

THE

P R E F A C E

TO THE

FOUR EVANGELISTS,

AND THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

THE one half of our undertaking upon the New Testament is now, by the assistance of Divine grace, finished, and presented to the reader, who, it is hoped, the Lord working with it, may hereby be somewhat helped in understanding and improving the sacred history of Christ and his apostles, and in making it, as it certainly is, the best exposition of our creed, in which these inspired writers are summed up; which is intimated by that Evangelist, who calls his gospel, *A Declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us*, Luke 1. 1.

And as there is no part of scripture which it concerns us more to be well established in the belief of, so there is none which the generality of christians are more conversant with, or speak of more frequently. It is therefore our duty, by constant pains in meditation and prayer, to come to an intimate acquaintance with the true intent and meaning of these narratives, what our concern is in them, and what we are to build upon them, and draw from them; that we may not rest in such a knowledge of them as that which we had, when in our childhood we were taught to read English out of the translation, and Greek out of the originals, of these books. We ought to know them as the physician does his dispensatory, the lawyer his books of reports, and the sailor his chart and compass; that is, to know how to make use of them in that which we apply ourselves to as our business in this world, which is, to serve God here, and enjoy him hereafter, and both in Christ the Mediator.

The great designs of the christian institutes, (which these books are the fountains and foundations of,) were, to reduce the children of men to the fear and love of God, as the commanding, active principle of their observance of him, and obedience to him; to show them the way of their reconciliation to him, and acceptance with him; and to bring them under obligations to Jesus Christ as Mediator; and thereby to engage them to all instances of devotion toward God, and justice and charity towards all men, in conformity to the example of Christ, in obedience to his law, and in pursuance of his great intentions. What therefore I have endeavoured here, has been with this view, to make these writings serviceable to the faith, holiness, and comfort of good christians.

Now that these writings, thus made use of to serve these great and noble designs, may have their due influence upon us, it concerns us to be well established in our belief of their divine original. And here we have to do with two sorts of people. Some embrace the Old Testament, but set that up in opposition to the New, pleading that if that be right this is wrong; and these are the Jews. Others, though they live in a christian nation, and by baptism wear the christian name, yet, under pretence of freedom of thought, despise christianity, and, consequently, reject the New Testament, and therefore the Old, of course.

I confess it is strange, that any now who receive the Old Testament should reject the New; since, beside all the particular proofs of the divine authority of the New Testament, there is such an admirable harmony between it and the Old. It agrees with the Old, in all the main intentions of it, refers to it, builds upon it, shows the accomplishment of its types and prophecies, and thereby is the perfection and crown of it. Nay, if it be not true, the Old Testament must be false; and all the glorious promises which shine so brightly in it, and the performance of which was limited within certain periods of time, must be a great delusion; which we are sure they are not; and therefore must embrace the New Testament to support the reputation of the Old.

That in the Old Testament which the New Testament lays aside, is, the peculiarity of the Jewish nation, and the observances of the ceremonial law; both which certainly were of divine appointment; and yet the New Testament does not at all clash with the Old; for,

1. They were always designed to be laid aside in the fulness of time. No other is to be expected than that the morning-star should disappear when the sun rises; and the latter parts of the Old Testament often speak of the laying aside of these things, and of the calling in of the Gentiles.

2. They were very honourably laid aside, and rather exchanged for that which was more noble and excellent, more divine and heavenly. The Jewish church was swallowed up in the christian, the Mosaic ritual in evangelical institutions. So that the New Testament is no more the undoing of the Old, than the sending of a youth to the university is the undoing of his education in the grammar-school.

3. Providence soon determined this controversy, (which is the only thing that seemed a controversy between the Old Testament and the New,) by the destruction of Jerusalem, the desolations of the temple, the dissolution of the temple-service, and the total dispersion of all the remains of the Jewish nation; with a judicial defeat of all the attempts to incorporate it again, now for above 1600 years; and this, according to the express predictions of Christ, a little before his death. And, as Christ would not have the doctrine of his being the Messiah much insisted on, till the great conclusive proof of it was given by his resurrection from the dead; so the repeal of the ceremonial law, as to the Jews, was not much insisted on, but their keeping up the observation of it was connived at, till the great conclusive proof of its repeal was given, by the destruction of Jerusalem, which made the observation of it for ever impracticable. And the manifest tokens of divine wrath, which the Jews, considered as a people, even notwithstanding the prosperity of particular persons among them, continue under to this day, is a proof, not only of the truth of Christ's predictions concerning them, but that they lie under a greater guilt than that of idolatry, (for which they lay under a desolation of 70 years,) and that can be no other than crucifying Christ, and rejecting his gospel.

