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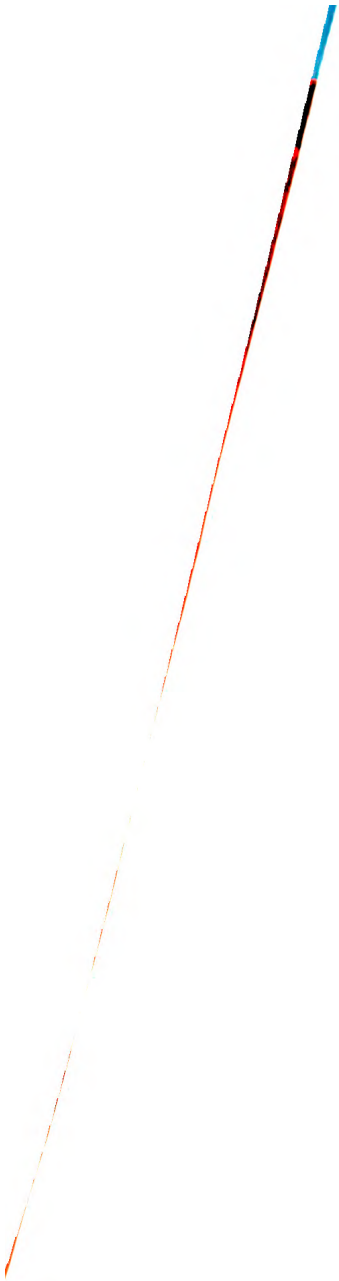
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ESSAY



AN

ESSAY

ON

MIRACLES.



LONDON
Printed by E. Smith, in Strand, near St. Dunstons Church
1794



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ON

A C L E S

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A N
E S S A Y
In ANSWER to
Mr. *HUME*'s ESSAY
O N
M I R A C L E S.

By *WILLIAM ADAMS*, M. A.
Minister of *St. Chad's, Salop*,
And Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of *Landaff*.

The SECOND EDITION, with ADDITIONS.



L O N D O N,
Printed by E. SAY, in *Ave-Mary-Lane*;
And Sold by A. MILLAR in the *Strand*, J. WHISTON
and B. WHITE in *Fleet-Street*, and R. DODSLEY in
Pall-Mall. M,DCC,LIV.



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A. M. A.



A N

ESSAY, &c.

MR. *HUME* hath many of the talents of a fine writer, and hath justly obtained that character by the agreeable *Essays moral and political* *, with which he has obliged the world. What he hath wrote well will create a prejudice in favour of his errors; and these will have all their bad influence, when recommended by so able an advocate. The present is a subject of the greatest importance, and the author expresses a particular satisfaction in his performance. These are reasons for considering it carefully, and for guarding ourselves against being deceived by the artifice or eloquence of the writer.

He begins with challenging, a little indirectly, the thanks of the publick, for a discovery, which, he apprehends, will be of uni-

* The reader is desired to distinguish betwixt this and the metaphysical essays of this author, which is the book refer'd to throughout this treatise.

B

verfal

verfal service to mankind. This is not
 than an infallible cure for superstiti-
 “ flatter myself,” says he, “ that I
 “ covered an argument, which, if
 “ with the wife and learned, be an
 “ check to all kinds of superstitiou
 “ and, consequently, will be useful
 “ the world endures; for so long,
 “ will the accounts of miracles and
 “ be found in all profane history
 virtues of this specifick are such, th
 minates all religions alike; as he
 trying its strength upon the *Christi*
 where it prevails, is perhaps more ob
 hard of cure than any other. Here
 it has been known to fail. I have
 fair trial, and known it tried by oth
 out the least effect, and think I can
 there is no one ingredient of any
 efficacy in it.

The secret itself is contained in th
 of a few lines: and therefore, to
 port and figure to it, the author h
 necessary to introduce it with some
 observations.

In the first of these, his meaning
 to lay down this as a principle — t
 reasonings concerning matter of fact
 ed wholly on experience: “ Tho’
 “ be our only guide in reasoning

• *Philosophical Essays concerning human understand-
 first edition.*

“ matters of fact, it must be acknowledged,
 “ that this guide is not altogether infallible,
 “ but in some cases is apt to lead us into errors
 “ and mistakes. One, who in our climate
 “ should expect better weather in any week of
 “ *June* than in one of *December*, would reason
 “ justly and conformable to experience; but
 “ ’tis certain, that he may happen in the event
 “ to find himself mistaken. However, we may
 “ observe, that in such a case he would have
 “ no cause to complain of experience; be-
 “ cause it commonly informs us before-hand
 “ of the uncertainty, by that contrariety of
 “ events which we may learn from a diligent
 “ observation.”* In illustrating this observa-
 “ tion, both here and elsewhere, he seems to con-
 “ fine it to such events as are future: “ An
 “ hundred instances or experiments on one
 “ side, and fifty on another, afford a very
 “ doubtful expectation of any event; tho’ an
 “ hundred uniform experiments, with only
 “ one contradictory one, do reasonably beget
 “ a very strong degree of assurance.” † Here
 “ then I readily allow, that in reasoning concern-
 “ ing future contingencies experience is the best
 “ guide we have, tho’ in many cases, as will here-
 “ after be seen, a very uncertain one.

This observation is followed by a prudent
 caution. “ A wise man,” he tells us, “ pro-
 “ portions his belief to the evidence. In such

* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 174.

† P. 175.

“ concl
“ exper
“ degre
“ perien
“ istenc
“ ceeds
“ oppos
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“ exper
“ doub
“ fixes
“ what
“ cafes
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“ the l
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• P

“ the relation of cause and effect. I shall not
 “ dispute about a word. ’Twill be sufficient
 “ to observe, that our assurance, in any argu-
 “ ment of this kind, is derived from no other
 “ principle than our observation of the veracity
 “ of human testimony, and of the usual con-
 “ formity of facts to the reports of witnesses.”*
 ’Tis difficult to say what the author would here
 exemplify, there being no clear connection be-
 twixt this and the preceding paragraphs. But,
 if I may presume to explain it, his argument
 stands thus: The principle he set out with,
 was, that our reasoning about matters of fact
 depends wholly upon experience. This he hath
 proved concerning such events as are future :
 he now wants to prove the same concerning
 facts that are past. Here he is aware, that,
 besides experience, we have another guide,
 which is the testimony of history, that of wit-
 nesses, &c. These he does not chuse to distin-
 guish from the former, but insinuates, that the
 evidence of testimony is included in that of
 experience, or that every argument from testi-
 mony is only an argument from experience,
 for as much as the truth of that depends
 ultimately upon this. † “ The ultimate standard,”

B 3 he

* P. 176.

† It may with more propriety be said, that the evidence of ex-
 perience is included in that of testimony, than the contrary. Our
 own experience reaches around and goes back but a little way.
 But the experience of others, upon which we chiefly depend, is
 derived to us wholly from history and tradition, that is, from
 testimony.

he tells us below, " by which
 " disputes of this kind, is always
 " experience and observation."
 that the evidence of testimony may
 at last into experience: but this
 of a species entirely distinct from
 the natural probability of any fact,
 nor does it consist, as this author
observation of the veracity of human
of the usual conformity of facts with
witnesses. It is built upon other
 which the author himself leads us
 that follow: " Did not men's i
 " naturally follow their memory-
 " commonly an inclination to tr
 " timent of probity — were they
 " shame, when detected in a fa
 " not these, I say, discovered by
 " be qualities inherent in hum
 " should never repose the least
 " human testimony."* The fir
 tives I do not understand. Of
 observe, that their force we c
 much from our observation of
 from our own feeling, and a c
 what passes within our own bre
 ceive in ourselves, that a love

testimony. And it is obvious to observe, th
 fact, the testimony of negative witnesses, h
 for the most part, no evidence at all; whi
 must, more or less, have its weight.

* P. 177.

for truth is natural to the mind of man: and the same self-experience teaches us, that there are certain other principles in human nature, by which the veracity of men may be tried, and the truth of testimony be often put out of doubt, as will be hereafter seen.

The next observation is, that, "as the evidence derived from witnesses and human testimony is founded on past experience, so it varies with the experience, and is regarded either as a proof or probability, according as the conjunction betwixt any particular kind of report and any kind of objects has been found to be constant or variable." * Here again the author's meaning is lost in a thicket of words, which it is difficult for a common eye to penetrate. Let the reader try what he can make of the *conjunction varying betwixt any particular report and any kind of objects*. The credibility of an historical fact depends upon the credibility of the fact itself, and that of the historian or witnesses who relate it. These should be always considered distinctly; tho' the author, for reasons of his own, chuses to confound them. The latter of these depends in part upon principles that are fixed and invariable, such as those the author has just mentioned, which are general principles of human nature; and in part too on the personal character of the relator, the interest he has in the fact re-

* P. 177.

lated,

lated, and other circumstances. When circumstances vary, the evidence of a fact becomes more or less credible concerning the natural credibility of this is greater or less, according to the observation of others, and of a similar nature, has been more or less. Something like this I take to be the meaning in this place: and this is the meaning of all that follows in this and the next paragraph. My design, therefore, in this is, not to contest the author's principles, as far as I understand them, are not to shew that his style and manner tend to embarrass the subject, and to mislead the reader.

We are now coming nearer to the question. "Suppose," says the author, "the fact, which the testimony attests, partakes of the extraordinary; the marvellous; in that case, the resulting from the testimony resulting, greater or less, in proportion, greater or less, in proportion, greater or less, in proportion. — "fact is more or less unusual. — "fact attested is such a one as has not been under our observation, here is a contradiction of two opposite experiences; of which one destroys the other, as far as it is possible, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains of the same principle of experience, and thus us a certain degree of assurance

“ many of witnesses, gives us also, in this case, “ another degree of assurance against the fact “ which they endeavour to establish.” * Here the author seems to suppose, that a want of experience, in any case, is the same with experiencing the contrary. *When a fact attested hath seldom fallen under our observation, “ here is, says “ he, a contest of two opposite experiences:”* but, in reality, here is no experience at all; only a fact not observed on one side, and positive evidence, or the fact attested, on the other — a very unequal contest! as we shall presently see; the slightest positive testimony being, for the most part, an over-ballance to the strongest negative evidence that can be produced. I grant, however, all that the author’s argument requires, *viz.* that experience teaches us, of many things, that they are improbable, and not to be hastily believed; of others, that they are naturally incredible: but these are so, not because they are unusual or unobserved, but because there is a known disproportion betwixt the cause assigned and the effect, or because the fact asserted is a contradiction to some known and universal truth.

These premises he now draws to a point, and makes them center in one conclusive argument against miracles: “ To increase the probability against the testimony of witnesses, “ let us suppose, that the fact which they

* P. 179.

“ affirm,

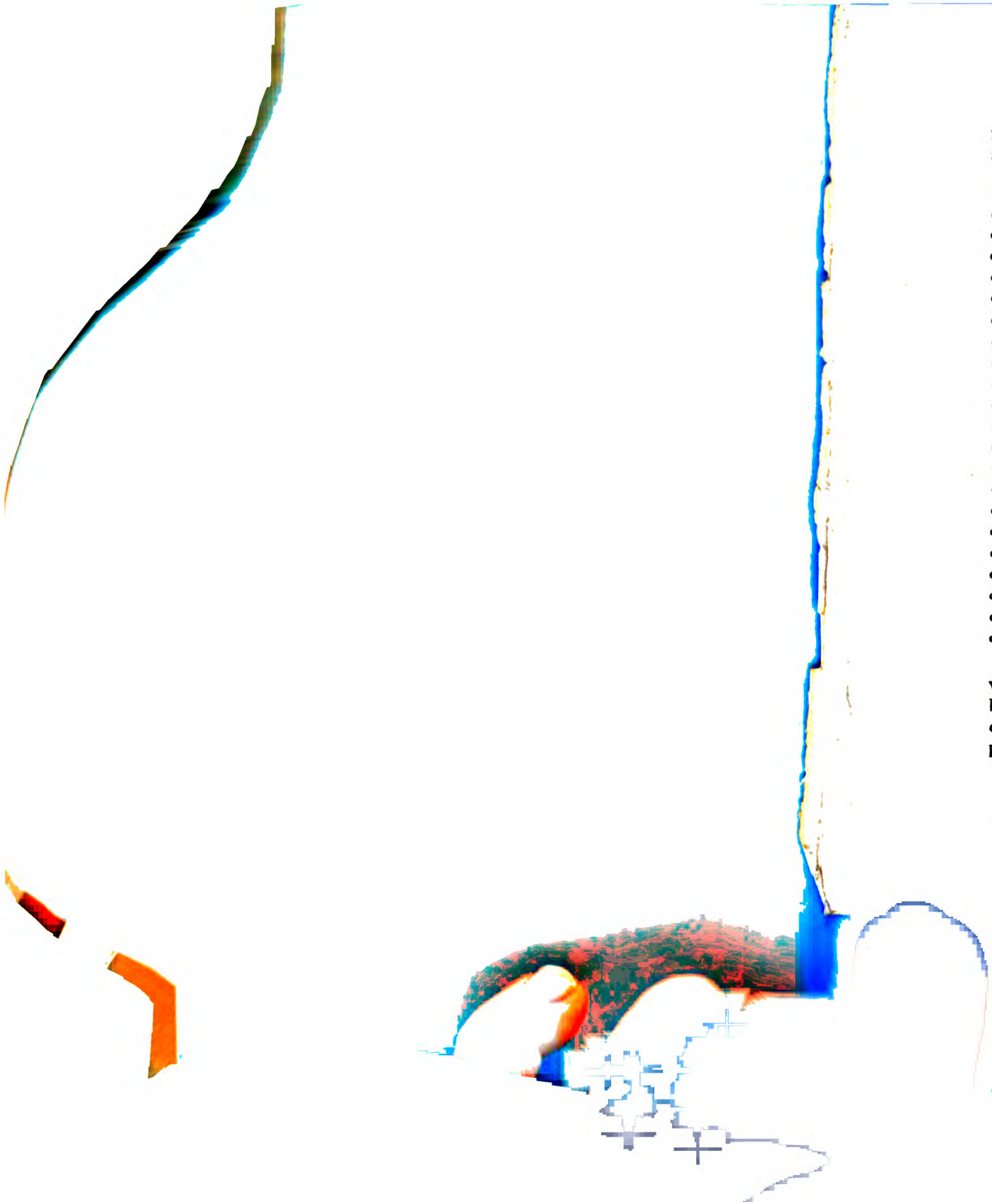
“ affirm, instead of being only n
 “ ly miraculous ; and suppose a
 “ mony, considered apart and
 “ to an entire proof : in that ca
 “ against proof, of which the t
 “ vail, but still with a dimin
 “ in proportion to that of
 I have just allowed, that the
 experience assures us are whole
 of these I shall assert, that no
 can be produced in their favo
 ways consistent with itself ; a
 can ever be contradicted by a
 thor is, therefore, too kind
 miracles may admit of full
 mony. I shall take no advan
 cession, but readily acknowle
 are proved *a priori* to be inc
 a vain attempt to prove the
 Let us see, then, what the auth
 of this proof. His batteries a
 and he begins the attack.

