KNOWLEDGE, in a great measure, forms the true dignity and happiness of man: it is that by which he holds an honourable rank in the scale of beings, and by which he is rendered capable of adding to the felicity of his fellow-creatures. Every attempt, therefore, to enlarge its boundaries, and facilitate its acquisition, must be considered as worthy of our attention and regard. The present work is designed to promote these valuable and important ends.

The plan of conveying knowledge by dictionaries has been long established, and well received in the republic of letters. A dictionary, however, of a religious and ecclesiastical nature was still a desideratum in the religious world; for although we have had dictionaries which explained Scripture terms, yet it is evident these could not embrace the history of the church since the sacred canon was concluded, nor explain the numerous terms which have been used; nor, indeed, point out the various sects and denominations which have subsisted since that time. I do not mean, by these remarks, to depreciate the valuable works above referred to: I am sensible of their excellencies, and I have no wish to undervalue them in order to exalt my own. This work, however, is of a different nature, as the reader will easily see, if he takes the trouble to compare and examine.

There may, doubtless, be defects in this publication which may have escaped my attention; but whoever considers the various books that must have been consulted; the discriminations that were necessary to be made; the patient investigation required; and the toil of selecting, transcribing, and composing, must be convinced that it has been attended with no small difficulty. The advantages, however, which my own mind derived from the work, and the probability of its being useful to others, greatly encouraged me in its prosecution. Besides, to be active, to be useful, to do something for the good of mankind, I have always considered as the honour of an intelligent being. It is not the student wrapped up in metaphysical subtleties; it is not the recluse living in perpetual solitude; it is not the miser who is continually amassing wealth, that can be considered as the greatest ornaments or the greatest blessings to human society:—it is rather the useful than the shining talent that is to be coveted.

Perhaps it may be said, the work is tinged too much with my own sentiments, and that the theology is too antiquated to please a liberal, philosophizing, and refined age. In answer to this, I observe, that I could do no other, as an honest man, than communicate what I believe to be the truth. It is a false liberality to acquiesce with every man's opinion, to fall in with every man's scheme; to trifle with error, or imagine there is no difference between one sentiment and another: yet, notwithstanding this declaration, I trust the features of bigotry are not easily discernible in this work; and that, while I have endeavoured to carry the torch of Truth in my hand, I have not forgotten to walk in the path of Candour.

It is almost needless here to say, that I have availed myself of all the writings of the best and most eminent authors I could obtain. Whatever has struck me as important in ecclesiastical history; whatever good and accurate in definition; whatever just views of the passions of the human mind; whatever terms used in the religious world; and whatever instructive and impressive in the systems of divinity and moral philosophy, I have endeavoured to incorporate in this work. And in order to prevent its being a dry detail of terms and of dates, I have given the substance of what has been generally advanced on each subject, and occasionally selected some of the most interesting practical passages from our best and celebrated sermons. I trust, therefore, it will not only be of use to inform the mind, but impress the heart; and thus promote the real good of the reader. The critic, however, may be disposed to be severe; and if I will, perhaps, be easy for him to observe imperfections. But be this as it may: I can assure him I feel myself happy in the idea that the work is not intended to serve a party, to encourage bigotry, nor strengthen prejudices but "for the service of Truth, by one who would be glad to attend and grace her triumphs; as her soldier, if he has had the honour to serve successfully under her banner; or as a captive tied to her chariot wheels, if he has though undesignedly, committed any offence against her." After all, however, what a learned author said of another work I say of this:—"If it have merit, it will go down to posterity; if it have none, the sooner it dies and is forgot the better."  

CHARLES BUCK.
The numerous and extensive editions of Buck's Theological Dictionary published both in England and in this country since its first appearance, together with the continued and increasing demand, sufficiently attest the estimate in which the work is held by the Christian public. The judgment, industry, candour, and impartiality evinced by the Author in the selection and compilation of the articles, embracing, as they do, the wide field of Theology, didactic and polemic, Ecclesiastical Polity, Church History, Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy, and Biblical Literature, together with a copious list of references to the most valuable authorities in each department, are universally acknowledged. So far as the merit of sterling utility can entitle any book to favourable acceptance, the Dictionary of Mr. Buck presents claims which will not be contested. As a theological and ecclesiastical manual, embodying a vast amount of useful information in a moderate compass, and clearly and judiciously arranged, it would not be easy to designate its superior.

Yet while this tribute of deserved commendation is readily bestowed, it must still be admitted, that the work hitherto has not been altogether adapted to the circumstances of our own country, or the wants of the present day. Considered in this view the Theological Dictionary labours under manifold defects, which it would be as easy to specify as it is obvious to perceive. As might have been expected, its local bearings and allusions are to the state of things in England, and not in this country. But a work of this nature is needed, which shall be suited to the state of religious opinion in the Christian community of the United States. Moreover, since the first publication of Mr. Buck's work, great changes have occurred in the religious world; great advances have been made in theological and natural science; a fresh impulse has been given to the investigation of revealed truth; new sects, especially in our own country, have risen up, and with them new controversies, or new forms of old ones; the ever varying field of religious discussion, while it has been contracted in some of its limits, has been widened in others; besides which, nearly every department treated in the Theological Dictionary has been enriched with new treasures from the writings of modern divines, to which the reader will look in vain for any references in the previous editions. While therefore the active spirit of progress and improvement is urging its way in the province of Theological inquiry as well as every other, while modern researches are shedding light upon numberless points of Christian and Jewish antiquities, upon Ecclesiastical institutions, and Biblical criticism, it is doubtless desirable that a Theological Dictionary should be prepared, fitted to meet, in some good degree, the exigencies of the present period.

With this view the present edition of Buck has been undertaken. In the prosecution of the plan, the steady aim has been to increase the amount of new and valuable matter, at the same time that the accession should not swell the size, nor enhance the price of the volume. The whole work therefore has undergone a careful revision—some few articles of trivial moment have been expunged to make way for others of more consequence—Several have been abridged—Several in whole or in part re-written. But the principal feature of the present edition is the addition of a large mass of new matter under the following heads: Abyss, Accommodation of Scripture, Annihilation, Antichrist, Antichristianism, Atonement, Church, Commentary, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Gnostics, New Independents, Neology, Presbyterians, Unitarians. Besides many others, which will be pointed out to the reader, wherever they occur, by the letter B. being annexed to them. Notices of all or nearly all the existing religious denominations in the United States are given, accompanied with historical sketches and ecclesiastical statistics. In this department of the work the Editor acknowledges his obligations to the very valuable Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society, for Feb. 1830, by means of which, and from other sources, he has been enabled to bring down the records of the various denominations to the commencement of the present year.

In the earnest hope that the attempted improvements of the present edition may be to a benefit, and not a bar, to its general reception, it is submitted to the candour of the public.

G. B.