facts and divine laws, just as well as the doctors, who preceded rabbi JUDA, quoted those of the other, as a commentary on them given by God himself on mount Sinai. It will be said, I know, that the authenticity of the pentateuch, given us by ESDRAS, is sufficiently proved, by the conformity it has, in most instances, with the pentateuch of the Samaritans, that is of the Cuthaeans, a people sent from the other side of the Euphrates by SALMANASAR to inhabit the country of Samaria, which he had depopulated. This people knew nothing of the mosaical law till ASARHADDON, the successor of SALMANASAR, sent a priest of the Jews to instruct them in it, who might carry, for aught we know, a pentateuch written in antient Hebrew characters with him. I enter into no examination of these precarious accounts, lest I should go out of my depth; neither need I to do so: for if we allow that the pentateuch was public before the time of ESDRAS, JOSIAH, or even DAVID, will it follow that it was so as early as would be necessary to answer that condition of authenticity, which we speak of here? Was there not time more than enough between MOSES and DAVID to make fabulous traditions pass for authentic history? Did it take up near so much to establish the divine authority of the alcoran among the Arabs, a people not
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more incapable to judge of MAHOMET and his book, than we may suppose the Israelites to judge of MOSES, and his book, if he left any, whether of law alone, or of history and law both?

THE time that the Israelites passed from the Exode under MOSES, and the four centuries, that they passed afterwards under their judges, may be compared, well enough, to the heroical age of the Greeks. Marvellous traditions descended from both, and their heroes were much alike. Those of the Greeks were generally bastards of some god or other, and those of the Jews were always appointed by God to defend his people, and to destroy their enemies. But AOD, one of these, was an assassin, and JEPHTHA, another, was a captain of banditti, as DAVID was, till, by the help of the priests, he obtained the crown; after which, under him, and his son SOLOMON, the government of the Israelites took a better form; arts and sciences were cultivated; and their historical age might begin. It has been urged, by those who scruple little what they say, that the four centuries, which the Israelites passed under their judges, were times of adversity and oppression, wherein they had something else to do than to invent fabulous traditions, or that if any such were invented so near the times of MOSES and JOSHUA, they must have been detected by the Israelites themselves, who would have been far from encouraging traditions so injurious to neighbouring nations, of whom they had reason to stand in awe. Thus it seems that times of ignorance, barbarity, and confusion, were the most unlikely to give rise and currency to fables, and the most proper to preserve the truth of traditions, which must, for this ridiculous reason, have come down uncorrupted and unmixed. One can hardly imagine any thing so extravagant, and yet I can quote, from ABBADIE, a way of reasoning that is more so. You have thought,

I doubt not, hitherto, like other men of sense, that the consistency of a narration is one mark of its truth; but this great divine will teach you, that the inconsistency, not the consistency, is such a mark. MOSES, he says, is so inconsistent with himself, that he establishes the existence of one God, and then talks as if there were many. He introduces JACOB wrestling against God, and the mortal comes off victorious. Could he have advanced such an apparent absurdity, if the fact had not been true? He advanced it, because he knew it to be true, tho he did not understand it. Just so he talked of several lords, who appeared to ABRAHAM under the forms of angels, without knowing what he said, tho ABBADIE knew that the angel of the covenant was one of them: by which I profess myself not to know what ABBADIE meant, or what they mean, who say, that this angel was the son of God. Thus a new rule is added to the canon of criticism by this learned divine.

ANOTHER condition of the authenticity of any human history, and such alone we are to consider in this place, is, that it contain nothing repugnant to the experience of mankind. Things repugnant to this experience are to be found in many, that pass however for authentic; in that of LIVY, for instance: but then these incredible anecdotes stand by themselves, as it were, and the history may go on without them. But this is not the case of the pentateuch, nor of the other books of the Old Testament. Incredible anecdotes are not mentioned seldom and occasionally in them. The whole history is founded on such, it consists of little else, and if it were not an history of them, it would be an history of nothing. These books become familiar to us before we have any experience of our own. The strange stories they relate, represented in pictures or in prints, are the amusements of our infancy; we read them, as soon as we learn to read, and they make their

their impressions on us, like the tales of our nurses. The latter are soon effaced, tho sometimes, with difficulty; because no one takes care to preserve them, and care is taken, in a good education, to destroy them. But the others are industriously renewed, and the most superstitious credulity grows up along with us. We may laugh at Don QUIXOTE, as long as we please, for reading romances till he believed them to be true histories, and for quoting archbishop TURPIN with great solemnity; but when we speak of the pentateuch, as of an authentic history, and quote MOSES, as solemnly as he did TURPIN, are we much less mad than he was? When I sit down to read this history with the same indifference as I should read any other, for so it ought to be read, to comply with all that archbishop TILLOTSON requires of us, I am ready to think myself transported into a sort of fairy-land, where every thing is done by magic and enchantment; where a system of nature, very different from ours, prevails; and all I meet with is repugnant to my experience, and to the clearest and most distinct ideas I have. Two or three incredible anecdotes, in a decade of LIVY, are easily passed over; I reject them, and I return, with my author, into the known course of human affairs, where I find many things extraordinary, but none incredible. I cannot do this in reading the history of the Old Testament. It is founded in incredibility. Almost every event contained in it is incredible in its causes or consequences, and I must accept or reject the whole, as I said just now. I can do no otherwise, if I act like an indifferent judge, and if I give no more credit to MOSES than to any other historian. But I need say no more on this head. No one, except here and there a divine, will presume to say, that the histories of the Old Testament are conformable to the experience of mankind and to the natural course of things. I except here and there a divine, because I remember one, who speaking of the conversation of the serpent with

with the first woman, and the other circumstances of the fall of man, (that he may avoid the explanations given by the rabbins of this story, or that of PHILO, a little less extravagant than the others, all which turned the whole into allegory) has the front to assert, that there is nothing incredible in this relation, literally understood.