“ A miracle,” says he, “
 “ the laws of nature ; and, a
 “ alterable experience hath
 “ laws, the proof against a n
 “ nature of the fact, is as
 “ gument from experience
 “ imagined. Why is it mo
 “ that all men must die — th

" itself remain suspended in the air — that fire
 " consumes wood, and is extinguished by water.
 " — unless it be, that these events are found
 " agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is
 " required a violation of these laws, or, in
 " other words, a miracle, to prevent them?
 " Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever hap-
 " pen in the common course of nature. 'Tis
 " no miracle, that a man in seeming good
 " health should die of a sudden; because such
 " a kind of death, tho' more unusual than
 " any other, has yet been frequently observed
 " to happen: but 'tis a miracle, that a dead
 " man should come to life; because that hath
 " never been observed in any age or country.
 " There must, therefore, be an uniform expe-
 " rience against every miraculous event, other-
 " wise the event would not merit the appella-
 " tion. And, as an uniform experience amounts
 " to a proof, there is here a direct and full
 " proof, from the nature of the fact, against
 " the existence of any miracle: nor can such a
 " proof be destroyed, or the miracle render'd
 " credible, but by an opposite proof that is
 " superior." *

I have endeavour'd to preserve the strength
 of this argument entire, by collecting every
 thing that is of any import to it in the obser-
 vations that precede it: and, that the reader
 may see it in its strongest light, I shall here

repeat
author
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“ very
“ deav
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“ and
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“ from
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“ that
“ main
“ expl
“ all p
“ anni
“ it as
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“ of re
: This
whole
but we
down l
pleaded



and to find the experience of all mankind brought in evidence against all the religions of the world. An experienced uniformity in the course of nature hath been always thought necessary to the belief and use of miracles. These are indeed relative ideas. There must be an ordinary regular course of nature, before there can be any thing extraordinary. A river must flow, before its stream can be interrupted. It is strange, therefore, that this uniformity, which is implied in the nature of a miracle, should at the same time be inconsistent with it. This is to suppose, that the existence of a miracle is a contradiction in terms; and as such indeed the author seems to treat it: "A miracle supported by any human testimony is more properly a subject of derision than of argument:"* And again, "What have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events?" † A modest reader can scarce look such assurance as this in the face: he will be apt to mistrust his own apprehension, and think there is more in these big words than he readily sees. The first reading gave me suspicions of this kind; but, having recovered myself, and taken courage to review it, I fear not to assert, that all the experience the author can bring will amount to neither proof nor argument against the belief of miracles. Let him, if he pleases, plead his own experience — that he has never seen or been witness to any miracle — that he

* P. 194.

† P. 195.

has always found the course
same and unchanged: but do
teach him, that the laws of nature
and immutable — that there
being sufficient to suspend
that there can be no reason
power to act? 'Till one or
be proved from experience,
in the present case, and, in the
matter in question, is wholly
foreign to it. Can the soul
experience that there is no frost
can Mr. *Hume* experience that
fire kindled by a touch from
evidence, tho' multiplied in
be negative: and the fact last
be true, and capable of very
testimony, as I shall presently
world should agree that they
like.

The uniformity of nature is
ed or brought in question by
miracles. The concurring testi-
to the course of nature is not
those who have experienced
ances in a few instances. The
unites and reconciles these fe-
By supposing the facts in que-
culous, the uniformity of na-
and the facts are accounted
principle entirely consistent with
perience teacheth us that lead

vier than water: but a man, by projecting these heavy bodies, may make them swim in water, or fly in air. Should the same be done by any invisible power, it would be a miracle. But the uniformity of nature is no more disturbed in this case than the former: nor is the general experience, which witnesses to the superior gravity of these bodies, any proof that they may not be raised in air and water by some invisible agent, as well as by the power of man. All that experience teaches is the comparative weight of these bodies. If, therefore, they are seen to float in mediums lighter than themselves, this must be the effect of art or strength: but, if it be done without any visible art or power, it must be done then by some art or power that is invisible; that is, it must be miraculous. This is the process by which we infer the existence of miracles; which is, therefore, so far from being contradicted by that experience upon which the laws of nature are established, that it is closely connected and stands in the fairest agreement with it.

The question then will remain — Whether any such invisible agents have ever interposed in producing visible effects? Against the *possibility* of this, tho' the author is pleased to pronounce it impossible, he hath offered no argument (and, indeed, none can possibly be offered): against the *credibility* of it, the experience which he pleads is no argument at all. This experience proves a course of nature; but, whether this is ever interrupted,

interrupted, is still a question. Experience teaches what may be ordered from common causes, and the common course of things: but interpositions, which we are enquired by their nature and essence, and out of the common course of nature, if at all, are effects of an extraneous cause upon extraordinary occasions, which common experience can determine concerning them. That such occasions both in the natural and moral world we can conceive. The greatest of philosophers * hath thought, that the world will want, in a course of time, that made to retouch and refit it. Some of moral philosophers † hath taken reasonable hope, that God would send a messenger from heaven to instruct us in our great duties of religion and morality.

As to the question of fact - whether such interpositions have been observed? this must be tried, like other historical facts, by the testimony of those who relate it, and the credit of the first who have vouched it; and not, as the philosophers have it, by the testimony of others who lived in distant times and places. There is mention of a comet, a lightning, and an *Achaian* war, which appeared

* *Newton Opt. ed. Lat. p. 346.*

† *Socrates in Platonis Alcibiade 2^o, sub. finem.*

sun *. If this were well attested by the astronomers of that time, it would be trifling to object against it that the like had never been observed before or since. And just as pertinent is it to alledge the experience of ages and countries against miracles which are said to be wrought in other times and other countries.

But, in truth, were the world to give evidence in the present question, they would; I am persuaded, depose very differently from what this author expects. A great part of mankind have given their testimony to the credibility of miracles: they have actually believed them. By this author's account, all the religions in the world have been founded upon this belief. If this be true, we have universal testimony to the credibility of miracles. How then can there be universal experience against them? The author tells us that we must judge of testimony by experience. It is more certain that we must judge of the experience of men by their testimony.

It is far from true that all religions have been founded on miracles. None but the *Christian* and *Jewish* appear to be so founded. But there is a sort of miracles, which men of all religions have agreed in believing. "A miracle," as this author says, "may be either discoverable by men, or not. This alters not its nature and essence." † Many things appear to us to be effected by natural means, the first springs of

* *Seneca Nat. Quæst.* lib. 7, cap. 15.

† P. 187.

which may be moved by the im-
 God. But every such interpo-
 ruling or giving a new direction
 nature, is, as the author all
 If then Providence ever interp
 exemplary wickedness, or in the
 nent virtue — in averting evi
 good — these are miracles. Bu
 universally believed. These bl
 have been implored and ack
 these judgments deprecated, i
 private prayers of mankind, fr
 of the world to this time.

We cannot indeed argue, fr
 interpositions, that therefore P
 terpose in a visible and sensible
 follows, that such interposition
 follows, that they are credible
 these miraculous interpositions
 not appear to our senses, what
 from believing the like upon t
 senses, or of credible persons
 to them? If there are general
 cealing these interpositions, m
 be special reasons for signalizi
 to the senses and notice of mar
 tain, that, if any such reasons
 all that is difficult of belief in
 removed. Now, though we ca
 into the counsels of Providen
 presumption, pronounce what
 any supposed circumstance, to c

ing of past facts or miracles, that are questioned, we can readily see whether any great end, worthy of God, hath been answered by them: and, if this appear to be the case, it will create a presumption in their favour: and, if, farther, it shall seem that this end could not have been compassed by any other means, this will amount to some proof of their reality.

To see this matter in the clearest light, it may be proper to consider more distinctly the grounds of that credibility, which we allow, in different degrees, to historical facts. This depends, as I have said, on the credibility of the facts themselves, and on that of the historian or witnesses who relate them.

The credibility of any fact in itself, as this author frequently tells us, depends upon its analogy with the known course of nature *. But the powers of nature are so imperfectly known to us, that in most cases we argue with great uncertainty from this principle. A consequence of this is, that testimony is, for the most part, of much greater force to establish the truth of past facts, than experience. It would have been thought highly incredible a few years ago, that an animal might be propagated by cutting it in pieces — that you might, by dividing one living creature, give life to an hundred of the same species. Yet this sort of *Hydra* has been discovered; and the fact, tho' contrary to the whole analogy of nature, was readily believed, when it

* P. 165.

had been experienced and testified. In like manner, I have no doubt loses its polarity in very cold latitudes this upon the testimony of one experience of travellers in all attests the contrary. Here the experience is outweighed by a The reason is, that the experience of countries is only a negative question. This experience was the fact was tried, a very strong against it. The most cautious ventured his fortune and life upon this presumption of no weight of past fact, when compared with testimony †.

* Mr. Ellis, in his account of the North

† Every proposition or fact asserted is *certain* credible or probable we mean, not any thing the proposition or fact, but only its appearance to the person who estimates this credibility. A thing when it wants and is thought capable of probability when there appear more reasons for than against it. *Credible* is more than *possible*, and *improbable* is more than *credible*, and *improbable* is more than *credible*, and *improbable*. But these words are used in common what promiscuously. Thus, what is highly highly credible, and what is very improbable Hence, there are all degrees of incredible and arrive at probability. After this, credible and admit again of all degrees, 'till you arrive at probability. The same thing then may be credible in all to different persons. That the earth is constantly spinning about like a top, and travels motion, while the sun and the heavens stand

In cases where a sufficient cause is assigned, an effect, however new and strange, may become credible, or even probable, in itself, without any testimony to support it. That fire should be

part of mankind is wholly incredible, and to another morally certain. The credibility, therefore, or comparative incredibility of any fact is, for the most part, too loose a bottom to ground any argument or inference upon. The same testimony may likewise be variously credible to different persons. But the evidence of this is far more distinct, and its force more easily ascertained. The truth of testimony, where it is doubtful, may be proved many different ways: that of doubtful facts can be made clear only by testimony, which is indeed, after all, the proper proof of facts.

Experience is the general testimony of mankind to general truths. Testimony, as it is here opposed to experience, is the attestation of particular persons to particular facts; the former of these witnesses to the credibility of facts; the latter gives evidence directly to their reality or existence. From the former we collect, that *May* is on this side the line a warmer month than *December*; but the certainty of this in particular instances is only to be proved, and the contrary may be proved, from the latter. We may indeed, as I have granted, in some cases, infer from the former of these the certainty or impossibility of facts. But even here this limitation or condition is always understood—that we know the whole of the case—that no cause intervenes, which is unknown or does not appear to us. And therefore, in the strongest cases that can be supposed, experience is no bar to the evidence of testimony; because it is very possible, in almost all cases, that such cause may intervene. Should I see a stone climb up hill, or a piece of solid iron swim in water, I could not doubt the fact, how incredible soever in itself. Suppose the same to rest upon the testimony of others: I cannot, indeed, see with the eyes of other men; but I can see that they have eyes, as well as myself: and, if their veracity is proved, as I assert it may, even to our eyes and senses (I mean, by sensible and visible facts) I have then nearly as good evidence for the fact, as if I had seen it myself. I might perhaps conclude, that the effect was produced by some invisible agent; but, whether this can

be kindled by a touch from ice
the experience of some thousand
electricity is a cause given equal
From this time then the fact be

can be discovered or not, the fact must
this is unwarily allowed by the author himself
as can be desired: "Suppose all authors
"that, from the first of *January*, 1600
"darkness over the whole earth for eight
"the tradition of this extraordinary event
"ly among the people; that all travellers
"foreign countries, bring us accounts of the
"out the least variation or contradiction
"our present philosophers, instead of doubting
"to receive it for certain, and ought to
"whence it might be derived." P. 199

The author of the *Free Inquiry into the
the primitive Church* has stated this matter
light. He supposes, that we have the evidence
natural credibility of facts, and seems to
argue from hence, we go upon surer ground
from testimony, which he represents as evidence
and amounting only to a reasonable presumption
contrary to which, in almost every part
the truth. As the principles laid down by him
general, and may be easily misapplied, be
the present question, it will not be improper
with what has been said. "The question
"raculous powers depends," says he, "upon
"of the facts pretended to have been produced
"who attest them: if either part be in error
"sink in proportion, and, if the facts be
"must of course fall to the ground, because
"ny can alter the nature of things. The
"open to the trial of our reason and fer
"lity of witnesses depends on a variety
"concealed from us; and, tho' in many
"ably be presumed, yet in none can it
"for it is common with men, out of a



and even probable, tho' it were not tried and proved by any one witness.

In moral or intelligent agents we look for moral causes—for reasons or motives to induce them

“ to dissemble and deceive: but plain facts cannot delude us—
 “ cannot speak any other language, or give any other information, than that of truth. The testimony, therefore, of facts,
 “ as it is offer'd to our senses, carries with it the surest instruction in all cases, which God, in the ordinary course of
 “ his providence, has thought fit to appoint for the guidance of
 “ human life.” * In answer to which, I shall not deny that the credibility of facts may in many cases be tried by our senses; but this is generally learnt from experience, or the common testimony of mankind: And, 2dly, this credibility, however learnt or proved, is no direct evidence of the reality or existence of any doubtful fact; since the fact may be highly credible, and yet never exist—may be in a great degree incredible, and yet certainly true. What the author calls *the testimony of facts offer'd to our senses* is in this case only the testimony of our senses, or that of other men, to the existence, not of the fact in question, but of other facts that are supposed analogous or similar to it; which, tho' in many cases it may amount to a very high presumption, yet is *in none a direct proof of any doubtful fact*: Whereas, 3dly, testimony is a direct evidence to the existence or reality, not of similar facts, but of the fact itself: and therefore, in judging of past or distant facts, where we cannot have the evidence of our senses, the testimony of those who have this evidence is, not only the surest, but the only *method of instruction which Providence has appointed for our guidance thro' life*. All that we *certainly know* of such facts is derived from this source. The truth of testimony is always presumed, where there are no particular reasons to suspect it. This presumption alone will give more weight, as we have seen, to a single testimony, and make it better evidence for the truth of facts, than a very high degree of presumption drawn from analogy is against it. 4thly, This presumption may be increased to any degree by the concurrence of other testimony; which concurrence too is itself a

* Preface, p. 9.

them to act, as well as for the
of acting. And, where both a
ent cause appear equal to the ef
however strange in itself, will b
by testimony, if not probable w
possible for a man to swim acro
The possibility of this fact will
upon sufficient testimony: but,
reason is assigned for this hazar
(such as the escaping certain c
make it credible upon the slighte
even probable without any.

The result then is—that what
or in the lowest degree credible,
proof from testimony—that th
sumption from experience is
against positive evidence—and
cause is assigned equal to any e
is rendered credible upon com
and sometimes probable without

But there are,—it is granted, m
we may, from nature and experie
to be impossible. It is impossib
proposition should be true, when

distinct proof of the fact attested. Lastly,
single witness may be proved by plain and
will be seen more fully hereafter. If the
dible facts require stronger evidence to supp
of testimony may be increased, and the proo
tupled, infinitely; and, consequently, wha
impossible may be thus proved. The fore
indeed *alter the nature of things*; but it ca
Bable become probable—it can give credibili
to things that were before incredible.

ed is unequal to the effect. Now, the proportion of causes to effects, the natural powers of agents, and the force of moral causes on the mind, we know to a good degree, from experience. If we cannot precisely determine the force of natural agents, we can, in most cases, assign limits which they cannot pass. For instance: We cannot precisely mark out the bounds of human power; but we can, in all cases, say to what it does not extend. If the strength of men, at a medium, be equal to one, that of king *Augustus* or *Hercules* may be equal to two; but it cannot be equal to two hundred. A physician may restore a dying man to health; but he cannot restore a dead man to life. Of all such events, as raising the dead, calming the winds or seas, curing diseases with a word, we may fairly pronounce, that they are impossible to human strength, and therefore, when imputed to it, are incredible; because a force equal to two cannot produce an effect equal to two hundred. In this case experience decides with sufficient authority against the fact. And this, I suppose, the author mistook for an argument against miracles.

