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*The Excellency of the Scriptures.*

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**S E R M O N,**

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

**ALBANY BIBLE SOCIETY,**

AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING,

IN THE

**NORTH DUTCH CHURCH,**

FEBRUARY 12, 1811.

—\*— k  
BY **SAMUEL BLATCHFORD, D. D.**

Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Lansingburgh.

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The proceeds of the sales are devoted by the Author to the benefit of the funds of the Society.

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**ALBANY :**

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1811



At a MEETING of the MEMBERS of the ALBANY BIBLE SOCIETY, held in the North Dutch Church, in the City of Albany, the 12th day of February, 1811.

RESOLVED, That the thanks of the Society be presented to the Rev. Dr. BLATCHFORD, for the excellent Sermon which he has this evening delivered, and that a copy of the same be requested for publication.

*Extract from the Minutes,*

JOHN STEARNS, *Sec'ry.*

## A SERMON, &c.

HOSEA VIII, xii.

I HAVE WRITTEN TO HIM THE GREAT THINGS OF MY LAW, BUT THEY WERE COUNTED AS A STRANGE THING.

THESE words were uttered by a holy prophet, under the express command of God, concerning the Jews. The Jews were a nation highly distinguished of heaven, and were particularly styled God's chosen and peculiar people. They descended immediately from Abraham who was the friend of God; and, to answer some of the gracious purposes of the Almighty towards a guilty and ruined world, they were separated from the nations around them by privileges peculiar to themselves. Among the splendid advantages they possessed was this, that "*to them were committed the oracles of God.*"\*

A revelation from God, my brethren, is a thing of immense value: they, who enjoy it, are laid under unceasing obligations to obey it,

\* Rom. 3, 2.

to make its sacred contents familiar to their hearts, and in all their conduct to exemplify its solemn maxims. To treat it with neglect, is to trifle with its divine author, and to betray a destitution of principle, an ingratitude of soul which words can never express. Yet it would seem this people, so elevated in point of privilege, and so favored of heaven, gave occasion for the complaint of our text; a complaint which they had never heard, had not he who made it known the value of his own gift; "*I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.*"

In treating on this passage I shall

I. Shew that the scriptures were written by the inspiration of God.

II. That they deserve the character given them in the text; "*the great things of God's law.*"

III. That they should not be *counted as a strange thing*, but be universally acknowledged, and cordially received.

I. The scriptures were written by the inspiration of God.

This is a point of great consequence; for if the bible be not the word of God, we are bound to reject it as we would the impostures of Mahomet or the dreams of Zoroaster. Parts of it, indeed, might claim the attention of a speculative philosopher; but what then? We should be driven back to the religion of nature, to be traced out by the dim light of human reason,

always liable to err, and almost always in the wrong. The truth of the scriptures lies at the foundation of that excellence which they claim, and it is susceptible of proof from a variety of considerations.

Here I might go into a long detail of reasoning and shew you the truth of the scriptures, and consequently prove that they are of divine authority. It might be made abundantly evident from the genuineness of the sacred books, and the truth of the principle facts which they contain. From the manner in which divine providence has guarded and protected them from age to age, and handed them down to us. From the vast importance of their histories, their promises, their threatenings and their prophecies. From the language, style and manner of writing, with the great number of particular circumstances of time, place and persons mentioned in them. From their agreement with natural and civil history, and their agreement with themselves and with each other. From the unity of design evidently manifested in the dispensations recorded in the scriptures, and from the necessity of divine communications, miracles and prophecies in the infancy of the world. From the moral character of Christ, the prophets, and apostles. From the excellence of the doctrines contained in the sacred books, with the astonishing advantages which have accrued to the world in consequence of divine revelation; and also, from the



nature and superior excellence of the attempt made by Christ and his apostles, as it respects the happiness of this life, and that which is to come.\*

On each of these topics, and on many others, much might be said; and, in pursuing them, an abundant satisfaction would be enjoyed by the serious investigator of truth.—He would be absorbed in the wisdom and goodness of the moral governor of the universe, who has been pleased to bless us with a revelation of his will, and rejoice that God hath not left himself without witness; but guarded and supported his own word by a body of evidence, under which, indeed, carping infidelity might groan, but which it can never overthrow.

We could not do justice to these arguments in the compass of a discourse; and all we can attempt is the selection of a few.

Now, the best proofs for the truth of the scriptures are taken from the scriptures themselves. The word of God is called a light; and it is so because it hath the peculiar property of light; that is, *it discovers itself*.

