

L E T T E R I V .

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R E A S O N A B L E N E S S
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F A I T H I N C H R I S T .

L E T T E R I V .

DEAR SIR,

I Did intend in this letter to point out the importance of Faith in Christ, taking the reasonableness of it for granted. But as you particularly desire me to consider its REASONABLENESS, your will shall be law. I know you are well established in the grounds of the Christian faith, and therefore cannot ask for your own satisfaction. But as it is the duty of a Christian to *be able to give a reason of the hope that is in him, to every one that asketh it of him**, it would be wrong to refuse the request of a friend.

By

* 1 Peter, iii. 15.

the false glare of worldly grandeur, looked for a temporal deliverer, in consequence of the sublime imagery which the prophets used, in the true style of eastern poetry, to describe the person and kingdom of our Lord. The Samaritans likewise expected the appearance of Christ, and they apprehended he would be a prophet as well as a king*. It appears from some remarkable passages in Josephus, Philo, Tacitus, Suetonius, and other ancient historians, that there was an expectation even in the heathen world, that *the desire of all nations*† was about to appear; to which many suppose there is reference in Virgil's fourth Eclogue, on account of the similarity, in several striking particulars, between the descriptions

* John iv. 25 29 42. † Hag ii. 7.

in the Pollio, and those of the prophets, when they represent the glorious reign of the Messiah.

The expectation of Christ at the time he really appeared was rational, because well founded. It rested entirely with God whether he would send a Saviour at all or not; and therefore his positive will can only be known, with certainty, by an express revelation. The time likewise of the Saviour's advent depended upon the sovereign pleasure of Jehovah; and on this account there could be no reasonable expectation of the Messiah at one period any more than another, unless God had condescended to point out the particular time, which we find from the holy scriptures he was pleased to do. The first

promise of the Redeemer was made in Paradise, soon after the fall of our first parents, and was conveyed in general terms. The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head*. This promise was repeated, with the addition of particular circumstances, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To Abraham God said, *In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*†—*and in Isaac shall thy seed be called*‡. Of the children of Isaac, Jacob was elected to be the ancestor of Christ, according to the flesh. Hence it is written, *Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated*§. Under a prophetic influence, Jacob on his dying bed foreto'd that the Shiloh should be of Judah's line,

* Gen. iii. 15. † Gen. xxii. 18. ‡ Gen. xxi. 12. § M^o. i. 2, 3. Rem. ix. 13.

line, *and that the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until he came**. Afterward, at sundry times and in divers manners, God spake unto the fathers by the prophets, who foretold the coming of Christ, the glory of his kingdom, and the period of his advent. Divine truth, like the rising light of day, gradually displayed its cheerful beams, as the auspicious era of the birth of Christ approached, when the sun of righteousness shone forth, and a flood of light broke in upon the benighted world. Several of the prophets pointed out the time in which the illustrious Saviour was to make his appearance; and upon their prophecies the Jews built their expectation.

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* Gen. xlix. 10.

And perhaps the same expectation was excited in the Gentile world, by the Greek translations of the Old Testament.

The Messiah must be come, whether Christ be the Messiah or not. This is my third observation, which I ground upon ancient prophecy in connection with important facts. It is a fact that the Jewish sceptre is departed, and that the lawgiver of Judah is no more; consequently the Shiloh must be come* It is certain that the seventy-two weeks, from the going forth of the commandment, to restore and to build Jerusalem, are expired; and therefore the Messiah is come, and has been cut

* Gen. xlix, 10.

cut off for the transgression of his people*. The temple at Jerusalem, built by Zerubbabel, was to be honoured by the personal ministry of Christ: but this temple was destroyed when Titus Vespasian, the Roman emperor, took the city; consequently the Desire of all nations is come†. The Roman empire has long since fallen, and therefore the God of heaven has erected his spiritual kingdom‡.

As it appears, from the remarks just made, that the Messiah must be come, we will proceed briefly to point out some of the positive evidences there are, that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Shiloh, the Desire

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* Dan. ix. 24. † Hag. ii. 6. &c. ‡ Dan. ii. 44.

of all nations, the Saviour of the world.

He not only came in the fulness of time, the time foretold in ancient prophecy, but in other respects answered to the predictions of the Messiah, respecting his birth, life, ministry, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension. Compare the prophecies of the Old Testament with the history of the New, and you will perceive that they are in perfect harmony.