But who ever attributed these facts to human power? Those who record, and those who believe, miracles, universally ascribe them to a power superior to man. They agree, that they far exceed all human strength, and therefore are an argument of the concurrence and agency of some superior power. Against the interposition
D of

of such superior power, experience, can determine nothing. Experience does not attest or acknowledge positions, the answer is given. Questions do not call for them. Things of nature are provided for by the laws of nature. Extraordinary occurrences call for extraordinary interpretations. On occasions we are not the primary agents, that many such may arise in the world, free agents, seems obvious even.

If men, by a bad use of their freedom, sink themselves into a moral abyss, forgetting the ends of their creation, should lose sight of God and his great motives to holiness and virtue, should become general and permanent of recovery—it is very supposable that God may interpose, by a special Providence, in restoring them to a knowledge of him, and of attaining to the ends which they were created. It is the knowledge which is necessary to the care of Providence—and the danger of perishing out of existence—should it be thought incredible that God should send a righteous man to teach and enforce the duties of religion? This might express authority? This might be miraculous; but the miracle would appear; and therefore other things necessary to attest its truth.

ledge and virtue are not sufficient to characterize a prophet: he must do such things as no man can do, except God were with him, before his mission or character will be acknowledged for divine. Here then is a reason, which, whenever it can be pleaded, will make miracles every way credible, and as capable of proof from testimony as any matter of fact whatsoever.

In the examination of past facts, if no such end appears to have been answered by the miracles alledged, this will be a strong presumption against them. On the other hand, if any great consequences have followed — if, for instance, it should appear from history, that natural religion had, when lost, by the help of these miracles, been revived in all its purity, and established in many nations as the will of God — this will be a strong presumption in their favour: And, if there appear no other assignable cause, which could give birth to this great event, but the miracles pretended, this will be a good proof of their reality.

We come next to consider the credibility derived to facts from testimony. This depends in general upon the principles of human nature, which we can argue with the more certainty from, because we experience them in ourselves, as well as observe them in others. We are made naturally to love truth, and to hate and abhor falshood and deceit. The shame of being detected in a lye, and the reproach that ever fol-

lows it, is a full proof of the
ters of no moment, in the
course, where men think it
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from vanity or a desire of ple
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by which the veracity of men
be tried. For example: If t
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evils, which, by receding from
might prevent—and, lastly,

itself for a painful and ignominious death—this is such a proof of sincerity as cannot be resisted. In this case, we are not only assured that the witness is free from every corrupt bias, but that he has the highest regard for truth. Nothing but a conscious sense of this, with the hope of a future reward from the God of truth, can support men under a loss of all things, and under the actual suffering of all the evils of life. A good man may give up his interest for the sake of truth: a bad man will sacrifice truth to interest: but no man will give up interest and truth together for nothing, or for the sake of falsehood, which is worse than nothing.

The maxims we here argue from are the most certain and uncontroverted of any in morality—That men act from motives, and that good, real or apparent, is the object, the motive and aim of every action. The laws by which the moral world is governed are as certain and infallible as those of the natural. The passions, appetites, and senses of mankind act, and are acted upon, with as much uniformity as any powers and principles in nature. That men should love falsehood rather than truth—that they should chuse labour and travail, shame and misery, before pleasure, ease, and esteem—is as much a violation of the laws of nature, as it is for lead or iron to hang unsupported in the air, or for the voice of a man to raise the dead to life: but this, I have granted to the author, is, not miraculous, but impossible, and shall therefore

have his leave, I hope, to affirm that testimony, thus attested, is impossible — that testimony, thus tried and found to be credible and certain.

It remains, indeed, that witnesses who are upright and unsuspected may be deceived in their testimony: they may be deceived by appearances, and therefore their testimony, though true, is not to be securely relied on. But miracles, at least all that we are to believe, are of such a nature, that they cannot be deceived about them. Facts of this kind, done in open day-light, that lie open to the eye and observation for a long time, and that present witnesses must know who are not. They who report them cannot be deceived themselves, and they who believe them, however they may be deceived by others.

I conclude then, that miracles which are attested by credible witnesses, appear a sufficient cause for our belief, and are credible in themselves — that, under the cognizance of our senses, they are a proper matter of testimony, and that we may believe witnesses who have sufficient evidence to convince themselves, and give evidence of their conviction, have a right to our faith.

And here I accept the authority of the Bible without complaining of the manner in which it is expressed. “The pl



says he, " is (and 'tis a general maxim worthy
 " of our attention) that no testimony is suffi-
 " cient to establish a miracle, unless the testi-
 " mony be of such a kind, that its falshood
 " would be more miraculous than the fact which
 " it endeavours to establish : and even in that
 " case there is a mutual destruction of argu-
 " ments, and the superior only gives us an af-
 " surance suitable to that degree of force which
 " remains after deducting the inferior. — If
 " the falshood of any person's testimony would
 " be more miraculous than the event which he
 " relates, then, and not 'till then, can he pre-
 " tend to command my belief or opinion." *

By miraculous it is plain that the author here means, in the popular sense of the word, wonderful or incredible. I assert then, that miracles may be made so credible by circumstances and concurring facts, and so supported by testimony, that, if we reject them, we must believe things more incredible, or, as the author would have us speak, more miraculous than the miracles themselves.

The miracles I shall mention are those in the *Christian Gospel* — healing the sick without any visible means, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead to life, &c. all which are said to be performed by the power of God for ends the most worthy of himself, *viz.* to restore religion and morality to their true principles, and to establish the practice of them in the world. The character of those who were appointed to this

* P. 182.

work,

work, and the doctrines which they responded perfectly with this design. It was, they undertook it with alacrity, declaring from the beginning their commission was to go and teach the nations. The miracles which they attest, as given to their doctrine, they assert from their knowledge, as what they saw with their eyes, and handled with their hands: these facts, and the numbers of converts, were very great: they concurred in their testimony, in the same doctrine, and in the same testimony: they submitted, with courage and constancy, to the persecutions and afflictions, in confirmation of the truth; and, when called to it (as they were) laid down their lives for it: they foresaw from the beginning the difficulties they met with, and foretold, with confidence, their success against it: they justified their predictions; the doctrine taught was in a short time established in a great part of the world.

Here, now, the attempt itself is justified, and supported by truth, is reasonable, and unaccountable. That men of sense and education should conceive a plan of modelling the religion of all nations, by changing their manners, by the laws of justice, purity, and charity—that bad means should be used to procure an end so great and good—that men in means so impious as from

sure—that men of craft or address should chuse for the hero of their story one who was chronicled as a malefactor, and who had been put to death by the consent of a whole people—one, too, that had abused their confidence, and misled them by false hopes into an endless train of miseries—all this is contrary to nature, and therefore, by the author's rule, impossible.

The zeal with which they carried on this design, traversing seas and kingdoms, without rest, and without weariness—a zeal which could not be exceeded by the most righteous men in the most righteous cause—this, if not prompted by duty and a strong conviction of the truths they taught, is still more incredible.

The excellency of the religion they taught, in its worship and morality far surpassing all human wisdom and philosophy, and the sole end of which is to make men honest, sincere, and virtuous, if it be the work of ignorance and fraud, is equally strange and mysterious.

The success of this design is yet a greater miracle. In this chain of wonders the event is the most miraculous part. The establishment of the Gospel in an hundred different nations, its victory over *Jews* and *Gentiles*, over the power and policy of the wisest and greatest people, over the pride of learning and the obstinacy of ignorance, over the prejudices of religion and those of sin and irreligion, is an event the most wonderful of any in history. But this is a
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They put their testimony to the trial, by claiming a power of working miracles themselves: they displayed this power frequently and publickly, and so submitted their truth to the eyes and senses of all about them. This pretence, if false, must have defeated the most probable and hopeful scheme; if true, it was no more than necessary to the difficulties of this. The event was—great numbers were every day converted to the faith. But this conduct cannot, any more than the event, be reconciled to the character or supposition of imposture.

Lastly, They gave the highest proof that can be given to the veracity of testimony, by going thro' the fiery trial of persecution, in all its various forms of imprisonment, torture, and death. This began with the very beginning of Christianity. They saw it evidently before their eyes, and plainly devoted themselves from the first to a life of sufferings and affliction. They gave up ease and security, country, kindred, family, and friends, to be treated every-where with contempt and contumely, to conflict with poverty and want, to be persecuted from city to city, sentenced to imprisonment and stripes, and, at last, to die by stoning, by the sword, or the cross. But this, in support of falshood and wrong, is so contrary to human nature, that it is absolutely incredible.

The supposition then, that the miracles of the Gospel are false, is full of wonders, prodigies, things unnatural, and which experience,
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the author's criterion in mat
nounces to be impossible.

And what now is that con
which is pleaded against the
raeles? "A miracle," the
"may be accurately defined
"a law of nature by a partic
"Deity or by the interposi
"agent." * But this defini
curate nor consistent with its
nature are the laws of God: a
occasionally change or invert
is no law, that I know of, a
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universally corrupted, and th
bable means were left of rest
and philosophy had tried their

* P. 181.

It was, therefore, on the part of man, highly expedient and desirable. In fact, to this revelation, whether real or pretended, and to no other cause, it is owing, that the great truths of nature, concerning God, a Providence, and a future state, are now so widely spread, and that half the world, instead of dumb idols, are serving the living God: and, if all the good ends, that might be expected, are not yet answered by it, yet the seed of the word is sown, the foundations of true religion are laid, and there is hope that it will in time enlarge its borders, and prevail, where it is received, with more effect and influence. It cannot be denied, that the Gospel is an adequate provision for the wants, a remedy for all the infirmities, of mankind. There is nothing, that can be wished for in a rule of duty, that is not comprehended in it. The miracles, then, that attest it, are accounted for to our reason: we have God, the cause of all things, for their author: and a sufficient reason is assigned for the divine interposition. And this will, at the same time, account for all the wonders that followed: the actions, sufferings, and success of the Apostles will, upon this scheme, appear easy, consistent, and natural.

But, if this account be not admitted, these will remain so many contradictions to nature and experience, and it will lie upon the author to reconcile them to our belief. If the common motives to human actions, interest, passion, and

E pre-

prejudice, cannot be pleaded in difficulties, what other account them? Some cause must be to the effect. For men to tives is as unnatural, as it sink without weight—to act of motives is as contrary to for a stone to ascend against vity. Hear what this author another Essay: “ We cannot “ more convincing argument “ that the actions ascribed to “ directly contrary to the cour “ that no human motives, in “ stances, could ever induce “ conduct.” *

The author tells us, that in reject the greater miracle. But soft a name for these inconsistencies, that God, or some invisible interposed in confounding the understanding of all that preached Gospel, in changing their natural contrary direction to their passions and instincts, they would then proper objects of our belief. presume impossible to be produced can be assigned for such intention merely to deceive mankind—the will of God, and contrary to t

his nature, that we may pronounce it impossible for him to promote, or even to permit it to take effect.

Here, then, I may call upon the author, in his own words, to lay his hand upon his heart, and declare, whether the miracles of the Gospel could possibly have been better attested, if true — whether there is any one condition wanting that can add credibility to them — whether there is any thing so contrary to nature in these miracles, as in the testimony given, and the belief gained, to them, if false — whether it is not easier to believe the miracles true, than that so many miraculous consequences (a natural effect of true miracles) should arise from them, if false — or, lastly, whether it be not more credible that God should work these miracles for so great an end as that of giving birth and establishment to Christianity, than that he should work more and greater miracles to confound and deceive mankind. When he has balanced his account of the impossibility of miracles with the evidence for those of the Gospel, and subtracted the former from the latter, *this subtraction will certainly amount to an entire annihilation.*

Let us now see the poor case which the author puts at last to illustrate and crown his argument: “ When any one tells me, that he saw
“ a dead man restored to life, I immediately
“ consider with myself, whether it be more pro-
“ bable that this person should either deceive

" or be deceived, or that th
 " should really have happened
 " miracle against the other,
 " the superiority which I disco
 " my decision, and always
 " miracle." * The author's
 him to prove, that no mirac
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 pose raised to life without
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 the former of these cannot
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 they were neither deceived
 intended to deceive others.
 unassisted, cannot lift a weight
 twenty men, with the help o
 lift the weight of one. I
 author, that, when a man is
 the ghost in *Prince Edward* †, o
 it is more credible, that the te

* P. 182.

† A late play, called *Edward the*

than the miracle true : but, when I see an effect worthy of Providence, in which the religion, virtue, and morality of a great part of mankind are concerned, brought about by the belief of this or such-like miracles, and find, upon inquiry, that this miracle is attested by a great number of persons who lived and died confessors and martyrs to it, the fallhood of such testimony appears to me far more miraculous than such a miracle.

The author puts the same case, with the addition of some particulars, in the second part of his Essay: “ Suppose that all the historians
 “ who treat of *England* should agree, that, on
 “ the first of *January*, 1600, queen *Elizabeth*
 “ died — that, both before and after her death,
 “ she was seen by her physicians and the whole
 “ court, as is usual with persons of her rank —
 “ that her successor was acknowledged and
 “ proclaimed by parliament — and that, after
 “ having been interred a month, she again ap-
 “ peared, took possession of the throne, and
 “ governed *England* three years : I must confess
 “ I should be surprized at the concurrence of
 “ so many odd circumstances, but should not
 “ have the least inclination to believe so mira-
 “ culous an event.” * Here, again, the fact
 supposed is the strangest and most unaccountable that the author could well conceive, because no final cause appears to make it in any degree credible. But when was any such fact at-

* P. 200.

tested by historians? If the au-
 story incredible, I think it as in-
 good historian should relate it:
 incredible, because it is a mirac-
 credible that God should work
 for nothing.

But the importance of mirac-
 with the author, a thing of n-
 this, which we considered as
 that gives the highest credibilit-
 miracles, is, at last, the very
 rejects them as incredible. “

“ that the limitation here ma-

“ marked, when I say, that a m-

“ be proved, so as to be a four-

“ stem of religion; for I own,

“ there may possibly be mirac-

“ of the usual course of nat-

“ kind, as to admit of proof fr-

“ mony, tho' perhaps it will

“ find any such in all the recor-

This concession is very remarka-

to me to be fairly giving up the

if miracles may be wrought in c-

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nion of this author? I conf-

lofs to guess what can be his i-

place. If, in compromise for

acles which he here grants us

pects us to give up all that have religion for their object, it will indeed answer his purpose very well. He may grant other miracles possible, and yet make good his argument against them. But these are not so easily dealt with. The surest way not to believe them is not to examine them. And this he wisely recommends as the best expedient that has been tried against them. "If a miracle," says he, "be ascribed to any new system of religion, men, in all ages, have been so much imposed on by ridiculous stories of that kind, that this very circumstance would be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient, with all men of sense, not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without farther examination." * This, indeed, is a short way with religion and miracles; and we must own, that the author hath found out at last a decisive argument against them.

