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*The Evidence
of the
Christian Religion*

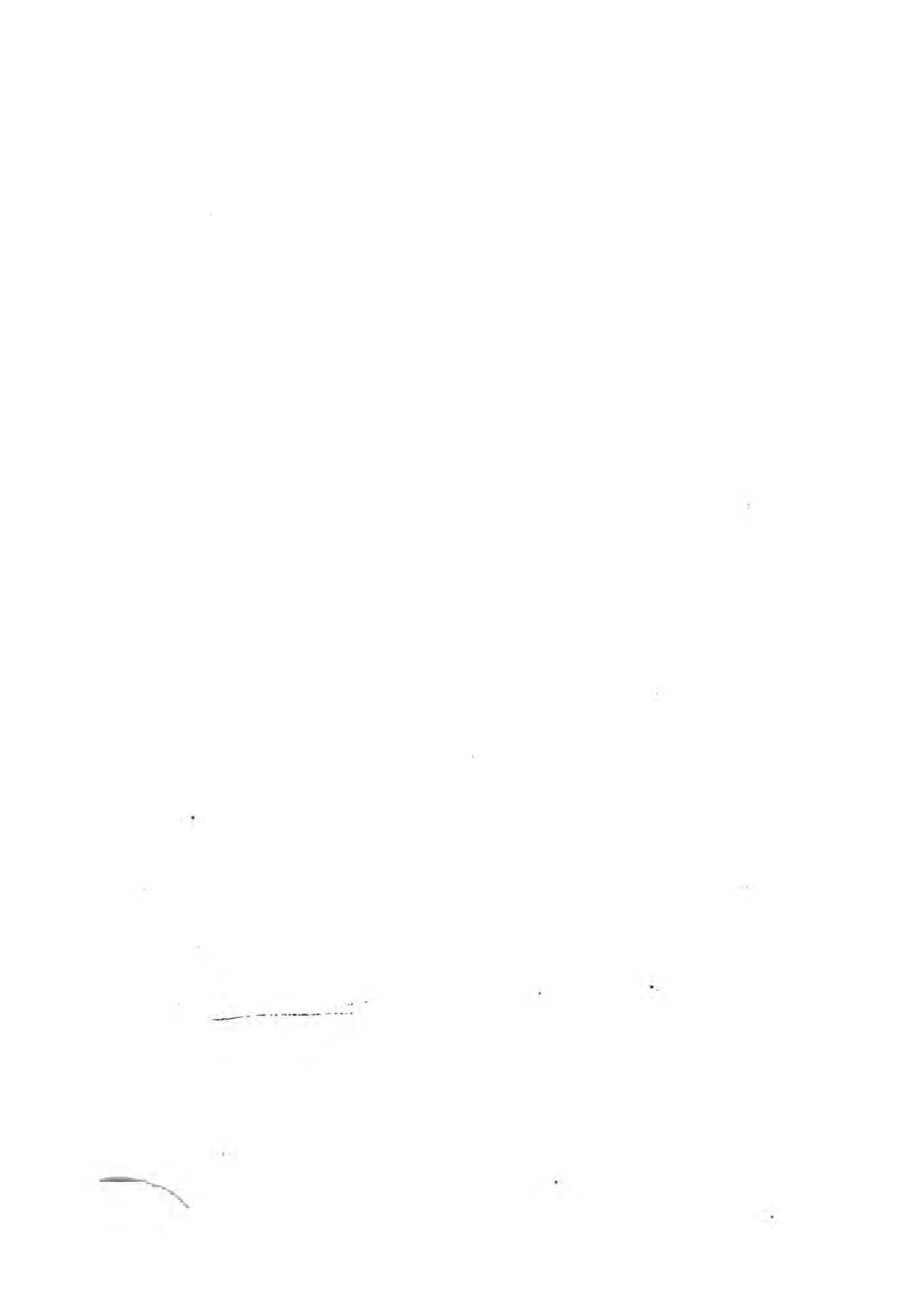




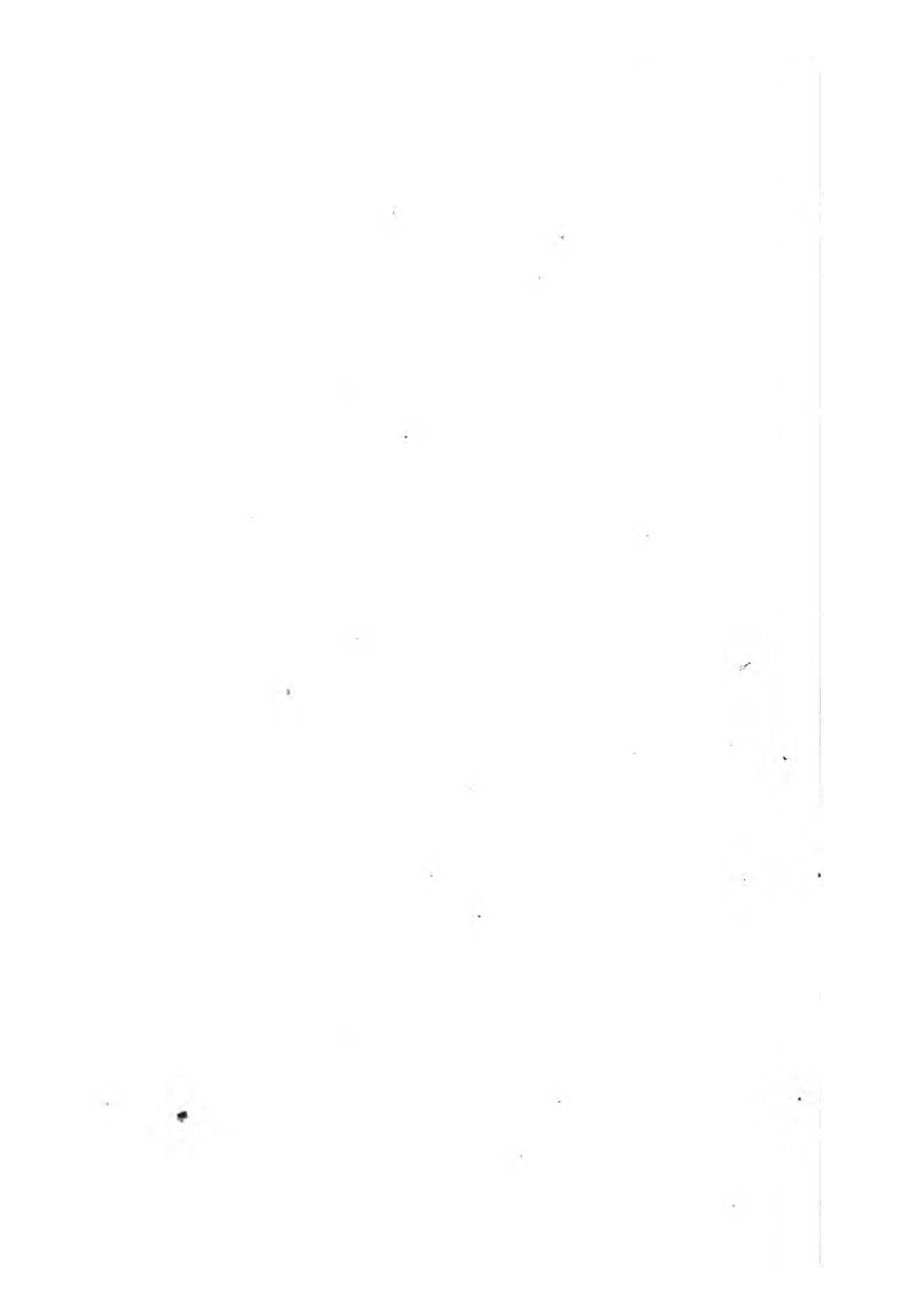
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THE EVIDENCE
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION



THE EVIDENCE
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION

DERIVED

From its Original Propagation in the World

BEING A PORTION OF THE

ORIGINES SACRÆ

OF



DR. EDWARD STILLINGFLEET

Bishop of Worcester

ABRIDGED AND ANNOTATED

By G. R. WYNNE, B.A.

INCUMBENT OF WHITECHURCH, RATHFARNHAM

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EXTRACT FROM THE ORIGINAL
PREFACE.

“IT may justly seem strange that true religion, which contains nothing in it but what is truly noble and generous, most rational and pleasing to the spirits of all good men, should yet suffer so much in its esteem in the world through those strange and uncouth vizards it is represented under. Some accounting the life and practice of it, as it speaks, subduing our wills to the will of God (which is the substance of all religion), a thing too low and mean for their rank and condition in the world; whilst others pretend a quarrel against the principles of it, as unsatisfactory to human reason.

“Thus religion suffers, like the Author of it, between two thieves; and it is hard to define which is more injurious to it, that which questions the principles, or that which despises the practice of it. And nothing certainly will more incline

men to believe we live in an age of prodigies, than that there should be any in the Christian world who should account it a piece of gentility to despise religion, and a piece of reason to be Atheists.