THE next condition of historical authenticity is this, that the facts, the principal facts at least, be confirmed by collateral testimony. By collateral testimony I mean the testimony of those, who had no common interest of country, of religion, or of profession, to disguise or falsify the truth, as I expressed myself above. Thus too it is necessary that we express ourselves in order to prevent a common theological sophism. HUETIUS says, in the place to which I have referred already, that an history is deemed to be true, when other histories relate the same facts, and in the same manner. But it is not enough that the same facts are related, even in cotemporary, or nearly cotemporary books; since if the authors of these books were such as I describe, all these testimonies would be in effect but one, as all those of the Old Testament, which confirm the mosaical history, are in truth but one, the testimony of MOSES himself.

JOSEPHUS attempts to support this history by collateral testimonies, those of Egyptians, Phoenicians, Chaldaeans, and even Greeks. But these testimonies, were they never so full to his purpose, would cease to be collateral testimonies, by coming thro' him who had a common interest of country and religion to disguise and to falsify truth. If we examine the use he makes of the fragments he cites from MANETHO, concerning the shepherd-kings, and many other citations in his works, we shall find abundant reason to suspect him of both. EUSEBIUS is a collateral witness, as little as he, and yet from these two quivers principally have all the arrows employed to defend

the authenticity of the Old Testament, been drawn. They are blunt indeed, and nothing can be more trifling than the use that has been made of them by antient and modern scholars. Whenever these men find, in profane history or tradition, the least circumstance that has any seeming relation to sacred history, they produce it as collateral testimony, and sometimes even the similitude of sounds is employed for the same purpose, with a great apparatus of learning. But nothing can be more impertinent than this learning. The man who gives the least credit to the mosaic history for instance, will agree, very readily, that these five books contain traditions of a very great antiquity, some of which were preserved and propagated by other nations, as well as by the Israelites, and by other historians, as well as by MOSES. Many of them may be true too; but, I think, they will not serve to vouch for one another in the manner they must do to become such collateral testimonies as are required. That the Israelites had a leader and legislator called MOSES, is proved by the consent of foreign, whom I call collateral, witnesses. Be it so. But surely it will not follow, that this man conversed with the supreme Being face to face, which these collateral witnesses do not affirm. The Israelites were an egyptian colony and conquered Palestine. Be it so. It will not follow, that the red-sea opened a passage to them, and drowned the Egyptians who pursued them. It will not follow, that the possession of the land of Canaan was promised to their father ABRAHAM four hundred years before, as a consequence of the vocation of this patriarch, and of an alliance which God made with him and with his family. A great number of instances might be brought of the same kind; and such instances might serve to prove the authenticity of those histories, which the monk of Viterbo endeavoured to impose on the world under the names of MEGASTHENES and other antient writers, just as well as they serve to prove the
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authenticity of those which we ascribe to MOSES, or JOSHUA, or any other supposed writers of the Old Testament.

THE three or four antient neighbouring nations, of whom we have some knowledge, seemed to have had a common fund of traditions, which they varied according to their different systems of religion, philosophy, and policy. We may observe this, if we compare the traditions of the Arabs, descended from the Ismaelites, with those of the Jews, descended from the Israelites. Human tradition for human tradition, the former deserve as much credit as the latter. Why then do we put so great a difference between them? Have we any reason for it, except the affirmation of one of the parties? ABBADIE will tell you that we have, because the Jews were a people of sages and philosophers. The best excuse, that can be made for the poor man, is to say, that he became, soon afterwards, mad enough to study the apocalypse, and to believe that he found an hidden sense in it. The truth is, that ignorance and superstition, pride, injustice, and barbarity were the peculiar characteristics of this people of sages and philosophers. The principles of their religion formed them to every part of this character. Their priests, who had the care of their religion and the keeping of their records, as we are told, maintained them in it; and whether their history was such, as we see it, before the days of ESDRAS and NEHEMIAS, or nothing more than broken traditions, collected and put together by them in the present form, thus much is certain, that the same spirit breathes thro' the whole, and that the character of the nation appears evidently in every part of the composition. It has been said, I know, of the pride of this people particularly, that their scriptures were not contrived to flatter them in it, since their revolts, their apostacies, and the punishments which followed them, as well as the discourses of their prophets,

filled with the most mortifying reproaches, and the most terrible threatenings on the part of God, are set forth in these books with every aggravating circumstance. But this evasion will strengthen, instead of weakening, what I have said. It is true that the Jews are often represented in them like rebellious children, but they are always represented like favorite children. They abandon God's law and his worship; they depose him; they choose another king in his place; still his predilection for this chosen people subsists, and if he punishes, it is only, like an indulgent parent, to reclaim them, and to shew them the same favor as before. In short, he renews all his promises to them; future glory and triumph; a Messiah; a kingdom that shall destroy all others, and last eternally, "consumet universa regna et ipsum stabit in eternum." Thus was the pride of this people kept up by incredible stories about the past, and incredible prophecies about the future; and with their pride, even to this day, their ignorance, their enthusiastical superstition, and in principle, if not in effect for want of power, their injustice and their barbarity. Thus we see that the authenticity of the mosaical history and the other histories of the Old Testament has no sufficient collateral testimony, but rests, solely, or principally, on the good faith of a people who deserve, on many accounts, to be trusted the least; and of whom we may say, that it is improbable their history should have been written, and impossible that it should have been preserved, with a strict regard to truth.