* P. 200.



PART



P A R T

LITTLE as it is that th
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“ foregoing reasoning, we ha
“ the testimony upon which a
“ ed may possibly amount to
“ and that the falshood of tha
“ be a kind of prodigy. But
“ that we have been a great c
“ our conceffions, and that t
“ miraculous event, in any hi
“ on fo full an evidence.” *
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referve, a body of troops tha
ever harrassed, and are yet untir
of infidelity?

The first of these veteran ba
as follows: “ There is not,”
“ found, in all history, any m
“ a sufficient number of men
“ tioned good sense, educatio
“ as to secure us against all d
“ selves — of such undoubted
“ place them beyond all suspicio

* P. 183.



“ deceive others—of such credit and reputation in
 “ the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to
 “ lose, in case of being detected in a falshood —
 “ and, at the same time, attesting facts perform-
 “ ed in such a publick manner, and in so cele-
 “ brated a part of the world, as to render the
 “ detection unavoidable: all which circum-
 “ stances are requisite to give us a full assurance
 “ in the testimony of men.” * The reader will
 allow me to suppose, that the author has in view,
 both here and throughout his Essay, the *Christian*
 miracles, which we have been considering. Now,
 the objections here made have been so frequent-
 ly and fully answered by the advocates of Chris-
 tianity, that it is quite piteous to see the author,
 after proclaiming a victory, calling in such poor
 auxiliaries to his relief.

As to the first condition here required, there
 never was perhaps a fact directly attested by so
 many witnesses as the miracles in question. We
 have still upon record the express depositions of
 many in the writings of the Apostles. The con-
 version of every single person to Christianity
 was, in truth, a clear and precise testimony to
 these facts; for this religion was wholly built
 upon them. Now, besides the twelve Apostles
 and seventy Disciples chosen to preach the Gos-
 pel, a great number more were converted by the
 miracles and resurrection of *Christ*. But those
 that gave this witness to the miracles of the
 Apostles were without number. Never was there

* P. 183.

a doctrine

a doctrine that spread so swiftly thro' the world, or that gained so many present and future witnesses to its truth.

The Apostles and first Disciples had no money, many of them, the advantages of education, and no learning. But what learning is required of men to see with their eyes and hear with their ears? The miracles they attest were not the objects of sense. Folly itself could not be deceived in them: and sure folly could not so successfully deceive. These men were simple men, they were and void of art or eloquence. What could they do? what this author, with all his arguments, could never be able to do: they got the victory over the religions in the world about the same time, they published their own in different and distant countries. They had, therefore, we may say, more courage enough to testify what their eyes saw and their hands had handled.

They had not perhaps any great things to lose. But the good name of a man is as dear to him as that of the great God. They had no publick character to lose, they had no publick infamy to dread: and this they were not to lose, not by being detected in a falsehood, nor by severing in the truth. If it was like that which gave up to follow *Christ*, it was, indeed, that which they had. And what they lost was a negative quantity, and must be put in the account of their losses: they gained hunger, cold, toil and labour, watchings and fasts, and reproach, scourgings and death.

then, enough to evidence their sincerity. They gave every proof, that ever was given by man, to the truth of their testimony.

As to the notoriety of the facts, they were done in the most publick manner — in places of constant resort — many of them in *Jerusalem*, at times of the greatest concourse: and, what is more, they were done in direct opposition to the prejudices of all that saw them — before the most vigilant and powerful enemies, who did not, as this author tells us wise men commonly do, “think the matter too inconsiderable to deserve their attention *,” but exerted their utmost industry and authority in suppressing this new religion; putting its head and leader to death, suborning false witnesses to discredit him and his miracles, and proceeding immediately, by imprisoning some, and killing others, to deter and disperse his followers. These miracles, therefore, were wrought in the very place where their detection was most certain and unavoidable; and the testimony given to them was given in the same publick manner and in the same place.

The author is well aware, that the testimony of the Apostles and first Christians, if the miracles were false (I mean, the fact of giving such testimony) and the miraculous events that followed in consequence of them, will be thought, upon reflection, at least as incredible as the miracles themselves: and therefore, to abate our

* P. 198.

wonder

wonder on this head, he observ
 “ that there is a principle in
 “ which, if strictly examined,
 “ to diminish extremely the affu
 “ have from human testimony
 “ prodigy. The maxim, by v
 “ monly conduct ourselves in
 “ is, that the objects of which
 “ perience resemble those of wh
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 “ ceeding by this rule, we rea
 “ fact that is unusual or incred
 “ nary degree, yet, in advanci
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 “ miraculous, it rather the more
 “ such a fact upon account of
 “ cumstance which ought to de
 “ thority. The passion of surpr
 “ arising from miracles, being
 “ emotion, gives a sensible ter
 “ the belief of those events fro
 “ derived.” *

The love of novelty is, ind
 passion; it is no other than the
 ledge, which God hath impl
 mind for the wisest reasons:
 same reasons we may be assured t
 laid snares to betray us into error
 hath placed in us a principle, as

supposes, the tendency of which is to make us believe things, merely because they are incredible. "With what greediness," saith he, "are the miraculous accounts of travellers received, their descriptions of sea and land monsters, their relations of wonderful adventures, strange men, and uncouth manners!" It is true that every new discovery gratifies our love of knowledge, and gives pleasure to the mind: but it must have the appearance of truth to do so. Tho' we love to be informed, we do not love to be deceived. A single miracle would risk the credit of the best-esteemed travels. But, according to this author's principle, the voyage to *Lilliput* or *Laputa* must meet with more credit than that of *Anson* or *Ellis*.

But, if the love of novelty will not reconcile us to miracles, that of religion will make us believe any thing. "If the spirit of religion joins itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense." * If the author means, that men are more apt to believe miracles in the cause of religion than in any other case, he is so far in the right. Where should men expect or believe miraculous interpositions, but where it is most worthy of God to interpose? But it does not follow, that religion is a friend to false miracles, or an enemy to common sense. On the contrary, right notions of the divine nature

* P. 185.

and perfections, which religion teach necessary help to distinguish true miracles from false. Now, the *Jews*, in general, were better instructed in these points than the Heathens. The men of *Athens* were more superstitious than the most ignorant *Hebrews*. The false wonders of magic, necromancy, and their law to hold in contempt, and, consequently, were less liable to be practised upon appearances of this sort. And, of the ancient and first Christians, it is certain, that all the security against delusion and error of this kind, that a rational piety and the notions of God and a Providence afford them.

But “ a religionist may be an enthusiast, may imagine he sees what has no reality, may know his narration to be false, and be sincere and severe in it, with the best intention, may be useful to the world, for the sake of promoting a good cause: or, even where this delusion is not, vanity, excited by so strong a passion, operates on him more powerfully than on the rest of mankind in any other circumstances, and self-interest with equal force, which his auditors may not have, and which they may have not, sufficient judgment to judge of the evidence; what judgment they have, they may pronounce upon principle in these mysterious subjects.” * Here, it is

* P. 185.

the author has touched upon a very powerful and fruitful source of error. Men, whose passions are stronger than their reason, will be guilty of excess in religion as well as in other things. A zeal for opinions frequently makes men conclude their own cause to be the cause of God; and, from wishing that Heaven may declare in their favour, they are easily led to believe such interpositions upon the slightest testimony. But, tho' this principle will make men believe false miracles, it will not overpower their senses, or make them see what has no reality. The *French* prophets were extravagant enough to expect that one of their principal teachers would come to life again; but, with all their enthusiasm, none could believe that he saw this miracle: on the contrary, this disappointment opened their eyes, and the pretence to miracle ruined their cause. Nor can I allow, with the author, that men of the best intentions can propagate a known falsehood for the sake of truth. An honest man may be hasty in believing; but he cannot be a deceiver or impostor. It is certain, the religion of *Christ* disdains such pious frauds, and his Apostles have forbid and condemned them in terms as severe as language can express: nor is it a principle in this religion, as this writer would insinuate, that men should renounce their judgment in inquiries of this sort: on the contrary, they are enjoined carefully to examine the truth

of miracles and doctrines, before them.

But, granting the author's principle to the full extent, the miracles of the Gospel were no way affected by them: For, the Apostles are free from all tincture and influence of enthusiasm; witness the writings they have left behind them, and that system of doctrines and morals contained in them. There is no piety nothing over-passionate, rapt, or statick appears, but all is rational and temperate: their zeal for their master's religion never transports them into invectives against his enemies or into any strained elogiums or panegyrics upon his character: they recite all that he did wonderful in his actions, without exclamation or without vehement asseveration, with an unguarded simplicity, that is high and remarkable: their whole conduct and manner, was void of ostentation, affectation, and regular throughout: they were only consistent each with himself (which a tick spirit seldom is) but all pursued the same plan, without varying or change, with perfect harmony and agreement. And finally, whatever influence, from passion or prejudice, the witnesses to Christianity received, this operated the contrary way, and disposed them to reject, rather than receive miracles: the Apostles themselves were not zealous of the traditions and custo-

ancestors: the other converts, whether *Jews* or Pagans, were prejudiced, as strongly as they could be, by religion, against the Gospel: bigotry and enthusiasm rose up every-where in persecution against it; nothing but reason and conviction could induce men to declare for it: every passion, every interest, and every prejudice persuaded against this belief: and, in fact, every single conversion to it was not barely the testimony of an unprejudiced judge, but the testimony of an enemy to its truth.

“The wise,” says the author, in another place, “lend a very academick faith to every report which favours the passion of the reporter, whether it magnifies his country, his family, or himself, or in any other way strikes in with his natural inclinations and propensities. But what greater temptation than to appear a missionary, a prophet, an ambassador from heaven? Who would not encounter many dangers and difficulties to attain so sublime a character?” * Where this character is indeed attended with honour and respect, it will be natural for ambitious men to desire it. But the head and leader of this sect had been every-where reviled and persecuted, and was crucified as a malefactor: his followers every-where shared the same fate. What temptation was there to appear his prophet or ambassador? What vanity or self-interest was gratified by it?

* P. 196.

But, thirdly, the author tells us
 “ a very strong presumption against
 “ natural and miraculous relations,
 “ always found chiefly to abound
 “ among ignorant and barbarous nations;
 “ civilized people has ever given advantage
 “ of them, that people will be more ready
 “ to receive them from ignorant
 “ ancestors, who transmitted them with
 “ an inviolable sanction and authority,
 “ which ways attends ancient and received
 This argument, we presume, has been
 answered. The miracles of the Gospel
 we have said, performed where they were
 suspected. The *Jews* were by no means
 barbarous people, and they were freer
 from superstition than any other nation in
 the world. These miracles were immediately
 opposed to all the severity that the prejudice
 could suggest. Some who were afflicted with
 diseases were sent immediately to be cured
 for that purpose, as it seems, that they might
 be brought to the strictest inquiry. Others were
 brought before the council, examined, and threat-
 ened with death, if they did not deny the
 charge. Every means tried to refute and silence
 the religion did not get strength in the world,
 but then adventure itself by degrees in
 it was openly proclaimed, from the
 temple, and in the synagogue, with
 always resorted: and, when the
 filled *Jerusalem* and *Judæa* with t

Rome and *Athens* were some of the next scenes of their ministry.

Under this head we are entertained with a long story from the *Pseudomantis* of *Lucian*. "It was," saith the author, "a wise policy in that cunning impostor, *Alexander*, who, tho' now forgotten, was once so famous, to lay the first scene of his impostures in *Paphlagonia*, where, as *Lucian* tells us, the people were extremely ignorant and stupid, and ready to swallow even the grossest delusion. People at a distance, who are weak enough to think the matter at all worth inquiry, have no opportunity of receiving better information. The stories come magnified to them by an hundred circumstances. Fools are industrious to propagate the delusion; while the wise and learned are contented, in general, to deride its absurdity, without informing themselves of the particular facts, by which it may be distinctly refuted. And thus the impostor above-mentioned was enabled to proceed, from his ignorant *Paphlagonians*, to the inlisting votaries even among the *Grecian* philosophers and men of the most eminent rank and distinction in *Rome*—nay, could engage the attention of that sage emperor, *Marcus Aurelius*, so far as to make him trust the success of a military expedition to his delusive prophecies." * But what, if this famous

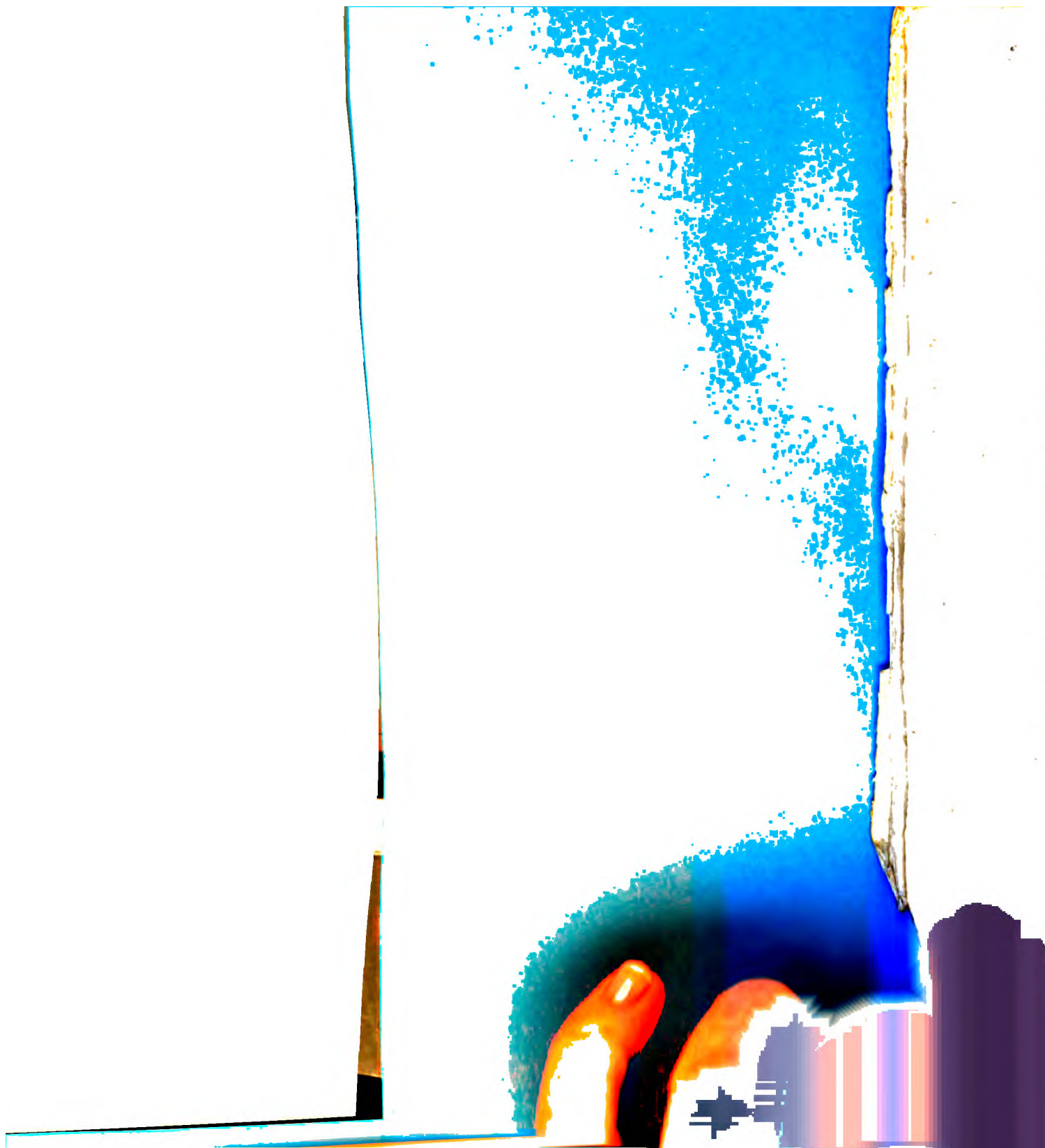
* P. 122.

im-

impostor never pretended to mi
 said, indeed, that he had his em
 tant countries, who reported this,
 things, to his honour: but there
 ance in his history of his ever cou
 pretending to this power. It was
 to hazard his reputation on so
 issue. Ignorant and stupid as his
 were, it might have been too
 his art to impose false facts upon
 and senses. He had, by a bold
 ful cheat of another kind, establi
 racter among this people, who, *A*
 differed from brutes in nothing b
 ward form. He had the fortune
 the ear of a famous *Roman* gene
 the same author's account, was
 the dupe of every pretender. T
 have got him some name in *Roma*
 none, that deserve to be called
 among his votaries. It is certain,
 of a *Christian* or an *Epicurean* di
 his management. They were a
 from his presence, having the co
 doubt, to deride the prophet and
 Every one must believe, upon the
 here made, that the emperor *Ant*
 dertaken the expedition mentioned
 gation of this impostor, or, at le
 certed measures with him for pur
 the oracle given out by this prete
 was voluntary and unasked, in

event had happened, as was probable, to increase his own credit. And, superstitious as this great emperor and philosopher was, he did nothing, in pursuance of it, but what the wisest general might have done to humour the superstition and folly of his soldiers, and to inspire them with a confidence of victory. It no-where appears that he hazarded the least point, or altered any one of his measures, in consequence of it. But, if it were true that this impudent impostor had this learned emperor and the schools of *Greece* among his admirers, this would only prove how much the wisest part of mankind were enslaved by superstition, before Christianity released them from it.