Among the internal proofs of the inspiration of the scriptures, are the just exhibition they afford of the character of God:—The purity of their precepts:—And the truth of their prophecies.

\* See these arguments excellently discussed in *Hartley's observations on man*, vol. 2. Or, for want of this author; that part of his work, containing these arguments, may be found in *Bp. Watson's collection of theological tracts*, vol. 5.

### THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

God is represented in the scripture in all those sublime and just characters which we cannot but admit should belong to the deity. Is it necessary to the Alpha and Omega—the beginning and the ending—the glorious creator—the almighty father—the moral governor of the universe, and judge of heaven and of earth, that he should be a spirit, eternal, unchangeable, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite in wisdom, spotless in purity, inflexible in justice, invariable in truth, inexpressible in glory, and boundless in goodness? In these divine characters, the scriptures clothe the divinity; and what is left to men or to angels but to bow down and adore! Let us approach with reverence and hear what Jehovah saith concerning himself.

*“I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God.”* *“With whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning.”*---  
*“The Lord God almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”* *“Behold the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him.”*  
*“Holy and reverend is his name.”* *“The most high dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”*  
*“God is a spirit and will be worshipped in spirit and in truth.”* *“He is a God of truth, just and right is he.”* *“The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgres-*

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*“ sion and sin, and that will by no means clear  
 “ the guilty.” “ Hell is naked before him and  
 “ destruction hath no covering.” “ The eyes of  
 “ the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil  
 “ and the good.” “ Who hath measured the  
 “ waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out  
 “ heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust  
 “ of the earth in a measure, and weighed the  
 “ mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?  
 “ It is “ the everlasting God, the Lord, the cre-  
 “ ator of the ends of the earth, who fainteth not,  
 “ neither is weary, and there is no searching his  
 “ understanding.” “ He sendeth forth his com-  
 “ mandment upon earth, his word runneth very  
 “ swiftly. He giveth snow like wool, he scat-  
 “ tereth the hoar frost like ashes, he casteth forth  
 “ his ice like morsels; who can stand before his  
 “ cold?” “ He maketh his angels spirits, his  
 “ ministers a flame of fire.” “ A sparrow falleth  
 “ not to the ground without your father,” “ and  
 “ the hairs of your head are all numbered.”  
 “ Pray to thy father which is in secret, and thy  
 “ father which seeth in secret shall reward thee  
 “ openly.”\**

In these, and numberless passages which might be collected, God hath declared his character; and here nothing is intermixed of weakness or folly. All is perfect---all is excellent---and so sublime, so worthy of the great invisi-

\* Is. 44, 6. James 1, 17. 1 Kings 8, 27. Ps. 111, 9. Acts 7, 48. John 4, 24. Deut. 32, 4. Ex. 34, 6, 7. Job 26, 6. Prov. 15, 3. Is. 40, 12, 28. Ps. 147, 15, 16, 17. Ps. 104, 4. Matt. 10, 29. Matt. 6, 4.

ble, that this revelation of his glory and nature and essence could only come from him who is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders."\*

Compared with him, what were *the gods of the heathen but vanity and a lie?* † Paganism, aided by the wisdom of its sages, assigned various deities to various purposes and to various regions. Hence there were gods of the groves, gods of the sea, and gods of the bloody field. One tutelar god for a city, and another for a nation. These were often agitated by envy, and transported with jealousy; so that Jupiter Capitolinus could only be reconciled to Jupiter Tonans, by the last becoming the porter of the former. † Some were the patrons of folly, and others the patrons of vice. Here was Bacchus, reeling in drunkenness! Mars, raging in slaughter! Venus, rioting in obscenity! and Mercury, the pander of lust! As were their gods, so were the emblems by which they represented them, and to which they also sacrificed. Sometimes the sun---sometimes the moon---sometimes a star! Here was a temple dedicated to an ox, to a dog, or to a dead hero! There a magnificent fane glittered in the sun; but the deity within was a serpent---a crocodile, or a monkey!

In this system, so absurd, so gross, there were so many characteristics of folly and of crime, and so many inconsistent attributes giv-

\* Ex. 15, 11. † Jer. 10, 15. † Divine Legation, B. 2, §6.

en to their gods, that some reflecting men in the pagan world would gladly have abandoned it for a better. But, where was that to be found?—No where; but where the light of revelation dawned. *“Men professing themselves to be wise became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.”\**

O happy people whose God is the Lord!— who are taught of God by God himself!— Here in the scriptures we contemplate his perfections, and behold his glory! For as the beams of light assure us of a risen sun; so in the splendid beams which irradiate the sacred page, we perceive that the divinity hath been here and shed his own lustre.