The miracles which Christ performed prove the divinity of his mission. Hereby Nicodemus, a man of considerable eminence, and probably a member of the grand Jewish Sanhedrim, was convinced that Jesus
came

came from God*. The miracles of Christ were real, and not the effect of delusive art. They were of various kinds. The roaring billows obeyed his voice; diseases flew at his command; and devils submitted to his authority. He restored impaired reason, decayed health, lost senses, maimed limbs, fallen virtue, and departed life. His miracles were not done in secret only, but most times in the presence of many witnesses. They were not wrought seldom, but frequent. They were not ostentatious displays of power, but the effects of the purest benevolence. They were sensible demonstrations of his divine mission to those who saw them performed; and on their testimony we may safely rely.
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* John iii. 1.

The character of Christ is itself a proof that he was the Messiah. He was too wise to be deceived himself, and too good to deceive others. Could he, who at twelve years of age disputed with learned rabbies—he who saw Nathaniel under the fig-tree—he who knew that money was in the fish's mouth—he, who confounded the wisest cavillers of the age by his learned questions—he, to whom the heart of man was unveiled, and held itself without a covering—could he be deceived? Impossible!—and equally impossible is it that he should deceive others. He had no selfish ends to answer; no pride to gratify; or he might have been made a king, instead of being treated with contempt. No covetousness to indulge; or he might have enjoyed

enjoyed the riches of the world in the greatest abundance, instead of being without a place where to lay his head. He had no evil passions to satiate, as every impostor has. His whole life was free from every sinful stain, and filled up with acts of piety to God, and benevolence to man. His very enemies acquit him of all guilt. Judas, who betrayed him, was one of his twelve apostles; and if Christ had been an impostor, or in any respect dishonest, Judas, from his long intimacy with him, must have known it: but that he had no such idea is abundantly evident from his own language and conduct*. Pilate, the procurator of Judea, a civil officer under the Roman emperor, who through fear

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* Matt. xxvii. 3, 4.

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condemned Christ to be crucified, was convinced in his own conscience that he was a just person . One of the two thieves, who at first reviled him, afterward acknowledged his faith in the divinity of Christ's mission, and prayed to be remembered by him when he entered his kingdom†.

Jesus Christ was not only holy himself; but he sought to make others holy, by his precepts, example, parables, miracles, and death. He never countenanced vice in any, nor did he suffer the faults of his disciples to pass without reproof.

The prophecies of Christ furnish us with an argument in proof of his
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* Matt. xxvii. 24. † Luke xxiii. 41, 42.

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being the Messiah. Future events are known only to God. The mind of every creature is finite, and cannot possess that perfect knowledge of matter and spirit, which is necessary to enable it to ascertain, with certainty, what events will take place hereafter. This is one of the grand peculiarities of deity. Hence Jehovah calls upon the false gods of the heathens to make known future events to prove their divinity*. A veil, through which we cannot penetrate, hides things future from the view of mortals; but to the view of Christ futurity was unveiled. He foretold the treachery of Judas—the fall of Peter—his own death and resurrection—the persecution of his disciples—the destruction of Jerusalem—

* Isa. xli. 22, 23.

lem—the spread of the gospel—and many other events: all which exactly came to pass, and so verified the truth of the predictions.

The circumstances attending the death of Christ are worthy of our attention. There was darkness over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour; that is, according to our way of reckoning, from twelve at noon to three in the afternoon. This was occasioned by a supernatural eclipse; ‘a dread eclipse, without opposing spheres from the Creator’s frown.’ As Christ was crucified at the Jewish passover, when the moon was near her full, there could be no natural eclipse of the sun. This uncommon event confounded philosophy. When Jesus yielded up his

his spirit, the vail of the temple was rent into two parts from the top to the bottom, the earth quaked, the rocks rent, and the graves opened. These phenomena struck such terror and conviction into the minds of the centurion, and those who were with him, as forced them to exclaim, *Truly, this was the Son of God**.