“ Or doth now the conquest of passion, forgiving injuries, doing good, self-denial, humility, patience under crosses, seem less noble and generous than a luxurious, proud, and impatient spirit? Is there nothing more becoming and agreeable to the soul of man, in exemplary piety and a holy, well-ordered conversation, than the lightness and vanity (not to say worse) of those whom the world accounts its greatest gallants? Is there nothing more graceful and pleasing in the sweetness, candour, and ingenuousness, of a truly Christian temper and disposition, than in the revengeful, implacable spirit of the world? Is it not more truly honourable and glorious to serve that God who commands the world, than to be a slave to those passions which put men on continual hard service, and torment them for it when they have done it? Were there nothing else to commend religion to the minds of men besides that tranquillity and calmness of spirit, that serene and peaceable temper, which follow a good and quiet

conscience wherever it dwells, it were enough to make men welcome that guest which brings such good entertainment with it.

“ But what a strange religion would Christianity seem, should we frame the model of it from any other thing than the Word of God? Without all controversy, the dis-esteem of the Scriptures, upon any pretence whatever, is the decay of religion, and, through many windings and turnings, leads men at last into the very depths of Atheism. But the hypocrisy of one age makes way for the Atheism of the next.

“ Blessed be God, our age is not yet barren of instances of real goodness and unaffected piety; there being some such generous spirits as dare love religion without the dowry of interest, and manifest their affection to it in the plain dress of the Scriptures, without the painting and set-off which are added to it by the several contending parties in the Christian world. Were there more such noble spirits in our age, Atheism would want one of the greatest pleas which it now makes against the truth of religion, for nothing enlarges more the gulf of Atheism than the *μέγα χάσμα*, the wide passage which lies between the faith and lives of men pretending to be Christians.

“Finally, if the principles of religion be true, why are they not practised? If they be not true, why are they professed?”

“ED. STILLINGFLEET.

“*June 5, 1662.*”

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF BISHOP STILLINGFLEET.

THE remarkable man from whose writings the following pages are extracted, was one of those rarely endowed persons to whom the words of Livy may justly be applied—"Natum ad id unum diceret quodcunque ageret." "You would say of each matter which he took in hand, that nature had specially fitted him for that one thing." Few divines, in his own or any other age, have left such voluminous writings; and of few can it more truly be said, that he lived, studied, and acted, for the defence of Divine truth alone.

Edward Stillingfleet was descended from a family of that name which had long resided about six miles from York, where his great-grandfather, John Stillingfleet, Esq., brother to Cuthbert, Abbot of York, had an estate. He was the seventh son of Samuel Stillingfleet and Susannah, his wife, daughter of Edward Norris,

of Petworth, Sussex. He was born April 17, 1635, fifty-seven years before Bishop Butler, the famous author of the *Analogy*, who was indebted to Stillingfleet for many of his thoughts. Cranbourn, in Dorsetshire, was his native place, where a priory had been founded by Aeilward, a nobleman who lived in the tenth century. The earliest education he received was in his native town, Thomas Gordon, of Cranbourn, having there prepared him for the school of Ringwood, in Hants, to which an exhibition was attached in the University of Cambridge.

In 1648 he entered St. John's College, Cambridge, on this exhibition, at the age of thirteen years; his tutor was a Mr. Pickering. He was elected Scholar of the House, November 28, in the same year, on the recommendation of the Earl of Salisbury. At that early age he exhibited so much diligence in his studies that at the next election, after his taking the B.A. degree, he was chosen Fellow of his College, March 31, 1653. This position enabled him to make much use of the library of the College, an opportunity which his writings show he did not neglect. After taking his M.A. degree, he spent several years as a private tutor in the houses of Sir Roger

Burgoyne, Bart., of Wroxam, in Warwickshire,* and of Francis Pierrepont, Esq., of Nottingham.

In the latter of these two houses he composed his first work, entitled *Irenicum*, which was designed to recall those to the Church of England who had forsaken her communion during the past few years. This work, which created a profound sensation, and drew forth many answers, was published (1659) after the author's return from Nottingham, whence Sir Roger Burgoyne had called him, in order to present him to the living of Sutton. He was ordained by the Right Rev. Dr. Brownrigg, (the ejected) Bishop of Exeter. At this time he was but twenty-four years of age. One of the leading aims of the *Irenicum* was to prove that the Church is a distinct body from the State, and possessed of rights and authority towards her members, which connexion with the Commonwealth does not deprive her of. The power of excommunication, for offences of a religious character, he proved, amongst other rights, to belong to the Church of Christ.

* To this Sir Roger Burgoyne, Stillingfleet dedicated his *Origines Sacræ*; and if we may judge of the character of a patron by the terms of a dedication, the baronet must have been one unusually calculated to draw forth all that was true and loving in the character of his young friend and tutor.

In the year 1662, at the age of twenty-eight years, Stillingfleet published the work from which the following pages are taken. Its title is *Origines Sacræ*; its aim, the defence of the religion revealed by God in the Holy Scriptures. Of this work, his biographer (1710) says, "A work of great extent and variety of learning, and written with such perspicuity of expression, such solidity of judgment and strength of argument, that it would have been deservedly esteemed a most complete performance for one of more than twice his age, and so it was thought by the most excellent judges; for when he appeared at the Visitation of his Diocesan, Bishop Saunderson, the Bishop, seeing so young a man, could hardly believe it was Mr. Stillingfleet, whom he, as yet, only knew by his books; and afterwards, when he had embraced him, he said he much rather expected to have seen one as considerable for his age, as he had already shown himself for his learning."

This book drew Mr. Stillingfleet before the public. And it was not long before the Bishop of London requested him to write a reply to a Jesuit who had been in controversy with Archbishop Laud. We cannot pause to do more than

chronicle the outlines of Mr. Stillingfleet's further progress. He was appointed select preacher at the Rolls, and in 1664-65 he was given the living of St. Andrew's, Holborn, by the Lord Treasurer. He further obtained the post of Lecturer in the Temple, which introduced him to many of the learned men of the day, amongst the rest to Sir Matthew Hale and Lord Chief Justice Vaughan.

King Charles II. made him his Chaplain in Ordinary, and nominated him to a Canonry of St. Paul's, June 1670. On the death of Dr. Sancroft, he was appointed Dean of St. Paul's, and at the death of Dr. Pory, he became Archdeacon of London. From this time forward he was constantly engaged in controversy, now with the Deists, now with the Socinians, sometimes with Romanists, and again with philosophers, who sought to overthrow the doctrines of faith. It is impossible even to name, in this brief sketch, the vast number of tracts, sermons, books, and pamphlets, which his prolific pen produced.* He seemed equally skilled in using the Scrip-

* The bare titles of these works occupy three or four closely printed columns, folio, of the Catalogue of Books in the library of Trin. Coll. Dublin.

tures, the writings of the Fathers, and the Statutes of the Realm; and during the reign of James II. he stood forth as a champion of the religion which was for the time persecuted.

King William III., at the Revolution, did not pass over Dr. Stillingfleet. He appointed him one of the Commission (1689) for revising the Liturgy, of which Commission he proved a prominent member. He had some years before been made Prolocutor of the Lower House of Convocation.

In this year he was promoted to the vacant Bishopric of Worcester, and was consecrated at Fulham, on the same day (October 13, 1689) with Dr. S. Patrick, Bishop of Chichester, and Dr. Gilbert Ironside, Bishop of Bristol. The possession of a See did not check his labours. And while diligently tending his own diocese—a proof of which is afforded by his excellent Visitation Charges on the duties of the Parochial Clergy—he found time to continue his controversy with each form of error which the times gave birth to. Amongst other opponents he wrote against John Locke, whose Essay on the Human Understanding he misunderstood, and whom he believed to be secretly undermining the truth of the Scriptures.

In this controversy, more recent years have generally decided that he was at a disadvantage.

This was the last public labour in which the Bishop engaged. His remaining years he devoted principally to his diocese. His life was several times threatened by his religious opponents; but the knowledge of this fact only served to confirm him in the opinion of the justice of his side.

Bishop Stillingfleet was twice married, but out of many children, only three survived him. He graduated B.A., 1653; M.A., 1656; B.D., 1663; D.D., 1668. He died of gout in the stomach, March 27, 1699, at Park Street, Westminster. He left a noble library behind him, which was purchased by Narcissus, Primate of Ireland, and presented to the City of Dublin. Never, perhaps, was there a man more perfectly master of the contents of his books. Seldom has one lived who applied his knowledge more zealously and uniformly to advance the cause of that religion which was his personal support, and which he has defended so vigorously in the *Origines Sacræ*; a portion of which is here presented to the candid judgment of the reader.

ERRATA.