Thus evident it is, that in our expounding of the New Testament, we are not undoing what we did in expounding the Old; so far from it, that we may appeal to the law and the prophets for the confirmation of the great truth which the gospels are written to prove—That our Lord Jesus is the Messiah promised to the fathers, who should come, and we are to look for no other. For though his appearing did not answer the expectation of the carnal Jews, who looked for a Messiah in external pomp and power, yet it exactly answered all the types, prophecies, and promises of the Old Testament, which all had their accomplishment in him; and even his ignominious sufferings, which are the greatest stumbling-block to the Jews, were foretold concerning the Messiah; so that if he had not submitted to them, we had failed in our proof; so far it is from being weakened by them. Bishop Kidder's *Demonstration of the Christian's Messiah*, has abundantly made out this truth, and answered the *cavils* (for such they are, rather than *arguments*) of the Jews against it, above any in our language.

But we live in an age when christianity and the New Testament are more virulently and daringly attacked by some within their own bowels, than by those upon their borders. Never were Moses and his writings so arraigned and ridiculed by any Jews, or Mahomet and his Alcoran by any Mussulmen, as Christ and his gospel by men that are baptized and called *Christians*; and this, not under colour of any other divine revelation, but in contempt and defiance of all divine revelation; and not by way of complaint, that they meet with that which shocks their faith, and which, through their own weakness, they cannot get over, and therefore desire to be instructed in, and helped in the understanding of, and the reconciling of them to the truth which they have received; but by way of resolute opposition, as if they looked upon it as their enemy, and were resolved by all means possible to be the ruin of it; though they cannot say what evil it has done to the world, or to them. If the pretence of it has transported many in the church of Rome into such corruptions of worship and cruelties of government as are indeed the scandal of human nature, yet, instead of being thereby prejudiced against pure christianity, they should the rather appear more vigorously in defence of it, when they see so excellent an institution as that is in itself, so basely abused and misrepresented.

They pretend to a liberty of thought in their opposition to christianity, and would be distinguished by the name of *Freethinkers*. I will not here go about to produce the arguments which, to all that are not wilfully ignorant and prejudiced against the truth, are sufficient to prove the divine original and authority of the doctrine of Christ. The learned find much satisfaction in reading the apologies of the ancients for the christian religion, when it was struggling with the polytheism and idolatry of the Gentiles. Justin Martyr and Tertullian, Lactantius and Minutius Felix, wrote admirably in defence of christianity, when it was further sealed by the blood of the Martyrs.

But its patrons and advocates in the present day have another sort of enemies to deal with. The antiquity of the pagan theology, its universal prevalence, the edicts of princes, and the traditions and usages of the country, are not now objected to christianity; but I know not what imaginary freedom of thought, and an unheard of privilege of human nature, are assumed, not to be bound by any divine revelation whatsoever.

Now it is easy to make out,

1. That those who would be thought thus to maintain a liberty of thinking, as one of the privileges of human nature, and in defence of which they will take up arms against God himself, do not themselves think freely, nor give others leave to do so. In some of them, a resolute indulgence of themselves in those vicious courses which they know the gospel, if they admit it, will make very uneasy to them, and a secret enmity to a holy, heavenly mind and life, forbid them all free thought; for so strong a prejudice have their lusts and passions laid them under against the laws of Christ, that they find themselves under a necessity of opposing the truths of Christ, upon which these laws are founded. *Perit iudicium, quando res transit in affectum—The judgment is overcome, when the decision is referred to the affections.* Right or wrong, Christ's bonds must be broken, and his cords cast from them; and therefore, how evident soever the premises be, the conclusion must be denied, if it tend to fasten these bands and cords upon them; and where is the freedom of thought then? *While they promise themselves liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.*

In others of them, a reigning pride and affectation of singularity, and a spirit of contradiction, those lusts of the mind, which are as impetuous and imperious as any of the lusts of the flesh and of the world, forbid a freedom of thinking, and enslave the soul in all its inquiries after religion. Those can no more think freely, who resolve they will think by themselves, than those can, who resolve to think with their neighbours.