The author adds, as a fourth reason which diminishes the authority of prodigies, “ that
 “ there is no testimony for any, even those
 “ which have not been expressly detected, that
 “ is not opposed by an infinite number of wit-
 “ nesses; so that not only the miracle destroys
 “ the credit of the testimony, but even the testi-
 “ mony destroys itself. To make this the bet-
 “ ter understood, let us consider, that, in mat-
 “ ters of religion, whatever is different is con-
 “ trary, and that 'tis impossible the religions of
 “ antient *Rome*, of *Turky*, of *Siam*, and of
 “ *China* should, all of them, be established on
 “ any solid foundation. Every miracle, there-
 “ fore, pretended to have been wrought in any
 “ of these religions (and all of them abound
 “ in



with in almost every page of antient history:
 “ When we peruse the first histories of all na-
 “ tions, we are apt to imagine ourselves tran-
 “ sported into some new world, where the whole
 “ frame of nature is disjointed, and every ele-
 “ ment performs its operations in a different
 “ manner from what it does at present. Battles,
 “ revolutions, pestilences, famines, and deaths
 “ are never the effects of those natural causes
 “ which we experience.” * But the truth is,
 they are very thinly sown in the writings of the
 heathens. Portents and prodigies I call not by
 that name. These are to be accounted for from
 natural causes, or owe their existence to a fright-
 ed or disturbed imagination. Of miracles, pro-
 perly speaking, there are very few upon record:
 most of these are given up, by the historians
 who relate them, as vulgar fables, unworthy of
 belief, and none are so attested as to make them
 in any degree credible. Of this the author has
 undesignedly given us a full proof in the story
 which immediately follows:

“ One of the best-attested miracles in all pro-
 “ fane history is that which *Tacitus* reports of
 “ *Vespasian*, who cured a blind man in *Alexan-*
 “ *dria* by means of his spittle, and a lame man
 “ by the mere touch of his foot, in obedience
 “ to a vision of the god *Serapis*, who had in-
 “ joined them to have recourse to the emperor
 “ for these miraculous and extraordinary cures.” †
 This, the author seems to insinuate, is as well
 attested as any *Christian* miracle, and may be

* P. 187.

† P. 192

made as good an argument for the
the antient *Egyptians* as any miracle
religion whatsoever: “ Every circumstance
says he, “ adds weight to the testimony
“ might be displayed at large with all
“ of argument and eloquence, if any
“ now concerned to enforce the evidence
“ that exploded and idolatrous superstition.
The occasion being so tempting, he
his hand, and shewn us how far the
may be parallell’d with those of the
“ The gravity, solidity, age, and
“ so great an emperor, who, thro’
“ course of his life, conversed in a familiar
“ with his friends and courtiers, and
“ selected those extraordinary airs of
“ assumed by *Alexander* and *Demetrius*
“ historian a cotemporary writer,
“ candor and veracity, and, withal,
“ best and most penetrating genius, pre-
“ all antiquity, and so free from any
“ to superstition and credulity, that
“ lies under the contrary imputation
“ and profaneness — The persons, from
“ testimony he related the miracle, of
“ character for judgment and veracity
“ may well suppose) eye-witnesses of
“ and confirming their verdict, after
“ family were despoiled of the evidence
“ could no longer give any reward
“ price of a lye: *Utrumque, qui interjura*
“ *quoque memorant, postquam nullum*

“ *pretium*. To which if we add the publick nature of the fact, as related, it will appear, that no evidence can well be supposed stronger for so gross and so palpable a falshood.” As to the character of this wise emperor, *Suetonius*, who has wrote his life, tells us, that he had long before this conceived hopes of the empire, from certain idle dreams and omens, of which he has reckoned up eight or ten, as ridiculous as any in history: that immediately before this, when he was now proclaimed emperor by some of the legions, and had strengthened himself by several alliances, he condescended, notwithstanding his probity and gravity, to give out a miracle upon his own authority, to make himself considerable in the eyes of the people; pretending that, in the temple of *Serapis*, where he went alone, *de firmitate imperii auspiciam facturus*, one *Basilides*, who was known at the time to be far distant and unable to travel, had appeared to him, offering him crowns and garlands—a certain omen (as he and his courtiers interpreted the word *Basilides*) of the royal dignity. As for the credit of the historian, he was no witness of the fact, nor, for ought we know, ever conversed with those that saw it; and the testimony he gives to it does by no means amount to a proof that he believed it himself. To what purpose, then, is the character he gives us of his veracity, penetrating genius, and incredulous turn of mind? But, if the testimony of the historian be not ad-

G mitted

mitted, the witnesses, from whom he related it, were of established veracity and judgment. This, indeed, was the purpose. On this point the whole cause must rest. How, then, is this to be proved? Why, the author says *it may be proved*, and the historian tells us that they were satisfied in the report, when they could do nothing by the fraud. But how do we know that they had never received any other verdict? The emperor, though not the airs of divinity, yet was treated with his new title, and, no doubt, was understood to look with a favour on those who contributed to support his power. It is for good uses to which this miracle was applied, as honestly told us both by *Suetonius* and *Tacitus*. *Auctoritas, et quasi majestas quædam inopinato et adhuc novo principi deeras accessit, Suet. Miracula evenere, quæ in Vespasiano et quædam in Vespasianum inclinaverunt, Tacit.* The *Alexandrians* were not without interest in gaining the favour of this prince: the persons cured are said to be *à plebe Alexandrinâ*, probably unknown to the witnesses and to all the *Romans* about the court. The partisans of the new emperor were not slow to welcome and improve every thing that was said in his favour: the physicians, who were consulted whether these disorders were natural or declared that they were: Where, indeed, is it to be wondered that two men should be insti-

the part of lame and blind, when they were sure of succeeding in the fraud, and of being well rewarded (*as we may well suppose*) for their pains?

This story is followed by two other, as remarkable proofs of the credulity of mankind, which, having obtained in *Christian* countries, may perhaps be thought more apposite to the author's purpose of discrediting the *Christian* miracles. "There is also," saith he, "a very memorable story related by cardinal *de Retz*, and which may well deserve our consideration: When that intriguing politician fled into *Spain*, to avoid the persecution of his enemies, he passed thro' *Saragossa*, the capital of *Arragon*, where he was shewn, in the cathedral church, a man who had served twenty years as a door-keeper of the church, and was well known to every body in town who had ever paid their devotions at that cathedral: he had been seen for so long a time wanting a leg, but recovered that limb by the rubbing of holy oil upon the stump; and, when the cardinal examined it, he found it to be a true natural leg, like the other. This miracle was vouched by all the canons of the church; and the whole company of the town was appealed to for a confirmation of the fact, whom the cardinal found, by their zealous devotion, to be thorough believers of the miracle. Here the relater was also contemporary with the

“ supposed prodigy, of an incredu
 “ libertine character, as well as of
 “ nius—the miracle of so singular
 “ as could scarce admit of a cour
 “ and the witnesses very numerous,
 “ of them, in a manner, spectator
 “ fact to which they gave their te
 “ and what adds mightily to the for
 “ evidence, and may double our sur
 “ this occasion, is, that the cardinal
 “ who relates the story, seems not
 “ any credit to it, and, consequently
 “ be suspected of any concurrence in
 “ fraud.” * The story is, indeed, re
 as the author has told it. First, t
 ter was *a cardinal and a man of*
nius; and, tho’ he had never seen the
 leg, yet he satisfied himself that the
 now *two natural legs, like another man.*
 not, indeed, appear, that he examin
 any of the canons, or that he discou
 any body in town about it: but he f
the devotion of the people, that they
 the man to have had a wooden leg
 the cardinal was a man of a libert
 racter, and, *which is still more wonder*
adds mightily to the evidence, he did n
the story himself. This climax of evid
 wonder still rising upon us is very e
 nary. The relater of the story was a
 and therefore a good evidence of a

miracle: he was of a *libertine character*, and therefore had the better right to be believed: but, what puts the evidence out of question, *he did not believe the story himself*; which, again, is *doubly surprizing*, as the author observes, because he was naturally of an *incredulous temper*. This is the first story. The second deserves a more serious attention.

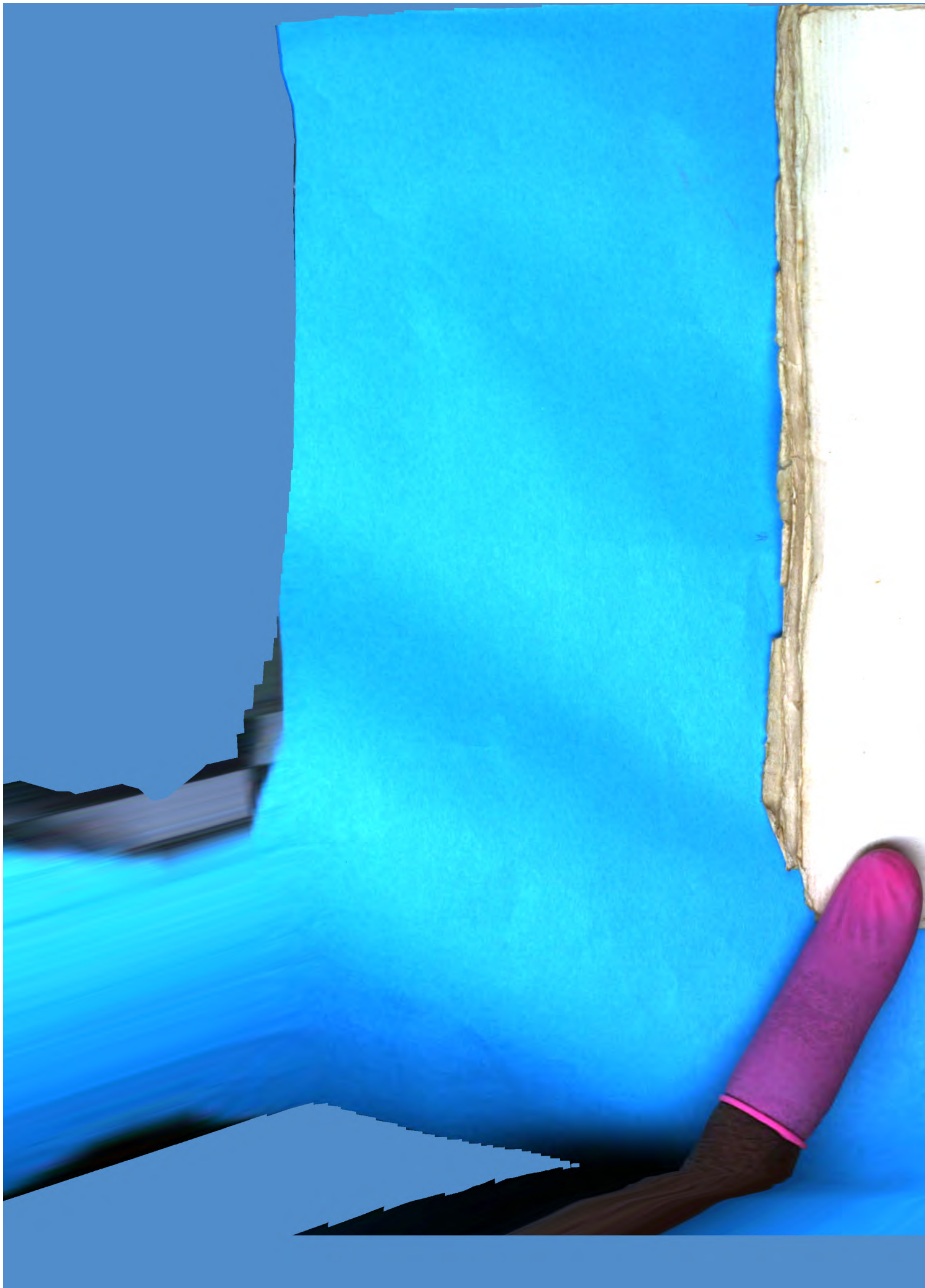
“ There, surely, never was so great a number of miracles ascribed to one person, as those which were lately said to have been wrought in *France* upon the tomb of *Abbé Paris*, the famous *Jansenist*, with whose sanctity the people were so long deluded. The curing of the sick, giving hearing to the deaf and sight to the blind, were everywhere talked of as the usual effects of that holy sepulchre. But, what is more extraordinary, many of the miracles were immediately proved, upon the spot, before judges of unquestioned integrity, attested by witnesses of credit and distinction, in a learned age, and on the most eminent theatre that is now in the world. Nor is this all: a relation of them was published and dispersed every-where: nor were the *Jesuits*, tho’ a learned body, supported by the civil magistrate, and determined enemies to those opinions in whose favour the miracles were said to have been wrought, ever able distinctly to refute or detect them. Where shall we find such a number of circumstances

“stances agreeing to the corro
 “fact? And what have we to
 “a cloud of witnesses, but t
 “possibility or miraculous natu
 “which they relate? And thi
 “eyes of all reasonable peopl
 “regarded as a sufficient refuta

The author has here asserted
 that he will not be able to sup
 racles pretended were, many o
 upon the spot: a judicial inq
 by the archbishop of *Paris* in
 most celebrated, and the cheat
 tected: the lieutenant of the
 many to confess that the part
 was all artifice and pretence;
 nance was hereupon issued fro
 apprehending all that were cor
 frauds: the archbishop of *Sens*
 lick charge against more than
 pable and discovered cheats:
geron, the professed advocate of
 of whom we shall have more t
 does not, in his answer, preter
 fourth part of these: and the
 his defence of these, and of all
 racles he defends, *distinctly refu*
tique générale of Mr. *Des Vœux*
 usual effects of this sepulchre v
 but distempers—a sort of con
 seized alike the found and the

attended with such strange appearances as brought great contempt and ridicule upon the other miracles of this saint. These convulsions, we are told by skilful physicians, are easily counterfeited, and, from being counterfeited, frequently become real and habitual: they are too so communicable, by a sort of sympathy, to persons of weak nerves, that this distemper, it is well known, is for this reason excluded some of our great hospitals; it having been found that, when one is seized, it spreads, like infection, thro' a whole ward. This will account for the great numbers who are said to have felt this extraordinary effect from visiting the *Abbé's* tomb.

