



THE

YOUNG FREETHINKER

RECLAIMED.

WRITTEN FOR THE AMERICAN SUNDAY
SCHOOL UNION,

BY THE

REV. ELIHU W. BALDWIN.

REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.

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Eastern District of Pennsylvania, to wit:

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D. CALDWELL,

Clerk of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

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CHAPTER I.

YOUNG and inexperienced persons are not only apt to be vain of the knowledge they possess, but they frequently imagine themselves extremely learned in those subjects of which they are almost entirely ignorant. This remark my readers will find strikingly exemplified in the case of Henry Hawkins, whom this little volume will introduce to their acquaintance.

Henry had enjoyed greater advantages for learning than most young persons. He had also been, for two years and upwards, a member of the Sabbath-school; but though he learned readily, he had no great liking either to the confinement or the serious exercises of the school; and it was with some difficulty that Mr. Alston, his teacher, could secure his regular attendance. The princi-

pal cause of this indifference probably was, that the parents of Henry, especially his father, had no love for the Christian Sabbath. He was accordingly left to his own choice of the manner in which he would spend its sacred hours, and gradually drew off from the school, until his teacher altogether lost sight of him.

Some years after this occurrence, as Mr. Alston was one morning on his way to the Sabbath-school, he came up to a large collection of boys, engaged in noisy sport. It being the Lord's day, he spoke to them on the impropriety of their conduct; and was proceeding to give them some friendly advice, when his eyes fell upon a countenance that appeared more intelligent than the rest, and somewhat familiar to him. He paused a moment, when the lad, perceiving himself particularly noticed, said rather pertly, "I think you know me, sir; if you do not, I inform you that I am Henry Hawkins."

Mr. A. Henry Hawkins! formerly a member of my Sabbath-school?

HENRY. Yes, sir; but I have done attending Sabbath-schools, a long time since.

Mr. A. I should think so, indeed;—you would not otherwise have been found in such company and employments on a Sabbath morning. I am persuaded, however, that you might better have remained in the school.

H. I am not quite so certain of that matter. There is not much, I find, to be learned from attending it, besides the Bible.

Mr. A. You greatly mistake; for since you were connected with the school, we have procured a handsome library, to which every scholar, who merits the privilege, can have access.

H. That is more than I knew of; but the books are principally in favour of the Bible,—are they not?

Mr. A. Most certainly they are all consistent with the Bible, and not a few of them are meant to recommend and enforce it. You would not, I should hope, esteem them the less on that account?

H. O ho, that is quite another question; I suppose you have heard that my father is a Freethinker, and I am not much short of it.

Mr. A. A Freethinker, Henry!—You are scarcely fourteen yet——

H. I beg your pardon, sir, I am nearer sixteen, and have my mind pretty well made up.

Mr. A. Made up to what?

H. That the Bible does not contain the truth of God, as you Christians pretend; but is a sorry cheat, which he never directed to be written. I have done living by it, and studying it, too.

Mr. A. I am concerned, Henry, to hear you talk in this style.—You certainly cannot have the best means of understanding this subject; and you are, besides, much too young to set up your opinion against the belief of the wisest and best men.

H. So you may judge; but I have different thoughts. You are not informed of all my advantages of understanding those things. You must know that my father has taken great pains with me of late; that I read many publications, and attend infidel meetings constantly. I have studied this subject, I assure you, not a little.

Mr. A. Indeed!—I suspect, then, you would have no objection to paying me a visit, and conversing in a friendly way on so important a subject.

H. None at all, sir;—set your own time; there is nothing to hinder me from coming at any hour I please. But I shall not be in haste to attend the Sabbath-school till I think better of what is taught there.

The reader will, by this time, have perceived the truth of the remark with which this chapter commenced. Henry was indeed too young to render it proper for him to propose his opinions in so flippant and consequential a manner, and altogether too confident in himself. But Mr. Alston was a gentleman of amiable and condescending

manners, as well as an intelligent Christian. He did not rebuke the presumption of Henry, but mentioned a time when he would be at leisure, and encouraged his coming to converse with him. Having done this, he pursued his way to the Sabbath-school, of which he was the superintendent, more deeply impressed than ever with the necessity of implanting good principles in early childhood.



CHAPTER II.

HENRY was faithful to his promise of calling upon Mr. Alston, at the time appointed for their conversation. He came, however, with no very teachable spirit. His ambition and self-conceit led him rather to aim at confuting his former teacher, and gaining a victory to boast of, than to inquire after the good way in which he should walk. As he entered the house, Mr. Alston saluted him in a very friendly manner; being truly glad to have the opportunity to converse with one whom he regarded as a sprightly lad, but miserably deceived in his views of the Holy Bible, and exposed to be drawn into the most destructive courses.

Mr. A. You are then up to your engagement, Henry.

H. Yes, sir; I mean to stick to truth and morality, if I do not to your Bible.

Mr. A. It is right, certainly, to be true and faithful in all things; nor shall I have a worse opinion of you for being frank. But how came you to think so lightly, as I perceive you do, of the Holy Bible?

H. Because I have learned it was all written by wicked men, on purpose to deceive people. And they have succeeded to their wishes, truly; for almost every body thinks the Bible a good book, but not I. There are many other objections——

Mr. A. Let us, however, talk about one thing at a time.

H. As you please, sir.

Mr. A. How, then, I would inquire, have you so certainly ascertained that the Scriptures were written by wicked men, for the sake of deceiving others?

H. O, I am told so by Freethinkers; I have many times read it in the books I mentioned; and I believe it besides.

Mr. A. Have these books, of which you think so highly, or your infidel acquaintance, informed you what were the names of those deceivers, who, they pretend, wrote the Bible?

H. Not as I remember.

Mr. A. Have they informed you in what country they lived?

H. No, sir.

Mr. A. Have they ever told you at what time they wrote the Bible?

H. They have said something about it, but I believe they are not agreed among themselves.

Mr. A. But is it not very strange, that they should declare the Bible to have been written by wicked men, for the sake of imposition, while they cannot inform us either who those men were, in what country, or when they lived?

H. It does appear so, truly. I never thought of that before now.—But they judged them to be wicked men from the character of their writings. Don't you think they did, Mr. Alston?

Mr. A. That is a question, Henry, which belongs rather to yourself to answer. To assist you in doing it, I would inquire, what kind of a Bible a set of wicked men, who should have their own way, might be expected to write? Would they write one that should be suited to their bad character? or one that should entirely condemn it?

H. They would write one that should be like themselves; we don't any of us choose to be condemned, you know.

Mr. A. Tell me, then, what description of wicked persons, in your opinion, wrote the Bible.

H. Why, I have never thought much of what sort they were. They must, I should say, have been liars, or they would never have attempted to deceive us.

Mr. A. You judge correctly, that all deceivers are guilty of lying. But have you never read, how these writers of the Bible condemn liars? How they try to put them out of countenance, and make them afraid of being severely punished for that sin? "Lying lips," they declare, "are an abomination to the Lord." "The Lord doth hate a false witness that speaketh lies." "There shall in no wise enter into it (heaven) any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." "The prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail." "The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts." "All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death." Men who were employed in deceiving the world, could not have written such things against themselves.

H. Very true,—I mistake, they could not have been liars.

Mr. A. What then?

H. They might have been persons bent upon getting money, and so made a Bible to increase their wealth.

Mr. A. But would such persons have written, that "Covetousness is idolatry?" "Ye cannot serve God and mammon?" "The love of money is the root of all evil?" Or, "A rich man shall hardly enter in the kingdom of heaven?" Would they have admonished us, that "While some have coveted after money, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows?"

H. They could not have been lovers of money either, who wrote the Bible. But I judge they were ambitious and conceited persons, who wished to make much of themselves, and wrote the Bible to fill the world with their praise.

Mr. A. Have you then forgotten that the Bible every where condemns proud and ambitious persons, and threatens them with future punishment? It tells us: "The Lord hateth a proud look;" that, he "Resisteth the proud;" that, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall;" and that, "A man's pride shall bring him low." "Except ye be converted," says Christ, "and become as little children," that is, teachable and humble, "ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." And again, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

H. Well, really, I don't know exactly what sort of wicked men could have written

the Bible,—only, I believe, they were wicked at heart.

Mr. A. But do not the Scriptures also condemn such as have evil hearts? Do they not remind us, that “God looketh on the heart?”—that, “if we regard iniquity in our hearts, he will not hear us?” “That the pure in heart shall see God?” There is no book, equally with the Bible, opposed to the indulgence of sinful thoughts and intentions. It leads us to expect, that God will judge men hereafter, and reward them according to the state of their hearts.

H. I cannot deny what you assert; and I begin to doubt whether they were wicked men who composed the Bible.

Mr. A. You may well doubt it, Henry; for such characters will never be found deceiving others at their own expense. Neither liars, nor lovers of money, nor proud and ambitious persons, nor those who indulged any evil or selfish design, could have written the sacred Scriptures. They must have been men of honest intentions, and who thought less of the present life, than of that which is to come. They were persons who would not lie.

H. I perceive they were so, and that I was ignorant of the subject until now.

Mr. A. But if they spake and wrote the truth, they were the servants of God, and have given us his instructions; for they

claim to have been taught of him. Moses and the Prophets, Jesus Christ and his Apostles, give us to understand, that their doctrines are from heaven. You will, therefore, believe, that the Bible contains the truth of God,—will you not?

H. I never heard these arguments before. I must have time to get some one older than myself to help me to confute them.

Mr. A. Do not mistake, my young friend; I have no wish to perplex, but only to instruct you.

H. You have been candid, I acknowledge, and I shall be willing to come again, and tell you more of my objections.

Mr. A. You will be welcome, Henry, to come; only be ingenuous, and remember, it is most important to know what is true on this subject.

CHAPTER III.

THE conversation we have just related, though altogether pleasant and kind, on Mr. Alston's part, resulted differently from what Henry had expected. As I have said, it was his vanity, more than a desire to know the truth, which induced him to visit his for-

mer teacher : he imagined that objecting to the Bible, and being a Freethinker, made him appear great in the eyes of others ; when, in fact, it only betrayed his ignorance and pride. He was therefore extremely mortified to have been so plainly shown his mistakes, and almost resolved not to repeat his visits ; but the inviting manner of Mr. Alston, and his recollecting other objections to the Bible, determined him to go. His infidel friends no doubt afforded him their aid ; so that he again presented himself by the hour appointed at Mr. Alston's.

Mr. A. Well, Henry, I hope you have come prepared to have a candid and serious, as well as friendly conversation, on the divine character of the Bible.

H. I have come with not a few objections, sir, which I should like to have answered.

Mr. A. What are those objections, pray ?

H. The Bible appears to me to contain too many improper accounts of immoral conduct, and describes too many bad characters, of every sort, to be a good book. Besides, those characters are some of them recommended as great saints, without deserving to be thought any better than other people, if quite so good. In short, infidels are agreed, that the Bible is such a book as cannot be safely trusted with many persons.

Mr. A. I am sorry, my young friend, to hear you talk after this manner ; because it

is plain you do not thoroughly understand this subject; and it is more easy to raise needless objections than to get rid of them.

H. How! Do you really think my objections needless?

Mr. A. You shall yourself judge of them after they have been sufficiently discussed. I understand you to hold, that the Bible cannot be a good and holy book, because it contains accounts of much bad conduct and many wicked persons.

H. I do, sir.

Mr. A. Should it not be the object of a holy book to condemn and correct what is evil?