#### THE PURITY OF THEIR PRECEPTS.

This affords another proof of the divine original of the scriptures. The scriptures, in this respect, are unrivalled. Aiming at the heart, they instruct us in every thing necessary for us to know in point of duty; and that whether it relates to ourselves, to our neighbours, or to our God. This is the grand summary of the commandments, which are commented upon and enforced throughout the divine books; *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”*

\* Rom, 1, 23. Mark 12, 30, 31.

Moral precepts are here advanced to the highest perfection. Every virtue which can grace a human character is commanded, and every vice which can dishonor it is forbidden. Here justice is enjoined with all its sacred attributes; love with all its gentle charities; sympathy with its smiles and its tears; industry with all its active employments, and chastity with its un sullied robe. Here are commanded temperance and contentment; firmness amid the storms of adversity, and patience under tribulation. These are urged upon us in the most persuasive style, and are grounded upon the strongest motives. Nor can we say less of those divine precepts which teach us to subdue our passions, conquer our lusts and to rise superior to that selfishness of temper, which hurries us on to the commission of a thousand crimes. We are "*to deny ourselves, to love our enemies, to bless those who curse us, to pray for those who despitefully use us, and persecute us.*"\* Of so pure a nature is this holy law, that revenge is considered as spiritual murder, and a wanton look as the adultery of the heart. †

But the precepts of scripture respect likewise, the claims of deity; and whilst they unfold the obligations we are under to our great creator, they command a worship worthy of God and a reasonable creature. Here are no ceremonies enjoined, no rites ordained, but

\* Matt. 16, 24. Matt. 5, 44. † 1 John 3, 15. Matt. 5, 28.

which, in their nature, are calculated to lead men to the reverence of the divine character---to the love of God---to humility---to faith---to hope, and to obedience. Nor, without feeling this, can we read, that divine command, *to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."*\*

Now, apart from the bible, where shall we find a book containing rules so holy, so just, and so good? We cannot possibly be at a loss for the author of the scriptures; it is God—he has written his name on every page, and proved the authority of his laws, by means, at least, as certain as those by which the Israelites were convinced at Sinai; when the almighty spoke amidst thunderings and lightnings and the voice of a trumpet, and frail mortality fainted under the dreadful magnificence of heaven!—Unlike to this sacred book are all other systems which have been imposed upon mankind for oracles; in every one of these some vice or other is recommended and thus their origin is betrayed. But here not one sin is spared and even *the appearance of evil* † is condemned. For this reason also we conclude, that the scriptures were written by the inspiration of God.

#### THE TRUTH OF THEIR PROPHECIES.

To God only can be ascribed that foreknowledge which ascertains the existence of future events; and this is perfect on the part of the eternal. For as every thing is wrought thro' the determination of his will, he must be sup-

\* 1 Chron. 16, 29. † 1 Thess. 5, 22.

posed to know with infinite precision whatever shall take place throughout the whole extent of his immense empire. He foresees the result of circumstances to us the most obscure; arranges his forces, and marshals his instruments, and doth whatsoever he pleases among the intelligences of his throne, and the creatures of his footstool. His whole plan of operation he has not seen fit to develope; but part of, it he has: and that which he has been pleased to communicate concerning his designs, that we call *prophecy*. Now a book containing these, if true, we must of necessity consider to be divine; and the truth of prophecy is established by the event.

The most ancient prophecy is that which relates to the Messiah; it was delivered immediately after the fall of our first parents, whilst indeed they yet stood trembling behind the trees of the garden; and it served to support them in the midst of that despair to which they had reduced themselves by their apostacy and guilt. “*The seed of the woman was promised to bruise the head of the serpent.*”\* And such fast hold did our first mother take of this cheering prophecy, that no sooner did she enfold in her arms her first born son, than she exclaimed “*I have gotten the man, the Lord!*”† But she was mistaken both as to the person and time. God, however, had not forgotten his word. Many ages were to roll along, various

\* Gen. 3, 15. † Gen. 4, 1. Marginal reading.



events to take place, and every thing brought to that point which infinite wisdom designed, and then was the fulness of time in which the Saviour was to be born. This prophecy at its first promulgation was obscure; but it was of too much consequence to remain so. Wherefore it pleased God that it should be explained and brightened by minute details, and also by religious institutions, each of which was a prophecy. In the result, inspired men were influenced to foretel the nature of his office, and the glory of his person; the time of his appearance, the place of his birth, the manner of his life, the circumstances of his death, the certainty of his resurrection, and the glory of his ascension. Now that all this was true, we point you to the manger of Bethlehem---to the river of Jordan---to the mount of Olives---to the treachery of Judas---to the flight of the disciples---to Calvary's awful hill---to the sepulchre of Joseph---to the opening tomb--to the place of ascension---and to the establishment of the christian church.