I deny not that there were real cures wrought upon the sick that were brought there: but the same, I dare pronounce, would happen, if a thousand people, taken at a venture, were at any time removed from their sick chambers in *London* to *St. Paul's Churchyard* or the *Park*, especially, if they went with any strong hope of a cure: in such a number, some are always upon the point of recovery — many only want to fancy themselves well — others may be flattered for a time into this belief, while they are ill — and many more, by fresh air and motion, and especially by forbearing the use of other means, will find a change for the better: but, that the blind received their sight, or the deaf were restored to hearing, by these visits, I deny that we have any competent



Doctor *Middleton*, who has likewise set out the evidence of these miracles with great parade, is pleased to tell us that "the reality of them is attested by some of the principal physicians and surgeons in *France*, as well as the clergy of the first dignity, several of whom were eye-witnesses of them, who

" pre-

miracles, *M. le Gros*, could find nothing to reply in its defence; nor does *Mr. de Montgeron* himself pretend to defend it. It was proved, by five of the witnesses to this miracle, that the certificates, which they had given into the hands of the notary, and which were countersigned by *Mademoiselle le Franc* herself, were afterwards falsified, and many material circumstances added which they had never attested; by others, that she was, in great measure, recovered before she visited the tomb; and that many of the disorders alledged as cured were entirely chimerical: and by others, that she returned from the tomb in the same condition that she went there, and still wanted the help of farther medicines: which last circumstance may seem confirmed by the non-appearance of *le Franc* herself, who was not to be found at the trial.

The author goes on, after celebrating the vigilance, activity, penetration, and extensive intelligence of *Monf. Hérait*, then *lieutenant de police*, to observe, that "this magistrate, who by the nature of his office is almost absolute, was invested with full powers, on purpose to suppress or discredit these miracles; and he frequently seized immediately and examined the witnesses and subjects of them; but never could reach any thing satisfactory against them." But the nature of this magistrate's office was so far from making him absolute in the present case, that it gave him no power at all to examine the truth of these miracles. This was the province of the archbishop alone, and not to be invaded: accordingly, in the ordonnance of the king, dated *January 27, 1732*, by which *Mr. Hérait* was impowered to arrest and confine the most obstinate of these miraculized cheats, after the conviction of *Anne le Franc*, and after he had brought many to a voluntary confession of the fraud, this power is particularly referred to the archbishop.

Soon

“ presented a verbal process of each to the
 “ archbishop, with a petition, signed by above
 “ twenty curés or rectors of the parishes of
 “ Paris, desiring that they might be authen-
 “ tically registered, and solemnly published to
 “ the people, as true miracles.” * Any one,
 who reads this in connection with what goes
 before it, will be led to believe that a great
 number of these miracles had been confirmed
 by this verbal process †: but there never were,
 as far as I can inform myself, more than four
 or five thus proved by order of the cardinal
Noailles. Whether the petition mentioned was
 presented by physicians and clergy of the first
 dignity, as the doctor’s words seem to import,
 I will not take upon me to controvert: but,

Soon after this the tomb was inclosed and shut up; but the same
 face still continued in many parts of the city, some hundreds pre-
 tending to these miraculous convulsions; most of them poor girls,
 who got a livelihood by the business. So that the author might
 have spared his remark, “ No *Jansenist* was ever embarrassed to
 “ account for the cessation of the miracles when the church-yard
 “ was shut up. ’Twas the touch of the tomb that operated
 “ these extraordinary effects; and when no one could approach the
 “ tomb, no effects could be expected, &c.” As he might too
 his concern for the poor *Molinists* that rejected these miracles;
 who were never put, as he represents, to the hard necessity of ac-
 counting for them from witchcraft and the power of the devil, but
 always resolved them into their proper causes.

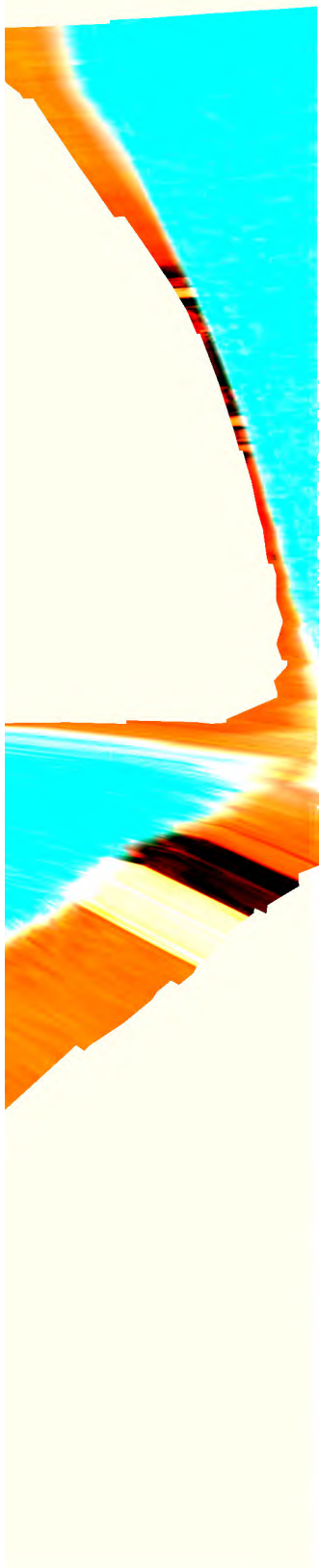
* *Free Inquiry*, p. 225.

† The verbal process I take to be a narrative of the fact drawn
 up on the spot by a magistrate (in the present case, by a com-
 missary appointed for that purpose) upon a view of the place and
 circumstances, an examination of the parties, and the deposition
 of witnesses.

in all that I have read, I find only that it was presented by the twenty-two curés who signed it †. The doctor might have told us too that it was rejected as well as presented, and the archbishops reasons for rejecting it, which were nothing less than palpable falsehoods and contradictions, legally proved, *par des informations juridiques*, on the witnesses, and even in the depositions taken by order of the cardinal *de Noailles*: he might have told us that thirty of the most eminent *Jansenist* doctors, who were supposed to have an interest in supporting these miracles, protested against the abuse that was made of them, and published many good reasons for not believing them — that, if some physicians of note pronounced the cures in question to be miraculous, many more, who had better opportunities of informing themselves, judged the contrary — that one of the faculty published a treatise to account for the phenomenon of the convulsions in a natural way, and several,

† Mr. *Hume*, in the additional note to page 196, speaking of Mr. *de Ventimille*, who was successor to cardinal *Noailles* in the archbishoprick of *Paris*, tells us that twenty-two rectors or curés of that city, whose general character, for strictness of life and manners, he celebrates very justly, but very little to the purpose, did, “with infinite earnestness, press him to examine these miracles, which they assert to be known to the whole world, and “indisputably certain: but he wisely forbore.” But it is certain, that this prelate was so far from forbearing or declining this task, that he caused a publick judicial inquest to be made into them; and, in an ordonnance of *November 8, 1735*, has published the most convincing proofs that the miracles, so strongly warranted by these curés, were forged and counterfeited.

who



“ supported by the authority of the court.” * Half the city of *Paris*, and many among them of rank, took part with the appellants against this bull. The saint was, therefore, sure to have justice done him. Most of these, if they did not believe, yet wished well to his miracles, for the sake of mortifying the *Jesuits* and their party.

“ But the evidence of these miracles is still preserved in a pompous volume of *Monf. de Montgeron*, a person of eminent rank in *Paris*, who, *Dr. Middleton* tells us, dedicated and presented it to the king in person, being induced, as the author declares, by the incontestable evidence of the facts, by which he himself from a libertine and professed Deist, became a sincere convert to the *Christian* faith.” † As the credit of these boasted miracles rests almost wholly on this book of *Mr. Montgeron*, the reader will not be displeased, if we stop a little to consider the character of the work and its author.

This book was published, as we are advertised at the beginning, to demonstrate, among other things, the justice of the cause of the appellants against the bull *Unigenitus*: but it was so far from answering the purpose of reviving the credit of the *Jansenists* or their

* *Free Inquiry*, p. 223.

† *Free Inquiry*, p. 224.

miracles, that from this time to
greater disgrace than ever; wh
was cashiered from his employ
to the *Basile*, and afterwards int
The author declares himself conv
fianity by the evidence of these
is strange to observe, from his
of this conversion, that it was
out his either seeing or exami
dence of any one of these mi
pears, from this history, that t
early impressed with a sense of
having given himself up to a li
and debauch, he was, on a ce
so struck with remorse, as to sh
in a convent, with design to spe
penitence and retirement—that, r
to his former life, he endeavoure
self from the checks of conscien
the books of Deists, and perfe
that religion was a cheat—that t
Unigenitus, which just then app
much to confirm him in this b
fears of religion still kept hold
particularly, on the first report
miracles, his conscience took t
put him upon inquiring in earnest
of religion—that, upon hearing
of these miracles, he resolved to
and make a strict inquiry into the
coming there, he was immediat

the ardor that appeared in the devotion of the people; strongly impressed with which, he fell himself on his knees, and addressed a short prayer to the saint, beseeching him, "That, if indeed he still lived, and had any power with the Almighty, he would pity his blindness, and intercede for him, that his mind might be enlightened, and the cloud removed which held him in darkness!" Upon which, immediately, while he continued some hours on his knees, all the arguments for religion, which he had ever heard or read, presented themselves to his mind, and passed in review before him, with such force and conviction, that he became from that moment a zealous and confirmed Christian. Here, you see, the author, without waiting for any miracle, or inquiring into those which he had heard, was not only converted to Christianity, but became a determined believer of all the miracles of this saint. And from this short sketch we may easily make out his character, which was plainly that of a wrong-headed and violent man, that could think coolly about nothing, changing, as fancy or temper led him, from one opinion, from one extreme, to another, and governed throughout by passion or prejudice, and not by reason.

His book was published ten (or, according to Dr. *Middleton*, twelve) years after the *Abbé's* death; and 'tis a collection of only nine cures,

H 2

selected

selected out of the great number
said to have been wrought in
the first of which I shall present
with, in a few words, as a specimen
rest: A *Spanish* youth, at the age
lost entirely the sight of the left
lent rheum and inflammation: a
receiving a blow upon the right eye
almost blind for some days, by
remedies, recovered his sight again
of sixteen, this eye was attacked
and inflammation like to that which
destroyed the other, but was soon
the application of a certain water
allow him for two or three months
secute his studies: but, the disease
turning, and the same remedy being
effectual, he continued in this state
application of any remedy, near
at the end of which, hearing of the
miracles, he resolved, with the
governors, who were zealous *Ja*
ply to the *Abbe's* tomb: he entered
vaine, or nine-days devotion, in
faint, and to supplicate his assistance
was, that his pains redoubled, and
mation increased; but towards the
term these bad symptoms abated,
last became strong enough to bear
to permit him to return to his studies
this without the use of any other
saving the eye from reading for t

shutting out the light, and bathing it the two last days with a little decoction of mallow-roots with laudanum, prescribed by an oculist; and this too owed all its virtue to the manner of applying it, which was not with a common linen rag, but a piece of the shirt in which the *Abbé* died, and some of the earth in which he was buried. A certain *Jansenist* physician, who saw this eye two days before the cure, judging it to be a disorder of the optick nerve, expressed some doubt whether it were curable, and, being told afterwards that no human means had been used, inclined to think the cure miraculous. This, I suppose, is one of the principal physicians, who, Dr. *Middleton* tells us, attested the truth of these miracles. But it is certain that many other physicians and oculists, both in *France* and *Spain*, thought otherwise, and prescribed bleeding, bathing, and the use of different medicines for it. The left eye, in the mean time, remained in its former state, uncured; and the eye which was healed relapsed some time after, and was again cured by bleeding. This is the first miracle, as it is related by this author, and attested by many vouchers and certificates printed along with it—a story too contemptible for argument or remark. But, if the reader desires to see the false colouring in which the writer has dressed it, and the inconsistencies and prevarication of the witnesses detected, he may find this done, to his entire satisfaction, in the letters above-mentioned, and

in the nineteenth and twentieth
Bibliothèque raisonnée; from which
*Vernet's Traité de la Vérité de la
 tienne*, most of these remarks are

The evidence, then, for these
 set out with so much eloquent
 examined, is found to amount
 But this is acknowledged, that
 of mankind is very fully proved
 the other legendary miracles of
 that hence an argument of seem
 lies against the miracles of the C
 so many other miracles have been
 ly and without reason, it is pos
 may likewise have been received
 petent testimony: and, if this be
 it not also be allowed more prob
 events so strange and contrary to
 course of nature should be true
 inference, we may presume, the
 have us make from the stories he
 and this objection he has incid
 in several parts of his Essay: “
 “stances of forged miracles, a
 “and supernatural events, whic
 “have either been detected by
 “dence, or which detect them
 “absurdity, mark sufficiently t
 “penfity of mankind to the ext
 “the marvellous, and ought re
 “get a suspicion against all rel

“ kind:” * And again, in the place above cited, “ Should a miracle be ascribed to any new system of religion, men in all ages have been so much imposed on by ridiculous stories of that kind, that this very circumstance would be sufficient, with all men of sense, not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without farther examination.” † As this is one of the most specious and prevailing arguments against the miracles of religion, it will deserve a distinct answer.

To the first consequence, then, which the author here draws from the credulity of men, I readily agree — That miracles and facts of an extraordinary nature may be justly suspected, ’till sufficient evidence of their reality is produced, and ought never to be received, ’till after a previous examination had into this evidence. But, that all miracles should be rejected without examination, because a great number have been forged, is, sure, a most illogical conclusion. The truth of the Gospel miracles does not imply that all the miracles upon record are true: how then does the falshood of other miracles affect the truth of these? If some men are cheats and impostors, is there no truth in the world? If some have believed upon too slight evidence, must we, therefore, reject all testimony, and disbelieve or doubt about every thing? Is the currency of bad coin a proof that there is none good? The test and assay

* P. 186.

† P. 200.

will

will always distinguish the true and it is our own fault, if we are misled by counterfeits. God hath given us a sufficient understanding to know good and evil, and to discern truth from falshood, and, in all things pertaining to our duty, hath made the difference sufficiently clear and discernible. If he will, he will give us a voice to be known, and give us authority. To those, who are ignorant of the necessities of his power, this evidence is admitted with such testimony and preached — such as will stand the test of an equitable trial. With such testimony the Scripture miracles are delivered. Let them be brought to the trial, if they are found wanting, be rejected, and be damned, as this supercilious world is, and them, unheard.