- Page 2, line 6, *for* “ κριτήρων ” *read* “ κριτήριον .”
,, 12, line 5 of note, *for* “ cease ” *read* “ come .”
,, 28, line 18 of note, *for* “ de la ” *read* “ delà .”
,, 35, line 28, *for* “ 20 ” *read* “ 24 .”
,, 60, last line, *for* “ xxv .” *read* “ xv .”
,, 69, line 4 of note, *for* “ India ” *read* “ Syria .”
,, 94, head-line, *for* “ iv .” *read* “ v .”

THE
RATIONAL EVIDENCE OF THE TRUTH OF
THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

Introduction.

OF TRUTH AND ERROR.

INQUIRIES after truth have that peculiar commendation above all other designs, that they come on purpose to gratify the most noble faculty of our souls, and do most immediately tend to advance the highest perfection of our rational beings; for all our most laudable endeavours after knowledge now are only the gathering up of some scattered fragments of what was once an entire fabric, and the recovery of some precious jewels which were lost out of sight and sunk in the shipwreck of human nature. That saying of Plato, that all knowledge is remembrance, and all ignorance forgetfulness, is a certain and undoubted truth; if by forgetfulness he meant the loss, and by remembrance the recovery, of those notions and conceptions of things which the mind of man once had in its pure and primeval state, wherein the understanding was the truest microcosm, in which all

the beings of the inferior world were faithfully represented, according to their true nature and genuine perfections.

God at first created the soul of man, not only capable of finding out the truth of things, but furnished him with a sufficient touchstone (*κριτήριον*) to discover truth from falsehood, by a light set up in his understanding, which, if he had attended to, he might have secured himself from all impostures and deceits. Not as though the soul could then have had, any more than now, an *actual* notion of all the beings in the world co-existing at the same time, but that it would have been free from all deceit in its conceptions of things which were not caused through inadvertency. The clear knowledge of God, above all things, will appear most necessary to man in his first creation, if we consider that God created him for this end and purpose—to enjoy converse and an humble familiarity with Himself. In the words of Clement of Alexandria, “Converse with God was as natural to him as his being was.” For man, as he first came out of God’s hands, was the reflection of God Himself on a dark cloud—the iris of the Deity. Hence he is said to be “created after the image of God.” His knowledge then had not been so much in employing his faculties in the operose deduction of reason (the pleasant toil of the rational faculties since the fall), but in immediately employing them about the sublimest ob-

jects: not about quiddities and formalities, but about Him who was the Fountain of his being, and the centre of his happiness.

But we need not have run so far back as the first man to evince the knowledge of truth to be the most natural perfection of the soul of man. For even among the present ruins of human nature, we find some noble and generous spirits, who discern so much beauty in the face of truth, that to such as inquire what they find so attractive in it, their answer is the same as Aristotle's in the like case, that "this was the question of those who never saw it." For so pleasing is the inquiry, and so satisfying the finding of truth after the search, that the relish of it doth far exceed the greatest epicurism of Apicius, or the most costly entertainments of Cleopatra; there being no taste, no jewel, to be compared with truth.

But you will say, If this knowledge of truth be so great, so natural, so valuable a perfection of human nature, whence comes it that so much of the world is overrun with ignorance, superstition, and barbarism? whence come so many pretenders to knowledge, who fancy they have a love of truth, and yet fall down and worship error?

In reply, we must consider that the souls of men are sunk into a state of lethargy, which has well nigh blotted out their original desire of truth, and it needs a new fire to be kindled to

bring forth these latent desires. But when once these tokens of a former friendship are produced, the needle does not more closely embrace the magnet than does the understanding discovered truth. But, alas! the most are so pleased with their sleep, that they are loth to disturb their rest, and set a higher price upon a quiet ignorance than an active knowledge. And even of those whose souls are, as it were, between sleeping and waking, there are few that can put a difference between a mere fantasm and a real truth. Of which these two rational accounts may be given.

1. *First, want of an impartial search after truth.* Truth *now* must be sought, and that with care and diligence, before we find it. Jewels do not commonly lie upon the surface of the earth. Highways are never paved with gold. What is most worth our finding, calls for the greatest search. And certainly nothing has oftener separated between the mind and truth inquired after, than partiality and pre-occupation of judgment; which makes men inquire more diligently after the dowry than the beauty of truth—its correspondence to their interests, than its evidence to their understandings. Prejudice is the wrong bias of the soul, which effectually keeps it from coming near the mark of truth; nay, sets it at the greatest distance from it. The several influences of education, authority, custom, and pre-

disposition, do exceedingly keep men from discerning.

2. Another reason why there are so few who find truth is, *the near resemblance which error often bears to truth*. It has been well observed, that error seldom walks abroad in her own garments: she always borrows something of truth, to make her more acceptable to the world. It has, therefore, always been part of the plan of great deceivers to graft their errors on some material truths; for, as pernicious weeds are bred best in the richest soil, so the most destructive principles are founded on some necessary and important truths. Thus idolatry doth presuppose the existence of a God, and superstition the immortality of the soul of man.

When Divine Revelation was manifested to the heathen world, it brought nothing contrary to the common principles of human nature, but only did rectify the depravations of it, and clearly showed men that way which they had long been ignorantly seeking after; which was the excellent use the Apostle made of the inscription of the altar at Athens to the unknown God: "Whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." And this was the happy use the primitive learned Christians made of all those passages concerning the Divine nature, and the immortality of the souls of men, which they found in heathen writers; thereby to evidence to the world

that the main postulates or suppositions of the Christian religion were granted by their own most admired men, and that Christianity did not rase out, but only built upon, these common foundations, which were entertained by all who had any name for reason.

There are two errors which need to be cleared here—two dangers which befall those who considerately study rotten or false superstructures, which are built upon true foundations. These errors are common to the primitive times and our own.

1. *For the sake of the rottenness of the superstructures, there is a danger of questioning the soundness of the foundations.*

This was what was done by many reflecting heathens, who having learned to perceive the unreasonableness and immorality of the temple worship of the pagan idolaters, and not being able, by the strength of their own reason, to deduce any true form of worship, they were shrewdly tempted to renounce the principles on which all religion is built, because they could not but abhor the conclusions drawn from them. For there is nothing more usual than for men who exceedingly detest some absurd consequence they see may be drawn from a principle supposed, to reject the principle itself for the sake of that consequence. Thus, when the intelligent heathen did apparently see that from the principles of the

being of a God, and the immortality of souls, did flow all these inhuman sacrifices, all these absurd and ridiculous rites, all these execrable and profane mysteries; out of a loathing of the immorality and impiety which attended these, they were brought to question the very truth of those principles which were capable of being thus abused.

The first danger, therefore, is, that superstition and idolatry should lead to Atheism.*

2. The other danger which arises when truth and falsehood are mixed is this, *for the sake of the truth to embrace the falsehood*. Which is a mistake as common as the other, because men are apt to think, that things so vastly different as truth and falsehood could never blend or incorporate together; therefore, when they are certain they have some truth, they conclude no falsehood to be joined to it. And this I suppose to have been the case of the more credulous and vulgar heathen,

* The above example of the erroneous reasoning of heathen philosophy is of equal force in the present day. For the abuses and corruptions of the Christian religion frequently lead philosophers to question its principles, *i.e.*, the revealed truths of the Bible, just as the abuses of natural religion, led the ancient philosophers to doubt its principles, *i.e.*, the being and moral character of God. It needs, however, little impartial reflection to show that the superstitions of heathendom, so widely spread, so eagerly followed, argue the necessary truth of certain first principles, and not their falsehood; and in like manner, that the corruptions and abuses of the Christian system argue the existence of certain original facts, doctrines, and commands, which have formed the foundation on which the corrupt practices complained of stand.—ED.

as the other was of the philosophers; for they, finding mankind to agree in this, not only that there is a God, but that he must be worshipped, did without scruple make use of whatever way of worship prevailed among them, without question, as knowing there must be some, and being ignorant of any else. And from hence they came to be as confident believers of all those fables and traditions which their idolatry upheld, as of those first principles from which the necessity of Divine worship did arise. But we should do as *Archimedes* with the crown of *Hiero*, and find out the exact proportion of fable which comes to us mixed with truth.*

* This second principle is almost of equal importance with the former. The acceptance of error for the sake of the particles of truth which it enwraps may not be so fatal as the rejection of truth, on account of its erroneous additions and developments. And thus superstition may be less fatal than Atheism. But it is the duty, not only of every philosopher, but of every man, to use whatever faculties God has endowed him with to discover where one man's error is based on truth, and where another man's truth is developed into error. This discriminating of mixed systems is what few have a taste for. But without it, we must needs plunge into debasing superstition or hardened Atheism. It is not true, as is now frequently asserted, that the only choice lies between these extremes. And I believe that every man who asks the guidance of Divine Wisdom, and uses the Divine helps in his inquiries, may, remembering our author's two cautions given above, discover with much satisfaction that path which lies equally removed from infidelity and superstition—the path of truth laid down by our Saviour, illuminated by His Spirit, and leading to the Father.—ED.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING THE RATIONAL EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