Nor will they give others liberty to think freely; for it is not by reason and argument that they go about to convince us, but by jest and banter, and exposing christianity and its serious professors to contempt. Now, considering how natural it is to most men to be jealous for their reputation, this is as great an imposition as can possibly be; and the unthinking are as much kept from freethinking by the fear of being ridiculed in the club of those who set up for oracles in reason, as by the fear of being cursed, excommunicated, and anathematized, by the counsel of those who set up for oracles in religion. And where is the freethinking then?

2. That those who will allow themselves a true liberty of thinking, and will think seriously, cannot but embrace all Christ's sayings as *faithful*, and well *worthy of all acceptance*. Let the corrupt bias of the

zarnal heart toward the world, and the flesh, and self (the most presumptuous idol of the three) be taken away, and let the doctrine of Christ be proposed first in its true colours, as Christ and his apostles have given it us, and in its true light, with all its proper evidence, intrinsic and extrinsic; and then let the capable soul freely use its rational powers and faculties, and by the operation of the Spirit of grace, who alone works faith in all that believe, even the high thought, when once it becomes a free thought, freed from the bondage of sin and corruption, will, by a pleasing and happy power, be captivated, and brought into obedience to Christ; and when he thus makes it *free*, it will be *free indeed*.

Let any one who will give himself leave to think impartially, and be at the pains to think closely, read Mr. Baxter's *Reasons for the Christian Religion*; and he will find, both that it goes to the bottom, and lays the foundation deep and firm, and also that it brings forth the top-stone in a believer's consent to God in Christ, to the satisfaction of any that are truly concerned about their souls and another world. The proofs of the truths of the gospel have been excellently well methodized, and enforced likewise, by Bishop Stillingfleet, in his *Origines Sacrae*; by Grotius, in his book, *Of the Truth of the Christian Religion*; by Dr. Whitby, in his General Preface to his *Commentary on the New Testament*; and of late by Mr. Ditton, very argumentatively, in his discourse concerning the *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*; and many others have herein done worthily. And I will not believe any man who rejects the New Testament and the christian Religion, to have thought freely upon the subject, unless he has, with humility, seriousness, and prayer to God for direction, deliberately read these or the like books, which, it is certain, were written both with liberty and clearness of thought.

For my own part, if my thoughts were worth any one's notice, I do declare, I have thought of this great concern, with all the liberty that a reasonable soul can pretend to, or desire; and that the result is, that the more I think, and the more freely I think, the more fully I am satisfied that the christian Religion is the true Religion, and that which, if I submit my soul sincerely to it, I may venture my soul confidently upon.

For when I think freely,

First, I cannot but think that the God who made man a reasonable creature by his power, has a right to rule him by his law, and to oblige him to keep his inferior faculties of appetite and passion, together with the capacities of thought and speech, in due subjection to the superior powers of reason and conscience. And when I look into my own heart, I cannot but think that this was it which my Maker designed in the order and frame of my soul, and that herein he intended to support his own dominion in me.

Secondly, I cannot but think that my happiness is bound up in the favour of God, and that his favour will, or will not, be toward me, according as I do, or do not, comply with the laws and ends of my creation. That I am accountable to this God; and that from him my judgment proceeds, not only for this world, but for my everlasting state.

Thirdly, I cannot but think that my nature is very unlike what the nature of man was, as it came out of the Creator's hands; that it is degenerated from its primitive purity and rectitude. I find in myself a natural aversion to my duty, and to spiritual and divine exercises, and a propensity to that which is evil; such an inclination toward the world and the flesh, as amounts to a propensity to backslide from the living God.

Fourthly, I cannot but think that I am therefore, by nature, thrown out of the favour of God; for though I think he is a gracious and merciful God, yet I think he is also a just and holy God, and that I am become, by sin, both odious to his holiness, and obnoxious to his justice. I should not think freely, but very partially, if I should think otherwise. I think I am guilty before God, have sinned, and come short of glorifying him, and of being glorified with him.