Prophecies of other events are every where recorded. Does God promise to Abraham that he will make him a great nation? Are his seed to inhabit a land, emphatically called the promised land; and this after a lapse of four hundred years? The event is according to the prediction.\*

\* Gen. 15, 14. from the birth of Isaac to the deliverance from Egypt.

Are the Jews to be involved in the horrors of war, to be overcome of their enemies, to be carried captive, and to be dispersed for seventy years in Chaldea? After this, are they to be restored to their country and to their home? The fact was predicted nearly two hundred years previous to the event; and the *very individual* was named who on this occasion was to become the instrument of providence.\*

Is the altar of Bethel to be destroyed, and a signal discovery of the Lord's anger against the patrons of idolatry to be there displayed? The prophecy is given three hundred and thirty years before the person named in the prediction was born, to whom God had committed the fulfilment of his purpose.†

Where is Nineveh that exceeding great city of three days journey? Where is Babylon that wonder of the world? And what are the circumstances of Egypt, which boasted of its Pharaohs and its Nile? The prophecies of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, of Habakkuk and of Daniel, have been all fulfilled; and in a manner which proves that he who controlled the events inspired the predictions.

Yea, where is Jerusalem, that holy city, of which it was prophesied that it should be *trod-den under foot of the Gentiles*?‡ Where that temple, *one stone of which it was predicted,*

\* Isaiah 45, 1, 4, compared with Ezra 1 ch.

† 1st Kings, 13, 2, compared with 2d Kings, 22, 1, and 23, 15—20. ‡ Luke 16, 24.

*should not be left on another?\** Where those inhabitants, who were to be dispersed thro' the nations, and who, to answer further designs of providence, were to be preserved a distinct people? Alas! the city is in desolation---the temple is no more; but the descendants of Abraham are found in Asia, and Africa, in America and in Europe? This people still retain their own language; their own habits, their characteristic features; so that you can hardly mistake a Jew for one of another nation. The people of other ancient kingdoms and countries are lost in the great mass of mankind; but these are preserved: so that every travelling Jew is a proof of the truth of prophecy, and an evidence for the inspiration of the scriptures.

II. The scriptures deserve the character given them in the text---*the great things of God's law.*

The word here translated *great*, † signifies both *ample* and *glorious*; and it will be easy to shew that the scriptures deserve this character. Their excellence in these respects rises beyond the power of expression. There is no truth which is useful to man, which they do not communicate. There is no perplexity in which

\* Matt. 24, 1, 2.

Terentius Rufus, a captain in the army of Titus, did, with a plow-share, tear up the foundations of the temple," and hereby, not only fulfilled the words of our Lord, but also the prophecy of Micah, 3, 12. "Therefore shall Zion for your sakes be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest." Jewish Talmud, and Maimonides. See, Whitby in his notes on Matt. 24, 2.

† רבן רבן Amplitudo. Magnificentia.

we can be involved, for which they have not provided a direction. There is no sorrow under which human nature can droop, in which they do not console and support us. They have been eulogized by an apostle, as containing every thing necessary "*for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.*"\* They are the mind and will of God, declared to a guilty world, labouring under the consequences of sin---a world, to which God was pleased, in the exercise of his sovereign compassion to shew mercy. They contain glad tidings of great joy. They afford us news from heaven; and we mark with devout wonder the course of the angel as he flies, having the everlasting gospel in his hands. O wondrous book! I will embrace thee with rapture! I will make thee my bosom friend! thou shalt guide me by thy counsels! By thy lucid beam I will explore my way to eternity---shoot the gulph of death, and find my residence at the throne of God!

THE SCRIPTURES ARE THE GREAT THINGS OF GOD'S LAW; that is, they are ample in all their communications, and of an extent suited to every possible circumstance of mankind, and every exigence of life.

To the *young*, the bible speaks the language of advice and tenderness; it bids them to "remember their creator in the days of their youth," and assures them, that "God loves those who

\* 2 Tim. 3, 16.

love him, and they who seek him early shall find him ;” whilst the *aged* are counselled “ to be sober and grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity and in patience.”