THERE are many found who deny miracles to have been wrought in the world, chiefly because they have not seen them wrought, or spoken with persons who have. But a little consideration will show that such a mode of arguing begs the question, for they who thus speak deny that the known course of nature can be altered, because they say it never has been altered. Now, if evidence is produced to prove that it has been thus miraculously altered, both the conclusion and the premise fall to the ground. It is foolish to deny that there have been transactions in the world of a certain kind, because these transactions do not happen under our own eyes; and the argument against miracles, that they are contrary to experience (which is the only argument of apparent weight), falls to the ground as soon as we produce the experience of such as have seen them done.*

* Strictly speaking, miracles cannot be said to be "contrary to experience," but contrary to the analogy of experience, which makes a great difference. The difficulty of miracles, considered in the abstract, resolves itself into—1. The difficulty from the analogy of experience. 2. The difficulty arising from the presumed constancy of law. 1. The former of these difficulties is lessened when we insist on the evidential character of the Gospel miracles. They were not mere prodigies, but signs of a very peculiar and important fact, namely, the estab-

In proving that there have been such facts as miracles, we proceed on probable, not demonstrative evidence. Who ever yet undertook to bring matters of fact into mathematical demonstration, or thought he had ground to question the certainty of anything that was not proved in a mat-
 lishment of a Divine religion in the world. And who is able to produce the analogy of any other experience of a like kind? Can any one say it is contrary to experience that a message from Almighty God should be miraculously attested? 2. The difficulty arising from the presumed necessary constancy of the succession of phenomena—general laws—is relieved in a twofold way—*a*, by remembering that the word ‘law,’ when applied to material things, ought only to denote a number of observed and anticipated sequences, from which we *infer* constancy of sequence, but of which we are only able to say that they follow one another *as if* an inviolable law had been laid down. For we only are acquainted with the operations, and we assume the law. But, for us, ‘law’ is only a term representing the fact that we do observe such sequences. A self-made and self-executing law is a thing we do not understand. The *law* lies with Him who causes the sequences, not with the phenomena themselves.

β. It is to be remembered that nature presents us with examples of the interference of ‘laws’ with one another; *i.e.*, when one series of sequences modifies or interrupts another. And we are not acquainted with any laws but those which at present exhibit themselves. The assertion that it *may* be a law of the universe which causes what we name miracles, cannot be denied. And if we produce credible evidence of the past manifestation of such a law, we cannot, on any true philosophical principles, be accused of asserting *violations* of nature’s laws. In conclusion, it is submitted to the reader, whether it be not contrary to the analogy of experience for a ‘law’ to be independent of the will of its author, or so self-executing as to be not capable of suspension or repeal by such author?—ED.

thematical way to him? Who would ever undertake to prove that Archimedes was killed at Syracuse, by any of the demonstrations that he was the author of, or that Euclid was the undoubted author of the geometry which bears his name? Do men question these things for want of demonstration. Yet this is all we at present desire—only the same liberty here which is used in anything of a like nature.

I demand of the person who denies this moral certainty* to be sufficient for an assent, whether he doth question everything in the world which he was not present at the doing of himself? If he be peremptorily resolved to believe nothing but what he sees, he is fit for nothing but a voyage to Anticyræ, or to be soundly dosed with hellebore, to free him from those cloudy humours that make him suspect the whole world to be an imposture.

Do we not see that the most concerning and weighty actions of men's lives are built on no other foundation than this moral certainty? Yet men do not the least question the truth of the things they rely upon. And thus a moral certainty—that is, a probable proof of a thing—is a sufficient foundation of an undoubted assent; not

* "Probable evidence is essentially distinguished from demonstrative by this, that it admits of degrees; and of all variety of them, from the *highest moral certainty* to the lowest presumption. . . . And to us, probability is the very guide of life."—*Butler's Analogy*, Introduction.

such a one, indeed, as can be called infallible, but such as must needs be held true.

As to the evidence of miracles, that they were wrought to confirm the truth of our Saviour's message, and of His Gospel, we shall hereafter treat of that.* But first it requires care and diligence to search what influence the power of miracles hath upon proving the Divine commission of those who do them—whether they are such undoubted credentials, that wherever they are produced we are presently to receive the persons who bring them as extraordinary ambassadors from heaven, employed on some particular message to the sons of men?

It is our duty, therefore, strictly to inquire (in order not to be imposed on by false assertions), *In what cases may miracles be expected as credentials to confirm an immediate message from heaven?*

And here I lay it down as a certain foundation,

* The Rev. T. R. Birks has laid down four conditions of miracles, which go far to justify our firm belief in the fact that there have been such facts. They are: a wise parsimony—general publicity—a consistent plan—and a moral purpose. Miracles must be comparatively unfrequent, or they will cease to be regarded as natural phenomena. They must not be “done in a corner,” or they will become disputable, and will rest on the unsupported assertions perhaps of an individual. They must appear with some plan or design, such as to open or close a dispensation—to recall a people to the true worship, &c. And they must serve good, moral, and beneficent designs; *i.e.*, not contradict the natural apprehension of God's character with which He has furnished us. (See these thoughts developed in “The Bible and Modern Thought,” chap. vii.)

that a power of miracles is not and cannot be perpetually necessary in all those who manage the affairs of heaven here on earth, or that act in the name of God in the world.* When the doctrine of faith is once settled in sacred records, and committed to the keeping of a Church or body of men, then the Divine revelation is sufficiently attested, and its preservation sufficiently guaranteed; and what imaginable necessity or pretext can then be contrived for a continued power of miracles? To make a power of working miracles to be constantly resident in the Church of God, as one of the necessary notes and characters of it, is to put God upon that necessity which common nature is freed from, viz., of multiplying things without sufficient cause to be given for them. When God *hath* given sufficient testimony to rely upon, He needs not do more to gratify mere curiosity, or to convince the obstinate.†

Indeed, before the great harvest of converts in the primitive times was brought in, both of Jews and Gentiles, and the Church fully settled in receiving the canon of Scripture universally, we find God did continue this power among them;

* For besides the reasons which follow, a perpetual power of miracles would be, in fact, an overthrowing of the nature of a miracle, since it would become habitual, and to be expected by all. (See previous note.)—ED.

† It is only too certain, that in the face of the greatest miracles, the hardened would be hardened still; for an example of which, see St. John xii. 37-41.

but after the books of the New Testament were generally embraced as the rule of faith among Christians, we find them, so far from pretending to any such power, that they reject the pretenders to it, such as the Donatists were, and plead upon the same accounts as we do now against the necessity of it. We see, then, no reason in the world for miracles to be continued when the doctrine of faith is settled, as it was enough that it should have been then confirmed in the original preachers of it.*

There are, then, two chief cases wherein miracles may justly and with reason be expected:—

1. When any man comes as by an extraordinary commission from God to the world, either to deliver some particular message or to do some more than ordinary service.

* If it be fairly considered, it is alike illogical to argue that we ought to have miracles now, because they had them at the first settling of the Christian religion; as to argue, on the other hand, that because we have them not now, therefore they had them not at that epoch referred to. For both these assertions come to this, that God must needs deal alike with every age. Or to take a parallel. It would be equally inconsequential to argue because we have not the power of producing works of statuary in all respects equal to the Greeks of old, that therefore they had not that power; or, because they had it, therefore we should possess it now. In this example we know that a power of making perfect statues was once possessed, which we have lost. And the question of miracles is of the same kind; and this argument gains greatly in force if we can show *why* that power was once possessed, and now lost.—ED.

2. When something that hath been before established by Divine law is to be repealed, and some other way of worship established instead of it.

1. In the former case it is but reasonable, when one comes assuming a special authority, that we should then require some more than ordinary evidence of such authority. We cannot think that God would require it as a duty to believe, especially new and hard truths, where He doth not give sufficient arguments for faith, nor that He will punish persons for such a fault as disbelieving that which offered no proofs.

Indeed, God never informs us that faith is necessary without so clearly propounding the object of it, with all arguments inducing to it, as may sufficiently justify a believer's choice in point of reason and prudence, and may leave all unbelievers without excuse. I cannot see what account a man can give to himself of his faith, much less what apology he can make to others for it, unless he be sufficiently convinced in point of the highest reason that it was his duty to believe; and, in order to that conviction, there must be some clear evidence given that what is spoken hath the impress of Divine authority upon it.

Now what conviction there can be to any sober mind concerning Divine authority in any person without such a power of miracles going along with him, when he is to deliver some new doc-

trine to the world, I confess I cannot understand.* For although I doubt not but wherever God doth reveal anything to any person, immediately, He

* "The necessary inference of the human mind is, that if an Infinite Being act, his acts will be superhuman in their character; because the effect, reason dictates, will be characterized by the nature of the cause. Man has the same reason to expect that God will perform acts above human power and knowledge that he has to suppose the inferior orders of animals will, in their actions, sink below the power and wisdom which characterize human nature. . . . Hence, if God manifest Himself at all, unless, in accommodation to the capacities of man, He should constrain His manifestation within the compass of human ability, every act of God's immediate power—of His higher law—would, to human capacity, be a miracle. But if God were to constrain all His acts within the limits of human means and agencies, it would be impossible for man to be convinced that these acts and the testimony they accompanied came from heaven."—*Philosophy of Salvation*, pp. 21, 22. Rel. Tract Soc., London.