H. I should think so.

Mr. A. But can this be done in the plainest and most striking manner, without describing the conduct it corrects, and the characters it condemns?

H. Perhaps not.

Mr. A. Mention, if you can, some of the wicked actions which are related in the Scriptures.

H. Indeed, I shall not recollect all. But there is Cain who slew his brother, and Noah who got drunk for once, and Jacob who cheated Esau out of his birthright, and David who killed Uriah; besides many others, almost too bad to mention.

Mr. A. But do you understand that the

Bible recommends or palliates the crimes you have mentioned ?

H. I cannot say that it does.

Mr. A. If not, how does its relating them render the Bible an immoral book ?

H. Why, I suppose that the Bible must be of course immoral, if it contains accounts of what is wicked.

Mr. A. I should rather say, that depended upon the manner in which those accounts are given. You would not pronounce any other book immoral, merely because it informed you of a murder, or mentioned the circumstances of a wicked action, which it condemned ?

H. I should not.

Mr. A. The Bible, so far from approving those vices and imperfections of the ancients, which it narrates—every where condemns them. It gives, in many instances, a fearful impression of their destructive consequences and punishment. It tells us how Cain was condemned of God, and became a vagabond in the earth ; how the old world was, for their wickedness, destroyed ; how Jacob and David were made to suffer for their sins. By relating the conduct you have mentioned, it also teaches us how malignant and infectious sin is ; which renders it the more necessary for all, even the best of men, to avoid every temptation to its practice.

H. Very true; but I did not so understand it before now.

Mr. A. Have you ever considered what would actually be the conduct of men, if they followed perfectly the directions of the Bible?

H. Not much, I confess.

Mr. A. But you can easily understand this subject, and how it proves the Bible to be God's book.

H. I should like then to be informed.

Mr. A. How much does the Bible require us to love God?

H. With all our hearts, if I remember.

Mr. A. That is, we must esteem him more highly than any and all other beings; we must even rejoice to do him service, and give him the honour which is due unto him.

H. It is so.

Mr. A. How much does the Bible require us to love our neighbours?

H. As ourselves, I believe.

Mr. A. In other words, we must regard their welfare as we do our own; and no sooner do an injury to their character, their property, or their peace.

H. So I understand it.

Mr. A. Do not the Scriptures also instruct children to honour their parents, and parents to bring up their children in a virtuous and pious manner?

H. They do, sir.

Mr. A. Have not the Scriptures also forbidden murder, drunkenness, falsehood, cheating, profaneness, and idleness? and required us to love our enemies, be temperate, reverence the name of God, and deal justly with all men?

H. What if they have?

Mr. A. You must then perceive, that were we and the whole world to follow the instructions of the Bible, all men would honour God as they ought—would treat each other as brethren—would carefully avoid every species of vice, and live in the practice of every virtue. There would be no longer any disturbers of the peace of society, nor any injurious persons in the world. And all this would come of following the Bible.

H. I cannot deny that it would be so.

Mr. A. How then can you object to the Bible, as an immoral book? Is that book immoral, which would make every person virtuous and good, that should follow its precepts?

H. I must confess I was under a mistake, and did not, as you observed, understand the matter.

Mr. A. I am glad to hear you speak so frankly, Henry, because you were certainly wrong. The Bible is the most desirable of all books, to make one wise and virtuous; and it must be displeasing to God to speak

reproachfully of it. You will find in it no excuse for the sins of any, not even of pious persons; for which reason I am the more persuaded that it is true, and contains the very will of God.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was a frankness in Henry, which, notwithstanding his bad education and his vanity, gave hope of his reformation. His former attendance at the Sabbath-school, had made him acquainted, as the reader will have observed, with many interesting portions of the Scriptures; and had, moreover, impressed his mind with the difference between good and sinful actions. The pains which were subsequently taken to lead him into infidelity, had not completely destroyed his conscience. Still he was foolishly anxious to justify himself in neglecting and despising the sacred Scriptures. And he had scarcely left Mr. Alston's, before he recollected some other objections which he imagined were stronger than any he had already proposed. So he looked over his infidel books, to see how they might be stated to the best advantage, and came back

to Mr. Alston, as confident as before in his unbelief.

H. I forgot, when I was last here, to state a very great objection to the character of the Bible.

Mr. A. But you have the opportunity of doing it now: it shall never be considered too late to propose any difficulty of that sort.

H. Well, then, I don't think that the God which your Bible reveals, is altogether good.

Mr. A. In what respects, Henry?

H. He is a God who delights in the misery, more than in the happiness of his creatures; and in making them do wrong besides. He not only destroyed the old world with a flood of waters, but he commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, and sent the people of Israel to destroy the Canaanites with fire and sword. I could find a number more of such things against him, if I had my books here.

Mr. A. You should, however, be careful, my young friend, to speak with reverence of the God of the Bible.

H. Why so, if I do not believe what the Bible says of him?

Mr. A. Lest, after all, you should find yourself in an error, and the Bible to be true. You believe, I presume, that there is

a God, who made and who governs the world?

H. I do, assuredly—the God of nature.

Mr. A. How do you discern the existence and providence of this God?

H. By the works of nature, and the events which constantly occur around us.

Mr. A. Do you imagine the God of nature has a right to punish men, if they do wrong? And to deprive them of their possessions, and even their lives?

H. I suppose so, because he does it.

Mr. A. You then understand it is he who sends disease and pain, and every calamity that afflicts the earth?

H. Yes, I do.

Mr. A. Pray, Henry, how many of mankind does the God of nature remove from our world, by death, every year?

H. I don't know, indeed.

Mr. A. Not far, it is calculated, from thirty millions.

H. Is it possible?

Mr. A. Yes, so many of the human family die every year. Some of them die in old age, and some young. Some are drowned, some are burned, some are starved to death, some are swallowed up by earthquakes, some perish by the plague, and some by consumption or fever. The world is filled with human sufferings. While I

am speaking, many are no doubt in the agonies of death !

H. Well, that is shocking : it never struck me so before.

Mr. A. Will you then conclude that the God of nature is cruel, and quite indifferent to the happiness of his creatures ?

H. I don't know what to conclude.—It seems very cruel to treat mankind in this way.

Mr. A. But if you allowed the Bible to be from God, it would help you out of this difficulty. Men are not now, it declares, as they once were. God made them like himself—just and good ; but they have become enemies to him, by wicked works. Instead of loving him, and doing him service, they break his laws, blaspheme his name, and forget all his benefits. They also hate, deceive, rob, and kill one another. By this apostacy from God, they have entirely forfeited his favours, and rendered themselves deserving of the severest punishments. For this reason, he sent a flood of waters upon the old world, and a storm of fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah ; and appointed the Israelites to destroy the people of Canaan. It is because we are sinful creatures, who deserve to be treated as criminals ; and not because God delights in our misery, that we are thus appointed to suffer and die.

H. But could it have been right for God to direct Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and to send the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites?

Mr. A. God has undoubtedly a right to dispose of our life as he pleases—to continue it under any circumstances, or to take it away by any means; but you will observe that he gave Abraham the command to sacrifice Isaac, for a trial of his faith; and never intended that he should be actually suffered to do it. He sent the Israelites to destroy the people of Canaan, that he might show to the world how much he abhorred their disgraceful crimes. The iniquity of the Amorites was full. It was right for God to do all this, because they were his creatures who had rebelled against him, and therefore deserved to die.

H. But does not the Bible represent God as cruel in the treatment of his creatures?

Mr. A. Very far from it, Henry: the Bible represents him to us as entirely just and benevolent. "He sendeth rain," says an apostle, "upon the just, and the unjust." "The Lord is good," says the author of the Psalms, "his mercy endureth for ever." If you go to the Bible for his character, you will find, that while he punishes wicked men, he graciously rewards and blesses them that do well. Remember how he treated Noah, when he destroyed the old

world ; and Abraham, and Moses, and many others, whom he called to be his servants. He has also had compassion on the sinners of mankind, and has sent his Son to make provision for their being saved. This way of salvation he explains to us in the gospel of his Son ; and is not willing that any should perish, but rather that they should turn unto him and live. The God of the Bible, is full of goodness and mercy.

H. But will he not, according to the Bible, send those hereafter to a place of punishment, who do not, in this life, come to repentance ?

Mr. A. He has so declared ; but that does not render him cruel, because he will never punish any who have not deserved it ; and he sends the offer of pardon and eternal life to all men. Tell me, however, what you know about the mercy of the God of nature.

H. I cannot say that I know much respecting it. I suppose that he is merciful.

Mr. A. Why do you suppose it, since so many of his creatures daily perish ?

H. He does us good at the same time.

Mr. A. The God of nature does good unto all. He is, in truth, the very God whom the Scriptures reveal and describe ; and it is from the Bible chiefly, that we learn his great goodness and tender mercies. This blessed book, my young friend, informs us all, how the Father of our spirits is wait-

ing to be gracious unto us, and, if we do not despise his precious gospel, will certainly receive us unto himself, and make us perfectly happy for ever. You cannot, I perceive, say as much of the God of nature, without the aid of the Bible.

H. There does appear to be good reason in what you say. I shall not hereafter speak lightly of the God of the Bible; and I am almost ashamed of infidels and their books, for doing it. I wish that some of my acquaintance could hear your explanations; they would talk differently from what they now do.

CHAPTER V.

THE reader may have supposed, from the disposition which Henry manifested at his last parting with Mr. Alston, that he was well nigh convinced of the truth and holy character of the Scriptures. Perhaps he was so, at the time; but he was surrounded by despisers of the gospel, who laboured to possess his mind with false views of it, and with objections to revealed religion in general. Some of them put him on quite a different track, from that which he had pursued. The Bible, he was told, though

originally a good book, was written, at first, in another language; and had been so badly translated into English, and so much altered by Jews and Christians, at their pleasure, as to be no longer the same Bible. Henry caught up this old objection, which was new to him, and went the first opportunity to propose it to Mr. Alston.

“I have got an argument,” he said, in his flippancy way, “which will spoil your Bible, after all. It is nothing in favour of the Scriptures, that they were true, or, if you please, the word of God, when given to the ancients; for they have been altered a thousand times, since they were first written. And then, who can tell whether they have been correctly translated; and what parts of them are of men, and what from God?”

Mr. A. I perceive, Henry, that you have some assistance in finding objections against the Bible.

H. Some little, perhaps.

Mr. A. I do not express this suspicion, because I wish to take advantage of your ignorance, or am unwilling that you should go to others to assist you in this friendly discussion; but you should understand the meaning of your own objections, which I imagine you do not, in this instance.

H. How, sir?

Mr. A. You cannot tell me, I presume, in what, or how many languages, the Scriptures were at first published.

H. I confess I have not yet been informed.

Mr. A. You do not understand, either, in what way the Bible was preserved, after it was written.

H. I do not; but I suspect, as I said, that it is very much altered.

Mr. A. We ought not to be so ready to suspect, in this case, that of which we have no proof. If you can give me no account, either of the languages in which the Scriptures were written, or of the manner in which they have been preserved, how can you know that they have been altered a thousand times? How can you know that they have been altered at all? Do you not suppose it possible for God to preserve his own instructions from being destroyed, or altered by men?

H. I do; if he sees it best.

Mr. A. If then the Bible was at first, as you seem to allow, a good book, containing his instructions to men, you ought rather to suppose that he has taken care of its preservation. Besides, what sort of men would you expect to be employed in altering it—good men, or bad?