I observe, that this author, and many others, seems to think even the credulity of mankind a sort of evidence of the Gospel: that the evidence of the Gospel: that is sufficient to account for the belief, and that it is, therefore, need not look for any evidence in their reports. “such reports fly about, the phenomenon is obvious; and in conformity to experience. “when we account for it by the principles of credulity and delusion, we, rather than have recourse

“ solution, allow of a miraculous violation of
 “ the most known and most established laws of
 “ nature? ” * But I must deny that there is
 any such cause or principle in human nature as
 credulity. If some are more credulous than
 others — if the same person be more credulous
 in some points than other — this depends upon
 other principles: it is a natural effect, and al-
 ways to be accounted for from natural causes.
 Interest, when it is opposed by truth, will bias
 the mind to error: ignorance and indolence will
 dispose men, the one of necessity, the other of
 choice, to follow the judgment of others, and
 to believe as the world about them does: a de-
 ference to authority, whether publick or pri-
 vate — a prejudice to opinions in which we
 have been educated, or which we have long
 entertained — has the like effect: where men
 are, as is frequent, divided into parties by opi-
 nion, this prejudice will be heightened by pride
 and resentment; they will hearken greedily to
 every thing that favours their system, and be
 obstinately deaf to every thing that opposes it.
 These are principles in human nature of great
 force and extent; and, where they induce to
 the belief of any thing, there we may suspect
 credulity, and that men will be prepared to be-
 lieve, without evidence, even things the most
 difficult of belief. If, in these circumstances, it
 happen, that not the fact itself, but the miracu-
 lous nature of it only, is the point that gratifies

* P. 197.

our

our wishes, there, the greater the
greater are these corrupt reasons
and, the more strange and incon-
more easily sometimes will it
a stone, the heavier it is, and
to motion, will descend the
plane be sufficiently inclined,
moves.

But, on the other hand, when
like principles have no influence
fairly heard, and the faith of
generally proportioned to the
appears: and, where men believe
opinions contrary to the influ-
ciples, it is a fair presumption
is well grounded, and that
torted by the force of truth.
therefore, of credulity will
count for all belief alike. To
descend by its own weight, is
that it can move itself upon
if it be seen, contrary to its
ascend a steep acclivity, we
must be some competent po-
Where miracles are wished for
strangest and most unsupported
but, in other circumstances, the
ture of the fact will hang as
and retard its progress; and, in
in opposition to the wishes, pre-
judices of mankind, there must
evidence to support it.

I have already asserted that it required stronger faith and more credulity to believe the evidence of the Gospel false, than to believe the miracles true. All the principles that can make men credulous conspired to make the first Christians disbelieve the Gospel. It was not, therefore, credulity, but conviction, which wrought this belief in them. But these principles very naturally account for the miracles of the *Romish* church. Interest, authority, and all the powers of enthusiasm, superstition, and prejudice, forward the belief of these: the power of the church is supported by them, and the countenance of the church, in the opinion of the believer, gives certainty and infallibility to them.

The disparity, then, betwixt these and the Gospel miracles is infinite. The end for which the Scripture miracles were wrought is the greatest that can be thought of, and the testimony by which they are supported is confirmed by the surest test of truth. If miracles, therefore, are in any case credible, they are in this; if testimony is in any case to be relied on, it is in this. But what are the ends proposed or answered by the miracles of Popery? More offerings are, perhaps, brought to the shrine at *Loretto*, more gain is made of the relicks of the saints. But are any nations brought to the faith, or is any single infidel converted, by them? Then, the testimony which vouches them is implicitly received, and the veracity of the witnesses

nesses confirmed by no proof or evidence—no one condition here to make them credible—no one circumstance to give them evidence that supports them. There is no consequence to be drawn from these miracles of the Gospel.

And the same observation will hold with equal force, of the miracles of the church before the times of the apostles: were not the same antecedent reasons for believing them, nor the same great consequences attending them: and when were they to be at the hazard of their fortunes and lives? We are not, therefore, to be brought in question, if the truth of these miracles should be proved to be false; since the *Christ* and his Apostles are not to be brought in question by this, and the Gospel wants not its own, to support it: nor, indeed, to do a greater injury to the cause of Christianity, than to parallel these, even supposed to be true, with the canonical miracles of Scripture: tho' both may be equally true, yet the reasons for believing them, are not the same, but the one, in its weight and force, transcends the other. Nor is it an injury to Christianity, or any just cause of offence to pious Christians, if the fathers of the church, men justly celebrated for their piety and even for their learning and

found to have given too easy credit to these miracles. Learning and piety are no security against errors of this kind. On the contrary, men of this character, as they are often less practised in the arts of men, and less apt to suspect design and fraud in others, may lie more open to be deceived. Men may be prejudiced, even by piety and virtue, to such opinions as are thought favourable to piety and virtue, and, where any thing is thought of good tendency, may think it good to believe it. A little acquaintance with history will teach us, if our own observation does not, that men of great abilities and of the most upright intentions may be hasty in believing and zealous in supporting the belief of fables, especially where the cause of virtue or religion is supposed to be promoted by them.

We may, therefore, retain our veneration for the piety and good works of these eminent lights of the church, without believing every thing that they believed: we may believe many of the facts which they have recorded to be false, without hurting Christianity, or in the least impairing the evidence of the Gospel.

I might, under this head, have observed that false miracles are almost a natural consequence of true, and, therefore, their prevalence and reception is rather a presumption of the existence of true miracles than an argument against them. Could we foresee that a series of miracles would be wrought in any country, and a publick wor-

ship and religion be established in
of it, we might presume that mira-
there more frequently pretended
feited than in any other place. T
like true money, will give a curre
and the authority and character,
give to those that work them, wi
crafty and ambitious to imitate th
other hand, where no prior mira
knowledged, there is less temptat
terfeit this power, and more diffi
ceeding in it. In fact, the false pre
racles among Christians are no mor
be expected, in consequence o
and certainty of the first miracles o
ty; and, if the number of these
greater in the *Christian* world than
is an argument that there, if any
miracles have been wrought. Th
be pleased to see this argument in t
Dr. Middleton: "The innumera
" of this sort, which have been in
" mankind in all ages, are so far fr
" ing the credibility of the *Jewish*
" miracles, that they strengthen
" could we account for a practice
" of forging miracles for the sup
" religions, if on some occasions
" actually been wrought for the cor
" a true one? or, how is it pos
" many spurious copies should p
" world, without some genuine c

“ which they were drawn, whose known existence
 “ and tried success might give an appearance of
 “ probability to the counterfeit? Now, of all
 “ the miracles of antiquity, there are none that
 “ can pretend to the character of originals, but
 “ those of the Old and New Testament, which,
 “ tho’ the oldest by far of all others of which
 “ any monuments now remain in the world,
 “ have yet maintained their credit to this day,
 “ thro’ the perpetual opposition and scrutiny of
 “ ages; whilst all the rival productions of fraud
 “ and craft have long ago been successively ex-
 “ ploded, and sunk into utter contempt—an
 “ event that cannot reasonably be ascribed to
 “ any other cause, but to the natural force and
 “ effect of truth, which, tho’ defaced for a time
 “ by the wit, or depressed by the power, of man,
 “ is sure still to triumph in the end over all the
 “ false mimicry of art and the vain efforts of
 “ human policy.” *

The remainder of this Essay is little more than
 a rude insult on the Scriptures and the *Christian*
 religion. For fear his readers should mistake his
 meaning, and not apply his argument where he
 intended, the author proceeds, with a smiling
 grimace, to tell us, “ that our most holy religion
 “ is founded on faith, not on reason; and ’tis a
 “ sure method of exposing it, to put it to such a
 “ trial as it is by no means fitted to endure.”
 This he pretends to make evident by examining
 the miracles related in the Pentateuch: “ Here,”

* Prefatory Discourse to a Letter from Rome, p. 88.

says he, " we are to consider a book
 " to us by a barbarous and ignorant
 " wrote in an age when they were
 " barous, and, in all probability,
 " facts it relates, corroborated by
 " testimony, and resembling those
 " counts which every nation gives
 " Upon reading this book we find
 " digies and miracles: it gives an
 " state of the world and of human
 " tirely different from the present
 " from that state—of the age of
 " to near a thousand years—of the
 " of the world by a deluge—of
 " choice of one people as the favored
 " ven, and that people the count
 " author—of their deliverance from
 " prodigies the most astonishing i
 " desire any one to lay his hand up
 " and, after serious consideration,
 " ther he thinks that the falsehood
 " book, supported by such a testi
 " be more extraordinary and mira
 " all the miracles it relates; which
 " necessary to make it be receiv
 " ing to the measures of probability
 " blished." *

If the *Jews* were thus more than
 at the time when these books were written
 without a miracle, could they learn
 truths relating to the being and

* P. 201.

God, which the most learned part of the world were for many ages after in total ignorance about? Whence could the religion and laws of this people so far exceed those of the wisest Heathen, and come out at once, in their first infancy, thus perfect and entire; when all human systems are found to grow up by degrees, and to ripen, after many improvements, into perfection? The *Jews* had but little commerce with other nations, and, therefore, did not excel in the literary and other arts of *Greece*: but the same Scriptures, which prove that they were earlier in possession of the most useful and sublime parts of knowledge, secured them likewise from ever sinking into that barbarity which the author charges upon them. Let any one compare the book of *Genesis*, which he treats with so much freedom, and which is by many centuries the oldest book in the world, with any of the earliest heathen historians—let him compare the psalms of *David* with the hymns of *Callimachus* or *Orpheus*—let him read the history of *Josephus*, who was just cotemporary with *Christ* and his Apostles—and he will incline to judge more favourably of this people.

The great events recorded in this history have no connection with the argument of miracles, and, therefore, do not belong to this place. But these are corroborated by the strongest concurring testimony that can be desired to facts that are, most of them, older than the use of letters itself. The traditions of every country seem all to point

to one and the same original. The
tion of arts and sciences, the foundat
and empires, the manner of peopling
and the number of its present inhabi
all to prove that the world had its be
earlier than the period assigned by
agree perfectly with the account of
There are no monuments of antiquity
room to suspect the world of earli
The first authors of *Greece* and *Egypt*
chaos, of the abyfs of waters that
earth, of man's being formed out of t
and of his first innocence. From th
the *Latin* poets has described the cr
state of innocence, the gradual cor
mankind, and the deluge, in a m
nearly resembling that of *Mofes*. Th
of a general flood, which destroyed
race of men and animals, except
seems to have been preserved for fo
mong almost all nations. *Lucian* t
tradition among both the *Greeks* and
that this was a judgment from heav
wickedness of mankind: he describes
of the flood, the ark in which som
kind were preserved, and many oth
lars, just as we have them in the b
nefs. *Plutarch*, alluding to the sam
mentions the ark, and even the dov
sent forth to see if the waters were
great number of antient authors, wh
the deluge, and give witness to the

Babel, the burning of *Sodom*, and many other great events in the *Mosaic* history, are reckon'd up by *Josephus*, *Grotius*, and others. The present surface of the earth, the shells of fish that are found in midland countries, and even on the tops of mountains, and the remains of land-animals at very great depths in the earth, are still surviving monuments of the deluge*. It is almost certain

* An universal deluge will, I suppose, be allowed one of the most miraculous facts in the history of the Old Testament. The difficulties that on all sides surround it are as great as can easily be conceived. And hence many *Christian* writers (among whom is the learned *Mr. Wollaſton*) have thought it sufficient to believe that this flood was topical, confined to a small part of *Asia*; and that the genius of the language in which the relation is delivered, and the manner of writing history in it, will account for all the rest. But, the more we improve in natural knowledge, the more reasons we see for believing this history in the literal and largest sense. One of the latest and ablest writers upon this subject confirms what the best natural historians have observed—that the shells of fish are found in great quantities in all parts of the world—that the *Lapides Judaici*, which are gathered on the top of mount *Carmel*, are evidently the remains of a sea-animal—that the *Alps* and *Pyrenean* mountains abound with others—and that there is not a mountain in the world, in which there have been tolerable opportunities of inquiring, where remains of sea-animals have not been found: he tells us, that many of those which are found in great abundance in our island are natives of other seas—that the horns of *Indian* deer are found in great clusters, and always at considerable depths, in many parts of *England*, and sometimes under a stratum of sea-shells: and hence, tho' writing upon another question, he concludes, "it is equally certain, that, wherever they are found, water must have at one time overflowed, since there is no other possible means of their being brought there; and, since they are found in every part of the earth, the tops of the highest mountains not excepted, that overflowing of water must have been universal." *Hill's Remarks on Phil. Transf.* p. 53. Here, then, we have one of the most disputable

certain that the world began to be peopled about the plains of *Babylon* and near where the ark is said to have rested. From the east colonies of men were sent westward: and from thence we can trace pretty distinctly the progress of arts and sciences. The long lives of the first men are spoken of by all the Heathens. This fact is so far from discrediting the *Mosaic* history, that Monsieur *Pascal* reckons it a full proof of the fidelity of the author: "This historian," says he, "has brought the deluge, and even the creation, so near his own time, by means of the few generations which he counts between them, that the memory of them could not but be still fresh and lively in the minds of all the *Jewish* nation." In the line of tradition there are but five steps betwixt *Moses* and the first man. "Therefore, the creation and the deluge are indubitably true. This argument," says he, "must be acknowledged for conclusive by those who apprehend its process."* The longevity of men in the first ages seems necessary for the better peopling the world, the invention and improvement of arts, and for propagating religious and all useful knowledge, when they

putable parts of the Bible-history confirmed and proved by indisputable fact and experiment. In the mean time, it must be observed that the miracles upon which the *Christian* and *Jewish* religions were built have an evidence of their own, distinct from that of the other parts of this history; and that, tho' it were allowed that many errors may have crept into the historical parts of this book, yet the truth of these religions, and the faith of those miracles upon which they are built, would remain unshaken.

* *Pascal's Thoughts*, p. 86.

depended

depended wholly on tradition. And I am persuaded that this author cannot even invent a more probable or rational account of peopling the world than this which he affects to deride.

The other insinuations, which he has thrown out to discredit these books, have been so often refuted, that it is tedious to go over them again. The authority of an historian is not, sure, the worse for his being the countryman of those whose history he writes. The character of *Moses* is remarkably free from all partiality to himself and his countrymen: he faithfully records all the obstinacy and perverse behaviour of the latter, and frequently reproaches them with it in the severest terms: he spares not his own failings, or those of his nearest friends, and omits many things, which are recorded by others, to his honour: the future government of the *Israelites* he left not to his own tribe, but to that of *Judah*, and, in the appointment of his immediate successor, had no regard to his own family, but left them undistinguished and mixed with the common *Levites*.

As to the arbitrary preference of this people, a distinction in religious privileges is perfectly agreeable to the analogy of God's dispensations to mankind, both natural and moral. But the *Jewish* dispensation ought not to be considered apart, but in connection with the *Christian*, in which it ended. These are but different parts of one and the same scheme, which naturally illustrate and confirm each other's authority.