Fifthly, I cannot but think that, without some special discovery of God's will concerning me, and good will to me, I cannot possibly recover his favour, be reconciled to him, or be so far restored to my primitive rectitude, as to be capable of serving my Creator, and answering the ends of my creation, and becoming fit for another world. For the bounties of Providence to me, in common with the inferior creatures, cannot serve either as assurances that God is reconciled to me, or means to reconcile me to God.

Sixthly, I cannot but think that the way of salvation, both from the guilt and from the power of sin, by Jesus Christ, and his mediation between God and man, as it is revealed by the New Testament, is admirably well fitted to all the exigencies of my case, to restore me both to the favour of God and to the government and enjoyment of myself. Here I see a proper method for the removing of the guilt of sin, (that I may not die by the sentence of the law,) by the all-sufficient merit and righteousness of the Son of God in our nature; and, for the breaking of the power of sin, (that I may not die by my own disease,) by the all-sufficient influence and operation of the Spirit of God upon our nature. Every malady has herein its remedy, every grievance is hereby redressed, and in such a way as advances the honour of all the divine attributes, and is suited and accommodated to human nature.

Seventhly, I cannot but think that what I find in myself of natural religion, does evidently bear testimony to the christian religion; for all that truth which is discovered to me by the light of nature, is confirmed, and more clearly discovered, by the gospel; the very same thing which the light of nature gives me a confused sight of, (like the sight of men as trees walking,) the New Testament gives me a clear and distinct sight of. All that good which is pressed upon me by the law of nature, is more fully discovered to me, and I find myself much more strongly bound to it, by the gospel of Christ, the engagements it lays upon me to my duty, and the encouragements and assistances it gives me in my duty. And this is further confirming to me, that there, just there, where natural light leaves me at a loss, and unsatisfied—tells me that hitherto it can carry me, but no further—the gospel takes me up, helps me out, and gives me all the satisfaction I can desire, and that is especially in the great business of the satisfying of God's justice for the sin of man. My own conscience asks, *Where-with shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God? Will he be pleased with thousands of rams?* But I am still at a loss; I cannot frame a righteousness from any thing I am, or have, in myself, or from any thing I can do for God or present to God, wherein I dare appear before him; but the gospel comes and tells me, that Jesus Christ has made his soul an offering for sin, and God has declared himself well pleased with all believers in him; and this makes me easy.

Eighthly, I cannot but think that the proofs by which God has attested the truth of the gospel, are the most proper that could be given in a case of this nature—That the power and authority of the Redeemer in the kingdom of grace should be exemplified to the world, not by the highest degree of the pomp and

authority of the kings of the earth, as the Jews expected, but by the evidences of his dominion in the kingdom of nature; which is a much greater dignity and authority than any of the kings of the earth ever pretended to, and is no less than divine. And his miracles, being generally wrought upon men, not only upon their bodies, as they were mostly when Christ was here upon earth, but, which is more, upon their minds, as they were mostly after the pouring out of the Spirit in the gift of tongues and other supernatural endowments, were the most proper confirmations possible of the truth of the gospel, which was designed for the making of men holy and happy.

Ninthly, I cannot but think that the methods taken for the propagation of this gospel, and the wonderful success of those methods, which are purely spiritual and heavenly, and destitute of all secular advantages and supports, plainly show that it was of God, for God was with it, and it; could never have spread as it did, in the face of so much opposition, if it had not been accompanied with a power from on high. And the preservation of christianity in the world to this day, notwithstanding the difficulties it has struggled with, is to me a standing miracle for the proof of it.

Lastly, I cannot but think that the gospel of Christ has had some influence upon my soul, has had such a command over me, and been such a comfort to me, as is a demonstration to myself, though it cannot be so to another, that it is of God. I have tasted in it, *that the Lord is gracious*; and the most subtle disputant cannot convince one who has tasted honey, that it is not sweet.