The *rich*, surrounded with the comforts of life, are charged “ that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy ; that they do good ; that they be rich in good works, ready to communicate.” And the *poor*, whom we have always with us, that we may never want an object for our benevolence, they are reminded of the mercy of God, who “ raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill.” In the midst of their poverty, they are assured that God is their father : “ here the rich and the poor meet together, and the Lord is the maker of them all.”

Art thou a *magistrate* and clothed with the authority of thy country ? “ Thus saith the God of Israel, thus the rock of Israel spake ; he that ruleth over men, must be just, ruling in the fear of God, and he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds.” Or, art thou in the more *private walks of life* ? The scriptures bid thee to be “ subject to principalities and powers ; to obey magistrates ; to be ready to every good work.”

Perhaps thou art a *parent*, and God hath committed to thy care an infant train, to be brought

up for happiness and heaven ; precious charge ! Thou art instructed to “ command thy children and thy household after thee ” and to “ bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ; ” and *thy children* are to “ obey their parents in the Lord ; to honor their father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise.”

Do you *serve at the altar* ? you are to “ watch for souls, as they who give account ; to preach the word, to be instant in season and out of season, to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.” Or have you the *gospel preached to you* ? “ You are to be doers of the word and not hearers only. You are to pray for your pastors and that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified. You are to know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you. You are to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake, and be at peace among yourselves.”

The *ignorant*, are here instructed in all those important truths, which are able to make them wise to salvation ; and so perfect is the instruction, “ that wayfaring men, tho’ fools shall not err therein.” And, *he* whose polished mind is decorated with learning’s finest ornaments, will find in this sacred volume, a height and depth, a length and breadth, amidst which he may range in the pursuit of intellectual knowledge,

and still make new discoveries, and still find new beauties.

Here the most powerful calls are addressed to the *sinner* in the high career of vice; and repentance is urged by the most persuasive motives. Here the humble *penitent* returning to his God, is taught to lift an eye of faith toward the cross of the suffering saviour, and to hope for mercy thro' the righteousness and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

By this holy word the *saint* is cheered and comforted, and enabled to pass along from "one degree of grace unto another." Is he in doubt and perplexity? He is here directed to "*the father of lights, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not.*" Is he in temptation and oppressed by the adversaries of his peace? He is permitted to consider him who "*hath suffered, being tempted, and is able to succour them who are tempted.*"

Here every circumstance of *affliction* is provided for. The trials of life are the affectionate chastisements of a heavenly parent, who causes "all things to work together for the good of those who love him; and God is known as the "husband of the widow and the father of the fatherless."

Here the christian is taught how to live, and instructed how to die. The scriptures have shewn to him death, spoiled of his sting and stripped of his terrors. They have given him

a glimpse of that glory he longs to enjoy ; and gathering strength from the almighty support afforded him in the gospel, he smiles amidst the pangs of dissolution, and utters his last sigh, full of hope and triumph !

Hence you will perceive how well the scriptures deserve to be considered as “ *the great things of God’s law*” from the extent of their application. But, the same thing may be equally proved from the *glorious character which they claim*. In support of this, it will be sufficient to point you to their author—the doctrines which they contain—and the effects which they produce. Consider, THE AUTHOR OF THE SCRIPTURES, who is God. On this account these sacred records are often styled, “ *the word of God,*”\* “ *the law of God,*”† “ *the counsel of God,*”‡ “ *the oracles of God.*”§ Now every dispensation of God is worthy of himself. The universe is a sublime object ; and we pass with delight from orb to orb, rolling along thro’ the wide expanse. These are the glorious works of the great Almighty, who “ *spake and it was done, who commanded and all things stood fast.*”¶ The government of God is a glorious object ; and we must perceive how all his ways praise him. “ *He ruleth in the heavens and in the earth ;*” he maketh “ *the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.*”|| He governs the most magnificent of his creatures, and supports

\* 1 Pet. 1, 25. † Ps. 1, 2. ‡ Acts 20, 27. § Rom. 3, 2. ¶ Ps. 33, 9. || Ps. 65, 8.



the meanest. "He maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and restraineth the remainder of wrath."\* Now, in every work of God, and every dispensation of heaven, there is a character of dignity and glory enstamped upon them, which so illustriously reflects the divine majesty, that the productions of Jehovah cannot be mistaken for those of any other being. So also that sacred book, written by the inspiration of God, possesses that character by which we know whence it came. It contains the moral image of its author; and like God it is holy without blemish, wise without folly, and replete with moral glory and excellence.