Again and again the upholder of Divine revelation must needs defend this prime truth, that miracles (of some sort) are necessary in proof of any Divine message. "There is one great necessary purpose," says Dr. Mozley, "which divines assign to miracles, viz., the proof of a revelation. And, certainly, if it was the will of God to give a revelation, there are plain and obvious reasons for asserting that miracles are necessary as the guarantee and voucher of that revelation." A revelation is, properly speaking, such only by virtue of telling us something which we could not know without it. But how do we know that that communication of what is undiscoverable by human reason is true? Our reason cannot prove the truth of it, for, by hypothesis, it is beyond our reason. There must be, then, some note or sign to certify to it, and distinguish it as a true communication from God, which note can be nothing else than a miracle.—*Bampton Lectures*, 1865: Lect. I.

gives demonstrable evidence to the inward senses of the soul that it comes from Himself; yet this inward sense can be no ground to *another person* to believe his doctrine Divine, because no man can be a competent judge of the actings of another's inward senses; and it is impossible to another person to distinguish the actings of the Divine Spirit from strong impressions of fancy.

If it be said that we are bound to believe those *who say they are fully satisfied* of their Divine commission, I answer (1) this will expose us to all delusions imaginable, for if we are bound to believe them because they say so, then are we bound to believe *all* who say so: and (2), moreover, this will make the ground of all faith to be human testimony, and not Divine, for in this case the Divine authority assumed will be known only by human testimony, and we must needs demand some better evidence than an unsupported assertion.*

* To this it may be replied, that if the doctrine is divinely pure, good, and in accordance with God's will, then we may believe the man who, speaking thus, says he has Divine authority, for he would not lie, if his character be such. But the answer to this is obvious. The author is speaking (see *ante*) of a new and particular revelation, and in this case it will often be impossible to judge of its consistency with God's will, since no similar announcement of that will may previously have been made. No new truths, no addition to the light of nature could come supported thus, for we are not judges *à priori* of the purity, morality, or perfection of all things known to God, and there must be some power exerted which all can

If it be said that *God will satisfy the minds of good men concerning the truth of Divine revelation*, I grant it to be wonderfully true. But all the question is *de modo*. Whether merely by inspiration of His own Spirit in them (a subjective consciousness), or by giving them rational evidence, convincing them of sufficient grounds to believe it. That which is said above would need that each believer should be a recipient of Divine inspiration, as well as the original instrument of the revelation, and, consequently, we should need to be inspired to believe the Bible to be the word of God, as they were who wrote it.

But a further answer is this:—Doth not the above assertion make the fairest plea for men's unbelief? For I demand, is it the duty of those who *want* that immediate illumination to believe or no? If it be not their duty, then unbelief can be no sin to them; if it be a duty, it must be made known to them to be a duty, and how can that be made known to them to be a duty when they want the only necessary means of instruction to it? Will God condemn them for that

recognise as Divine. This position is well illustrated by the case of our Saviour healing the palsied man. He was accused of blasphemy when He said "Thy sins be forgiven thee," because it was a new thing, and apparently immoral, for a man to forgive sins; but "*that they might know that He had power to forgive sins,*" He said unto the sick of the palsy, "take up thy bed and walk," thus proving the doubtful doctrine by an undeniable sign from God.—ED.

which God withheld from them? How can any man be left without excuse who has had no rational inducements to faith? I speak not now of the efficacious persuasion of the soul, but of the arguments which rationally justify that persuasion.*

The case will, perhaps, be cleared when we observe that the Scriptures use this same way of argument. When God commissioned Moses to go speak to the Israelites, Moses puts the case—Supposing, saith he, that I should go to the Israelites, and tell them, God hath appeared to me, and sent me to deliver them; and they should say, God hath not appeared unto me, how should I satisfy them? God doth not reject this objection of Moses as savouring of unbelief, but presently shows him how he should satisfy them, by causing a miracle before his face, turning his rod into a serpent, “that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers hath appeared unto thee.” It seems, then, that this was thought, both by God and by His servant, to be the most pregnant evidence of a Divine commission.

* The testimony both of Scripture and of experience is, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of God,” and that a superhuman power is needed to turn the heart and will to God. But both Scripture, reason, and experience concur in proving that some sufficient signs must be wrought to arrest attention, show the necessity of believing, and the worthiness of the objects of faith, as well as to leave the unbeliever without excuse. Hence the necessity of miracles.—ED.

2. I now come to the second case wherein miracles may be justly expected, which is—when *something which hath been before established by Divine law is to be repealed, corrected, or added to,* and some new way of faith or worship set up instead of it.

The New Testament hath come thus as a correction of, or addition to, the Old, and whether Jews or infidels dispute the authority of that new covenant, it is alike our business to enforce and explain its miraculous introduction.

The ceremonial law was so far from being founded on an immutable reason that, while it was in its greatest force, a state of things was foretold with which the observance of that law would be inconsistent. The precepts of the ceremonial law were founded neither on the goodness of the things themselves nor on any unalterable reason, but were enforced for a peculiar reason on the Jews of that time, as they were a people separated from the rest of the world for the worship of the true God. And though the ceremonies of the law had not a mouth to speak out Christ, yet they had a hand to point to Him: for they were the shadow or dark representation of that which was to be drawn afterwards to the greatest life. And, indeed, the ceremonial law was not so early as the promise of Christ. There was a spring of spiritual promises whose head was higher than Jordan was, that ran down from the

patriarchs, and was more fully opened to some of them, which, though it seemed to run underground in the midst of the ceremonial observances of the law, yet it frequently broke forth, and opened itself in the midst of them, and by degrees in the prophetic age did make itself a larger channel, till, in the time of the Messiah, by its force and violence, it overthrew those banks which stood in the way of it, and overspread the face of the whole earth. It is evident by the whole series of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, that God's ultimate intention was not to confine the saving knowledge of His will only to the Jews, for the great promise to Abraham was, "*that in him and in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed.*"

Thus from the first there was a design on foot, of which the law of Moses was a part, not the whole; and in view of this design, it is absurd to say, as do the Jews, that Moses' law is immutable. We have, indeed, many promises, to which both Jews and unbelievers should take heed, that when the mountain of the Lord's house should be exalted, *all nations should flow into it*; that from the rising of the sun till the going down of the same, God's name should be great among the Gentiles; and that He would take of them also to be priests and Levites. (See Zech. xiv. 20; Isaiah ii. 2; Mal. i. 11; Psalm cx. 4, 5, 6; Isaiah lxvi. 21;

Hag. ii. 7 ; Mal. iii. 1 ; Dan. iv. 24, 26, 27 ; Jer. xxxi. 31, 32.)*

Having now cleared that the law of Moses was capable of a repeal, I come to the inquiry, whether the miracles of our Saviour did give a sufficient evidence of His authority to revoke it. I shall not (to prevent too large an excursion) insist on any other evidences (and they are many) of our Saviour being the promised Messiah, and the Divinely-sent Author of a new religion ; but shall keep close to the matter of our present debate—concerning the evidence which ariseth from such a power of miracles as our Saviour had, in order to establishing that doctrine which He came to publish to the world.

* Dr. Davison well argues, quoting Isaiah ii. 2-4 ; xlii. 1-7 ; lx. 1-3—“The conversion of the Gentiles to a religion proceeding from Judea is unequivocally foretold. ‘The law going forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem,’ is a definite and unambiguous description of a religious doctrine thence communicated to the world. But in the midst of this prophetic matter relating to that long future order of things, there is delineated the character or history of a PERSON, of whom it is clear that He is eminently connected with the introduction of the foretold dispensation, and who appears, indeed, to be the minister, or appointed messenger, by whom it should be ushered into the world. (Isa. lii. 13 ; liii., liv.) His state of humiliation, His sufferings and *death*, as well as His character, and the prevailing success of His work amidst contempt and obloquy, are all figured forth centuries before they came to pass.” (See this opened up fully in Davison “*On Prophecy*,” pages 285, &c. Edn. 1861.)

We might have supposed that by thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquakes, such as accompanied the giving of the Law, God might have forced all men to hearken to Christ; but we find that it was otherwise. The "grace and truth" which "came by Jesus Christ" came not as the "Law, which was given by Moses;" but the heathens as well as Jews, from the first, thought His mean appearance and humble retinue sufficient to negative His claim to be the Messenger and Son of God. Celsus, for example, says, "As the sun, previous to enlightening the world, first shines out in his own glory, so it was necessary that the Son of God should do."