I MIGHT rest the matter here, if it did not come into my thoughts to expose a sophism that has been employed by those who defend the authenticity of this history. If they cannot shew that it is confirmed by collateral and foreign testimony, cotemporary or nearly cotemporary, they hope to confirm it by assuming that relics continued long among the Jews, and that

that festivals and ceremonious institutions continue still, all which are so many cotemporary proofs; since they must have been cotemporary, in their origin, with the facts to which they are relative. The proof is precarious, in the mouth of one of your divines, who have abused it to establish so many pious frauds, and the belief of so many foolish legends; but it becomes contemptible, when it is employed by one of our divines, who declaim so much against the use that has been made of it in your church. With what face can he talk to us, like ABBADIE, of the rod of AARON, of the pot of manna, or of the figures that represented rats and the privy parts of the Philistines? Would the man prove his sincerity to us, as he proves that of MOSES, by his contradictions and inconsistencies?

THE relics, so long preserved, exist no where out of the books whose historical authenticity they are advanced to prove, and if they did exist, we should be obliged to reject them, or to admit many of the grossest impositions that have passed on popular credulity. Did not the priests of Delphi shew the very stone that SATURN swallowed, when he intended to devour JUPITER? Was there not an olive-tree at Troezena or somewhere in Greece, in the time of PAUSANIAS, which bloomed and bore fruit, which had been the club of HERCULES, and which this hero had planted, just as JOSEPH of Arimathaea planted his stick, that became a miraculous thorn at Glastonbury?—The institution of festivals and ceremonies proves as little as relics. Tho' supposed cotemporary, they may owe their original to some fabulous traditions; or if really cotemporary, they serve as well to prove all the ridiculous circumstances, that have been blended with the tradition, in process of time, as the fact which they were designed to record. The Israelites had their sabbath of days, their sabbath of years, and their weeks of years. Will it follow that God was employed
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fix days in the laborious work of the creation, and that he rested the seventh? The passover and other institutions served to commemorate the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt, and their transmigration into Palestine. But will they serve likewise to commemorate all the incredible circumstances which had been added to the tradition of a very credible, and, no doubt, of a very true event? Collateral testimony proves the event; but these supposed cotemporary institutions cannot stand in lieu of collateral testimony to prove the circumstances. Whether the event be true, or whether it be false, such institutions will confound the truth of the event with the falsehood of the circumstances in one case, and will vouch for both alike, in the other. The death of MOSES, who certainly died, is confounded with the circumstances that accompany it in the last chapter of Deuteronomy; circumstances absurd and profane; and yet, if the Jews commemorate the true fact, they must commemorate, on this principle, all the circumstances that are related in the bible, and in their oral traditions. A good iman believes piously the ascension of MAHOMET, on the faith of his traditions, and of the ceremony, by which it is annually commemorated. The ascension and the circumstances of it are false alike, the ceremony vouches for all alike; and he must believe, not only the ascension of MAHOMET, but that the angel GABRIEL brought, by night, to his sepulchre a flying horse, called Borak, which the prophet mounted and rode on horseback into heaven. Shall the annual ceremony, which confirms the whole account alike, make us believe that MAHOMET went to heaven, or hinder us from placing this story in the same class with that of ASTOLPHUS and his hypogryphe? We shall believe no part of it; but the good iman is obliged to believe the whole.

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THE little I have said makes it plain enough, and more particulars in so plain a case would be superfluous, that if we take TILLOTSON at his word, if we give only the same credit to MOSES, which we give to every other historian, and no more, his history cannot pass, according to any rule of good sense or true criticism for authentic. But other divines are not so generous; they give up nothing; and, therefore, when they cannot maintain weak arguments of one kind, they have recourse to another hypothesis, and affirm this history to have been writ by men under the immediate influence of divine inspiration, and to be, therefore, of divine authority. For this they have the word of JOSEPHUS, and the unanimous attestation of the jewish and christian churches. But all this will not amount to proof, unless it may be said, that they who cannot give to this history even the appearance of human, can give it the appearance of divine authenticity. That sameness of spirit, which runs thro all this history, and which appears in all the writings of the jewish prophets, confirms one thing that JOSEPHUS says. A distinct order of men, priests and prophets, among the Jews, as well as the Egyptians, published the sacred writings of these people, and these writings were received on the faith of this order of men, who had the same temptations to impose, and the same opportunities of imposing, in both countries. JOSEPHUS boasts all the integrity of these men, and the strict regard which they paid to truth, in Egypt, as well as in Palestine, and his testimony will be of as much weight, in favor of one, as in favor of the other, that is of none at all. The sacred writings of the Egyptians had no more authority out of Egypt than the polytheism, superstition, and idolatry of other nations gave them; and the sacred writings of the Jews were never received as such, out of Judaea, till the propagation of christianity carried them abroad. Christi-
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anity abrogated the law, and confirmed the history of MOSES, from the time, at least, when St. PAUL undertook, like a true cabalistical architect, with the help of type and figure, to raise a new system of religion on the old foundations.

No proof of this kind, therefore, affording pretence to say, that the scriptures of the Israelites, any more than those of the Egyptians, are of divine authority; our divines turn themselves to declaim on certain undoubted marks of it, which are to be found, they assume, in the books themselves that the canon of the Old Testament contains. Let us say something on this subject. It deserves our utmost attention. Let us compare some of these supposed marks of a divine original with those of an human original, which will stare us in the face, and point out, plainly, the fraud and the imposture. I use these words with great freedom. I think myself obliged, in conscience, to do so, and before I conclude, you shall judge of the reasons for which I think in this manner and hold this language.