Consider THE DOCTRINES OF THE SCRIPTURES. In virtue of this blessed revelation, the enquiring christian may attain that knowledge which learning could never bestow.— With this key he may unlock the arcana of heaven, and look into the sublimest mysteries of our holy faith. Here we have doctrines relating to God, which all the volumes of nature could never impart; for what signature is there stamped upon any of the creatures of a Trinity in unity? Of the eternal generation, or the mysterious incarnation of the son of God? What creatures could inform us of our first fall, and of the sin and guilt contracted by it?— Where are the secretaries of nature who have explored its abstrusest parts, who could relieve the anxious mind weeping and exclaiming,

\* Ps. 76, 10.

“*What must I do to be saved?* Who could point to a sacrifice which God would accept, and urge an application to one able to save to the uttermost, through faith in his blood, and saying, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out?” Where is the optic, in virtue of which we can pierce the clouds, contemplate the polity of heaven, and behold an almighty saviour sitting at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us miserable finners? Where but in the sacred scriptures is the veil torn asunder, which concealed from mortals the great consummation of all things? The dissolving heavens—the melting elements—the burning globe—the resurrection of the dead—the erection of the throne of judgment—the assembling of the universe---the rapture of the saints, as they pass through the portals of celestial glory---and the groans of the damned as they sink under the sentence of their God into the prison of despair? These are among the discoveries of that precious word which contains “*the great things of God’s law.*”

Finally,

Consider, THE EFFECTS WHICH THE SCRIPTURES PRODUCE in proof of their glorious character. We assert but little in saying that an ameliorated state of society is to be attributed to the influence of revealed religion. But what wonderful effects hath it produced! Mark the progress of the gospel. Before its powerful authority, the superstitions of heathen-

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ism have bowed ; the temples of idolatry have tumbled into ruins, and the obscene rights of paganism have vanished. It flattered none of the sinful passions of man ; but it subdued them. It countenanced no vicious habits ; but overthrew them. It was not fostered by the wiles of politicians, nor propagated by the force of armies ; but in the midst of every species of opposition, it triumphed ; and the word of the Lord had free course and was glorified. There were employed no instruments but such as were every where spoken against. There were used no arms, but the gospel ; and there was no art but the same gospel.

The spiritual effects of the word of God are glorious. It terrifies by its awful authority. Under the weight of its majesty the conscience is awakened ; and the judge, clad in the robes of justice, turns pale and trembles, whilst his poor prisoner in bonds, “ *reasons of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come.*” \* The heart is converted by its influence ; and so wonderful is the change, that it is called a *regeneration, a resurrection, a new creation.* It brings the individual who embraces it, into the possession of the divinest privileges ; from a state of “ *darkness into marvellous light ;*” and “ *from the power of sin and Satan into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.*” The christian “ *born again, not of corruptible, but of incorruptible seed, even by the word of God, which*

\* 1 Pet. 1, 23.

*liveth and abideth for ever,"* † riseth into a holy heroism of character---asserts in all circumstances his attachment to the divine law---*exercises himself herein to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man,"* ‡ tramples upon the world, is victorious over his lusts, and follows his holy leader "*through evil and through good report.*" He is a miracle in the moral world, and is a standing monument of the glorious character of the divine law, as Lazarus was of the power of Jesus, who at the bidding of the son of God, started from the tomb, and burst the bands of death!

We have reason, my brethren, to bless God for the conversion of thousands and tens of thousands from sin to God by the instrumentality of his word; but much more remains to be done. The scriptures speak to us of a glorious scene when "*the knowledge of God shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the channels of the great deep.*" Then all nations and tongues and people shall know the Lord from the least even unto the greatest. "*Princes shall come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God.*" Jesus shall reign king of nations as he is the king of saints. No longer shall nation rise against nation, nor the fiend of war rove thro' the fold of cultivated society. No longer shall there be any thing to hurt or destroy in all the holy mountain.---The wilderness shall blossom as the rose and

† Acts 24, 16, ‡ Acts 24, 25.

the solitary place be made glad, and the converts of righteousness be numerous as the drops of morning dew.\* The spreading of the scriptures will, doubtless, be the great means in accomplishing this glorious event; and in this universal triumph of light over darkness, and of truth over error and of holiness over sin, what a magnificent proof will there be afforded, that the things of God's law "*are great things?*"

III. We are now prepared to shew that *the scriptures should not be counted as a strange thing*, but be universally acknowledged and cordially received.