“ And,

“ And, from this view of them,” says Dr. *Middleton*, “ we see the weakness of that objection commonly made to the *Mosaic* part, on the account of its being calculated for the use only of a peculiar people; whereas, in truth, it was the beginning of an universal system, which, from the time of *Moses*, was gradually manifested to the world by the successive missions of the Prophets, ’till that fulness of time, or coming of the *Messiah*, when life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel, or the chief good and happiness of man perfectly revealed to him.” *

The origin of this people is so far from resembling the fabulous accounts of other nations, that it is quite singular, and in all respects different from any other. They are a numerous people, sprung from the loins of one man, and have continued unmixed with the rest of the world, if we reckon from the time of *Abraham*, when they were first marked out by the promise of God to his posterity, near 4000 years—a great part of the age of the world, and approaching very near to the time when it was last peopled by the posterity of *Noah*. Their very existence at this time, taken with all its circumstances, is a miracle, which gives credit to all the miracles of *Moses*.

The books, which record these miracles, were certainly wrote soon after the facts; since the religion, laws, and polity of the *Jews* were

* Prefatory Discourse to the Letter from *Rome*, p. 88.

wholly

wholly built upon them. These books are the great charter by which they were incorporated into a nation. These miracles are the only sanction which gives authority to the laws they contain. The miracles were wrought in the face of all *Israel*, and many of them under observation for a long time together. The books, that record them, were of publick authority and daily resort. It was, therefore, impossible, if false, that they should obtain credit for a day. The very being of these laws is a proof of the miracles connected with them; since the latter, if false, must have discovered the falshood of the former. By appealing to these facts, it was put in the power of every one to see through, or, rather, it was put out of their power not to see through, the imposture. The memory of these facts was not only preserved in these records, but they were written, if I may so speak, and recorded in the daily customs and religious ceremonies of the *Jews*. The *Passover* was instituted in memory of their coming out of *Egypt*—the feast of *Pentecost* in token of the law being given upon mount *Sinai* fifty days after—that of *Tabernacles* in remembrance of their encamping in the desert—and, in the form of dedicating or offering their first-fruits, a solemn commemoration was enjoined of the signs and wonders by which they were delivered out of *Egypt*. The belief, therefore, of the miracles must of necessity be as antient as their religion; and indeed, without these, their religion, government, and even their present

present existence, as a people, would be more miraculous than all the miracles recorded in the Pentateuch.

We are now come to the conclusion of this celebrated Essay: "Upon the whole," says he, "we may conclude, that the *Christian* religion "not only was at first attended with miracles, "but even at this day cannot be believed by any "reasonable person without one. Mere reason "is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: "and whoever is moved by faith to assent to it, "is conscious of a continued miracle in his own "person, which subverts all the principles of "his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom "and experience." *

The author, in one of his Essays, complains of a want of politeness and civility in those who defend religion against the attacks of the Free-thinkers, "whose moderation and good manners," he tells us, "are very conspicuous, "when compared with the furious zeal and "scurrility of their adversaries." † But who can, without some impatience, see a religion which he holds sacred, and which hath established itself purely by reason and argument, treated with this open scorn and abuse? Has this author lived in the time of Sir *Isaac Newton*, Mr. *Locke*, and Mr. *Addison*? Can he know that these men gloried in the name of Christians, that

* P. 203.

† *Essays moral and political*, p. 62.

the first of them employed many of his best hours in studying and illustrating the Scriptures, and that the other two have wrote professedly in the defence of this religion, and yet think himself at liberty to treat all that believe it as men that are incapable of reasoning or thinking? The charge, which he has here brought against the advocates of Christianity, is so far from being true, that I dare rest the whole merits of the controversy upon this issue. Let any one read the authors he mentions, *Collins* and *Tindal*, with *Morgan*, *Gordon*, and the later writers in this cause, and compare them with their antagonists, *Chandler*, *Conybeare*, *Leland*, *Foster*, and judge on which side the temper and moderation lies. And yet, if men claim some authority to opinions which have the publick voice on their side, where is the wonder or the blame? It is nothing unnatural for men thus supported to assume a confidence, and to expect some deference and modesty from their adversaries. But, when men oppose established opinions with an air of authority, and decide against the publick—when they profess to doubt, and yet dictate, about every thing, and act at once the Sceptick and the Dogmatist—this is a character, which, however it may be accounted for, can never be excused*.

K

And

* The author tells us, that, "in all controversies, those who oppose the established and popular opinions affect a most extraordinary gentleness and moderation, in order to soften, as much as possible, any prejudices that may lie against them."

And I here ask my reader, whether he has anywhere met with either a more sceptical, disputatious

“ them.” † But the fact is notoriously otherwise. In establishments of every kind, the party which forms the opposition, if they have the liberty to speak out, is usually the most furious and loud in invective. The reason is, the most furious and vehement spirits are the most impatient of control, and the most forward to oppose. A man that is a tyrant in his own temper is sure to complain of tyranny in his superiors; and a proud man will always think you proud, if you differ from him, whatever authority and whatever modesty you may have on your side. Thus the celebrated author of the *Patriot King* pronounces the most candid of all writers to be a *presumptuous Dogmatist* for daring to differ from his opinion, even before it was known. This consummate writer, not content to shine in his own sphere, assumes the nod, and will give the law in metaphysics as well as politics. “ I would not say,” says he, “ that God governs by a rule that we know or may know as well as he, and upon our knowledge of which he appeals to men for the justice of his proceedings towards them, which a famous divine has impiously advanced in a pretended demonstration of his being and attributes: God forbid!” † I learn from hence, that the famous divine spoken of has the misfortune to have fallen under the displeasure of this author, and that he has a sovereign contempt for all that do so. But, what his offence is, I am still at a loss to conjecture. I think myself certain, that he has no-where said what the author charges him with, “ that we know or may know the rule by which God governs as well as he.” He has, indeed, said, “ that God himself, tho’ he has no superior, from whose will to receive any law of his actions, yet disdains not to observe the rule of equity and goodness as the law of all his actions in the government of the world, and condescends to appeal even to men for the righteousness and equity of his judgments (as in *Ezek. xviii.*); that (not barely his infinite power, but) the rules of this eternal law are the true foundation and the measure of his dominion over his creatures.” ‡

* *Essays moral and political*, p. 62. † *Patriot King*, p. 94.

‡ *Demonstration of the being and attributes*, &c. 9th edit. p. 218.

But

tatious turn of mind, or a more imperious, dog-
matical style, than in the writings of this author?

K 2

It

But what is this more than the author himself has said, in terms as free, in the very page that is stained with this censure?
 "That God is not an arbitrary, but a limited monarch, limited
 "by the rule which infinite wisdom prescribes to infinite power
 "—that he does always that which is fittest to be done—and
 "that this fitness, of which no created power is a competent
 "judge, results from the various natures and the more various
 "relations of things." He adds, "So that, as creator of all
 "systems by which these natures and relations are constituted,
 "he prescribed to himself the rule which he follows as gover-
 "nor of every system of being." This, tho' no candid reader
 will complain of it, is more crude and perplexed than any-
 thing I remember in the author here arraigned. God does
 always what is right and fit. But right and fit were not made
 what they are, when this or any other system of beings was
 made. The fitness of every action, the same circumstances sup-
 posed, was always and ever will be the same. This rule is eter-
 nal and immutable as truth itself, and its authority is as univer-
 sal, extending to all beings and to all possible systems of being;
 as the author we are speaking of has, with equal modesty and
 clearness, asserted and proved immediately before the passage here
 cited. If he has said, farther, that God appeals to men for the
 justice of his proceedings, he has given his authority for this—
 an authority which a *Christian* divine must think decisive. And
 what doth this amount to more than saying that God hath im-
 planted in men a sense of what is just, merciful, and good, and
 that all his dispensations are agreeable to our ideas of justice,
 mercy, and goodness? Does not the astronomer try the works
 of God by the laws of mechanism and geometry, when he pro-
 nounces that they are done in number, weight, and measure?
 And must we not have some measure of justice, mercy, and
 goodness, when we attribute these to the Deity? To say that
 we can see the wisdom of God in his works is not saying that
 we are as wise as God himself; nor does our seeing the fitness and
 equity of his proceedings in some instances imply that we are
 competent judges of or can see the reason of his proceedings in
 all. As the author has not pointed out the passages in the writer
 he

It is remarkable with what ease and alacrity he hath asserted the fact before us. But this cavalier manner is familiar to him. He tells us, in another Essay, "that the Quakers are perhaps the only regular body of Deists in the universe:" And again, "that the leading Whigs have always been either Deists or professed Latitudinarians in their principles, that is," says he, "friends to toleration, and indifferent to any particular sect of Christians."† Now, it is certain that the Quakers profess the belief of Christianity as universally as any sect whatsoever. And what right has the author to charge a whole body of men with such flagrant insincerity? As to the Whigs, the principles of toleration are certainly Christian principles, and do by no means imply an indifference to any sect, much

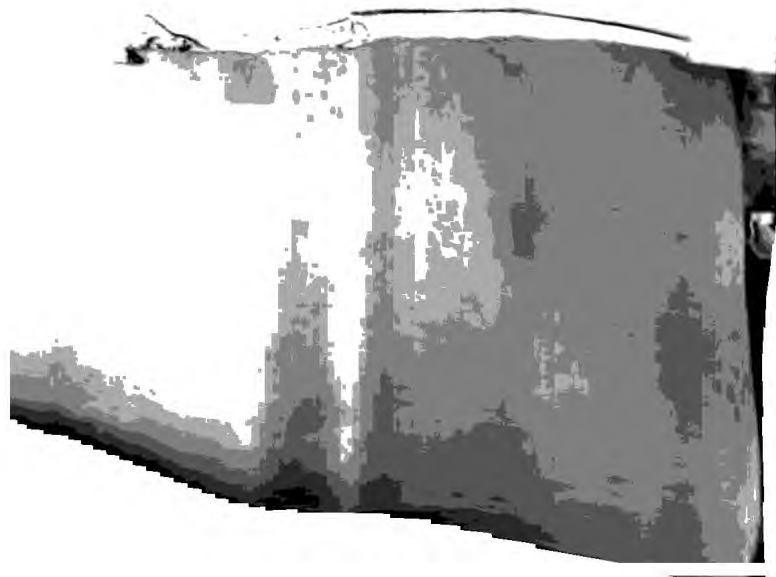
he excepts against, I can only guess this to be the place. But, if he has any-where dropped an expression that may seem less accurate or proper upon this subject, the author might have pardoned it, who confesses, in the same page, that he cannot express himself on this subject properly, and that, when our ideas are inadequate, our expression must needs be improper. To return. We have here a phenomenon, which, to those who have not studied human nature, will appear altogether singular: Lord B—e complaining of the impiety, pride, and presumption of Dr. Clarke. Established opinions and an established character provoke his resentment: rather than submit to another, he will contradict himself. And this, I take it, is the principle from which most of Mr. Hume's philosophy is derived; to whose extraordinary gentleness and modesty that of this writer (to speak in the curious phrase of the latter) * is but as the positive degree to the superlative.

*Est genus hominum, qui esse primos se omnium rerum volunt,
Nec sunt.*

* *Patriot King*, p. 148.

† *Essays moral and political*, p. 321.

less



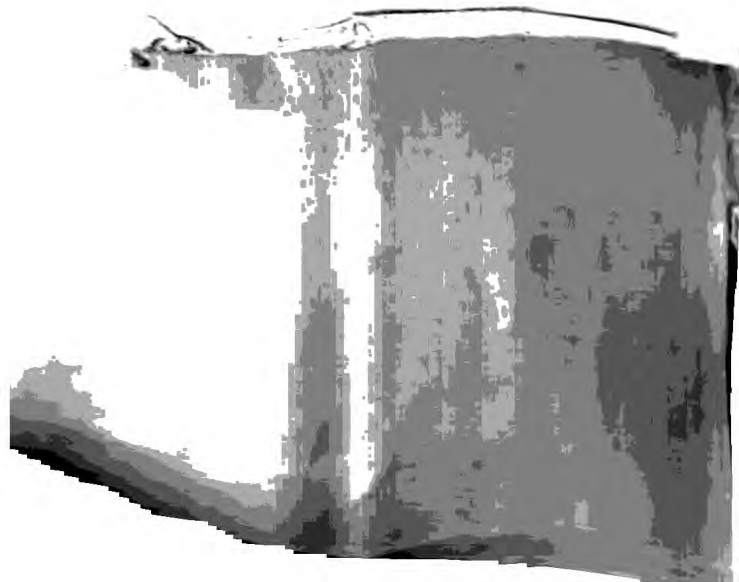
less a coldness to religion in general: and, if the best Christians are usually the best subjects and citizens (which I think an indisputable truth) I should hope their principles would be no impediment to their faith. I am sure, however, they have no reason to thank this author for his compliment.

They who believe religion must think that the cause of virtue and the happiness of mankind are bound up in it: and this will justify a degree of zeal and ardor in its defence. But what is there to call for or excuse this spirit in those who oppose it? If the author be a friend to virtue, which, from his elegance of mind and taste, I scarce can doubt—if he be a friend to natural religion, which a person of so much thought and reflection sure must be—what principles has he in reserve for the support of these, when Christianity is taken away? The best philosophy, as I have already said, availed but little in reforming the religions or morals of mankind: and, as to the philosophy of this author, it is, as far as I understand it, as ill calculated for this purpose as any I have met with*. But, indeed, religion can never be

* The character of this author's philosophical writings, which I should not otherwise have attempted, may be given in his own words, where he speaks of the *Alciphron* and other works of the ingenious and good Bishop Berkeley: "They admit of no answer, and produce no conviction: their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of Scepticism." *Essays moral and political*, p. 240.

supported, or virtue taught, with any force of effect, by the reasonings of philosophers. The world will never be governed by metaphysical ideas of honour and beauty, decency of action, and the fitness of things. It is the author's own observation, that "an abstracted, invisible object, like that which natural religion alone presents to us, cannot long actuate the mind, or be of any moment in life. To render the passion of continuance, we must find some method of affecting the senses and imagination, and must embrace some historical as well as philosophical accounts of the Divinity. Popular superstitions," says he, "and observances are even found to be of use in this particular."* The great thing to be wished, then, for the interest of virtue and the good of mankind, is, that the maxims of natural religion should be fixed and assured by an authority that is decisive—that a rule of duty should be taught as the will and law of God—that the sanctions of this law, a future state and a judgment to come, should be known alike to all, both small and great—that the hopes of pardon should be assured to the penitent sinner—that there should be an institution to propagate this knowledge, and to spread it thro' the world—that there should be a publick worship set up, and a discipline and œconomy prescribed, to train men to piety and virtue: but all this, and much more to the advantage of virtue, we have

* *Essays moral and political*, p. 231.



in the Christian religion. Can the author tell us where else they are to be found? If he is looking out a cure for superstition, I venture to assure him, that, with all his researches into metaphysics and morals, he will never find any equal to that religion which he endeavours to explode; which in a few years did infinitely more towards freeing the world from the fear and folly of prodigies, omens, dreams, and oracles, than all the philosophy in the world had done in many ages. If, unhappily, this religion is still corrupted by superstitious mixtures, these I freely commit to the mercy of the author. But Christianity is not to answer for these, any more than for the other errors and vices of mankind, which, however it aims to correct, it does not pretend to eradicate. And even these will be better and more successfully opposed by fair argument and civility than with insult and reproach. Where a liberty of debate and free inquiry is allowed, it is unpardonable to insult the publick that allows it. "There is a degree of doubt and caution and modesty, which, in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner." *

* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 250.

F I N I S.

By the Author.

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