H. Bad men, I should think.

Mr. A. Very true; for good men could not have been guilty of such a crime. But

if bad men have altered the Bible, has it been done to recommend truth, and every good principle and work? or to make it justify them in their wicked deeds?

H. To make it justify them, because they dislike to be condemned by its instructions.

Mr. A. But we have seen that the Bible is *now* a good book. It does not recommend what is evil, nor does it justify the wicked; on the contrary, it declares that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God." It condemns every class of bad men, and every kind of wickedness. If a man swears, or lies, or steals, or defrauds, or is quarrelsome or idle—is licentious, or oppressive to the poor, or does any thing amiss,—he will find that the Bible condemns him. I must therefore conclude, that the Bible has not been intentionally altered; for good men would not wish, nor would they dare, to change what God had commanded; and wicked men would not have altered it, except to make it suit their evil inclinations and doings.

H. I cannot deny what you say; for the Bible does not speak well of bad men. But I am curious to know by whom it was written, and by what means it has been preserved for so long a time.

Mr. A. Holy men of God wrote the Scriptures, as they were taught and moved

by his Spirit. Most, or all of them, were Hebrews. They wrote the books of the Old Testament in the Hebrew language, and those of the New Testament, with the exception perhaps of Matthew, in the Greek language. From these languages they have been translated into many others, and will yet be translated into all the languages of men. Their translation into our language was made, several centuries since, by learned and pious men, who not only understood the Hebrew and Greek tongues, in which the Scriptures were written, but are known to have used great pains to give us their true meaning.

H. Was it so, indeed! But how were the Scriptures preserved for so many years, as I understand have passed since they were written?

Mr. A. The good providence of God has no doubt taken special care of them, but in such a way as we can easily understand.

When the Scriptures began to be written and published, he gave directions that they should be laid up in the tabernacle, which the Hebrews prepared for him in the wilderness. Moses, their leader and prophet, wrote the first four books of the Bible; which were accordingly deposited in the ark, (a sort of chest that was placed in the most sacred apartment of the tabernacle,)

and preserved with religious care. This ark was afterwards removed to the temple of Solomon, doubtless with the books we have mentioned, and others which had been composed by Joshua, Samuel, Nathan, and David, down to that period of time. These, together with such other writings as were added by the servants of God, to complete the Old Testament, were kept in the temple of Solomon, and afterwards in the second temple, until the time of Christ. Besides the preservation of the Old Testament in the tabernacle, and in the first and second temples, copies of it were kept in the synagogues, and in many private families. The Hebrews had among them a class of persons, whose business it was to transcribe the sacred writings, and who did it with extraordinary care. It was also made the duty of the priests and Levites to teach them to the people. So great was the reverence which the Hebrews had for these books, that they caused every word and letter to be numbered, lest any mistake should be made in copying them. Accordingly, when the Saviour came, although he accused his countrymen of many other crimes, neither he nor his apostles charged them with altering the Scriptures. And you will recollect that he was accustomed to read them on the Sabbath day, in one of their synagogues.

H. Did the Jews keep the New Testament in the same way?

Mr. A. No: the books of the New Testament were written by Christ's inspired disciples, who left them in charge of the first Christian churches. They were soon copied and sent into every country where the gospel was preached. They were also translated into several languages, and so kept in thousands of churches and families. As they were principally in the keeping of those who were Christians, or friends to Christianity, it is not to be credited that they have been intentionally altered; nor was it possible they should be, with success; for had one church or sect of Christians done this, others would have detected their crime, and condemned them for it.—While the New Testament was thus preserved, the books of the Old Testament were in the hands of both Jews and Christians, who watched each other with a most jealous eye, and would not have suffered any change in them. In this remarkable manner, has the providence of God preserved the Bible through so many centuries. No other book has been kept with equal care and success.

H. I understand now in what way it has been handed down to us, without being altered to another book; and that those who told me otherwise knew nothing of the matter.

Mr. A. They may have known more respecting it than they were willing to communicate. I could give you further information, were it necessary, or did I find it easy to render the subject intelligible to one of your age.

H. Well, I shall have a fine story to tell those who have been deceiving me with their false accounts of the Bible.

Mr. A. Let this conversation teach you, Henry, to be in future more cautious what you believe. Those who dislike the Bible are wont to speak evil of it, just as a contentious man does of his enemy. You must learn to be candid, and remember that nothing is gained, but much may be lost, by turning away from the voice of truth.

CHAPTER VI.

As yet Henry had not learned the value of truth; he did not, therefore, search for it as for hid treasures; but his inquiries after it were unsteady and superficial. Advantage was doubtless taken of this circumstance, to erase from his mind the good impressions which his interviews with Mr. Alston had made; and to supply him with new objec-

tions against the holy character of the Bible.

My youthful readers should well understand, that if they wander from the way of truth, their return will be extremely difficult. Pride of heart, bad advisers, and the influence of Satan, will conspire to keep them wrong, and lead them onward to their complete destruction. It becomes the young, therefore, to be as careful what they believe as what they do; for those who renounce their good principles, or acquire from any source such as are false, will seldom fail to act accordingly. Like Henry Hawkins, they will soon "have done with living by the Bible, as well as with studying of it."

But to return to our subject:—Henry came back to Mr. Alston with an objection, which appeared to him quite unanswerable.

H. I should like to be informed, how you Christians get along with the strange stories contained in the Scriptures. Many of them are quite too large and unnatural for a holy book.

Mr. A. Indeed! to what portions of the Bible, Henry, do you refer?

H. I refer to the story of the flood which drowned the whole world, and the ark which Noah built to save himself and family. Who ever heard of such a deluge, or so great a ship? There are also the ten plagues of Egypt, the passage of the Israelites through

the Red Sea, and their eating manna in the wilderness; besides what is said about the pillar of cloud and of fire that went before them, and the appearance of God upon Mount Sinai. I find just as strange events related in the New Testament.

Mr. A. I understand you, Henry. You do not credit what the Bible says concerning these wonders, and think it entirely against the Bible to have related them.

H. They seem to me only put down for us to believe, without any evidence of their truth; and I do not find it in my heart to admit what is so monstrous.

Mr. A. But the greatest wonder of them all, you have not mentioned.

H. What is that, pray?

Mr. A. The creation of all things by God in the time of six days.

H. I recollect that account, but I did not think of objecting to it.

Mr. A. Why not? It was doubtless a greater and more extraordinary work to make the world, with all its furniture and inhabitants, than to drown it by a flood of water;—greater than it was to send the ten plagues upon Egypt;—to open a passage for the Israelites through the Red Sea, or to give them manna from heaven. The miracles of the Old Testament, and the New, are not, all of them put together, so unaccountable as this of the creation.

H. But I have never doubted that God had power to create the world.—Who should have made it and all things, if he did not ?

Mr. A. True ; he must have created all things, notwithstanding the greatness and mysterious nature of the work ; and we can *believe* that he did it, as the Scriptures relate. How easily, then, could he drown the world ; and perform all the other wonders you have mentioned.

H. I shall not deny his power to do them, if he saw fit ;—but why, then, do we not experience such wonders in our time ?

Mr. A. Because, Henry, those extraordinary works were miraculous, not intended nor necessary to be repeated. They were, however, not more unaccountable than some things which constantly take place within your knowledge.

H. But I never saw any thing so unaccountable.

Mr. A. Did you, then, never see a spire of wheat grow up ?

H. Yes, many a time.

Mr. A. Is it not wonderful, that a little kernel, which decays and dies in the ground, should send forth a ~~stalk~~, on which an ear will put forth ~~itself~~ and produce many kernels ? It is not the kernel sown in the earth which is afterwards found in the ear ; for that is entirely decayed, and it was but one, while the ear contains many kernels.

H. Well, I cannot account for it.

Mr. A. Did you ever think how it is you walk, or extend your hand?

H. Why, I choose to do so, and it is done.

Mr. A. Yes, indeed; but how does your choosing it move your feet or your hand?

H. Truly, I don't know;—I cannot answer such questions.

Mr. A. I ask them, Henry, to show you that there are other wonders besides what the Bible relates, and some of them very near us. You need not look beyond yourself to discover things as inexplicable as the miracles to which you object.

H. So I perceive; and were any proof given that the miracles related in the Scriptures took place, I should believe them; for doubtless God can do all things.

Mr. A. To begin, then, with their proof:—the deluge took place many centuries ago; yet, besides being mentioned in the Bible, accounts of it have been preserved by almost all the nations of the earth. The Chinese, the Hindoos, the Mexicans, and the early inhabitants of Italy and Greece, who were never favoured with the Bible, had these accounts among themselves; which therefore came down to them by tradition from their ancestors. It is also found that there are shells and other substances, in great abundance, which once existed in the bottom of the sea, now lying on the tops of very high

mountains; and which must have been carried thither by a deluge of water. Most persons who inquire deeply into this subject, allow there has been a flood, according to the Scriptures, as the only way to account for these and many other such appearances.

H. Well, there may have been a flood, and an ark too; but there is nothing to show that the other strange works were done as the Bible declares.

Mr. A. To whom, Henry, were the books which give an account of the wonders performed on behalf of Israel in Egypt, and in the wilderness, addressed?

H. To the Israelites;—were they not?

Mr. A. Yes, to the Israelites themselves, as you will see from reading them.—Were they written and published near the time when these miracles are said to have taken place?

H. I don't know, indeed.

Mr. A. A little attention to the subject will inform you, that they were written near that time. They are composed by Moses, who tells the people, in those very books, that they have seen the great works of the Lord, what he did in Egypt, at the Red sea, and in the wilderness. "For I speak not," he says, "with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his

greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm; and his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt, unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land; and what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses and to their chariots, how he made the water of the Red sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the Lord destroyed them in one day; and what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came unto this place.” “But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which he did.” Do you know whether the Israelites believed in these writings of Moses?

H. I should say they did, because they obeyed them.

Mr. A. No doubt they believed what he wrote, for they preserved his books as the oracles of God; they also received his laws, and submitted to many painful services in observing them. All their writers allow that Moses published the truth.

H. But they might have been mistaken in respect to his miracles.

Mr. A. What! mistake in supposing that they themselves actually saw, as he wrote, the plagues sent upon Egypt? That they passed through the Red sea? That they were fed with manna forty years in the wilderness? That they saw the glory of God upon Sinai, and heard the ten command-

ments pronounced by his voice? And that they had the pillar of cloud and of fire going continually before them? Could the whole nation have been deceived in these particulars?

H. No, certainly.

Mr. A. Then were the miracles related in the Books of Moses actually performed; for the people did believe in them, and it was impossible they should have been deceived.

H. I cannot deny the conclusion, if the books are written as you say.

Mr. A. You must, then, allow these wonders prove that God was with Moses, and acknowledged him as his faithful servant, who declared his truth to Israel. In the same manner were Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, and other prophets, proved by their miracles to be the Lord's servants. So that these very wonders, which you supposed were against the Bible, are all evidences of its being the word of God.

H. I confess it is so. And I now desire to hear you explain the miracles of the New Testament.

Mr. A. I shall do that with pleasure at our next meeting.

CHAPTER VII.

HENRY returned to Mr. Alston's with a desire, for the first time, to be taught, instead of teaching one so much his superior in age and wisdom; but he brought with him, as he imagined, a strong argument against the miracles of the Bible. He had been advised that many others, besides Christ, his Prophets, and Apostles, laid claim to the reputation of performing miracles; the Roman Catholics were constantly publishing their miracles; and yet few in these enlightened days gave them any credit for such ridiculous pretensions. Still the manner in which Mr. Alston had disposed of his former objections, rendered him far less confident than before. He was not in equal haste to introduce the ground of his doubts.

