**Judaism had been** widely **propagated in that country,** and that even kings in Arabia Felix had recognized the law of Moſes. The difficulty then is ſo far removed, that it ceaſes to create ſuſpicion againſt an epistle which has ſo many evident marks of authenticity; and it is only to be regretted that, in order to place the ſubject in the cleareſt point of view, we are not ſufficiently acquainted with the particular hiſtory of Damaſcus.

Examples of the second kind are ſuch as, if allowed their full force, might indeed prove a writer not divine­ly inſpired, but could afford no reaſon to conclude that he was not the author of the writings which bear his name, ſince miſtakes may be committed by the moſt ac­curate hiſtorian. The chief difficulties of this nature are found in the gospel according to St Luke, and do not apply to the writings of Matthew, John, Paul, and Peter. Laying aside the idea of inſpiration altogether, let us inquire whether Luke or Josephus be moſt in­titled to credit in thoſe paſſages where they differ; which of them is moſt accurate, and which of them had the beſt opportunities of exploring the truth of the facts which they relate. Now Joſephus relates the ſame ſtory differently in different parts of his works, and is ſometimes equally miſtaken in them all. We do not recollect to have ſeen ſuch inconſiſtencies in the wri­tings of St Luke. Luke knew the characters, and witneſſed many of the facts, of which he ſpeaks; and he could receive the beſt information reſpecting thoſe facts which were tranſacted in his abſence. Joſephus was bom A. D. 37, ſome years after our Saviour’s aſcenfion. Now it is a very important obſervation of Michaelis, that the period of hiſtory with which mankind are leaſt acquainted is that which includes the time of their childhood and youth, together with the twenty or thir­ty years immediately preceding their birth. Concern­ing the affairs tranſacted during that period, we are much more liable to fall into miſtakes than concerning thoſe of a remoter age. The reaſon is, that authentic hiſtory never comes down to the period of our birth; our knowledge of the period immediately preceding de­pends on hearſay; and the events, which paſs within the firſt eighteen or twenty years of our lives, we are too young and heedleſs to obſerve with attention. This muſt have been more remarkably the caſe in the time of Joſephus than at preſent, when there were neither daily papers nor periodical journals to ſupply the want of re­gular annals. There was no hiſtorian from whom Jo­ſephus could derive any knowledge of the times that immediately preceded his birth. There is a period then of forty or fifty years, in which, even with the moſt di­ligent inquiry, he was expoſed to error.

When we find therefore the relations of Luke and Joſephus ſo different as not to be reconciled, it would be very unfair to determine without any further inquiry in favour of Joſephus. Let their character, and works, and ſituation, be ſtrictly examined; let their teſtimony be duly weighed and compared; and then let the pre­ference be given to that author who, according to the ſtricteſt rules of equity and juſtice, ſeems intitled to the higheſt degree of credit. The deciſion of a jury, we ſhall venture to ſay, would in every inſtance turn out in favour of Luke.

Having thus aſcertained the authenticity of the books of the New Teſtament, the next thing to be conſidered **is** their inſpiration. It is certainly of ſome **importance** to know how far the apoſtles and evangeliſts were gui­ded in their writings by the immediate influence of the ſpirit of God; though this knowledge, if attainable, is not equally important with that of the authenticity of theſe writings. Michaelis indeed aſſerts, that the divi­nity of the New Teſtament may be proved whether we can evince it to be written by immediate inſpiration or not @@†. “The queſtion (ſays he), whether the books of the New Teſtament are inſpired? is not ſo important as the queſtion, whether they are genuine? The truth of our religion depends upon the latter, not abſolutely on the former. Had the Deity inſpired not a ſingle book of the New Teſtament, hut left the apoſtles and evan­geliſts without any other aid than that of natural abili­ties to commit what they knew to writing, admitting their works to be authentic, and poſſeſſed of a ſufficient degree of credibility, the Chriſtian religion would ſtill be well founded. The miracles by which it is con­firmed would equally demonſtrate its truth, even if the perſons who atteſted them were not inſpired, but simply human witnesses; and their divine authority is never preſuppoſed, when we diſcuſs the queſtion of miracles, but merely their credibility as human evidence. If the miracles are true which the evangeliſts relate, the doc­trines of Chriſt recorded in the goſpels are proved to be the infallible oracles of God; and, even if we admit the apoſtles to be miſtaken in certain not eſſential circumſtances, yet as the main points of the religion which Chriſt commiſſioned them to preach are ſo frequently repeated, their epiſtles would inſtruct us as well in the tenets of the Chriſtian ſyſtem, as the works of Maclaurin in the philoſophy of Newton. It is poſſible there­fore to doubt, and even deny, the inſpiration of the New Teſtament, and yet be fully perſuaded of the truth of the Chriſtian religion: and many really entertain theſe ſentiments either publicly or in private, to whom we ſhould render great injuſtice, if we ranked them in the claſs of unbelievers.

“Yet the Chriſtian religion would be attended with difficulty, if our *principium cognoſcendi* reſted not on firm­er ground; and it might be objected, that ſufficient care had not been taken for thoſe whoſe confidences were tender, and wſho were anxiouſly fearful of miſtaking the ſmalleſt of the divine commands. The chief articles indeed of Chriſtianity are ſo frequently repeat­ed, both by Chriſt and his apoſtles, that even were the New Teſtament not inſpired, we could entertain no doubt of the following doctrines: ‘Jeſus was the Meſſias of the Jews, and an infallible meſſenger of God: he died for our iniquity; and by the ſatisfaction made by his death we obtain remiſſion of ſins, if on our part be faith and amendment of life: the Levitical law is aboliſhed, and moral precepts, with the ceremonies of Baptiſm and the Supper of the Lord, are appointed in its ſtead: after the preſent follows an everlaſting life, in which the virtuous ſhall be rewarded and the wicked puniſhed, and where Chriſt himſelf ſhall be the Judge.’

“To the epiſtles indeed (ſays Michaelis), inſpiration is of real conſequence; but with reſpect to the hiſtorical books, *viz.* the Goſpels and the Acts of the Apoſtles, we ſhould really be no loſers if we abandoned the ſyſtem of inſpiration, and in ſome reſpects have a real advantage. We ſhould be no loſers, if we conſidered the apoſtles in hiſtorical facts as merely human witneſſes,

@@@[m]† Chap iii. § 1.