But facts, for which we shall yet adduce sufficient evidence, prove, that in lieu of personal majesty our Saviour possessed the power of working such miracles as both declared His might and His mercy, thus combining two great ends in one; so that while He showed who He was, He also made clear what was the object of His coming.

And we shall see the reason of this when we consider, that *where the truth of a doctrine depends not on self-evidence, but on the authority of him that reveals it, there is no other way of proving the doctrine to be true, but by proving the authority of him who reveals it.*

And here, since many would reject all but self-evident or intuitive truths, it must be premised, that it is not repugnant to reason, that a doctrine

should depend not on self-evidence but authority.*

By self-evidence of a thing, I mean so clear and distinct a perception of it, its nature, and its truth, that every one who hath the use of his rational faculties cannot but, upon the first apprehension of the terms, yield a certain assent to it. As, the whole is greater than its part. But this self-evidence [demonstrative evidence] belongs to abstractions, not to sensible matter. The truth of beings, or the certainty of the existence of things without us, can never, even at the best, be so certain as mathematical demonstrations; for in the latter we trust to the processes of the mind; in the former, to the evidence of our own, or of others' senses.

And yet, in a thousand things, which have no self-evidence, we are equally assured as though we had. And this opens the way to belief on the evidence of testimony, and to belief in the authority of one who appeals to sufficient evidence. That a man will not suffer himself to believe a thing which is not self-evident, even on the authority of God, argues, not that he denies that God *has* revealed truths to us, but that He *can* do so, which surely is blasphemous in the extreme.

* It is easy to see that in this proposition modern speculative thought is touched. The modern philosophers generally ridicule faith in authority.—ED.

If we grant this principle, that God will not send us false or deceptive messages, then we may admit, without further disputation, that a proposition may be believed as Divine and true, even if not self-evident, when proper evidence is afforded that he who speaks it speaks by commission from God. That truth may be far above our intelligence, but then it is of the nature of God to be higher than we; and therefore truths are not to be denied to be from Him because they possess this greatness, which renders them undiscoverable by our own unaided powers.

The next principle which must be premised is this. *A testimony may be known to be Divine and infallible, though God Himself do not speak in an immediate way.* It is hard that we should deny to God a power of speaking through others, and sending messengers, which we ourselves both possess and employ so often. And still more, when we remember how suitable it is that the immediate communication of God should be made, not to the whole human race, but to certain of ourselves, who use human speech, and can thus utter what we may have received. The notion of a prophet, divinely inspired, is common to the Jews and all heathen, and thus is not contrary to the instincts of human nature; and it seems strange indeed to deny that, supposing there is a God, He should reveal His mind by some particular chan-

nels to the intelligent moral agents whom He has made.

Tully has a remarkable passage to this effect. In the entrance of his books *de Divinatione*, he says—"The general opinion drawn even from heroic times, and confirmed by the faith of both the Roman people and all the nations, is, that there is a divination or intercourse between God and men, which the Greeks call (*μαντική*) prophecy, that is, a pre-knowledge or sense of future events. I know of no people, ignorant or wise, who do not believe that the future can be discerned, signified, and foretold by certain men."* He makes it appear to be an universal sentiment of all nations in the world, and instances particularly the Assyrians, Egyptians, Cilicians, Pisidians, Pamphyliaus, Grecians, Romans, Etrurians, and others, to which modern observation can add many more. And if the Epicurean philosophers denied this opinion, it was from the reason before assigned, namely, because this general truth had led to divers superstitions. But the generality even of the philosophers consented with the people in the belief of an intercourse between God and men, by means of some.

It may not be amiss to read to Christians the simple argument of the Stoics. "If," said they, "there be gods, and they do not reveal to men things to come, it either is because they do not

* Cicero de Divin., l. 2.

love men, or because they do not themselves know what is to come to pass, or they think it is no concernment to men to know, or that it doth not become their majesty to reveal them, or that they cannot reveal them though they would; but neither is it true that they do not love men—for the gods are of a bountiful nature, and friends to mankind—neither can they be ignorant of future things, since they have themselves decreed them; neither is it of no concernment to men to know future things, for that makes them more cautious if they know them; neither is it repugnant to their majesty to show them, for nothing is more noble than doing good, and therefore they may make known these things to men; and if so, there must be some way to know that they do so, else do they signify them to no purpose.”

These words of the heathen are yet more fully true when we put in place of a knowledge of future events, a knowledge of man's duty and of the way whereby he may overcome sin, and enter on the road to eternal life. Although, then, these heathens were greatly mistaken (and how should they not be?) as to those things they took for a Divine afflatus or inspiration, yet we cannot conceive so general a sense should be imprinted on the minds of men of such a thing as that was, were it not a thing highly consonant to principles of reason, that God should communicate to mankind, by His own authority, those truths which it

was good for them to know, and that by means of some who should go between Him and them. Well, indeed, speaks Lactantius—"Testimonium Gentium in hac una re, non est dissidentium."*

Having laid down that God may make His will known to His creatures without an immediate revelation of His truth to each† severally, I go on

* M. Guizot has put a similar truth well in "*L'Eglise et la Société Chrétiennes*":—"C'est sur un foi naturel ou surnaturel, sur un instinct inné du surnaturel que toute religion se fonde. Je ne dis pas toute idée religieuse, mais toute religion positive, pratique, puissante, durable, populaire. Dans tous les lieux, dans tous les climats, à toutes les époques de l'histoire, à tous les degrés de la civilisation, l'homme porte en lui ce sentiment, j'aimerais mieux dire ce pressentiment que le monde qu'il voit, l'ordre au sein duquel il vit, les faits qui se succèdent régulièrement et constamment autour de lui ne sont pas tout; en vain il fait chaque jour, dans ce vaste ensemble, des découvertes et des conquêtes; en vain il observe et constate savamment les lois permanentes qui y président; sa pensée ne s'enferme point dans cet univers livré à la science; ce spectacle ne suffit point à son âme; elle s'élançe ailleurs; elle cherche, elle entrevoit autre chose; elle aspire pour l'univers et pour elle-même à d'autres destinés; à un autre maître:

"Par de là tous ces cieux le Dieu des cieux reside."

A dit Voltaire, et le Dieu qui est par delà tous les cieux, ce n'est pas la nature personnifiée, c'est le surnaturel en personne. C'est à lui que les religions s'adressent; c'est pour mettre l'homme en rapport avec lui qu'elles se fondent."—*Guizot, L'Eglise et la Société Chrétiennes*, pp. 20, 21.—ED.

† Let the meaning of this be carefully studied. No man becomes a true Christian without a personal illumination or quickening of God the Holy Ghost. (John iii. 5, &c.) But this is not a revelation of new truths, but an application of known

to show that *those evidences whereby a Divine testimony may be known must be such as need not leave men's minds in suspense, but are, of their own nature, sufficient proofs of it.*

For although as to the event, some may doubt, and others disbelieve the testimonies so proved, yet it is sufficient for our purpose if the evidence be such as may justly win assent; for if the consent of *all men* to any reasoning or evidence be necessary to prove its truth, then there is nothing proved in the world. Men do run into fatal diseases by folly, of which they well see the consequence; and so the best evidence may be rejected by such as will not believe. If the consent of all be necessary to justify the belief of any, then, of all sins, the sin of unbelief in God's Revelation is the most excusable and pardonable.*

truths to the personal conscience—a presentation of the known objects of faith to a man in such a way as to kindle faith in him.—ED.

* Bishop Butler has well shown that men act in the weightiest concerns of life on the lowest probabilities, accounting justly that it is better to do so than to risk failure or ruin, because they have not demonstration or certainty to lead them. "For surely," he says, "a man is as really bound in prudence to do what, upon the whole, appears, according to the best of his judgment, to be for his happiness, as what he certainly knows to be so. Numberless instances might be mentioned respecting the common pursuits of life, where a man would be thought, in a literal sense, distracted, who would not act, and with great application too, not only upon an even chance, but upon much less, and where the probability or

But it is easy to see why the evidence of our Saviour's truth was not universally believed. It was from the peevish, obstinate, malicious spirit that would not suffer men to lay down their pride and selfishness, and come to Christ. For when the most convincing miracles were wrought, they did not deny them. This they could not do, because they saw them, but they attributed them to devils, and not to God; which is what the Jews do to this day.

It would be easy to show in all those instances where the unbelief of men is discovered in the New Testament, that the persons guilty of it did not proceed like rational men, or such as verily desired truth, but were wholly carried away by passion, interest, prejudice, disaffection, or some other cause of that nature; which may give us a sufficient account why those persons did not believe, though there might be clear and undoubted evidence to persuade them to it.

But although I assert that these rational evidences are sufficient arguments of the truth of the doctrine they come to manifest, yet I would not

chance was greatly against his succeeding."—*Analogy*, Part 1, Introduction.