Mr. A. I should suspect, Henry, from your punctuality and thoughtfulness, that you have been giving some attention to the subject of our last conversation.

H. Yes, sir, not a little. I have also heard something on the other side; which, after all you have said, makes me doubtful. I am told there have been not a few deceivers who pretended to work miracles; and that the Roman Catholics are to this day making great

pretensions to them. The world contains so many religions, and hypocrites, that one scarcely knows what to believe.

Mr. A. You do not conclude, I should hope, that because there is so much hypocritical and false, in what bears the name of religion, there can be nothing true in it.

H. I find that many persons are of that opinion.

Mr. A. But the world contains other deceivers besides religious hypocrites. There are those, for example, that claim to be persons of truth and honesty, who are not so. Others wish to be esteemed friendly and charitable, without any just claims to the character. Others still would be thought wealthy, and make a great show of it in their style of living, while in fact they are little better than bankrupts. Would you conclude from there being many such characters, that there are no persons of truth and honesty? None who are either charitable or rich?

H. I would not, certainly.

Mr. A. Have you never seen counterfeit money?

H. Yes, a plenty of all sorts; and been caught by it more than once.

Mr. A. Very well: have you come to the conclusion, that because there is so much counterfeit money in the world, and you

have been so often caught by it, there can be no good bills or good coin either?

H. No, sir; I am only the more careful what I take.

Mr. A. Suppose, however, there were neither coin nor bills in the world which had any real value, would rogues take the pains to counterfeit them?

H. I should expect not; because their counterfeits would be of no value, and they would gain nothing by doing it.

Mr. A. Very true. You then conclude when you see bad money circulating, that there is good money somewhere to be found, or people would not be deceived by the counterfeit. Just so when you see persons counterfeiting religion, you should expect to find true religion. Nor would some individuals and religious sects attempt to impose upon others by false miracles, unless the world had been favoured with those of a different character.

H. But how shall we distinguish the true from the false?

Mr. A. By considering well their different characters, and asking God to give you wisdom.

H. What is there then in the miracles of the Bible which proves them true?

Mr. A. They are very great works, such as God only has power to perform. He only could destroy the old world by a flood; he

only could have brought the ten plagues upon Egypt, or have divided the Red Sea, or guided the people of Israel in the wilderness by a pillar of cloud and of fire, or fed them, during the space of forty years, with manna from heaven. The miracles of the New Testament were equally above the power of men to perform. God only can still the raging tempest, open with a word the eyes of the blind, restore the maimed, and raise the dead to life. These are the works of God.

H. They are so, indeed.

Mr. A. The miracles of the Bible were also publicly done.—The whole Hebrew nation saw the wonders in the wilderness, as did both they and the Egyptians the plagues which were brought upon Pharaoh and his servants. A multitude of persons, both friends and enemies, witnessed the miracles of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. Nor does it appear that even the worst enemies to both had the hardihood to deny them.

H. I see it was just as you say; for the scribes and Pharisees accused Christ of performing miracles by the help of the devil; and they were going to kill Peter and John for doing a great miracle, which they could not deny.

Mr. A. But the most important miracle of all, was the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

H. I have heard more than one say, if it could be made out that Christ arose from the dead, they would turn to be Christians.

Mr. A. Let us see, then, whether it cannot be made out. He was certainly put to death; for his body was examined and pierced with a spear, before they took it down from the cross.

H. He was dead, no doubt.

Mr. A. His body was also put into a sepulchre, which was closed up and sealed; and a company of soldiers were appointed to keep guard over it.

H. Yes; but they reported that his disciples came and stole him away.

Mr. A. They made such a report, says an Evangelist, because they were hired to do it. The story was stupid enough; for, if they were asleep when the disciples came, how could they relate what then took place? Was it probable that a whole band of soldiers should, while employed on such a service, fall asleep? It was a crime punished with death by the Roman law, for soldiers to sleep on guard.

H. It was a very unlikely story, indeed:—I wonder it should have obtained any credit.

Mr. A. It would have obtained none, but for the artful management of the Jewish rulers, who did not wish to have the truth reported. In the meanwhile, the disciples

gave quite another account of it. They declared that an angel descended from heaven and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, "for fear of whom, the keepers did shake and became as dead men;" and that Christ himself arose from the sleep of death;—that he afterwards appeared to them,—conversed with them in the most familiar manner,—showed them his hands and his side, which had been pierced with the nails and the spear,—gave them directions to preach his gospel to the whole world,—and then ascended, in their presence, towards heaven, till a cloud received him out of their sight. In this account they all united, without hesitation, and without contradicting one another.

H. I confess, it does seem most likely to have been true; if so, it was wonderful.

Mr. A. It does not rest upon their bare assertion; for, had not Christ been raised from the dead, the Jews might have produced his dead body; and the disciples would have been afraid and ashamed to show their heads. Instead of that, they came forth boldly and declared what they knew; and when they were arraigned before the Jewish council for their report, they still persisted in it, and actually hazarded their lives in its confirmation. They also went forth, preaching the gospel to all nations; that Jesus Christ, who was crucified, had

risen from the dead, and was the Saviour of the world. Many others, besides the Apostles, who had seen him after his resurrection, added their testimony to the same facts ; and no one was ever found to contradict this account, though it cost them the severest persecutions, and even death itself.

H. It seems strange, indeed, that they should have uttered falsehood, when they had nothing to gain, and every thing to lose by doing it. I am almost persuaded to be a Christian, for I don't find that any of my arguments stand. You have taken them all away.

Mr. A. I am pleased to see you so candid, Henry, but it is best to be thorough on this important subject. There are many other arguments for the truth and holy character of the Bible, that have not been mentioned, and which you will do well to consider, in making up your mind to become a Christian.

H. But I have never heard of more.

Mr. A. Come and visit me to-morrow, about this time, and I will explain some of them to you.

H. That I will, and be thankful, too ; for I begin to like your discourse, and am glad that I came to hear what you have said in favour of the Bible ;—it is all new to me.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE intimation which Mr. Alston gave, that he had other important arguments to present on behalf of the Bible, excited Henry's curiosity to a high degree. He had imagined, as do many others who reject Christianity, that he knew all about the subject; while, in truth, he was ignorant of the most material facts, and the little which he did know was so mixed up with error, as to be scarcely of any advantage to him. Of this he was becoming more fully convinced by every succeeding conversation with Mr. Alston; and he had begun to feel desirous of hearing whatever could be said, especially if it should be something new, to prove the Bible to be a divine book.

Mr. Alston remarked the curiosity, mingled with serious interest, in the expressive countenance of Henry, as he returned the following day with great punctuality to resume the conversation.

Mr. A. You would be gratified, I perceive, to know what other arguments can be brought in favour of the Bible as the book of God.

H. Yes, sir; if you please.

Mr. A. I am quite happy, my young friend, to comply with your wishes; and do not

doubt but I shall suggest what may be to you both new and interesting. The subject of our conversation shall be the prophecies contained in the Scriptures.

H. The prophecies! I do not exactly understand what they mean.

Mr. A. Prophecy is the foretelling of events.

H. What, as we foretell things by calculation?

Mr. A. No:—our calculations inform us of common events, or such as are constantly taking place, and repeated within our knowledge. We can, for example, in this manner predict when the darkness of night will arrive, and the light of day succeed to it; that there will be summer and winter every year; or that men will become decrepid as they advance in life. These are events which fall in with our experience, and are consequently matters of calculation. But such are not the prophecies found in the Bible.

H. What are they, then?

Mr. A. They are predictions of things, which, from their distance of time, their nature, or from both these circumstances, could not possibly have been foreknown by human wisdom.

H. Does the Bible, then, contain such predictions?

Mr. A. Yes,—a great number of them.

H. I should be glad to be informed respecting these predictions. But what is their particular value?

Mr. A. They are valuable on many accounts; but my present object in pointing them out to you, is to show that the Scriptures are a revelation from God; for if they contain true predictions of events, which men could not of themselves have foreseen, nor have even suspected, at the time they were written, then must God be accounted their real author.

H. Sure enough, men could not have *predicted* those things which they did not foreknow; but may they not have *guessed* what would come to pass?

Mr. A. The sacred writers do not *guess*, but *declare* positively, and with plainness, what is to be; and, as you will perceive, declare those things which could not have been reasonably expected to take place.

H. I am quite anxious to hear some of these prophecies.

Mr. A. If you now correctly understand what they are intended to prove, I will proceed to recount them.

H. I understand they will prove, that God revealed his will and purposes to those who wrote the Bible; provided they are found to be true, and such prophecies as exceed the wisdom of men.

Mr. A. Very well. We will first consider the prophecies which relate to Jesus Christ. If you turn to the book of Deuteronomy, 18th chapter and 18th verse, you will read, that the Lord said unto Moses, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth;"—and in the next verse, "It shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." Now, Jesus Christ was a Prophet, in many respects, like unto Moses. He was raised up "from among their brethren," being an Hebrew by birth; and all, both Jews and Gentiles, are required to hear his words. He was therefore the Prophet that was spoken of by God to his servant Moses. Can you inform me where Christ was born?

H. In Bethlehem, in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

Mr. A. Observe, then, what Micah the prophet foretold of his being born there. This prophecy is in the fifth chapter of Micah and second verse: "But, thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be the ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting."

H. But was this actually written before Christ was born in Bethlehem?

Mr. A. Yes, many hundred years. When king Herod demanded of the chief priests and scribes where Christ should be born, they answered him, "In Bethlehem of Judea;" and quoted this same prophecy to prove it.—Do you recollect from what celebrated king Jesus Christ was descended?

H. Yes, from David.

Mr. A. Hear next what the prophet Isaiah foretold respecting Christ's descent and character, more than seven hundred years before his birth. Isaiah, eleventh chapter, first and second verses: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord." Jesse, you will remember, was the father of David the king. Observe, also, the character which is here described.

H. It does seem to answer exactly to Jesus Christ.

Mr. A. Do you recollect who was the mother of Jesus Christ?

H. The Virgin Mary, to be sure.

Mr. A. What remarkable circumstances respecting his nature is mentioned in the New Testament?

H. He is there said to be God as well as

man;—but infidels laugh, as you know, at this account of him.

Mr. A. Let me, however, read to you two prophecies of Isaiah,—the seventh chapter and fourteenth verse, and also the ninth chapter and sixth verse;—“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” “which, being interpreted,” says the Evangelist, “is God with us.” “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

H. That is remarkable, I confess.

Mr. A. How was Christ regarded and treated by the greatest portion of the Jews?

H. They regarded him with envy and cruel hatred. They reviled, persecuted, and at last destroyed him.

Mr. A. Was there any thing remarkable in his behaviour under such treatment?

H. He was particularly kind even to his enemies,—did not complain, nor strive to injure any one.

Mr. A. Well said; I am pleased to find that you remember so many interesting facts in his history. We will now read a few verses respecting him in the prophecy of Isaiah, the fifty-third chapter: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sor-

rows, and acquainted with grief." "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Do you recollect whether Christ's disciples stood by him, while he was apprehended and tried for his life?

H. They all ran away. He was condemned and crucified between two thieves, and put into a rich man's sepulchre. I can repeat the whole story.

Mr. A. A little too fast, Henry.—Hear what the prophet Zechariah wrote, thirteenth chapter and seventh verse: "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." Isaiah adds, "He made his grave with the wicked; and with the rich in his death."—What was done by those who crucified Christ, with his garments?

