

in contending with each of which the holy religion of Christ triumphed in each instance, and in each was trampled upon; conquered, and was conquered; diffused light and health, and admitted darkness and corruption." It is thus, and thus only, that we can account for the rapid corruption of the christian faith, and the extraordinary facility with which the best of the Fathers admitted the most monstrous extravagancies and the most silly puerilities. We can on this ground, indeed, palliate their errors and compassionate their foibles; but to set them up as *guides*, does appear to us the most extraordinary fatuity. Guides! A very moderate *course* of patriotic allegories, conceits, visions, legends, miracles, and superstitions—of Barnabas and Hermus, Origen, Turtullian, Jerome and Ambrose—will be quite sufficient to reclaim any sane mind from such debasement; while if we were to judge by any spicilegium (or collection) of their errors, collected out of that menstruum of insipidity and common-place in which they usually float, we should imagine that we had got into the company rather of a set of Bedlamites, than of christian sages; and should be unable to conceive the reason of that reverence with which they were regarded, except on that principle of the ancient Greeks, which connected insanity with inspiration; or that which dictated the custom of the Mahometans to worship as saints those who are fairly out of their senses.

And yet these are the men whose authority, when they are tolerably unanimous, is to be considered as co-ordinate with that of scripture; from whose single opinions we are to dissent with the greatest caution; and to whose keeping Divine Providence has committed an unwritten revelation. "And so he may have done," it is said, "for it is not the errors and absurdities of the Fathers for which we contend, but the Apostolic truths of which they were made the depositories." But is there no difficulty in believing that the freight of immortal truth should have been committed to such leaky and rotten vessels? that God, designing to give a revelation, could purposely and intimately mix it up with a mass of impure metal, leaving mankind to smelt it as they might? Truly if this theory be correct, it may well be said, that we have the eternal trea-

tures in earthen vessels.

This difficulty is still farther increased, if we consider the character of that portion of Revelation for which these men are the vouchers—the nature of the dogmas superadded to the Bible. The question is, whether the Christianity of the third, fourth, or the fifth century is a *development* or a *corruption* of the Scripture system—a natural growth or a cancerous enlargement? We believe the latter; but assuredly, nothing could warrant us in believing the former, except the most obvious harmony between the Scriptures themselves and these supposed additions to it.

But it is acknowledged that no such obvious harmony is to be found—that the doctrines contended for are not easily reconciled with the Scriptures—that apart from the patristic authority no one would have suspected them to be there—that there is very much at the least which appears to contradict them—that the tone and spirit in which the relative importance of the several elements of religion are spoken of, appear to be entirely alien. One could imagine, therefore, that nothing less than a Revelation as clear, as express, and as miraculously authenticated as the Scriptures, would be sufficient to justify our reception of these additions. Can we, then, believe that they would have been committed to such men as the Fathers are proved to be, and mixed up with their acknowledged errors, follies, and superstitions? Ought not this circumstance alone make us suspect, that the *soidant* additions to the Revelation are more probable corruptions of it?

The interval between the Scriptures and the very best of the Fathers is so immense, that not a few have testified that it forms to them the most convincing proofs of the inspired origin of the former; it being, in their judgment, absurd to suppose that any man, much less a number of men, could have composed such a volume as the Bible, in an age in which their immediate successors, many of them possessing undoubted genius and erudition, and having the advantage of their light to walk by, could fall into puerilities so gross, and errors so monstrous. We could sooner believe that Jacob Bohemen could have composed the "Novum Organum," or Thomas Sternhold the "Paradise Lost." But