The resurrection of Christ is another strong pillar, on which the truth of Christianity is supported. The circumstances attending his resurrection were very extraordinary†; and the fact itself, that he did rise, comes recommended by the strongest evidence. After Jesus rose from the dead he appeared publicly to many. Above five hundred
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* Matt. xxvii. 45—55. † Matt. xxviii. 2.

saw him at one time*. That so many were imposed on, is a circumstance by no means credible, as it required no metaphysical acumen, no display of genius, to ascertain the certainty of so plain a fact, for the truth of which they had the evidence of sense. Many witnesses of his resurrection conversed freely with their risen Lord, and frequently ate and drank with him, during the forty days he abode on earth before he ascended to heaven. The incredulity of Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, serves to strengthen our faith, as it proves that the disciples of our Lord were not such weak and credulous persons, as are liable to be imposed on by every artful tale, which the crafty may invent. Thomas would not believe but upon the fullest

* 1 Cor. xv. 6.

fullest evidence; this he obtained to his perfect satisfaction, and then acknowledged Christ as his Lord and his God*. As the disciples had ocular demonstration, they could not be deceived themselves; and to suppose that they aimed to deceive others would shock common sense. Would they have suffered the loss of all worldly advantages to propagate what they did not know to be true? Would they have taught the resurrection of Christ, so soon after they said he rose, on the very spot, and in the presence of those who could easily have detected them, if their doctrine had been false? Would they have exposed themselves to persecution, poverty, contempt, imprisonment, and even death itself in every

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* John xx. 28.

horrid form, if they had not believed what they taught? Nature recoils at so strange a thought! We must embrace universal scepticism, before we can deny the resurrection of Christ. That he rose from the dead is a fact—a well supported fact—a very important fact—as it proves the efficacy of his sacrifice, the truth of his character as the Messiah and the Son of God, and the certainty of the resurrection to eternal life.

The spread of the gospel is another evidence of its divinity. You know, Sir, the opposition it met with—the triumph it obtained—and the means of its propagation. When Christianity was first taught mankind, it received the most violent attacks.

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The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed. The gospel met with the united opposition of princes, philosophers, and priests. These all attempted to prevent its spread, from different motives, on different grounds, and by different means. Jews and Gentiles aimed at the same object—the destruction of Christianity. In the cause of persecution, Pilate and Herod became friends. But notwithstanding the most formidable attacks, *the gospel ran and was glorified.* Christian churches were soon erected in most parts of the Roman empire, and beyond its extensive bounds. Christian churches were formed in the countries of Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Cyprus, Crete, Pontus, Galatia,

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tia, Cappadocia, Asia, Greece, and Italy; and in the cities of Rome, Cæsaria, Antioch in Syria, Antioch in Pisidia, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, Philippi, Thesalonica, and in many other cities and countries. Now to what shall we attribute such amazing success, under such circumstances of opposition? Does the gospel suit the corrupt heart of man? By no means. Its doctrines are too humiliating for human pride, and its precepts too spiritual for depraved nature. Did the disciples of our Lord meet the corrupt prejudices of the populace, gratify the vanity of the great, and palliate the vices of the rich, to conciliate their affection and procure their interest? Far from it! Did they use fire and sword to promote their cause? No; the weapons of their warfare

warfare were not carnal, but spiritual. It was by manifestation of the truth they commended themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. The success of the gospel of Christ can be attributed to no adequate cause, but the omnipotent energy of the holy spirit, which would not have been exerted in favor of imposture. The evidence therefore of the Messiahship of Christ stands upon a rock, against which the gates of hell shall never be able to prevail.

And is Jesus Christ the true Messiah? is he a prophet sent from God, to teach mankind the most important truths? then let us hear him, and with implicit confidence receive his doctrines. On his wisdom and

veracity we may safely rely. His authority is evidence. If any of his doctrines are inexplicable, they are nevertheless true. They should not be rejected because they are attended with difficulties. Are there not difficulties in nature, in providence, and in natural religion? Can we explain the laws of nature? can we disclose their hidden mysteries? or do we deny their operation because it surpasses our understanding? Do we deny the existence of moral or natural evil, on account of the difficulties we feel when we think of their entrance? Do we deny the eternity or omnipresence of God, because our little minds are lost when we contemplate on these subjects? Let us be consistent. If we admit that there are difficulties which we cannot

not obviate attending the laws of nature, the events in providence, and the truths of natural religion, let us not object to the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, because they are superior to our limited comprehension. Is it not highly reasonable to receive the most mysterious doctrines, if they come recommended by the authority of Christ? The doctrines of Christ are, as facts, clearly revealed and easily understood: but the mystery of them not being revealed is no object of faith. What is revealed may be known, and what is not revealed cannot be credited. *Secret things belong unto God: but those things that are revealed belong unto us**. Let us use our reason to judge of the evidences of re-

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* Deut. xxix. 29.

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velation, and to know what doctrines it contains; then resign our reason to the guidance of an infallible leader, ever remembering that the true Christian WALKS BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT*

I am,

Dear Sir,

Yours, &c,

LETTER

* 2 Cor. v. 7.

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