And now I appeal to Him who knows the thoughts and intents of the heart, that in all this I think freely, (if it be possible for a man to know that he does so,) and not under the power of any bias. Whether we have reason to think that those who without any colour of reason, not only usurp, but monopolize, the character of *Freethinkers*, do so, let those judge, who easily observe that they do not speak sincerely, but industriously dissemble their notions; and one instance I cannot but notice, of their unfair dealing with their readers—that when, for the diminishing of the authority of the New Testament, they urge the various readings of the original, and quote an acknowledgment of Mr. Gregory of Christ Church, in his preface to his Works, *That no profane author whatsoever, &c.* and yet suppress what immediately follows, as the sense of that learned man upon it, *That this is an invincible reason for the scriptures' part, &c.*

We then receive the books of the New Testament as our oracles; for it is evident that that excellent notion of Dr. Henry More's is true, that "they have a direct tendency to take us off from the animal life, and to being us to the divine life."

But while we are thus maintaining the divine original and authority of the New Testament, as it has been received through all the ages of the church, we find our cause not only attacked by the enemies we speak of, but, in effect, betrayed by one who makes our New Testament almost double to what it really is, adding to it the *Constitutions of the Apostles*, collected by *Clement*, together with the *Apostolical Canons*, and making those to be of equal authority with the writings of the Evangelists, and preferable to the Epistles. By enlarging the lines of defence thus, without either cause or precedent,* he gives great advantage to the invaders.

Those *Constitutions of the Apostles* have many things in them very good, and may be of use, as other human compositions. But to pretend that they were composed, as they profess themselves to be, by the twelve apostles in concert at Jerusalem, *I Peter, saying this, I Andrew, saying that, &c.* is the greatest imposition that can be practised upon the credulity of the simple.

1. It is certain, there were a great many spurious writings which, in the early days of the church, went under the names of the apostles and apostolical men; so that it has been always complained of as impossible to find out any thing but the canon of scripture, that could with any assurance be attributed to them. Baronius himself acknowledges it, *Cum apostolorum nomine tam facta quam dicta referantur esse supposititia; nec sic quid de illis à veris sincerisque scriptoribus narratum sit integrum et incorruptum remanserit, in desperationem planè quandam dejiciunt posse unquam assequi quod verum certumque subsistat*—*Since so many of the acts and sayings ascribed to the apostles are found to be spurious, and even the narrations of faithful writers respecting them are not free from corruption, we must despair of ever being able to arrive at any absolute certainty about them.* Ad. An. Christ. 44. sect. 43, &c. There were Acts under the names of Andrew the apostle, Philip, Peter, Thomas; a Gospel under the name of Thaddeus, another of Barnabas, another of Bartholomew; a book concerning the infancy of our Saviour, another concerning his nativity, and many the like, which were all rejected as forgeries.

2. These *Constitutions* and *Canons*, among the rest, were condemned in the primitive church as apocryphal, and therefore justly rejected; because, though otherwise good, they pretended to be what really they were not, dictated by the twelve apostles themselves, as received from Christ. If Jesus Christ gave them such instructions, and they gave them in such a solemn manner to the church, as is pretended, it is unaccountable that there is not the least notice taken of any such thing done or designed in the *Gospels*, the *Acts*, or any of the *Epistles*.

They who have judged the most favourably of those *Canons* and *Constitutions*, have concluded that they were compiled by some officious persons under the name of *Clement*, toward the end of the second century, above 150 years after Christ's ascension, out of the common practice of the churches; that is, that which the compilers were most acquainted with, or had respect for; when at the same time we have reason to think that the far greater number of christian churches which by that time were planted, had *Constitutions* of their own, which if they had had the happiness to be transmitted to posterity, would have recommended themselves as well as these, or better. But as the legislators of old put a reputation upon their laws, by pretending to have received them from some deity or other, so church-governors studied to gain reputation to their sees, by placing some apostolical man or other at the head of their catalogue of bishops, (See *Bishop Stillingfleet's Irenicum*, p. 302.) and reputation to their *Canons* and *Constitutions*, by fathering them upon the apostles.

But how can it be imagined that the apostles should be all together at Jerusalem, to compose this book of *Canons* with so much solemnity, when we know that their commission was to go into all the world, and to preach the gospel to every creature. Accordingly, Eusebius tells us that Thomas went into Parthia, Andrew into Scythia, John into the lesser Asia; and we have reason to think that after their dispersion they never came together again, any more than the planters of the nations did after the Most High had separated the sons of Adam.

I think that any one who will compare these *Constitutions* with the writings which we are sure were given by inspiration of God, will easily discern a vast difference in the style and spirit. *What is the chaff to the wheat?*

* "Where are ministers, in the style of the true apostles, called priests, high priests? Where do we find in the apostolical age, that age of suffering, of the placing of the bishop in his throne? Or of readers, singers, and porters, in the church?"