We are told, in some theological declamations, that the revelation made to the Israelites and taught in their scriptures, corrected the false ideas of paganism, as it appears by the examples of SOCRATES and PLATO, who borrowed, from the writings of the Jews, the best and soundest parts of their philosophy, which has been proved over and over by learned antiquaries*. It is a sufficient answer to this, to say, that the fact is false. Christians, as well as Jews, have asserted it; but it is false to say, that they have proved it. Neither PLATO, nor SOCRATES, nor PYTHAGORAS, nor the Egyptians and Chaldaeans, their masters, appear to have borrowed any thing from the Jews, tho' MOSES had been instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and tho' the Jews, both before and after ESDRAS, borrowed evidently,

* Vide ABBADIE.

as evidently as any such thing can appear at this distance of time, from the Egyptians, the Chaldaeans, and even the greek philosophers, from PLATO and from ZENO for instance. At other times we are told, that the soul of man knows neither whence it came nor whither it is to go, that these are points concerning which human reason must be always in doubt, and which were clearly determined by the jewish revelation. We find this asserted very magisterially, but, if we have recourse to the Bible, we find no such thing. MOSES did not believe the immortality of the soul, nor the rewards and punishments of another life, tho it is possible he might have learned these doctrines from the Egyptians, who taught them very early, and yet not so early, perhaps, as they taught that of the unity of God. When I say that MOSES did not believe the immortality of the soul, nor future rewards and punishments, my reason for it is, that he taught neither, when he had to do with a people, whom even a theocracy could not restrain, and on whom, therefore, terrors of punishment future as well as present, eternal as well as temporary, could never be too much multiplied, nor too strongly inculcated. MOSES, the greatest of their prophets, knew nothing of this immortality, and SOLOMON, the wisest of their kings, decides against it. The texts in EZEKIEL, and others, which are alledged to prove that this doctrine was part of the jewish system, are too modern to prove it, and they admit, besides, of a different sense. In short, this doctrine does not appear to have prevailed amongst them, till they became acquainted with greek philosophy, and instead of lending to PLATO borrowed from him. This pretended mark of divinity may be ascribed therefore, if it be one, to pagan philosophy, but it cannot be so to jewish theology; and, I cannot help using an expression of one of these declaimers*, who write as if they were preaching,

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* ABBADIE.

and to apply it to the whole tribe. They would do well to think a little better beforehand, and to respect their readers a little more.

WHEN these men talk of the characters of a divine original, which are to be found in the books of the Old Testament, They must mean nothing, or they must mean to say, that these books are more perfect, according to our ideas of human perfection, whether we consider them as books of law or of history, than any other writings that are avowedly human. Now if this be what they mean, nothing can be more false. They cannot deny that pagan philosophers enjoined a general benevolence, a benevolence not confined to any particular society of men, but extended to the great commonwealth of mankind, as a first principle of the law of our nature. The law of the Jews exacted from them all the duties necessary to maintain peace and good order among themselves, and if this be a mark of divinity, the laws, which rapparees and banditti establish in their societies, have the same. But the first principles, and the whole tenor of the jewish laws, took them out of all moral obligations to the rest of mankind, and if MOSES did not order them to have no benevolence for any, who were not Jews, "*erga nullum hominem benevolos esse*," as LYSIMACHUS pretended, yet is it certain, that their law, their history, and their prophecies, determined them to think themselves a chosen race, distinct from the rest of mankind in the order of God's providence, and that they were far from owing to other men, what other men owed to them and to one another. This produced a legal injustice and cruelty in their whole conduct, and there is no part of their history wherein we shall not find examples of both, authorised by their law, and pressed upon them by their priests and their prophets.

IN the systems of pagan philosophy we are exhorted, says another of these declaimers, to love virtue for her own sake; but the Jewish divines, rising much higher, exhorted us to love virtue for the sake of God. But can there be any thing so impiously interested and craving, as the sentiments ascribed to the patriarchs by MOSES, and the principles of his own law? "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, than shall the Lord be my God, and this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee.*" This was JACOB'S vow, and the conditional engagement which he took with God. If we turn to the xxviiiith chapter of Deuteronomy, we shall find that MOSES, on the renewal of the covenant between God and the people, employs no arguments, to induce the latter to a strict observation of it, of an higher nature than promises of immediate good, and threatenings of immediate evil. They are exhorted to keep the law; not for the sake of the law, not for the sake of God, but for considerations of another kind, and wherein not only their wants were to be supplied, but all their appetites and passions to be gratified. If they hearkened diligently to the voice of the Lord, they were to be set on high above all the nations of the earth; they were to be the head, and not the tail; to be above only and not beneath; all the people of the earth were to fear them; all their enemies were to be smitten before their face, and they who came out against them, one way, were to fly before them seven. These were objects of ambition. Their basket and their store were to be blessed, they were to grow rich, they were to lend to many nations, and to borrow from none. These were

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* Gen. vi. 28.

objects of avarice. They were to be blessed every where, in the city and in the field, in the fruit of their bodies, in the fruit of their ground, and in the fruit of their cattle, and of their flocks of sheep. These were objects of all their other appetites and passions. God purchased, as it were, the obedience of a people, he had chosen long before, by this mercenary bargain. It was ill kept on their part; and the law, with all these sanctions, was continually violated, sometimes rejected, and had in no degree a force sufficient to maintain itself in observation and reverence.

