3. Let us now conſider the evidence of teſtimony for the authenticity of the Old Teſtament. As the Jews were a more ancient people than the Greeks or Ro­mans, and for many ages totally unconnected with them, it is not to be expected that we ſhould derive much evidence from the hiſtorians of thoſe nations: it is to the Jews alone we muſt look for information. But it has unfortunately happened that few of their works ex­cept the Scriptures themſelves have been preſerved to poſterity. Joſephus is the moſt ancient of the Jewiſh hiſtorians to whom we can appeal. He informs us, that the Old Teſtament was divided into three parts, the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa or poetical books. No man, ſays he, hath ever dared to add or take away from them. He tells us alſo, that other books were written after the time of Artaxerxes; but as they were not compoſed by prophets, they were not reckoned worthy of the ſame credit.

Since the promulgation of the Chriſtian religion, it is impoſſible that any material alterations or corruptions could have taken place in the books of the Old Teſtament; for they have been in the hands both of Jews and Chriſtians from that period. Had the Jews at­tempted to make any alterations, the Chriſtians would have detected and expoſed them; nor would the Jews have been leſs ſevere againſt the Chriſtians if they had corrupted the ſacred text. But the copies in the hands of Jews and Chriſtians agree; and therefore we juſtly conclude, that the Old Teſtament is ſtill pure and un­corrupted.

The diviſion mentioned by our Saviour into the Law, the Prophets, and the Pſalms, correſponds with that of Joſephus. We have therefore ſufficient evidence, it is hoped, to convince even a deiſt, that the Old Teſtament exiſted at that time. And if the deiſt will only allow, that Jeſus Chriſt was a perſonage of a virtuous and ir­reproachable character, he will acknowledge that we draw a fair concluſion when we aſſert that the Scrip­tures were not corrupted in his time: for wſhen he accuſed the Phariſees of making the law of no effect by their traditions, and when he injoined his hearers to ſearch the Scriptures, he could not have failed to men­tion the corruptions or forgeries of Scripture, if any in that age had exiſted. But we are aſſured, by very re­spectable authority, that the canon of the Old Teſta­ment was fixed ſome centuries before the birth of Jeſus Chriſt. Jeſus the ſon of Sirach, the author of Eccle­ſiaſticus, makes evident references to the prophecies of Iſaiah @@\*, Jeremiah@@†, and Ezekiel@@‡, and mentions theſe prophets by name. He ſpeaks alſo of the twelve minor prophets @@A. It appears alſo from the prologue, that the law and the prophets, and other ancient books, ex­iſted at the ſame period. The book of Eccleſiaſticus, according to the calculations of the beſt chronologers, was written in Syriac about A. M. 3772, that is, 232 years before the Chriſtian era, and was tranſlated into Greek in the next century by the grandſon of the au­thor. The prologue was added by the tranſlator: but this circumſtance does not diminiſh the evidence for the antiquity of Scripture; for he informs us, that the law and the prophets, and the other books of their fathers, were ſtudied by his grandfather: a ſufficient proof that they exiſted in his time. As no authentic books of a more ancient date, except the ſacred writings themſelves, have reached our time, we can aſcend no higher in ſearch of teſtimony.

There is, however, one remarkable hiſtorical fact, which proves the exiſtence of the law of Moſes at the diſſolution of the kingdom of Iſrael, when the ten tribes were carried captive to Aſſyria by Shalmaneſer, and diſperſed among the provinces of that extenſive empire; that is, about 741 years before Chriſt. It was about that time the Samaritans were tranſported from Aſſyria to repeople the country, which the ten captive tribes of Iſrael had formerly inhabited. The poſterity of the Samaritans ſtill inhabit the land of their fathers, and have preſerved copies of the Pcntateuch, two or three of which were brought to this country in the laſt century. The Samaritan Pentateuch is written in old Hebrew characters (fee Philology, n⁰ 28). and therefore muſt have exiſted before the time of Ezra. But ſo violent were the animoſities which ſubſiſted between the Jews and Samaritans, that in no pe­riod of their hiſtory would the one nation have received any books from the other. They muſt therefore have received them at their firſt ſettlement in Samaria from the captive prieſt whom the Aſſyrian monarch ſent to teach them how they ſhould fear the Lord (2 Kings xvii.)

The canon of the Old Teſtament, as both Jewiſh and Chriſtian writers agree, was completed by Ezra and ſome of his immediate ſucceſſors (ſee Bible). In our copies the ſacred books are divided into 39. The Jews reckoned only 22, correſponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. They united the books of Judges and Ruth; they joined the two books of Samuel; the books of Kings and Chronicles were reckoned one; Ezra and Nehemiah one; the Prophe­cies and Lamentations of Jeremiah were taken under the ſame head; and the 12 minor prophets were conſidered as one book—ſo that the whole number of books in the Jewiſh canon amounted to 22.

The Pentateuch conſiſts of the five books Geneſis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Se­veral obſervations have been already made reſpecting the authenticity of theſe under the article Pentateuch; but ſeveral additional remarks have occurred, which may not improperly be given in this place. For many of theſe we acknowledge ourſelves indebted to a ſermon publiſhed by the reverend Mr Marſh, whoſe reſearch and learning and critical accuracy will be acknow­ledged by every reader of diſcernment.

One of the ſtrongeſt arguments that have occurred to us in ſupport of the authenticity of the Pentateuch, and the inſpiration of the writer, has already been given under the article Religion, n⁰ 14, &c. which ſee: But we ſhall in this place preſent two arguments of a different kind, which would be ſufficient to prove at leaſt the former of theſe concluſions. We argue from the language and contents of the Moſaic writings, and from the teſtimony of the other books of Scripture.

From the contents and language of the Pentateuch there ariſes a very ſtrong preſumption that Moſes was its author. The very mode of writing in the four laſt books diſcovers an author contemporary with the events which he relates; every deſcription, both religious and political, is a proof that the writer was preſent at each reſpective ſcene; and the legiſlative and hiſtorical parts

@@@ [m] \*Ecclesiasticus xlviii. 22.

@@@ [m] † xlix. 6.

@@@ [m] ‡ xlix. 8.

@@@ [m] A. xlix. 10.