Little need be said in proof of this, after what we have heard. Each topic, on which we have enlarged, will serve to shew us, that both our interest and our duty were consulted by our Lord, when he was pleased to command us to "*search the scriptures.*"† Every man is concerned in this duty. Each one hath an immortal soul to be saved or lost. Every one is therefore interested in the precious contents of this book. Ought the scriptures then to be counted as a strange thing---as that which deserves neither our reverence or our regard?---it would argue ingratitude for one of Jehovah's best gifts. What! count that a strange thing, which God hath communicated from heaven, and which he hath ratified by so many extraordinary dispensations?---

\* Is. 11, 9. Ps. 86, 31. Is. 35, 1. † John 5, 39.

Count that a strange thing ! in which our guilt and misery are declared and that glorious remedy is published which sovereign grace hath provided !---Count that a strange thing ! from whence alone we receive every measure of solid consolation which we enjoy in this vale of tears ?---That ! which insures our safety amidst the storm, and dilates the visage of death to an open smile ?---No.---It is the word of my God ;---it is the blessing of my father upon his poor child, says the christian ;---it is the charter of my hope ;---it is the resplendent image of heaven's purity !---I prize it more than my life ! I would sooner part with the sun than with my bible !---

The truth of the scriptures is supported by more than common evidence. The bible has approved itself to all serious enquirers after truth ; It has indeed been vilified and abused ; but, it has been by men too ignorant of its contents and its design to form a correct opinion ; or too vile not to wish it to be untrue : for the same reason they would wish there were no God. Such men sport with the awful glories of the divinity, and amuse their fancy with the chains of the damned : but they carry in their hands the palm of folly ! It is " the fool"---the marked fool, who will be for ever distinguished even by the *contempt* of hell, who "*hath said in his heart there is no God.*"\*

The cordial belief of the scriptures is at the

\* Ps. 14, 1. James 2, 19.

foundation of happiness. That superstructure which is raised on this base is a building founded on a rock---it will never fall. It is supported by the hand of omnipotence and secured against all danger. The promises of God are yea and amen ; “ *till heaven and earth pass one jot, or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law 'till all be fulfilled.*” †

The rejection of the scriptures is connected with every thing dreadful in its nature. It places the individual out at sea in a tempest, without a pilot and without a chart : or in other words, he is “ without hope and without God in the world ;” and at last we perceive him among those despairing wretches, who hear the thunder of that word “ *Those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me.*” ‡

The universal spread of the scriptures and their cordial acceptance must produce an immense change in the world. What a state of things in this case would be produced ! The object is almost too splendid for the eye ! O my God ! in the universal spread of thy word, I behold the effulgence of thy character bursting forth, charming the moral universe, and enchanting all thy numerous offspring ! I perceive the triumphs of the cross of Jesus over all the powers of darkness. I see the rich victories of his grace, as in the greatness of

† Matt. 5, 18. ‡ Luke 19, 27.

his strength, he passes along, riding in the chariot of his salvation; receiving the homage of the millions of mankind, who dwell upon his beauties, and shout in the rapture of holy joy "Hosanna to the son of David; blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord!"

In concluding this discourse, I cannot but observe, that to all who feel the excellency of the scriptures, their dissemination must be a most desirable object. To all who wish for the promotion of the best interests of their fellow men, (and who is there within these walls who does not?) an attempt to spread the bible universally, must appear to be a duty of the first order. And all who look forward to that period which is fast hastening on, when all nations shall be converted to God; "*when he will destroy the covering cast upon all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations;*" † when all flesh shall see the salvation of the Lord;---such as you, who pray for the prosperity of Zion, must be anxious to use every possible exertion, and to employ every proper means for the production of so rich a glory.

The age in which we live is replete with events. The most interesting spectacles have arisen to our view. Providence, my brethren, is diligently at work to accomplish his purposes; see the fields are white already to the harvest. The servants of the Lord are collecting; they are preparing their instruments, and com-

† Is. 25, 7.



binning their efforts. Party distinctions are falling before the grandeur of the cross, and THE GENERAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE SCRIPTURES IS THE GLORIOUS CHARITY OF THE DAY!

Here commences a new æra in the christian church. Nations which have long sat in darkness are beholding the light. The scriptures are publishing in almost all languages, and the sun of righteousness, with healing under his wings, is arising upon all parts of the earth. Why this plan was not before thought of, is among the mysteries of the kingdom of God. The time, however, it would seem was not come which the sovereignty of God had determined. Happy we! who live at the commencement, at least, of this blessed period! It is like the dawning of the day, when the "soft and stealthy light" comes at first glimmering with the stars, and gradually eclipses them all!--- O glorious morning! and thrice blessed HE, whom we already perceive parting the clouds of night, and drawing them back like a curtain, to give us a sight of the most magnificent of all appearances!