H. They kept them somehow—O! I recollect, they cast lots who of the soldiers should have them.

Mr. A. They cast lots for one of his garments, the rest were divided. Even this circumstance had been foretold by the author of the Psalms, who wrote, 22d Psalm and 18th verse, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my ves-

ture." It was also predicted, with equal plainness, that he would rise from the dead, and become the Saviour of his people.

H. And was all this written before Christ was born ?

Mr. A. Yes, and much more of the same character, hundreds of years before his birth, by the very ancestors of those Jews who despised and persecuted him unto death. One might almost write his history from the Old Testament alone, without the aid of the Evangelists, so numerous and exact are the prophecies respecting him.

H. I never heard any thing so wonderful. It must have been God who enabled the prophets to foretell these things.

Mr. A. It was, indeed. You may know from such examples what is meant by the Apostle, when he declares, that " Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

CHAPTER IX.

A few days only were allowed to pass, before Henry paid his next visit to Mr. Alston, when the prophecies were again made the

subject of conversation. He had not, in the meantime, thought or heard of any objection to them as proofs of the divine character of the Bible. The last conversation served to increase his desire to obtain a more thorough understanding of them; while the Christian candour and kindness of his friend insensibly disarmed his prejudices, and prepared his mind to weigh the arguments he presented. He did not, on this occasion, wait for Mr. Alston to introduce the subject, but informed him directly what was the true reason of his coming.

Mr. A. I am gratified, Henry, to perceive that this subject interests you so much. You will, however, have need of some acquaintance with history to render it the most instructive.

H. I have been studying both geography and history, until lately, for these two years past.

Mr. A. That is well. You may then recollect what is said of the city of Babylon.

H. It was a great and splendid city, built on both sides of the river Euphrates.

Mr. A. Was it built at an early period?

H. Yes, sir; many hundred years before the time of Christ, and with extraordinary strength.

Mr. A. What was there in particular which rendered Babylon a strong city?

H. It was large, containing a multitude of

people, and surrounded by walls three hundred and fifty feet high, and more than eighty feet thick.

Mr. A. Was not Babylon also the capital of a mighty empire?

H. It was.

Mr. A. This circumstance of itself, together with its situation in a fertile country, and the care which was taken to have a full supply of provisions on hand, rendered it probable that Babylon would continue to exist and flourish down to the end of time. Was it possible that human foresight should have predicted the downfall and utter ruin of this splendid city? as that it would be levelled with the ground, and even blotted out from the list of habitable places?

H. I should think not; it was too large and well fortified.

Mr. A. And yet it was during her prosperity and most extensive dominion, that Jeremiah foretold, "The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire."—"Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling place for dragons, an astonishment and an hissing, without an inhabitant."—"Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil, that I (the Lord) will bring upon her."

H. Is that account of Babylon to be found in the Bible?

Mr. A. Certainly. I am reading it to you out of the fifty-first chapter of Jeremiah. Let us see what another holy prophet foretold of this same city. Isaiah says, in the thirteenth chapter of his writings, "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall become as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah." Can you tell me, Henry, what is the present condition of Sodom and Gomorrah?

H. They are entirely desolate and incapable of being inhabited.

Mr. A. They are so. But the prophet goes on; "It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there, neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there."

H. Is that, too, in the Bible?

Mr. A. Yes, it is here precisely as I am reading it. Can you tell me whether this prophecy has been fulfilled?

H. Why, the history which I studied describes Babylon as being now precisely such a place as you have read of. There are no houses, nor people in it; some parts are thought to have been overflowed by the river, so that it can scarcely be told where

the city was built; only there exist in the neighbourhood many heaps and ruins which the wild beasts inhabit. I read but the other day, in a book of travels, that the place where Babylon stood is completely desolate.

Mr. A. It might be added, in illustration of the prophecy, that the *manner* in which this proud city was destroyed answers, in all respects, to the prediction. And yet both the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, wrote during the time that Babylon was the most powerful and flourishing city in the world. They must, therefore, have been taught and appointed of God to declare his counsel.

H. I cannot deny that they were instructed from above in what they wrote. God must have told them what should come to pass. Pray, are there more prophecies like this respecting Babylon?

Mr. A. Yes, several more. The predictions which relate to Tyre are quite as remarkable.

H. What, ancient Tyre, on the Mediterranean Sea?

Mr. A. The very same. Can you relate the history of Tyre?

H. I think I could, the most of it; my teacher made me study it with special care, because Tyre was famous for commerce.

Mr. A. It had a very extensive commerce,

and consequently became wealthy and great. It was an ancient city, too.

H. It was amongst the oldest cities in Asia. The extent of it was eighteen miles in circumference, including the suburbs; and it had connexion, by means of its ships and merchants, with most of the world;—but for all that, Tyre has been destroyed.

Mr. A. Was it, however, destroyed all at once?

H. No, sir; it was many times taken in war. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took it first; but he got very little for his pains;—for the inhabitants removed from the main land, on which Tyre then stood, to the adjacent island, carrying with them their riches, and there rebuilt the city.

Mr. A. Who succeeded next in capturing Tyre?

H. Alexander, king of Macedon.

Mr. A. How did he get at the new city on the island? Was it done by means of ships?

H. It was not, but by building a causeway from the main land with the ruins of the old city, which he gathered up for that purpose.

Mr. A. Did Alexander put an end to the prosperity of Tyre?

H. He massacred most of the inhabitants, and sold thirty thousand for slaves. But the

city was again rebuilt, and became great and prosperous.

Mr. A. Such was the fact. Though Tyre experienced the cruelty of more than one conqueror, it remained a populous place several hundred years after the death of Christ. Nor was it finally destroyed before the time of Alphix, sultan of Egypt, in the year twelve hundred and eighty-nine.—Has there been any successful attempt to rebuild Tyre since that period?

H. There has not, if I remember correctly. It is become an insignificant place.

Mr. A. Has it now a good harbour, or such convenience of situation as might justify the hope of its ever regaining a character among the cities of Asia?

H. I believe, sir, the harbour is spoiled, the sides having been washed away by the sea.

Mr. A. Travellers inform us that such is the fact; and that the site of it is altogether a bleak and barren spot. One of them writes, "Its present inhabitants are only a few poor wretches, harbouring themselves in the vaults, and subsisting chiefly upon fishing." Now, all this ruin and desolation were most plainly foretold by one of the prophets. Read this passage in the twenty-sixth chapter of Ezekiel, beginning with the third verse.

H. (*Reads.*) "Therefore thus saith the

Lord God ; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causes his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers ; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea : for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God."

Mr. A. Observe, also, the fourteenth and twenty-first verses.

H. (*Reads.*) " And I will make thee like the top of a rock : thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon ; thou shalt be built no more."—" And thou shalt be no more : though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord God."

Well, this is remarkable enough.—I did not know before that the Bible contained these predictions.

Mr. A. They correspond, you perceive, exactly to the history of Tyre, which we have reviewed. Many nations did come up against that city in succession, as the waves of the sea. The dust of old Tyre was actually scraped up by the army of Alexander, to make a causeway to the new city on the island ; and, finally, the whole has become barren and waste, like the top of a rock ; and is literally a place for the spreading of nets.

H. I am astonished at what I have now read. It must be the very truth of God, for no other being could have foretold such things.

CHAPTER X.

THE last conversation added strength to the desire of Henry for farther instruction. He lost no opportunity to renew his visits ; while Mr. Alston, equally surprised and delighted by his perseverance, grudged neither the pains nor time which were devoted to him. His deportment had also begun to assume a more modest and respectful character. The forwardness, which did not become a person of his age, yielded to a silent and amiable reserve. "I perceive," said Mr. Alston, "that you consider the subject of prophecy as worthy of still more attention."

H. I do, sir. It is to me equally new and wonderful ; and you were pleased to intimate that you had not exhausted it.

Mr. A. It is not easy to do that with our opportunities of conversation. There is, however, some difficulty in selecting the particular topics, which may prove most interesting and instructive to you. Have

you paid much attention to the history and character of the Arabs ?

H. A little, sir. They are mostly descended, as I think, from Ishmael, the son of Abraham. They inhabit the country called Arabia, but are not confined to it.

Mr. A. Do you know what is their manner of life ?

H. They generally live in large families or tribes, and wander from one place to another, in quest of whatever is required to sustain them.

Mr. A. Are they friendly and inoffensive to strangers ?

H. No, sir ; they are altogether unfriendly to those whom they happen to get in their power : they plunder and take captive the inhabitants of all nations without favour or distinction.

Mr. A. Of course all other nations have been enemies to them. Have they been often attacked and conquered ?

H. They have been formally attacked many times, but, I believe, have never been completely subdued.

Mr. A. True, the most powerful armies have invaded their country, and sometimes with considerable success ; still they remain unsubdued by any foreign nation, and live as they ever have done, in the patriarchal style.

H. Is there any prophecy in the Bible which relates to these Arabs?

Mr. A. There is a short but a very descriptive and comprehensive one, respecting Ishmael and his descendants. You will learn from reading the sixteenth and seventeenth chapters of Genesis, that the birth of Ishmael was foretold by the angel of the Lord; who also predicted, that he would become "a great nation," but that "he would be a wild man, his hand would be against every man, and every man's hand against him;" "and yet would dwell in the presence of all his brethren." This prophecy was doubtless intended to be fulfilled principally in the descendants of Ishmael.

H. And how, then, has it been fulfilled?

Mr. A. In the first place, we see that his descendants have become a great nation,—that they are in general wild men,—their hand is against every man, and every man's hand is against them. And, secondly, they associate in tribes, composed of near and distant relatives, so that they live in the presence of all their brethren. What is most remarkable, no event, during the space of thirty-five hundred years and upwards, has ever destroyed either their peculiarities of character, or their state of society.

H. That was a remarkable prophecy, and it has been wonderfully accomplished.

Mr. A. There is also a prediction respecting Egypt, which is not less extraordinary. It is contained in the twenty-ninth chapter of Ezekiel.

H. (*Reads.*) "And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and I will cause them to return into the land of Pathros in the land of their habitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom. It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations."—But when was this prophecy written?

Mr. A. More than five hundred years before Christ, as you may know from its date, and the time in which Ezekiel lived. Egypt was then a populous, rich, and powerful kingdom; but the prophet foretold that it would be conquered and made comparatively desolate; and that afterwards it should remain a base kingdom.

H. Well, that has proved remarkably true.

Mr. A. Yes, Egypt has never since that period been governed by princes of its own nation, but uniformly by foreigners or their descendants. Neither has it risen to much power; on the contrary, it has become a feeble and despicable country.

H. Nobody, I should imagine, could have foreseen such things but God himself.

Mr. A. Evidently not, because the time has been so long, and the event so very singular. Other lands have been conquered and plundered, without being ruined or depopulated, for many generations. That such should be the fate of Egypt, a country most fertile and filled with inhabitants, was beyond the wisdom of man to conjecture.—But the most remarkable of all the prophecies, respects the Hebrews themselves.

H. I have lately heard some of my acquaintance speak lightly of them.

Mr. A. Without good reason, as you will probably see for yourself, when we shall have examined the subject.—If you turn to the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, you will find several very extraordinary predictions relating to the Hebrews. It is there foretold by Moses, that if they should prove disobedient to Jehovah, as his people, he would bring upon them very singular and destructive calamities. “The Lord,” he declares, “shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known;” “And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a bye-word, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee.” “And ye shall be left few in number;” “And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt

serve other gods." It is also foretold, that in the time of their destruction, they would be besieged in all their gates, their country would be despoiled of its treasures and means of subsistence; so that from mere hunger they would be compelled to eat the flesh of their own children; and that "among the nations whither they should be scattered, the Lord would give them a trembling heart, that should fear day and night, and have no assurance of their life."

