ſo was polytheiſm : but they were by no means univerſal. Should we allow, for the fake of ſhortening the argument, that all ancient nations were polytheiſts and idolaters, and presented oblations to their imaginary deities, all that could be concluded from this conceſſion is, that they fell into these miſtakes from their igno­rance and from the rude ſtate of ſociety, from which their imperfect knowledge of theology and moral philoſophy was never able to reſcue them. Theſe erroneous notions fled before the brightneſs of the Chriſtian ſyſtem; while the doctrines of the exiſtence of God, of moral diſtinction, and of a future ſtate, have been more thoroughly confirmed and aſcertained. The ſame thing may be laid of the belief of ſpectres. However generally it has been adopted in the firſt ſtages of ſocſety, or by civilized na­tions who had made but little progreſs in the ſtudy of divine things, it has been rejected, we may ſay invari­ably, wherever theology and philoſophy have gone hand in hand.

As all popular and long eſtabliſhed opinions are ob­jects of curioſity and reſearch for the philoſopher, we think the belief of ſpectres worthy of some attention even in this light. It will therefore, we hope, give ſome ſatisfaction to the philosophical reader to ſee a ſhort account of the ſources or principles from which this belief is derived. But as the belief of ſpectres is con­nected with other opinions which appear to us highly injurious to religion ; opinions which have been supported by many learned men, and which are ſtill believed by ſome men of literary education — it will alſo be proper, in the firſt place, to conſider the evidence on which this belief reſts, in which we muſt conſider both their proba­bility and credibility.

In the preſent inveſtigation we mean to ſet aſide al­together the celeſtial appearances recorded in Scripture, as being founded on unqueſtionable evidence, and per­fectly agreeable to thoſe rules by which the Deity acts in the uſual courſe of his Providence. The Iſraelites, during the exiſtence of their ſtate, were immediately under the authority of God, not only as the moral go­vernor of the world, but as the king of Iſrael. In the infancy of the world, while men were rude and unen­lightened, and entirely under the influence of idolatry, many revelations were neceſſary to preſerve in their minds pure ideas of the nature of God, and of the worship due to Him. They were neceſſary alſo to pave the way for that illuſtrious diſpenſation which the Lord Jeſus came from Heaven to diffuſe over the world. Every celeſtial appearance recorded in Scripture was exhibited for ſome wile and important purpoſe, which muſt be ap­parent to every perſon who conſiders theſe appearances with attention. But when the Scriptures were written and publiſhed, and the Chriſtian religion fully eſtabliſh­ed, revelation ceaſed, and miracles and heavenly meſsages were no longer requiſite. What credit then ought we to give to thoſe marvellous ſtories related in ancient authors concerning prodigies in the heavens, and the apparition of angels both good and bad ?

It is not pretended that any of thoſe prodigies and appearances were exhibited for purpoſes equally great and important with thoſe which are deſcribed in Scrip­ture : And can we ſuppoſe that the all-wise Governor of the World would permit his angele to render themſelves viſible to the eye of man for no purpoſe at all, or for a purpoſe which might have been equally well accompliſhed without their interpoſition ? Would this be conſiſtent with perfect wiſdom, or would it be conſiſtent even with the excellence and ſuperiority of underſtanding which we are taught to aſcribe to theſe elevated beings ? The whole will of God is revealed to us in the Scriptures ; what further uſe for the visible interpoſition of angels ? It may be objected, Are they not all miniſtering ſpirits ſent forth to miniſter for them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation @@\* ? We anſwer, That angels may animate and ſupport good men by an inviſible interpoſition. But the Apoſtle is not ſpeaking of celeſtial ſpirits. The word ανγελος signifies “ a meſſenger ;” and in Scripture often refers to men. In the passage which we are now reviewing it certainly is applied with much more pro­priety to men than to angels : for the Apoſtle is ſtating a companion between *the Prophets,* by whom God, at ſundry times and in divers manners, ſpake in time paſt to the fathers, and *the Son,* by whom he hath ſpoken in theſe laſt days.

And if God has given no commiſſion to his angels to deliver to men since the publication of the Chriſtian religion, is there any probability that he would give any commiſſion or any licence to evil ſpirits ? It will be ſaid, that this doctrine is clearly taught in the New Testament, in theſe words, “ The devil goeth about as a roaring lion ſeeking whom he may devour,” We will not avail ourſelves of the interpretation of ſome, who ſay that the word *devil,* which in the Greek language ſignifies an *adverſary,* or s*landerer,* refers here to ſome human being, who was a violent enemy of the Chriſtians. All that can be deduced from theſe words, upon the ſuppoſition that they reſer to a malignant ſpirit, is mere­ly that he goeth about ſeducing men to vice. But it is not by aſſuming a hideous form, and preſenting himſelf to the midnight traveller, that ſuch a purpoſe is to be accompliſhed. A ſpirit may probably have direct acceſs to our minds without the intervention of any thing corporeal ; and by exciting our paſſions may plunge us into vice, which is the only object ſuch a being is ſuppoſed to have in view. None of the marvellous ſtories which we have heard concerning the apparition of evil ſpirits lead us to conclude that they appear to entice men to commit crimes. We never heard of any evil ſpirits that required men to ſteal, to perpetrate robbery or murder. They only appeared to terrify ſome crazy timorous individuals, who have whims and fancies enow of their own to agitate their minds, though no pre­ternatural vision ſhould ever appear to them. It is not conſiſtent, therefore, with the character of God, and what he has revealed to us of his will, to believe that he would commiſſion good angels, or permit evil angels, to appear to men since the propagation of the goſpel, or indeed at any former period of the world, unleſs ſome great and mighty purpoſe was to be fulfilled. It is not conſiſtent with what we know of the nature of good or bad angels to ſuppoſe, that though permiſſion were granted them occasionally to ſhow themſelves to men, that they would appear in that way which ſtorytellers deſcribe.

It is equally improbable that the ſpirits of the dead who have removed from this world ſhould again be per­mitted to viſit it. At death men undergo as great, perhaps a greater change, than when they came firſt in­to the light of the ſun. Is it not therefore as impro­bable that a man ſhould return in a viſible corporeal

@@@[m]\*Heb. 14.