It is easy to apply this principle to the evidences of religion. Even if they be not sufficient to make a particular man certain, he is bound, if he regards his own happiness, to act just as if he thought them certain; and he is, "in a literal sense," distracted, if he waits, in such a matter, till he has arrived at a demonstration in the matter.—ED.

be understood that I hereby resolve all religion into an act of reason and knowledge, and that no more power is required in the understanding to believe the Gospel of salvation than to believe a mathematical demonstration ; for notwithstanding the rational evidence of the objective truth of the doctrine of Christ, the whole work of the Spirit of God, in its peculiar energy and way of operation upon the soul, is left entirely to Himself. Reason cannot step in, and rob Him of His work and office of love. But then the work of the Spirit is not the discovering to us what is the true religion, but the bringing the truths of the Gospel to our own souls in all their suitableness and fitness for our own case. The Divine faith which the Scripture exhorts us to is not merely such a one as believes the truth of the Divine religion, but such as plants that religion in the heart, and by it brings us near to God.

As the blind man may believe that a telescope will render distant objects apparently near, but will not make him see them ; so the rational evidences of the Christian religion do not suffice to kindle faith, but do suffice to present to us, with the clearest evidence of the understanding, those things on which faith is called to rest, and through which life eternal pierces and fills the soul.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE RATIONAL EVIDENCE OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, FROM ITS ORIGINAL PRO- PAGATION IN THE WORLD.

HAVING cleared that miracles, the *possibility* of which can only be denied by those who also deny the being and power of Deity,* are necessary for satisfactorily attesting the Divine origin of a new religion, or for making a change in one already established; having also showed that the fact of miracles, like all other facts concerning the being of things, can be known only by probable, not by demonstrative evidence, I now proceed to show that our Saviour Jesus Christ hath indeed come to change the Jewish worship, to establish the Christian, and to work miracles for the proof of His commission.

God would not be so much wanting to the faith of that people, which had received their law by signs and wonders from heaven, but that there

* On the *credibility* of miracles, and the *necessity* of a miraculous attestation of a new revelation, supposing one to be given to mankind, see "Paley's Evidences—Preparatory Considerations"—where Hume's argument is met in a manner which has been often evaded, but never answered. Until it shall be shown that miracles are incredible in themselves, as distinct from their not being witnessed by us—and until it is further shown that God cannot reveal new truths to mankind, or cannot authenticate such with miracles, this argument holds good.—ED.

should be a strong evidence given to them, that the fulness of time was come when that dispensation was to have an end, and to give place to one more perfect, which was to be established instead of it. Upon which account the Jews might rationally inquire after a sign, where any new revelation was discovered, which might null the obligation of any former law: and when they inquire so much after a sign, our Saviour doth not reject the inquiry as in itself unreasonable, but as made in an unreasonable manner; for they would not be contented with the miracles which our Saviour wrought, which sufficiently manifested a Divine power; but all that they desired was “a sign from heaven” (Matt. xii. 38; xvi. 1); *i.e.*, such as were done at the giving of the law—the thunders and lightnings there. Now, our Saviour justly checks this demand as importune and impudent; partly as knowing upon what account they asked it, merely to tempt Him, and not out of any real desire of satisfaction; and partly because of that abundant evidence which was given in the miraculous cures which were wrought by Him, which were more suitable to that design of doing good in the world than all the thunder-claps on Mount Sinai were. God graciously suited the discoveries of His power to the peculiar circumstances of the people which they were made to, and the dispensation they ushered in. Those terrible signs at Mount Sinai were very suitable to the

severity and rigour of the Law ; and the merciful miracles of our Saviour to the sweetness and grace of the Gospel. And on this account our Saviour charged the Jews with hypocrisy in requiring a sign, as something above a miracle.* “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given it but that of the prophet Jonas” (Matt. xii. 39) : *i.e.*, “This people, which are so far from the faith of Abraham that no miracles which I do will convince them, but they seek only to have their humours gratified more than their faith confirmed by some prodigy

* Archbishop Trench points out that there are three terms commonly used to express the miracles of Christ.

1. There is *τέρας*, a “wonder,” in which the effect on the beholders is mere astonishment. (Matt. xxiv. 24 ; Mark xiii. 22 ; John iv. 48 ; Acts ii. 22.) This word is never used for the New Testament miracles, except in conjunction with some other, such as “signs,” to show that not mere astonishment, but also proof, or mercy, was intended.

2. There is *σημείον*, a “sign.” This term is common in St. John’s Gospel. It is a token or indication of the near presence and working of God. They are, in fact, proofs of the Divine authority of Him who works them—*tokens* of God’s presence. The Jews, however, when (as in the text) they asked a “sign” (John ii. 18 ; Matt. xii. 38 ; xvi. 17), desired something *from heaven*, which could not be misinterpreted even by their perverse ingenuity, and which could not be set down to magic. And here they were wrong, for they simply refused to believe, just as Pharaoh had done long before.

3. Lastly, there is *δυνάμις*, a “power,” in which the “might” of God or of Christ is alone thought of, irrespective of the doctrines upheld, or the effect produced on the bystanders.

—ED.

from heaven, shall not by me be thus gratified; but having done enough already to persuade them, if they had any heart to believe, instead of a sign from heaven they shall have only one from the earth, and that not so much intended for the conversion of such wilful unbelievers, as for the testifying my innocency to the world, viz., my resurrection from the dead." And so elsewhere, when the Jews demand a sign, it was upon the doing of that which, if they had attended to it, had been a sufficient sign to them, viz., *His driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple* (John ii. 18): which trades being permitted by the Sanhedrim and the priests, how could they think so mean a person in appearance as our Saviour was could ever have effected it, had it not been for a Divine majesty and power which resided in Him?

It was not, then, the expectation of miracles which our Saviour rebuked in the Jews, but being unsatisfied with the kind and nature of His miracles. It was their hypocrisy and unbelief which Christ condemned, notwithstanding the frequent miracles which He wrought among them. For we plainly find our Saviour very often appealing to His miracles as the evidences of His Divine commission: "If I had not done the works among them which no man else did, they had not had sin" (John v. 36; x. 25; xv. 20); *i.e.*, in not believing me. Whereby Christ sets forth the necessity of His working miracles, in order to

the conviction of the world, and the greatness of the miracles which He wrought. He did those no man else had done—no, not Moses and Elias—in curing all manner of diseases by the word of His mouth; and those miracles which they had done, he exceeded them in the manner of doing them. Moses fed them with bread from heaven: but Christ multiplied on earth some *few loaves* and *fishes*, to the feeding of *many thousands*: Elias, indeed, raised one from the dead; but Christ raised more, and one after he had been *four days* in the *grave*. And upon this very evidence of our Saviour's miracles we find many believing on Him. And even of those who were not so far wrought upon as to become followers of Christ, as the only Messiah (John i. 49; ii. 11), yet we find them so far persuaded by the power of His miracles, that they looked upon Him as a great prophet, or one that was sent from God. So Nicodemus, who came first to Christ more as a rational inquirer than a believer, yet we see he was "persuaded that He was a teacher come from God, because no man could do the miracles which Christ did, unless God were with Him." (John iii. 2.) And many of the Jews at Jerusalem "believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did" (John ii. 23); yet these persons "Christ would not trust Himself with, because He knew their hearts" were not subdued to His doctrine, though their understandings were

convinced by His miracles. And after this, other of the Jews that looked not on Him as the Messiah, yet believed on Him on the account of His miracles. "And many of the people believed on Him, and said, When Christ cometh, will He do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" (John vii. 31.) Although herein they were most unreasonable in believing the evidence, and not the truth attested by it, in believing Christ to be one sent from God by His miracles, and yet not believing Him to be the Messiah, which was the thing attested by them. Not that mere miracles would prove the person to be the Messiah who did them, but the miracles proved the testimony to be Divine;* now, that which Christ delivered to them as a Divine testimony, was His

* It is very well said by Archbishop Trench—"The kingdom of lies has its wonders no less than the kingdom of truth, and this alone is sufficient to convince us that miracles cannot be appealed to absolutely and simply in proof of the doctrine which the worker proclaims [and in this case, of the Messiahship of Jesus]. A miracle does not prove the truth of a doctrine, or the Divine mission of him that brings it to pass: that which alone it claims for him at the first is a right to be listened to; it puts him in the alternative of being from heaven or hell. The doctrine must commend itself to the conscience as good, and only then can the miracle seal it as Divine. But the first appeal is from the doctrine to the conscience, to the moral nature in man. . . . To sum up. . . . The miracle must witness for itself, and the doctrine must witness for itself, and then only the first is capable of witnessing for the second." This principle is tacitly supposed in the following pages; but I have thought it well thus early to put it prominently forward.—Ed.

being the Messiah; and therefore, by the same reason they believed Him to be sent from God, they ought to have believed Him to be the Messiah; for one sent from God could never falsify in the main subject of his message, as this was of our Saviour's preaching. And hence it is observable our Saviour did not show forth His Divine power till He entered upon His office of preaching; thereby making it appear He intended this as the great evidence of the truth of the doctrine which He preached to them.