H. Those are very fearful predictions.

Mr. A. They are extremely ancient, too; for they were written more than three thousand years ago; and yet all of them have either been fulfilled, or they are now fulfilling before our eyes.

H. Is it so, indeed? I have read less about the Jews than other nations.

Mr. A. You are, however, aware that they did not prove an obedient people, so that the threatenings by Moses have actually come upon them. They have been conquered, and even rooted up out of their own good land. A strange people were sent against them, whom neither the generation to whom Moses spake, nor their fathers had known;—which people were the Romans, commissioned by God to destroy both their country and nation. During the sieges of their cities both in this and former wars, mo-

thers did actually kill and eat their own children.

H. That was dreadful.

Mr. A. It was very dreadful; but not the whole, nor perhaps the worst part of their punishment. They have been literally scattered among all people.

H. Sure enough, the Jews are every where to be found.

Mr. A. Are they not also every where despised and persecuted?

H. I must confess they have been. So much I have learned respecting them from the histories of different nations.

Mr. A. They have become among all nations "A proverb and a bye-word." We say of a man, to express our disapprobation, "He is as hard as a Jew," or, "As unbelieving as a Jew," or, "He is a perfect Jew." The same reproach is cast upon them by other nations; and, in most places, they are still the objects of unremitted enmity and persecution.

H. You astonish me; and yet I must acknowledge that what you say is both true and unanswerable.

CHAPTER XI.

THE interest which Henry manifested in the illustration of prophecy, as affording evidence of the divine character of the Bible, led Mr. Alston to enter pretty extensively into the subject. He had not, however, directed his attention to any prediction contained in the New Testament. This circumstance may have afforded occasion to the infidel friends of Henry to object to the argument; for he expressed, at the next interview, a particular anxiety to know whether there were like prophecies in the gospel; and if there were, to have them also pointed out and explained.

Mr. A. I perceive, Henry, it appears strange to you, that I should have selected my examples of interesting prophecies wholly from the Old Testament.

H. I have had such feelings.

Mr. A. The reason was not that I could find none in the New Testament. It has indeed fewer examples of a highly interesting character. It is a much smaller book, and contains numerous instances of the accomplishment of prophecy, as well as many miracles and other evidences peculiar to itself.

H. It would gratify me much to hear some of its predictions mentioned.

Mr. A. One of them is Christ's prophecy respecting the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Of Jerusalem he foretold, in the nineteenth chapter of Luke, "The days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and shall not leave thee one stone upon another." Respecting the Temple, he observed to one of his disciples, "Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." These predictions were not only uttered but published to the world, while the city of Jerusalem and the Temple were yet standing. Do you recollect whether history gives us any certain information of their having been fulfilled?

H. I have read in Josephus that the Romans encompassed Jerusalem with a trench, and kept in the inhabitants till they died of famine.

Mr. A. Did the Romans also take and demolish the city?

H. They did entirely, and the Temple along with it.

Mr. A. In all this you observe an exact and remarkable accomplishment of the predictions I have mentioned. It is related, that this subject was so well understood, from the first, by the Christians at Jerusa-

lem, that they were on the watch, and actually retired from the city to a safe place, in time to escape its destruction.

H. I recollect that Christ gave them several signs, by which they might know when that calamity was nigh at hand.

Mr. A. "Nation," he said, "shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines and pestilences; and fearful sights, and great signs shall be from heaven."—"When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." If you examine the history of Josephus, you will find he mentions these very things, as having taken place. He speaks particularly of the fearful sights and strange prodigies which were experienced at Jerusalem, a short time before its destruction. He also mentions that the Romans, after having first surrounded the city, retired in such a manner as afforded opportunity to those of the inhabitants, who desired it, to escape; and then it was, no doubt, that the few Christians who still remained there, saved themselves according to Christ's direction.—Christ also foretold very minutely the persecution and the success of his religion in the world.

H. I have lately read several of these predictions

Mr. A. You will find some of them in the tenth chapter of Matthew, where Christ admonishes his disciples. "That he sends them forth as sheep among wolves;" "that they shall be brought before governors and kings for his sake; and that they shall be hated of all men for his name-sake." He farther informs them, that his religion will have the effect of dividing men against each other; "It shall set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

H. I have heard it objected by some, that Christianity makes men quarrel, and therefore it is not a good religion.

Mr. A. We may answer that objection hereafter. What I have now to say is, that these predictions have been fulfilled. The first disciples were severely persecuted, both by Jews and Gentiles. Most of the Apostles, it is supposed all of them, John excepted, were put to death for preaching the gospel. Wherever the kingdom of Christ has been set up in our world, it has excited opposition of some kind; and not unfrequently the most violent and cruel. Children have been unwilling that their parents should become Christians, and parents have endeavoured to keep their children from

doing so. The nearest relatives have persecuted Christians unto death.

H. It has been precisely as you remark. Even now, I often hear Christians ridiculed and treated with the greatest contempt.

Mr. A. And yet the religion of Christ has continued to gain friends, and spread extensively over the face of the earth. This fact reminds me of another interesting prophecy, which is contained in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew: "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which is indeed the least of all seeds; but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree." Now, while the mustard seed is said to be smaller in the Holy Land than it is with us, it produces a much larger plant,—so large, indeed, that it resembles a tree, and affords the fowls of heaven a lodging place in its branches.

H. But what is the prophecy contained in this passage?

Mr. A. By the kingdom of heaven is doubtless intended that which Christ was setting up. This kingdom commenced with a few individuals. It was, in this particular, like a grain of mustard seed. But from such a beginning it has become so great as to embrace not only a vast multitude of individuals, but many nations; and is rapidly advancing to possess the whole world.—

“And I,” says Christ, in another place, “if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” He was lifted up upon the cross, and the consequence already is, that many nations are drawn unto him.—There are many other prophecies in the New Testament. The Apostles uttered several. Revelation contains a sublime, though highly figurative prophetic history of the church and of the world down to the end of time.

H. I had never suspected there were such evidences that the Bible contains the truth of God and is divine. I am quite ashamed of having thought that I knew all about the subject; for I plainly see my information was very deficient.—But there is still a difficulty, which something you said just now has brought to my recollection;—that is, how a religion can be from God which makes divisions and contentions among men. I have heard infidels say, Christianity produces most of the quarrels and wars with which the world is afflicted.

Mr. A. These representations of Christianity are doubtless uncandid and false; the subject, however, shall be considered at our next interview, when, I presume, it will be found to present no very formidable objection to Christianity.

CHAPTER XII.

It is often easier to raise objections to what is true, than it is to obviate them. Questions of this sort may be asked, in a few words, which it would require many a page to answer. But Henry was too inexperienced in these matters to judge correctly. He had, besides, yielded to Mr. Alston's representations, not so much for any partiality for the truth, as because he could not reply to his arguments. No sooner, therefore, was another plausible objection to Christianity thrown in his way, than he seized upon it, and seemed almost disposed to return to his former way of thinking.

H. I perceive, Mr. Alston, that Christianity has occasioned great contentions and bloody wars.

Mr. A. And what then? Does this circumstance lead you to suspect that it may, after all, be an imposition of men, and not from heaven?

H. I dare not go so far as that, because I acknowledge that the Bible appears to be a moral and holy book, and is proved divine by many unanswerable arguments. I am in great perplexity on this subject.

Mr. A. Your perplexity is, that you see no answer which can be given to the proofs

in favour of the Bible, nor yet are able to meet the objection you have mentioned.

H. It is precisely so.

Mr. A. Should you expect from reading the Scriptures, that they would lead men into contentions, or to engage in deadly strife? Do they any where exhort Christians to hate and kill one another?

H. I should think not.

Mr. A. How do they require us to regard and treat our enemies?

H. "To love them that hate us, and do good to them who despitefully use us and persecute us."

Mr. A. Were Christ and his disciples injurious and contentious persons?

H. No, sir.

Mr. A. But they were the most perfect examples of the effect which Christianity has in forming the disposition and principles of men, that the world has ever seen. If all men were perfect Christians, they would have the same kind and loving spirit with Jesus Christ. They would be no more disposed, than he was, to persecute or to destroy men's lives.—Are you not aware, Henry, that many persons have professed themselves Christians, without being so in truth?

H. I suppose they have.

Mr. A. What then, if a great multitude of such Christians, in name only, were to

'unite in making war upon their neighbours ; would it prove that the religion which they did not in reality possess, was injurious to the peace of others ?

H. Not unless they were influenced by that religion.

Mr. A. Now, it is a mournful fact, Henry, that no one nation has become generally Christian, except in name. I consider those who have engaged in what are termed religious wars and formal persecutions, as being miserably destitute of the Christian spirit. They have had little or nothing of Christianity except its name. The wars of such men, and their contentions and crimes of every sort, are as little chargeable to Christianity as are those of the Hindoos or the Turks.

H. Did not Christ, however, declare, that "He was come, not to send peace on the earth, but a sword?"

Mr. A. Yes ; and he farther said, his religion would be the means of dividing the members of the same family against each other. But tell me, Henry, must not any doctrine, which is received by some persons and opposed by others, create divisions among them ?

H. I should think so.

Mr. A. Do not some evidently *hate* the Bible because it condemns them ?

H. They do, I suppose.

Mr. A. It is, then, easy to see that the Scriptures may be true, and consequently from heaven, although they should give offence, and become the occasion of divisions and contentions. They have actually done so, as our Saviour predicted. Wicked men love neither the commands of God, nor such as receive and obey them. Accordingly, when the Gospel has been preached with great plainness and success, it has excited violent opposition, and, in some instances, bitter enmity and cruel persecutions.

H: But why in such cases should Christianity be preached, since peace and harmony is so desirable ?

Mr. A. For what class of persons, Henry, is instruction most necessary ? For those who hold the most, or who hold the least of divine truth ?

H. For those, I imagine, who hold the least of it.

Mr. A. Undoubtedly, because the darker the human mind, the more need has it of being enlightened. It becomes us, certainly, to instruct the ignorant at all hazards. But would not those who are farthest from knowing the truth, and who have the greatest prejudices against it, be the most likely to oppose and even to persecute them who declare it ?

H. I should expect they would.

Mr. A. It is not, then, difficult to understand why Christianity should be preached to such as oppose and persecute it, even to those who may possibly become the murderers of its friends; because they have peculiar need of it.

H. I cannot dispute what you say.

Mr. A. We have then a plain answer for objectors, who tell of wars and persecutions as the fruits of Christianity. It is not according to the precept or the spirit of the Gospel to make war, nor to do injury to any man. If some have used Christianity as a cover for their evil deeds, it is not the fault of the Bible, but of their own evil and corrupt hearts. And if, when the Gospel is faithfully preached, with all its exhortations to peace and good will, men hate and persecute it, the fault belongs not to the Gospel, but to its enemies. Is Christianity to blame simply for being opposed by unreasonable and wicked men?

H. I don't know, sir.

Mr. A. Did, then, the Saviour and his Apostles persecute the Jews, who sought their lives? or, were they unjustly persecuted?