THE most excellent constitutions of human government and systems of human law become often useless, and even hurtful, either in a natural course of things, or by extraordinary conjunctures, which the wisdom of legislators could not foresee. One of the most conceivable perfections of a law is, that it be made with such a foresight of all possible accidents, and with such provisions for the due execution of it, in all cases, that the law may be effectual to govern and direct these accidents, instead of lying at the mercy of them. Such a law would produce its effect, by a certain moral necessity resulting from itself, and not by the help of any particular conjuncture. We are able to form some general notions of laws thus perfect; but to make them is above humanity. Another of the most conceivable perfections of a law consists in the clearness and precision of its terms, and, even in this, the greatest legislators have often failed. The terms become equivocal or obscure, if they were not so originally, by the endeavours of those who fear the law, to elude it, and of those who get by their explanations or judgments, to perplex the meaning of it. But that which is ideal perfection not real among men, will be found, no doubt, and ought to be expected, when God is the legislator. If it is not so found, all that can be

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said about marks of divinity in any law, that pretends to be revealed and enacted by God, is mere cant.

To apply these reflections the more strongly, it will be proper to consider the law of MOSES, relatively to the first of the perfections mentioned, as a law given to the Israelites alone, and to consider, relatively to the second, the whole body of their law, and their history, which is a sort of commentary on their law, not only as given to them, but as given to all mankind, for purposes the most important to their common welfare. If eternal Wisdom dictated the laws and inspired these historians and prophets, in all their writings, eternal wisdom knew all the uses they were to serve in time; and by consequence, whether we regard the jewish oeconomy alone, or that of judaism and christianity together, the whole system of law, history, and prophecy, must be exactly proportioned, as the means to all these ends.

ON the first head we cannot read the Bible without being convinced, that no law ever operated so weak and so uncertain an effect, as the law of MOSES did. Far from prevailing against accidents and conjunctures, the least was sufficient to interrupt the course and to defeat the designs of it; to make that people not only neglect the law, but cease to acknowledge the legislator. To prevent this, was the first of these designs, and if the second was, as it was no doubt, and as it is the design or pretence of all laws, to secure the happiness of the people, this design was defeated, as fully as the other; for the whole history of this people is one continued series of infractions of the law and of national calamities. So that this law, considered as the particular law of this nation, has proved more ineffectual than any other law, perhaps, that can be quoted. If this be ascribed to the hardness of heart and obsti-

obstinacy of the people, in order to save the honor of the law, this honor will be little saved, and it's divinity ill maintained. This excuse might be admitted in the case of any human law ; but we speak here of a law supposed to be dictated by divine wisdom, which ought, and which would have been able, if it had been such, to keep in a state of submission to it, and of national prosperity, even a people rebellious and obstinate enough to break thro any other. If it be said, that the law became ineffectual by the fault of those who governed the people, their judges and their kings, let it be remembered that these judges and kings were of God's appointment, for the most part at least ; that he himself is said to have been their king, during several ages ; that his presence remained amongst them, even after they had deposed him ; and that the high-priest consulted him, on any emergency, by the Urim and Thummim. Occasional miracles were wrought to enforce the law, but this was a standing miracle that might serve both to explain and enforce it, by the wisdom and authority of the legislator, as often as immediate recourse to him was necessary. Can it be denied, that the most imperfect system of human laws would have been rendered effectual by such means as these ?

It may not be amiss here to compare the effect of this law, before the captivity of Babylon, with that which it had afterwards.—Ten tribes of this chosen people had been, for their disobedience, dispersed, and, we may say, lost in the east, long before the reign of NEBUCHODONOSOR. This prince completed the ruin of the whole nation. He burned their temple, and their city, and carried the two remaining tribes into captivity. This captivity is said to have lasted but seventy years, and the Jews had carried into it so little respect for their law, so little regard to their history, and so little trust in the
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prophecies, which had been published both before and during this time, that they seemed to have forgot them all when CYRUS gave them permission to return to their country, and to rebuild their temple. He did more than give them permission; he gave them encouragement, and, among other instances of it, he restored the sacred vessels, which had been taken from them. What happened on this great revolution? ZOROBABEL gathered, with much trouble, a small number of the Jews, who were willing to return into their own country on this great revolution, and even these were the dregs of the people. The most considerable of them, and, among these, twenty of the four and twenty orders of priests that had been carried to Babylon, chose rather to stay there than to return to the holy city, tho that was the place appointed by God for their sacrifices, and the most august ceremonies of their religion. Fourscore years intervened between the return of ZOROBABEL and the arrival of ESDRAS at Jerusalem. The temple and the city, probably, had been rebuilt, but the law cannot be said to have been restored. Many things, directly contrary to it, were practised openly and without scruple. Thus, for example, not only the people, but the Levites and the priests, married strange women, women who were not of their own country. ESDRAS, and NEHEMIAS after him, neglected nothing to restore and preserve the observation of the law, and for this purpose they took means very different from those which MOSES had instituted, and much more effectual. One of these means, and perhaps the most effectual, was the institution of synagogues, which became so numerous, that wherever there were ten Jews, it is said, there was a synagogue. In these the law was read and explained once every week; whereas it was to be read but once in seven years, and the people were obliged to go up to Jerusalem to hear it, according to the mosaic institution. The consequence was, that,
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notwithstanding some schisms, some apostacies, and other revolutions, which happened in the church and state, the Jews, in general, signalised themselves by a greater and more constant attachment to their religion and law.