To the christians of England we are indebted for the first grand idea of such an association. Their plan indeed embraces all the habitable parts of the earth, until there shall be "*no speech, nor language where their voice is not heard.*"† In the attaining of this object their

† Ps. 19, 3.

exertions have been unparalleled; their liberality immense; and what is worthy of universal imitation, ALL DENOMINATIONS HAVE UNITED IN ONE GREAT SOCIETY: one has not stood aloof from another; but in this particular they have owned "*one Lord and one faith.*" With their bibles in their hands, they visit their hospitals and their prisons;---their armies and their ships of war. They seek the abodes of poverty, of misery and sin, and lighten the distresses of humanity by the comforts of the gospel. They pass beyond their own sea-girt isle, and their messengers of life are found in Africa, in Asia, and in America. Here are instructed the ancient disciples of Brahma!---there the deluded follower of Mahomet is reclaimed! and yonder the poor savage of the wilderness on his knees, is pointed in his own language to the skies!---In the true philanthropy of that holy volume, which they diffuse, they present the scriptures at the doors of their enemies, and scatter them over the continent of Europe.

But here too we have our bible societies, and such establishments are among the finest distinctions of America. We too prize the scriptures. We know their excellence and feel their value. We too rejoice in the opportunity of patronizing so sublime a charity, and anticipate this evening in your offerings of gold and silver, that the Albany Society will not be less useful, nor of less consequence than its fellows.

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The object of this association has been well expressed in the address which you have seen; "*It is to give the bible to all who will accept and read it.*" † I should insult your sense and your feelings, were I to expatiate on the importance of such an institution. Wherefore have you entered this sanctuary of righteousness, this evening, but to be workers together with your God? His presence pervades this assembly, and in his book will be recorded what each one gives,—that book which will be opened amidst the solemnities of eternal justice, to the unutterable joy of the friends of God, and the confusion of his enemies.

Let me mention to you the fact; that there are thousands in our country who are destitute of a bible, and multitudes who need one; and among these there are they who would appreciate the gift, and rise up and call you blessed!

Is there then a patriot here who talks of his country's good? Let him prove it to himself by the liberality of his gift. Is there a magistrate here, who in the discharge of his official duty marks with regret the trembling culprit at his bar, and had rather prevent crime than punish it? Let him embrace the present opportunity of affording the most powerful restraint to vice. Is he present whom God hath clothed with ministerial authority and who teaches the precious truths of this sacred volume? Be liberal of your salary and teach by

† Address of the Managers of the Albany Bible Society.

your example. Professor of the religion of Jesus! You who pray for the kingdom of God, and that his will may be done on earth as it is done in heaven; convince yourself on this occasion, that your petitions are not words without meaning. Ye whom God hath blessed with this world's goods; contribute to the revenue of his glory who gives to you "*your corn and your wine, your oil, your flax and your wool.*"\* You are his stewards; let the item in your account of this evening, be such as you would wish to be remembered elsewhere.--- And ye, whose sympathies blend with the distresses of mankind, possess yourselves with the means of doing the greatest possible good.--- Come, help us raise that sacred pile, from whence a bible is to be received, and enter with it the house of affliction---perhaps, you will find *ignorance* there---you can shew the path of light. Perhaps, there is *guilt* there, in agonizing apprehension---you can point to the bleeding lamb of God. Perhaps, there is a *widow* there, surrounded with a family of *orphans*, exclaiming my husband! my father! Turn the holy page, and in the name of him who dictated the tender sentiment say "Thy maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name, and he is the father of the fatherless." Perhaps *sickness* is there, and the lamp of life is already trembling in its socket! Approach the bed of the dying, and whilst you wipe away

\* Hosea 2, 9.

the moisture of the fever, like an angel of mercy, with a commission of grace in your hand, attempt to extract the sting of death. Shew the proposals of sovereign love, and the certainty of salvation by an interest in Jesus Christ.--- Teach him to pray “*God be merciful to me a sinner,*” “*Lord Jesus receive my spirit,*” † and wait to hear the song of triumph as he dies; “*O death! where is thy sting!---O grave! where is thy victory!*” ‡

Charming charity!-----But wherefore do I detain you? Go ye who are to receive the contributions of this congregation---go, and receive from them, what as in the presence of omniscience they are anxious to give. Go, and let their offering come up as a memorial before God! To whom be glory for ever. AMEN.

† Luke 18, 13. Acts 7, 59. ‡ 1 Cor. 15, 55.

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