H. They were unjustly persecuted, as I understand it.

Mr. A. Such has ever been the fact, when the pure Gospel has occasioned either war or contention of any sort. The disciples of

Christ went forth with the injunction resting upon them, not to render evil for evil; but, as far as possible, to live peaceably with all men. Such is entirely the character of the Christian religion. It never made any man a persecutor, or an injurious person; but teaches all men to imitate the meekness and forbearance of Jesus Christ; "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

H. What you say does appear very reasonable. I can myself see that good Christians are not for the most part contentious.

Mr. A. They are not, indeed. Such persons do not, so often as others, have recourse to the law for settling their differences; and they are very seldom involved in trials for personal injuries. It were no more than fair, that infidels should give the Gospel due credit for the banishment of innumerable evils from society, and also for the introduction of many positive benefits.

H. I should be happy to hear its benefits recounted; for it has been said that Christianity does absolutely nothing for mankind, which can be proved desirable. I own myself convinced that it does not injure the world; and can easily believe it has had the contrary influence.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE enemies of the Bible slander that holy book, when they affirm that its religion promotes a spirit of contention and war. Christianity is opposed to both. It declares that "wars and fightings come of men's lusts;" and enjoins "that whatsoever we would that others should do unto us, to do even so unto them." But it is not principally by accusing the Bible falsely, that infidels show their want of candour; they keep out of sight the many benefits which it has conferred. These are in fact much less understood and appreciated than they deserve to be by Christians themselves. We therefore recommend to the youthful reader, a particular attention to the following conversation on this interesting subject.

At their last interview, Mr. Alston had presented Henry with a satisfactory answer to the objection, that the Bible is the source of the wars and contentions, which have existed among those falsely called Christians. He therefore proceeded in this conversation to give him a correct view of its positively good influences.

Mr. A. The books, Henry, which you have consulted, seem to have said nothing

about the good which Christianity has done in the world.

H. What you suspect is but too true. They only speak evil of it.

Mr. A. Your acquaintance, also, who are unfriendly to the Bible, treated it in the same manner.

H. They do, in general.

Mr. A. But you have studied enough of history to be your own judge in this matter ; or, at least, to perceive the truth of what I shall say respecting it. Do you recollect what was the moral character of the people whom the Israelites expelled from Canaan ?

H. They appear to have been very corrupt.

Mr. A. They were gross idolaters, who committed the most abominable crimes ;— and even sacrificed human victims to their gods.

H. I remember, now, that Moses mentioned these things to the Israelites, and warned them against imitating such bad examples.

Mr. A. Were the nations about Canaan very much like the Canaanites in their manners and religion ?

H. I should suspect they were, from what is said of them in the Bible.

Mr. A. The people of Israel were constantly inclined to apostatize from their religion, and live like the other nations.—

Can you inform me why they wished to do it?

H. I believe it was that they might worship many gods, and practise those immoralities which were tolerated by idolaters.

Mr. A. Yes, Henry, it was to give up the service of the one living and true God for that of idols, which neither hear, nor see, nor understand, nor help those who worship them. It was that they might renounce the practice of those virtues inculcated in the word of God, and indulge themselves in the most shameful crimes. Have you any recollection of the kind of sacrifices which they actually made to the base gods of their nation?

H. I think they sometimes offered up their children to them.

Mr. A. They did make their children pass through the fire to Moloch; that is, as learned commentators suppose, burnt them to death in honour of the horrid idol.

H. How dreadful!

Mr. A. Yes, alike cruel and absurd; and yet it was the Bible which kept the entire Hebrew nation from practising it. Here, then, you find an immense benefit which the sacred writings conferred upon a great people, through many centuries of their history.

H. Have we any knowledge of other hea-

H

then nations that have been so degraded as the Canaanites?

Mr. A. We will see; or rather you shall be enabled to answer this question for yourself.—What number of gods did the Greeks acknowledge and worship when Christianity was first preached among them?

H. A great many,—if I do not forget the number, it was several thousands.

Mr. A. What was the general character of their gods?

H. I think they were rather bad; at least not so moral as they should have been.

Mr. A. They were bad, indeed; it would not be too much to say, they were despicable. One of them was a perpetual friend to war,—another to licentiousness, and another still to thieves. The worst characters among the Greeks imagined that they had lived in imitation of their gods, and prayed to them for their assistance in the practice of detestable vices. They were also known to have offered up human sacrifices. The Romans either adopted the same gods, or those of equally exceptionable character.—What was the most popular amusement in the Roman circus?

H. The spectacle of fighting gladiators.

Mr. A. Who were these gladiators?

H. They were men who fought and killed each other for the gratification of the peo-

ple,—many thousands of whom were killed in this way.

Mr. A. More than twenty thousand in a single year have thus perished. The city of Rome resembled a great slaughter-house, where the citizens were constantly entertained with these fights; nor was it less remarkable for its corruption and licentiousness.—You may also know something of the religion of the Carthaginians.

H. They had a cruel religion, too; for they sacrificed children to their gods.

Mr. A. On some occasions they sacrificed hundreds at a time. But what must be said of our ancestors in the island of Great Britain? Were they also idolaters and addicted to cruel rites, before the Gospel reached them?

H. I believe they were.

Mr. A. Yes, they were addicted to the religion of the Druids, whose worship was deformed by unnatural cruelties. They were accustomed to sacrifice human victims by a painful and revolting process.—But how is it now in the several countries where these horrid superstitions and barbarous practices once prevailed?

H. They have done with practising them.

Mr. A. And what has cured the people of their attachment to such practices?

H. I never thought; but I now begin to see it was the Christian religion.

Mr. A. It was so, Henry. But for the Bible, you might have been educated a Druid, and been employed in burning men in sacrifice to some imaginary god ; or you might yourself have been the unhappy victim of a Druid's horrid rites. There is no conjecturing a worse condition in life, or a more terrible death, than might have been your portion. Think what it would have been to be the captive of some heathen, and reserved to fight as a gladiator for the amusement of a popular assembly ; or to be brought forth, perhaps in childhood, and put to death in the most deliberate and painful manner, to appease the wrath of some incensed divinity. Where the religion of the Bible does not prevail, just such, or as cruel, acts are done. The Sandwich islanders, before they received the Gospel, were accustomed to murder their aged parents, sick friends and troublesome children. The Hindoos, who have not yet embraced it, burn thousands of widows every year upon the funeral pile with the bodies of their deceased husbands ; and cast multitudes of their children into the river Ganges, as a religious offering to one of their gods.

H. But infidels have never been guilty of such cruelties ; they do not advise the practice of them.

Mr. A. They do not, I acknowledge, but whence have they acquired better ideas of

morality and religion? Is it not in the Bible they have found them?

H. I don't know, I confess, but I suppose they have obtained them there.

Mr. A. Yes, my young friend; they got those better notions nowhere else; and the Bible is necessary to perpetuate and defend them. For when the infidels of France threw it away, and the Christian Sabbath, and the Christian religion along with it, they began to kill one another by thousands,—and to show themselves as regardless of human suffering, as deceitful and abominable sinners, as the heathens of whom I have now spoken.

H. There must be truth in what you say; for I can see that many infidels are very rough in their language, and become so angry, when they speak of the Bible and Christian people, that I should expect them to do bloody deeds, if they had the power. But I never had this view of the subject before. I begin to regret what I have said in opposition to the Bible, and am almost persuaded to live by it, as well as to study it in time to come.

Mr. A. What I have related of the benefits which the Bible has conferred upon the world, comes far short of its good influence. The Bible has changed the face of many nations by giving a mild character to their laws, by promoting the growth of humane

and charitable sentiments, and by giving birth to numerous associations and institutions for the instruction and the comfort of the ignorant, the neglected orphan, and the helpless poor. Christianity has built all our hospitals, and provided the means of raising the most oppressed and degraded class of persons to respectability and usefulness. I might go on to state particulars, but it really appears to me that those who reject and hate the Scriptures are no good friends to the rest of mankind.

H. Or to themselves, either. I am determined not to walk in their ways any longer. But who shall teach me to understand the Bible, for all my friends are ignorant of its instructions,—they will laugh me to scorn, if they suspect I am becoming a Christian?

Mr. A. You forget, Henry, the SABBATH-SCHOOL and the BIBLE CLASS in this neighbourhood, where you may obtain instruction on many interesting Scriptural lessons. Beside that, if you will continue your visits to me, I will give you what assistance I can.

H. Thank you, sir. I shall call again the first opportunity.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. ALSTON expected with more than common interest the visit of Henry, for whose welfare he experienced a deep concern. He was not disappointed in his hopes; for Henry presented himself the very next day in a thoughtful state of mind, to avail himself of the promised assistance. He brought with him a Bible, which, though almost new, had the appearance of being read, and, from the marks it contained, with no ordinary care.

Mr. A. You have, then, commenced again the study of the Bible, I perceive.

H. Yes, sir, some weeks since.

Mr. A. I should like to know, from yourself, what were the real motives which first induced you to lay it aside, as you told me you had, at a former interview.

H. I am almost ashamed, Mr Alston, to tell. It was not so much that I had become a Freethinker, though I strove hard enough to be one; I did not wish to live according to the Bible, and so was glad to find an apology to be rid of it. My thoughts were, "If I can become a Freethinker, it will excuse me from attending Sunday-school. I shall then have the Sabbath for a day of

sport, and not be afraid to do whatever I please, good or bad."

Mr. A. But how came you to suppose that getting rid of the Bible would free you from your obligations to do right? I thought that infidels represented their way of thinking as altogether calculated to promote morality.

H. That is what they say to Christians; but I suspect that, like me, they become infidels for the sake of being wicked at their pleasure.

Mr. A. What makes you have that suspicion, Henry?

H. Their conversation and manner of life. Most of them are but little to be trusted in what they say. I begin to be shocked at their profaneness and want of good principles. They do not appear friendly, like you and other Christian people; nor are they taking any measures to do good in the world. It is plain, that their belief is making them worse instead of better; from which, I conclude, it is for the sake of doing worse that they strive to be infidels.

Mr. A. You speak of *striving* to become infidels; did you find it a hard matter to become one?

H. I did, sir,—not so much because I laboured to understand the subject, as from the difficulty I had with my own mind. Something within me kept saying, "It

will not be right after all to sin as you please. These Freethinkers will go to destruction." But their arguments converted me in the end; for the more I staid away from Sabbath-school and indulged bad habits, the more was I disposed to be an infidel. I became strong in the belief that the Bible is not the book of God, and began to enjoy Sabbath breaking and bad company very highly:—but that was not likely to have been the end of it.

Mr. A. Indeed!

H. I am now quite ashamed of my plans; but I had it in mind to follow my inclination in every thing. Said I to myself, "There is no punishment for the wicked, and no God who hates sin: I shall, therefore, be a fool not to enjoy myself when I can. As I do not know what will be in the next world, I shall take what is offered me in this. Nor do I intend to be over honest and faithful. If I am made an apprentice to Mr. —, as I expect, there will be a fine opportunity to do well for myself at his expense."

Mr. A. But had you, in reality, such thoughts?

H. I confess I had,—and was growing more wicked every day in my purposes. But, upon meeting with you, I began to think, "What if the Bible should turn out in the other world, to have been the truth of God; how could I meet it there?" The

more I heard of your arguments, the more this thought kept in my mind, until I am become very miserable.

Mr. A. Your infidelity, then, grew out of hatred to the duties of religion, and the fear of being punished for the sins which you love to commit.

H. Yes, all of it. I should never have read infidel books, attended infidel meetings, nor have put my Bible aside, but for the love of doing wrong; which I feared to do while I believed in the Bible.

Mr. A. The account you give of yourself answers exactly to what Christ said respecting those who believe not in him. You will find it in the third chapter of John, nineteenth and twentieth verses: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd."