ANOTHER perfection of law consists in the clearness and precision of the terms; and, in these respects, we propose to consider this body of history, of prophecy, and of law, relatively not to the Jews alone, but to the rest of the world likewise. Now the language in which this law was given, and in which we must suppose that the histories and prophecies were written, as well as the law, unless we suppose these to have been written in, or after the time of ESDRAS, is, the learned say, of all languages the most loose and equivocal; and the style and manner of writing of the sacred authors, whoever they were, or whenever they lived, increase the uncertainty and obscurity even of any other language. How should it be otherwise, when the same passages may be taken in historical, mystical, literal, and allegorical, senses, and when those who writ them, knew so little what they writ, that they foretold some future, when they imagined they were relating some past, event? LORD BACON, indeed, says, that the sacred authors had a special privilege of recording the future, as well as the past, in history. But I suppose his lordship to have been no more in earnest when he said this, than he was in writing his christian paradoxes. To supply these defects, the Jews have recourse to an oral law, and christians to the decisions of councils. Strange methods indeed! history may explain or controul tradition but it is quite absurd to explain or controul history, by tradition. Councils were composed of men, whose pretensions to inspiration deserve nothing but our contempt, and, therefore, it is equally absurd to explain or controul the word of God, by the judgment of these

these men, whether in their assemblies, or separately. St. JEROM complains, in one of his letters,* that they dragged the text to favor their particular sentiments, how repugnant soever to it. But this text does not seem to want so much dragging. The ambiguity of it makes it supple enough, and sentiments, the most contrary to one another, are equally well supported by it. If we add to these considerations that of the infinite number of copies, of versions, and of versions of versions, which have given occasion to many alterations and interpolations, that are to be found, without going to SPINOZA, to HOBBS, or to the fanciful author of the pre-adamitical system, we must be, I think, convinced, that the Bible, which we call the word of God, is as little fit, by the manner in which it has been preserved, to be an uniform foundation of universal religion, as by the manner in which it was writ and first published to the world.

DIVINES have their answer ready, and I hear, methinks, a great bishop of your church ask me, with that air of superiority, to which no man of his age had a better claim, whether the authenticity of these books diminishes, because some explanatory additions may have been inserted, because some errors may have slipped by accident into the text, or because the mistakes of copists have given occasion to various readings? Shew me, says the right reverend person, if you can, any law, any doctrine, any ceremony, any miracle, or any prophecy, that has been added! Are not all the writings of the profane authors, whom you deem authentic, come down to you in the same manner as those of the holy penmen? I reply, my objection and my complaint are, that the manner in which these books were writ, were published, and have been preserved, make it impossible to do this. Could we do it, could

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* Ad PAUL.

we distinguish between what is original and what not, the objection would vanish and the complaint cease. But both will remain in force till then; because of the vast difference that there is between the importance of these and of all other writings. The laws of PLATO, the odes of HORACE, and the history of LIVY, may have been corrupted without any ill consequence to those who read them. But the same cannot be said of the laws of MOSES, of the psalms of DAVID, and of the history of the Old Testament.

I HAVE been long enough on the defensive. It is time I should attack in my turn, and shew you for what reasons I cannot believe that the pentateuch, and the other books of the Old Testament, were writ under a divine influence, and have any right to be called the word of God. There may be some defects in human laws, some falsities or mistakes in human histories, and yet both of them may deserve all the respect and all the credit, on the whole, that the writings of fallible men can deserve. But any one defect, any one falsity, or mistake, is sufficient to shew the fraud and imposture of writings that pretend to contain the infallible word of God. Now there are gross defects, and palpable falshoods, in almost every page of the scriptures, and the whole tenor of them is such as no man, who acknowledges a supreme, all-perfect Being, can believe it to be his word. This I must prove; and when I have done so, divines may call me theist, or atheist, if they please. I shall not be ashamed of the first character, and shall leave them to purge themselves of one as absurd as the last.—That the Jews held the unity of God is true, and that their father ABRAHAM might have learned this doctrine among the Egyptians, tho it has been said, very foolishly, that he acquired great wealth by instructing that people in philosophy and the other sciences, is true likewise;

wife; but it will not follow that he, or his posterity, adored the true God. There are many passages in Job, in Isaiah, in the Psalms, and in other parts of the Old Testament, which give most sublime ideas of the majesty of the supreme Being, and which have been founded, for that reason, very high. But it will not be hard to quote mahometan, and even pagan writers, who have spoke of him with as much nobleness of style, and with as much dignity, as any of these; whilst, on the other hand, it will be easy to quote many things, imputed to the supreme Being by these, at least as unworthy of him, as any which the mahometans, or even the most extravagant of the pagans, invented. Sublime expressions, concerning the Deity, may serve to shew, that the imaginations of those who used them, were heated by the enthusiasm of poetry and devotion; they will not prove the writers to have been divinely inspired; and it will become nothing less than blasphemy to assert that they were so, when they impute, at the same time, such things to the Divinity as would bring disgrace on humanity.

I KNOW, for I can demonstrate by connecting the clearest and most distinct of my real ideas, that there is a God, a first intelligent Cause of all things, whose infinite wisdom and power appear evidently in all his works, and to whom, therefore, I ascribe, most rationally, every other perfection, whether conceivable or not conceivable by me. A book is put into my hands, which is, I am told, and have been told from my youth, the word of this God, and wherein I shall find the whole scheme of things which he has established, and the whole oeconomy of his providence. What I learned before by rote, I consider with more attention, and am far from finding in it the supreme Being, whose existence and attributes I demonstrate. The scene opens, indeed, by the creation,

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and this creation is ascribed to one God ; that of the material world, at least : for when this God proceeds to the creation of man, he calls on other Beings, we know not by the text how many, to co-operate with him, and to make man in his and their likenefs. This seems to lay a foundation for polytheism, and I am startled at it, because it is inconsistent with that unity of the Godhead which my reason shews me, and which the general tenor even of the mosaic law and history asserts. The divine, on the contrary, triumphs in the passage ; because he drags it, against reason and this revelation both, to signify the three co-equal Persons in one Godhead, which no reason can comprehend, which no revelation affirms explicitly, and which has no foundation, except that of a theology much more modern than this.