I fear the collector and compiler of those *Constitutions*, under the name of *Clement*, was conscious to himself of dishonesty in it, in that he would not have them published before all, because of the mysteries contained in them; nor were they known or published till the middle of the fourth century, when the forgery could not be so well disproved. I cannot see any mysteries in them, that they should be concealed, if they had been genuine; but I am sure that Christ bids his apostles publish the mysteries of the kingdom of God upon the house-tops. And St. Paul, though there are mysteries in his Epistles, much more sublime than any of these *Constitutions*, charges that they should be read to all the holy brethren. Nay, these *Constitutions* are so wholly in a manner taken up, either with moral precepts, or rules of practice in the church, that if they had been what they pretend, they had been most fit to be published before all. And though the *Apostolycise* is so full of mysteries, yet a blessing is pronounced upon the readers and hearers of that prophecy. We must therefore conclude that, whenever they were written, by declining the light they owned themselves to be apocryphal, that is, hidden or concealed; that they durst not mingle themselves with what was given by divine inspiration; to allude to what is said of the ministers, (*Acts 5. 13.*) *Of the rest durst no man join himself to the apostles, for the people magnified them.*

So that even by their own confession they were not delivered to the churches with the other writings, when the New-Testament Canon was solemnly sealed up with that dreadful sentence passed on those that *add unto these things.*

And as we have thus had attempts made of late upon the purity and sufficiency of our New Testament, by additions to it, so we have likewise had from another quarter a great contempt put upon it by the papal power. The occasion was this:

One Father Quesnel, a French papist, but a Jansenist, near thirty years ago, published the *New Testament* in French, in several small volumes, with *Moral Reflections* on every verse, to render the reading of it more profitable, and meditation upon it more easy. It was much esteemed in France, for the sake of the piety and devotion which appeared in it, and it had several impressions. The Jesuits were much disgusted, and solicited the pope for the condemnation of it, though the author of it was a papist, and many things in it countenanced popish superstition.

After much struggling about it in the court of Rome, a bull was at length obtained, at the request of the French king, from the present pope, Clement XI., bearing date September 8, 1713, by which the said book, with what title or in what language soever it is printed, is prohibited and condemned; both the New Testament itself, because in many things varying from the vulgar Latin, and the Annotations, as containing divers propositions, (above a hundred are enumerated,) scandalous and pernicious, injurious to the church and its customs, impious, blasphemous, savouring of heresy. And the propositions are such as these—"That the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the effectual principle of all manner of good, is necessary for every good action; for without it nothing is done, nay, nothing can be done"—"That it is a sovereign grace, and is an operation of the Almighty hand of God"—"That when God accompanies his word with the internal power of his grace, it operates in the soul the obedience which it demands"—"That faith is the first grace, and the fountain of all others"—"That it is in vain for us to call God our Father, if we do not cry to him with the spirit of love"—"That there is no God, nor religion, where there is no charity"—"That the catholic church comprehends the angels and all the elect and just men of the earth, of all ages"—"That it has the Word incarnate for its Head, and all the saints for its members"—"That it is profitable and necessary at all times, in all places, and for all sorts of persons, to know the holy Scriptures"—"That the holy obscurity of the word of God is no reason for the laity not reading it"—"That the Lord's day ought to be sanctified by reading books of piety, especially the holy Scriptures"—And "that to forbid christians from reading the Scriptures, is to prohibit the use of light to the children of light." Many such positions as these, which the spirit of every good christian cannot but relish as true and good, are condemned by the pope's bull as impious and blasphemous. And this bull, though strenuously opposed by a great number of the Bishops in France, who were well affected to the notions of Father Quesnel, was yet received and confirmed by the French king's letters patent, bearing date at Versailles, February 14, 1714, which forbid all manner of persons, upon pain of exemplary punishment, so much as to keep any of those books in their houses; and adjudge any that should hereafter write in defence of the Propositions condemned by the pope, as disturbers of the peace.

It was registered the day following, February 15, by the Parliament of Paris, but with divers provisos and limitations.