H. O, that was said for me.

Mr. A. I doubt not it was said for all Freethinkers. It teaches such persons what they must do if they would be saved from their mistakes, and their evil ways. They must no longer love darkness, but come to the light of salvation.

H. True enough,—but how shall I find this light?

Mr. A. You may find it in reading the Bible, and attending where it is explained and inculcated. You may find the true light by associating with good men, whose conversation and daily conduct are directed by it. You must not, however, rely upon these, without praying unto God to guide you into the paths of righteousness and peace.

H. Will he condescend to guide me, if I go to him by prayer?

Mr. A. "If any of you lack wisdom," says an Apostle, "let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him."

H. But how can one who has been a Free-thinker, and neither lived by the Bible nor read it, for so long a time, hope to be heard and accepted of God?

Mr. A. Because, as the Saviour declares, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Gospel offers salvation to all sinners who repent of their evil ways, and turn from them unto God.

H. That is good news, indeed. It is a thousand times better than infidelity; which finds fault with others and laughs at their mistakes, but says nothing about the pardon of sin or any way to obtain the divine favour.

Mr. A. What you say, Henry, is but too true. Infidelity leads men away from religion and morality. It tempts them on to the commission of innumerable crimes,—makes them justly worthy to suffer everlasting ruin, and then leaves them without any good hope of escaping it. Those who embrace infidelity, walk in darkness and uncertainty, as well as in the way of transgression. They cast off fear as much as possible, but they cannot altogether banish it from their minds; and are often in great trouble and shake with fear at the thought of appearing before God.—In short, infidelity does no good in any form; while the religion of the Bible is precisely such as we all have need of,—a religion to make us better in the present life, and happy in that which is to come. It is therefore true, and must have come down from the God of all grace and boundless wisdom.

H. I now fully believe what you assert; and am determined, that by the grace of God, I will hereafter walk according to the Bible, and seek in it for that salvation, which may lead me up to heaven.

CONCLUSION.

It is with a measure of regret, in which the reader may possibly participate, that we take our leave of Henry Hawkins, at the moment when he begins to exhibit so practical an interest in the Christian religion. But it must be considered that the object of this work, which is to evince the heavenly character and origin of our holy religion, does not call for more of his history. We have already marked the influence of truth in enlightening his ignorance, correcting his mistakes, and subduing his prejudices, until he cheerfully yields the point in controversy. He acknowledges that infidelity is not founded in reason, and that he was led to embrace it principally from a love of sinning, and the hope of doing it without restraint. He even resolves, under a painful impression of his mistake and folly, to renounce its delusions for the study and practice of the Holy Bible. A farther account of his progress in sacred knowledge, might therefore prove more interesting than instructive and useful.

We cannot, however, dismiss the subject, without adding a few suggestions, by way of counsel, to the youthful reader. We live in a country where all the citizens are allowed to follow the religion their judgment

most approves. If they choose to embrace none, the civil law leaves them unmolested. This is right, because the power to control the opinion and chain the consciences of men, is not delegated to government. But this circumstance does by no means release the young and inexperienced from the duty of appreciating the pious instructions and advice of their parents and guardians. It does not lessen their obligations to study the will of God and obey his commandments. He who made the mind has doubtless the right to direct our thoughts, our affections, and our active endeavours to their proper objects. He may justly require us to love and glorify him. He does actually require this of all men; not excepting even the young, who are able and have opportunity to understand his holy requirements. But his commands are not formed agreeably to the wishes of bad men; they do not justify them in the practice of falsehood, profaneness, or any vice; nor do they tolerate the love of the world and the pursuit of wealth, of fame, or fashionable indulgences, to the neglect of the practical duties of religion. The Bible stands directly in the way of wicked men. They cannot do as their selfish hearts desire, because of the precepts and threatenings of this holy book. It is not therefore wonderful, that they, and all who are bent on the practice of sin,

should betake themselves, as fast as their consciences will allow, to infidelity; and that, having thrown off the restraints of Christian principles, they should call themselves Freethinkers. There are many sorts of liberty in our world; some of which are not the most friendly to our happiness. A froward and disobedient child, who has broken away from the counsels and the authority of a good parent, may congratulate himself that he is quite free from restraint, and can now act in accordance with his pleasure; at the same time that he is doing himself the greatest possible injury. So the man who can despise the Bible, and trample upon the commands of God, without being called to account by Christian friends, or even by his own conscience, may glory in his freedom, and think other men superstitious slaves; but in all this he is only preparing himself for condemnation and wo. Liberty, which thus runs into licentiousness, is, *in fact*, the worst kind of servitude,—for sin is the most tyrannical master to which men can be subject. But infidels also affect to be extremely wise and confident in their opinions. They would make you believe that they have searched deeper into the subject of religion, than their more sober and conscientious neighbours. Be assured, my young friends, it is

mere pretence. There are no greater hypocrites in the world than Freethinkers. Not one of them in a thousand has given himself the trouble to examine, much less to answer, the arguments which are brought in favour of the Bible. Their confident harangues and profane books against it, are, for the most part, very superficial; and they have been repeatedly answered to the mortification of their authors. Those which are more ingenious, are no better founded; and have ceased to give intelligent Christians any anxiety for the Christian cause.

It is, however, unhappily the fact, that some young persons are captivated by the style and sophistry of infidel writings; and, like Henry Hawkins, imagine it increases their importance, and makes them look big, to talk profanely against the Bible,—just as if flippant ignorance and self-conceit were in high esteem among wise and good people; or judicious and knowing persons could not see through the thin veil of an unbecoming and weak assurance. Doubtless the pride and scowl of infidelity, with its profaneness and ridicule besides, are properly regarded as being, even in persons of mature age, a pretty certain proof of superficial knowledge;—in young persons, they provoke contempt, where they fail of exciting compassion. If, then, a young person de-

sires to appear big and wise in his own eyes; but to sober-minded and judicious persons, full of self-conceit, shallow and unamiable, let him try to be an infidel.

Henry Hawkins wished to be an infidel, that he might sin without restraint. Infidelity takes away the fear of sinning. This fact is of the most serious character, and has proved the destruction of thousands, who might otherwise have done well for themselves and for others in the world. You live in a world of temptation; your early years are peculiarly exposed to assault, because the adversary of God and men,—because the world knows, that you are then defenceless. Put away from you the advice and instructions of anxious parents, the influence of Christian friends, and all regard, not to say all study, of the word of God, and we tremble for the consequences in the present life. You must lose at once the confidence of all considerate persons. Even your best friends, your very kindred, will look upon you with distrust and painful alarm. Not one youth in five, in our large cities, who takes this course, fails of becoming a prey to the arts of dishonesty or licentiousness. O then, as you value the esteem and confidence of good men—as you judge a fair reputation of more worth than gold, perhaps than life itself,—as you anticipate

with reasonable prospects an honourable and useful station in society, beware of infidelity. It will prove a destructive worm at the root of the tree of hope. It will expose you to the scorching rays of this world's ignominy and contempt, as well as to everlasting punishment.

As others would become, with good reason, suspicious of you, were your feet to stray into the paths of infidelity, so have you sufficient cause to withhold your confidence from others, who are known to be walking in it. Infidels must, in ordinary cases, be distrustful of each other. Leave infidelity to take its course, and it is difficult to conceive what security would remain for property, character, or life. Most of the criminals, who, in this land, suffer the punishment of death, or confinement in our prisons, are found to be either wholly or partially infidel in their sentiments. The disposition which Henry thought he discovered in Freethinkers to do "bloody deeds," if they had the power, is not an illusion. It is the prevalence of Christianity in opposition to infidelity and scepticism, as well as to false religions of every kind, which has created and sustained in the world the interests of morality, kindness, and mercy. But for the world to come, what does infidelity promise? What can it do for us,

when the opportunities for sinful enjoyment are passing away? Can the infidel know there is no future judgment? No condemnation? No place of punishment? There are no greater hypocrites "we have said, than infidels." Very few of them firmly believe what they avow; for when they approach the grave with all their pride and blindness and obstinacy, with all the aid they can obtain from their books, their companions and their sophistry, they not unfrequently shrink back from the prospect before them. They would then be glad to have the Christian's peace. Yes, many have, in the hour of death, called upon Christ to have mercy and save their souls from the coming wrath. They have cursed the deceivers who led them into infidelity, and deprived them of the consolations and hope of the precious Gospel. What then, we ask, is the real value of infidelity? What does the Free-thinker possess, of which he has reason to be vain? Is he a better man than his Christian neighbour? Is he doing more, or even as much, for the good of mankind? Has he found out any new way of rendering men happy in the present world? No, he has got nothing by his infidelity but a hard heart and a seared conscience;—and these will not secure him against fear and trembling when he comes to die, nor against the condemnation of hell when he is dead.

But it is not sufficient that you be persuaded of the bad foundation and destructive influence of infidelity. We wish you to consider well the divine character and obligations of the Gospel. If the Scriptures are indeed the inspired word of God, expressing his will respecting your conduct, and disclosing your way back to reconciliation and eternal favour with him; then do they deserve the highest regard and most diligent study. Then is it an unspeakable privilege to be supplied in childhood and youth with the means of understanding them. With what cheerful diligence should young persons avail themselves of the aid of Sabbath-schools and Bible Classes, which are becoming so happily numerous and popular in our land. The most certain way of obtaining to a high and saving regard for the Scriptures, is to study them with candour and diligence. No person, whose mind is deeply imbued with the sentiments and sublime disclosures of the Gospel, can fail of being impressed with its divine character. Without this attention to it, the Bible will, after all, be to you a sealed book.

You may escape the mistakes and the shame of infidelity, and yet overlook the blessings which the Gospel was designed to impart. It is to be feared that some who read this little volume, and become entirely persuad-

ed that God has given them the Bible to make them wise unto salvation, will neglect to seek, in good earnest, for this wisdom. But if the holy word of God is treated in this manner, will it not hereafter testify against those who have every advantage for reading and understanding it? Will not Christ condemn those to the most fearful place of punishment, who could not be persuaded to listen to his words and become his faithful disciples, notwithstanding all the pains and pious anxieties of their best earthly friends for this object? Will it not prove most unhappy to remember, when too late, that you were admonished of the sacred character and claims of the Bible, and how it must be studied as well as read, and practised as well as understood, if you shall then have missed of its salvation.

Dear young friends, make the Bible your daily companion; study it with the desire to learn your duty and the way of eternal life; and look up to God, by prayer and supplication, for his good spirit to render it effectual to this end. Cultivate a teachable and obedient heart, and cast your whole soul upon that grace which is able to save you. You will thus escape alike the wiles of infidelity, the delusions of religious error, and the condemnation of those who know but do not the will of our heavenly Father.

It will be your noble privilege to enjoy the confidence of men, the approbation of conscience and favour of God, in the present world ; and to inherit eternal life and glory, in that which is to come.

THE END.

INFIDEL OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

Among the many able works which have been published to refute the objections of infidels to the Bible and to the Christian religion, the following are published by the American Sunday School Union, and are kept for sale at their Depository, 146 *Chestnut Street, Philadelphia*, and at the depositories of their Auxiliaries throughout the United States.

A FATHER'S REASONS FOR CHRISTIANITY. 1 Vol.—108 pages—14 cents in boards, and 24 cents bound.

MAHOMED ALI-BEY. 126 pages—16 cents in boards, and 26 cents bound.

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LESLIE'S SHORT METHOD WITH DEISTS is an excellent tract on the same subject.