THE more I compare what MOSES says of this God, and by a supposed inspiration from him, the more repugnant I find the whole to be demonstrated, and even to obvious truth. Nothing can better resemble modern rabinical traditions, than these antient and mosaical traditions : the same ignorance of nature, physical and moral, the same irreverent conceptions of the supreme Being prevails in both. MOSES, they say, was divinely inspired, and yet MOSES was as ignorant of the true system of the universe, as any of the people of his age. I need not descend into particulars to shew this ignorance. To evade the objection drawn from it, we are told that he conformed himself to that of the people. He did not write to instruct the Israelites in natural philosophy, but to imprint strongly on their minds a belief of one God, the Creator of all things. Was it necessary to that purpose that he should explain to them the copernican system ? No most certainly. But it was not necessary to this purpose, neither, that he should give them an absurd account, since he thought fit to give

give them one, of the creation of our physical, and we may say, of our moral system. It was not necessary he should tell them, for instance, that light was created, and the distinction of night and day, of evening and morning, were made before the sun, the moon, and the stars, which were "set in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night, and to be for signs and for seasons, and for days and for years." It was not necessary that he should tell them, how this moral system was destroyed, by the wiles of a serpent, and by the eating of an apple, almost as soon as it began, against the intention, as well as command, of the Creator. Besides MOSES must be considered as appointed, and inspired by God, to write, not only for his own age, but for all future ages; for the most enlightened as well as for the most ignorant: in which case, that his history might answer all the designs of eternal wisdom, it should have been proportioned to the ignorance of the Israelites, as little able to understand one system of philosophy as another, without giving so much reason to people, better informed, to believe him as ignorant as any uninspired person could be.

If the ignorance and the errors, which betray themselves very grossly in the writings ascribed to MOSES, make it impossible to believe such an author divinely inspired, the confused, inconsistent, and unworthy notions of a supreme Being, which appear in his writings, shew very evidently, that the true God was unknown to him. He acknowledged but one God, and the people were forbid to worship any other. But then he puts this one God to as many and as unworthy uses, in the service of man, as the heathens put their many gods, of different orders, and he was, therefore, in this respect more inconsistent than they were. The God of MOSES creates the world, makes man, and repents of it immediately, for a reason which he might have prevented by a little less indulgence to,

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what is called, free will. As soon as this indulgence had given an opportunity to the serpent to tempt EVE, and to EVE to tempt ADAM, who should have known the nature of serpents better, since he had just given to all animals the names that were proper to them; in short, as soon as they had eat the forbidden apple, and were fallen, they heard the voice of God, who was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. He condemned them for their disobedience; he cursed the earth, for their sakes, and the serpent above all other beasts. Their eyes were then opened, they knew that they were naked, and they made themselves aprons of fig-leaves, which served to cover their nudity, till God made them coats of skins, for that purpose, and then drove them out of paradise. Thus death and sin entered into the world, and the crime of this unhappy pair was punished in their whole posterity. This strange story, so trifling and so serious, and wherein God is made a principal actor with the serpent and ADAM and EVE, has given occasion to much silly pains that have been taken both by Jews, and Christians, to lessen the absurdity of it, if that were possible. Since it is impossible, some have attempted to explain the whole allegorically, and it may not seem improbable that this allegory had been invented, among other egyptian mysteries, to signify the introduction of physical and moral evil into the world, by the fault of man, and against the design of God. This however cannot be admitted by Christians; for if it was, what would become of that famous text whereon the doctrine of our redemption is founded? The whole therefore must be understood literally, and in that case the God who made the world and man, that is the supreme Being, is the same God who walks in the garden, to enjoy the cool of the evening, who tries this famous cause, and insults our first parents by irony and sarcasm.

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THUS again, and to shew in another instance what inconsistency, as well as absurdity, MOSES imputed to his one God, let us observe, that he makes this God repent a second time that he had made man on the earth, because "he also was flesh, every imagination of his heart was evil, and all flesh had corrupted his way." For this reason he resolved to drown the whole world, and every living creature in it, except one man, called NOAH, his family, and as many birds, and beasts, and creeping things as were necessary to replenish the earth. This resolution taken, the God of MOSES orders NOAH to build an ark, or clumsy chest, in the fashion and in the proportions he prescribes very minutely. This done, he crowds all the living creatures, he intended to save, men, and birds, and beasts, and insects, into the ark; tho' great scholars pretend to shew, by a fair calculation, that far from being crowded, there was ample room for them all in it. As soon as they were in, God shut the door upon them, the deluge began, and had it's full effect. When it was over, and as soon as God smelled the sweet favor of a burnt-offering, on the altar NOAH had erected, he repented again, and resolved not to curse the ground any more for man's sake, nor for a reason, which should have hindered him from doing it at all, tho' he had done it twice already. He established a covenant with NOAH, with his sons, and with their posterity, and that he might remember this covenant, between him and the earth, or every living creature upon the earth, which he had promised to drown no more, he declares to them the institution of a rain-bow, designed to put him in mind of his promise, whenever he should bring a cloud over the earth.

ABRAHAM descended from NOAH by SEM, and God made a new covenant with him and his posterity. The Supreme Being;