By this it appears that popery is still the same thing that ever it was, an enemy to the knowledge of the Scriptures, and to the honour of divine grace. What reason have we to bless God, that we have liberty to read the Scriptures, and have helps to understand and improve them; which we are concerned diligently to make a good use of, that we may not provoke God to give us up into the hands of those powers that would use us in like manner.

I am willing to hope that those to whom the reading of the *Exposition of the Old Testament* was pleasant, will find this yet more pleasant; for this is that part of Scripture, which does most plainly testify of Christ, and in which that *gospel-grace* which appears unto all men, bringing salvation, shines most clear. This is the New-Testament milk for babes, the rest is strong meat for strong men. By these, therefore, let us be nourished and strengthened, that we may be pressing on toward perfection; and that, having laid the foundation in the history of our blessed Saviour's Life, Death, and Resurrection, and the first preaching of his gospel, we may build upon it by an acquaintance with the mysteries of godliness, to which we shall be further introduced in the Epistles.

I desire I may be read with a candid, and not a critical, eye. I pretend not to gratify the curious; the top of my ambition is, to assist those who are truly serious, in searching the Scriptures daily. I am sure

it is designed, and hope it is calculated, to promote piety toward God, and charity towards our brethren; and that there is not only something in it which may edify, but nothing which may justly offend, any good christian.

If any receive spiritual benefit by my poor endeavours, it will be a comfort to me; but let God have all the glory, and that free grace of his which has employed one that is utterly unworthy of such an honour, and enabled one thus far to go on in it, who is utterly insufficient for such a service.

Having obtained help of God, I continue hitherto in it, and humbly depend upon the same good hand of my God to carry me on in that which remains, to gird my loins with needful strength, and to make my way perfect; and for this I humbly desire the prayers of my friends. One volume more, I hope, will include what is yet to be done; and I will both go about it, and go on with it, as God shall enable me, with all convenient speed; but it is that part of the Scripture, which, of all others, requires the most care and pains in expounding it. But I trust, that *as the day, so shall the strength be.*

M. H

ADVERTISEMENT.

THAT which has been just offered to the reader, was the reverend author's *first draught* of a *Preface* to this volume. He intended to revise it, if God had allowed him a return home from his late journey. But though, by the afflicting stroke of his sudden death, it wants the advantage of his last hand, yet serious readers will be well pleased to have his first sentiments on those important heads which there come under his consideration; especially since it contains his dying testimony to the Christian Religion the Canon of the New Testament, and the general usefulness of the sacred scriptures, on occasion of those debates which have been lately started, and made the most considerable noise in the world.

The *Exposition* itself, as far as the *Acts of the Apostles* goes, was entirely committed to the press before he left the City. The reader will perceive his intentions for the rest of the *Holy Bible*. But the sovereign providence of God, *in whose hands our times are*, has called this faithful and diligent servant to rest from his labours, and finish well himself, before he could finish this, and several other great and pious designs he had for the service of God and his church.

However, it may be acceptable to such as have often entertained themselves and their families with what is already extant, to let them know that we are not without hopes yet of seeing *Mr. Henry's Exposition* of the remainder; though it cannot be expected to be altogether so copious and complete as that which he himself prepared for the public. He drew up, several years ago, an *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, which he had designed to transcribe with little alteration, for the beginning of his next volume, and was earnestly solicited to print it by itself, before he had thoughts of writing upon the whole Bible. For the rest, there are copies of his *Expositions*, both in public and private, taken from him by judicious writers; wherein, though they may not be of equal length, yet Mr. Henry was used to express himself with like propriety, the same pious spirit, and uncommon skill in the Scriptures. There is encouragement to hope that the revising and preparing of these for the press will be undertaken (if God give life and health) by an intimate friend of the excellent Author, whose long acquaintance with his spirit and manner renders him the most proper person for that service; and his endeared affection will incline him to take the pains necessary for ushering them into the world. This course is apprehended to be much better than either to leave such a work unfinished, when it is already advanced so far, or to attempt the continuation of the design with a quite different set of thoughts, and another sort of style and method, that it may be as much *Mr. Henry's* as possible. But a reasonable time must be allowed before this can be expected. I pray God long to spare the valuable life of that dear friend of the Author, and every way furnish him for this good work, and all others he may undertake for the good of God's church.

John Evans.