condescended to be the tutelary God of ABRAHAM, ISAAC, and JACOB, and under this character he acted a part which a sensible heathen, not transported by presumptuous notions of his own importance, nor by the impudence of enthusiasm, would have thought too mean and too low for any of his inferior gods or daemons. The whole history, from NOAH to ABRAHAM, and from ABRAHAM to the Exode, is a series of tales that would appear fit to amuse children alone, if they were found in any other book, tho they served two great purposes of pride and ambition among an ignorant and barbarous people. They served to give JACOB the preference, over a much better man, over his brother ESAU. He acquired indeed this birth-right, and the prior blessing of a doating father, by a most infamous fraud; but the fraud was sufficient, even in the eye of God, to give the descendants of the younger brother, the Israelities, an entire preference over the descendants of the elder brother, the Edomites, and to set the former in the place of his favorite people. The same tales served the ambition, as well as the pride of the former, who claimed on their authority, as the legitimate offspring of ABRAHAM, a right to the land of Canaan, which God had given to ABRAHAM, and to all the glorious promises, which he had made to that patriarch. The other nations of the earth were plunged in idolatry; God left them in it; he neglected them, and thought it enough to preserve the knowledge of himself, and the purity of his worship, in Palestine: for which purpose he gave a particular law, as well as the country of the Canaanites, to the Israelites. If we consider his laws, as means of preserving monotheism, and the purity of worship, in opposition to polytheism and superstition, we shall find that no means could be worse proportioned to this end. If we consider the manner in which this people was conducted, by God himself, out of Egypt into the promised land; how they acquired the
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possession of it, by his immediate assistance, and by the execution of his orders, signified to their leaders; we shall find, that nothing can be conceived more unworthy of an all-perfect Being. In order to preserve the purity of his worship, he prescribes to them a multitude of rites and ceremonies, founded in the superstitions of Egypt, from which they were to be weaned, or in some analogy to them. He succeeded accordingly. They were never weaned entirely from all these superstitions, and the great merit of the law of MOSES was teaching the people to adore one God, much as the idolatrous nations adored several. This may be called sanctifying pagan rites and ceremonies, in theological language; but it is profaning the pure worship of God, in the language of common sense.—In order to make good his grant to ABRAHAM of the land of Canaan, he orders the posterity of this patriarch to conquer it, and to exterminate the inhabitants. Just so the leaders of Huns, of Goths, and Vandals, might, and did make good their promises with the people who followed them. Just so the Spaniards made good the decree of ALEXANDER the sixth, when they conquered America. PIZARRO was not more cruel than JOSHUA, nor the franciscan monk, who accompanied him in his expedition against ATAHUALPA, so cruel as SAMUEL, who spoke in the name of the Lord. The franciscan monk excited the soldiers to kill the king of Peru in the heat of battle. The jewish priest hewed the king of the Amalekites “to pieces before the Lord,” in cool blood, and SAUL was deposed for the clemency he had shewed, tho he too had exercised cruelty enough to fate any human ferocity.

I AM not ignorant of the arbitrary assumptions, and silly evasions, which are employed to soften and excuse such acts of cruelty, by antient fathers, and modern commentators. You may remember, that we read together, not long ago, the an-

swer which CYRIL of Alexandria writ to the emperor JULIAN, after the death of this emperor. When we laid aside the Billingsgate, and the long recriminations, by which if he could not defend MOSES, he tried to revenge himself on PLATO, we found little, or nothing, in it that deserved attention, except for it's absurdity; for absurdity deserves some attention to warn us against it. The men who justify such cruelties, as I have mentioned, and many others, which might be cited from the Old Testament, upon any hypothesis whatever, must have very ill hearts as well as heads, and he, who imputes them to the supreme Being, is worse than an atheist, tho he pass for a saint.

It is very unnecessary, in writing to you, that I should dwell upon the stale, theological artifices that are employed to get over such objections as have been raised against the books of MOSES, and the other books of the Old Testament. The most absurd things they contain are called, sometimes, types and figures, tho they have no more relation to the things said to be typified and signified by them, than to any thing that passes now in France. Others of the same kind are called allegories, and are explained, not by the book wherein they are found, but by some fanciful commentary on them. Sometimes the order of allegory is inverted, and things, plain in themselves, are assumed to be allegories, in order to establish, upon them, such doctrines as suit theological hypotheses; many examples of which may be found in the writings of St. PAUL. But the great expedient they employ after him likewise, is that of mystery; when things, that stand in flat contradiction to the divine attributes, and that can be neither disguised by allegory, nor softened by analogy, are urged against them. When a theist sees nothing repugnant to the wisdom and power, or any other attributes of a supreme, all-perfect Being,

in the works of God, and therefore thinks himself justified in rejecting the impiety of those who would impose on him, as the word of God, a book which contains scarce any thing that is not so, the divine has recourse to exclamation. Restrain your profane temerity, he cries. The wisdom of God is not like the wisdom of man, nor the justice of God like the justice of man, and who art thou, O man! who presumest to sound the depths of either? There is something so impudent, as well as absurd in this proceeding, that common as it is, one can see no example of it without surprise; for what can any man mean, who insists that I should receive these books, as the word of God, on account of the evident marks of a divine original, which he pretends to shew me in them, and then stops me in this examination, by assuming the very thing that is in question? There are many appearances, no doubt, in the physical and moral systems which may pass for mysteries, because we cannot fully comprehend them; but there is nothing in either of these, repugnant to any excellency which we ought to attribute to the supreme Being. We confess our ignorance, but we do not therefore call in question the divine attributes, nor disbelieve these systems to be his work, nor the law of nature to be his law. Had we the same certainty that the Jewish scriptures were his word, we might reason in the same manner about them. But we cannot believe them to be his word, though we know that the physical and moral systems are his work, whilst we find in them such repugnancies to the nature of an all-perfect Being; not mysteries, but absurdities, not things incomprehensible, but things that imply, manifestly, contradiction with his nature. They imply it so strongly, that if we believe in MOSES and his God, we cannot believe in that God, whom our reason shews us; nay, we must believe against knowledge, and oppose the authority of Jewish traditions to demonstration.

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HERE will I conclude, having said enough, I think, to shew that the beginning of the world is sufficiently proved, by the universality of tradition; that the testimony of MOSES cannot be reputed an historical testimony, if we give no more credit to him than we should give to any other historian; and that we cannot admit his testimony, for divine, without absurdity and blasphemy.