And herein the blind man in the Gospel saw more truth and reason than the whole Court of Sanhedrim, before which he was summoned about his cure by Christ; for when they sought to get something out of him in disparagement of our Saviour's person and miracle, he sharply and roundly tells them, "Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing" (John ix. 33); as though he had said, is it not plain that this man is employed by God in the world by the miracles which He doth? for otherwise God would not so readily assist Him in doing such great works; "for we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth" (John ix. 31); *i.e.*, if this man pretended a commission from heaven falsely (whereby he would be the greatest of sinners), can

we think God would so miraculously assist him? but we know by our law, if one comes with a commission from God, and draw men not to idolatry (which is meant by being a worshipper of God), such a one God is present with, and we are bound to believe him. Thus we see what strong rational evidence there was in this miracle of Christ's in the judgment of this blind man, which he uttered with so much reason before the Court of the Sanhedrim, when he knew how likely he was to be excommunicated for it; and yet this very person was as yet ignorant "that Christ was the true Messiah" (John ix. 36), as appears by the sequel of the chapter; but upon Christ's revelation of Himself to him, "he presently believed on him" (John ix. 38).

How strangely irrational were the Jews, then, in rejecting our Saviour, when His miracles not only exceeded those of Moses both in number and quality, but, which was more, they saw themselves the miracles which Christ did, but they received those of Moses only upon the credit of their fathers! And from the strength of the evidence arising from the power of miracles it is that St. Peter tells the assembly (Acts ii. 22), "That Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved of God among them, by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of them, as they themselves also knew." He appeals to their own knowledge, which he would not certainly have

done, had it not been in a case beyond all dispute among them. And this was such a case; for we find the Pharisees themselves confessing it: "What do we? For this man doth many miracles" (John xi. 47). Now, then, in a nation whose religion had been established by miracles; and the certainty of the truth of it, among those who then professed it, did depend so much upon the constant credit which the report of the miracles done at the settling of their law had among them; what could be a more rational and convincing way of proceeding, than for our Saviour to manifest by a power of miracles the undoubted credentials of His commission from heaven, and that He was the true Messiah which was foretold by their own most sacred and authentic records?

The evidence afforded by our Saviour's miracles was, however, if possible, even stronger than that ordinarily afforded by this means; and that for this reason, that it was foretold in books, which we know were written long previously, that He should do miracles. Are not the prophecies concerning the miracles which the Messiah should work, exactly fulfilled in Christ? "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing." (Isa. xxxv. 5, 6.) He must be a great stranger to the history of the New Testament who does not know the exact fulfilment of these prophecies. Nay, even

the Jewish Midrasch, upon Psalm cxlvi. 8, saith, "That when Messias comes, he should open the eyes of the blind" (V. Grot. in John ix. 32); and the Jews themselves often speak of the great miracles which the Messias should do when He appears; and therefore out of their own mouths will they be condemned, when the miracles of Christ make it so evident that He was the true Messias. Hence when John the Baptist sent his disciples to Christ for them to be fully satisfied concerning Him, He bids them tell him, "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up," &c. (Matt. xi. 5), as though the mentioning of these miracles was sufficient to make it appear to them who He was whom they came to inquire after.* And it is observable that

* On this event Stier excellently observes, "The question was, Do we look for another; are we, by renewed weary waiting, to expect a future which never appears? The answer cries in impressive response: No. *He is here*, to be *heard* and *seen*; prophecy has become reality and history before your eyes and ears. The *hearing* refers first to the rumour or fame of Him which was rapidly spreading through all Judea, concerning His wonderful work, and which had been reported to John. The *seeing* adds to this the present confirmation to their eyes. For *in the same hour*, He cured many of their infirmities and plagues; so that no further answer was in reality needed than—open your eyes, and ye find it so! But then the words—the doctrine—which follows, further embrace both the *hearing* and the *seeing* in one; and it is not without signification that what they hear comes first, thus placing the preaching of the doctrine before the seeing of the miracles [see last note from

John the Baptist himself, though greater than the prophets, nay, than whom there was not a greater born of women (Matt. xi. 9, 11), by our Saviour's own testimony; yet of him it is said, "that he wrought no miracle" (John x. 41): of which no account can be given so probable and rational, as that God in His infinite wisdom was pleased so to order it, that the evidence of our Saviour being the Messiah might be made more clear by the miracles which He wrought, that the minds of the people might not be distracted between John and Christ; he therefore reserved the glory of miracles wholly to the name of Christ, that there might be no pretence of competition between John and Him.

Thus far I have been occupied in clearing the way for the particular evidence which we have that our Saviour who declared such Divine doctrine, did also confirm it by Divine miracles. Having shown the reasonableness of these great works, and the suitableness of miracles to such an epoch as that at which the Christian faith was planted in the world, I pass on to lay down this proposition, which I shall then proceed to prove. We

Archbishop Trench]. To speak quite strictly, the seeing must turn to hearing; the miracles must become words, and the works must be witnesses, that so by hearing them, faith may come. The miracles confirm the preaching, but the preaching explains their significance. Hence, in ver. 15, it is said only, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'—"Words of the Lord Jesus" (ii. 12).—*Clark.*

have certain and undoubted evidence of the truth of those miracles whereby Christianity was first propagated in the world, and whereby Christ made it appear that His power was greater than the devil's, "who had possession, because he overcame him, took from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divided his spoils" (Luke xi. 21, 22); *i.e.*, dispossessed him of men's bodies, and his idolatrous temples, silenced his oracles, and non-plussed his magicians, and at last, when Christianity had overcome by suffering, established it as the religion of the Roman state.

Now the admirable success which this doctrine found in the world, considering all the circumstances of it, do make it clear that the miracles which were wrought were true, and that the doctrine attested by them was from God.* This will appear from these two things:—

I. That no rational account can be given why the Apostles should undertake to publish such a doctrine unless they had been undoubtedly certain

* "It is an acknowledged historical fact, that Christianity offered itself to the world, and demanded to be received, upon the allegation, *i.e.*, as unbelievers would speak, upon the pretence of miracles, publicly wrought to attest the truth of it, in such an age; and that it was actually received by very great numbers in that very age, and upon the professed belief of the reality of those miracles. And Christianity, including the dispensation of the Old Testament, seems distinguished by this from all other religions." (*Butler's Analogy*, Part II., chap. vii. § 3.) It is the position here laid down which Dr. Stillingfleet now proceeds at large to prove.

that the doctrine was true, and they had sufficient evidence to persuade others to believe it.

II. That no satisfactory account can be given, considering the nature of the doctrine of Christ and the manner of its propagation, why it should meet with so great acceptance in the world, had there not been such convincing evidence as might fully persuade men of the truth of it.

*Part I.—The evidence derived from the publishers of the Christian Religion.**

I. I begin with the first, from the publishers of this doctrine in the world. All that I here require by way of a postulatam or supposition, are only these two things, which no man, I suppose, will deny: That men are so far rational agents, that they will not set upon any work of moment and difficulty, without sufficient grounds inducing them to it; and so much the greater the work is, the more sure and steadfast had the grounds need to be which they proceed upon.

* ANALYSIS OF PART I.

The evidence derived from the *publishers* of the Gospel.

A. Consider the *hazard* they foresaw.

B. Consider on what *motives* they went forth.

C. Consider the strength of their testimony as *eye-witnesses*.

Prop. I. The truth of the *doctrine* proved by the proof of the *facts*.

Prop. II. Eye-witnesses' testimony the greatest evidence of *facts*.

α. When the facts were easily perceivable.

β. „ „ „ seen by many witnesses.

That the Apostles, or first publishers of the Christian doctrine were not men distracted or bereft of their wits, but acted by principles of common sense, reason, and understanding, as other men in the world do ; which if any one should be so far prejudiced as to question, if he have but patience and understanding enough to read and consider those admirable writings of theirs which are conveyed to us by as certain uninterrupted a tradition as anything in the world hath been, by that time he will see cause to alter his judgment, and to say that they are not mad, but speak the words of truth and soberness. These things supposed, I now proceed to the proving of the matter in hand, which will be

Prop. III. We cannot question, in the case of the Apostles, either,

First, the *knowledge* of what they spoke of ;

Second, their *fidelity* in reporting it ; for

α. They parted with all for the Gospel.

β. Consider how they preached it.

(1.) With the greatest impartiality.

(2.) With the greatest simplicity of words.

(3.) With the greatest openness of spirit.

(4.) With the greatest particularity of circumstances.

Prop. IV. There is no counter testimony.

Prop. V. The assent of many to the preachers, a ground of faith to us.

α. They had opportunities of testing the evidence.

β. The doctrine was of the highest moment.

γ. The believers could have no motive but conviction.

δ. Many who did not join them were convinced.

ε. Many who disagree on opinions, agree as to the facts.

done by these three things: first, that the Apostles could not but know how *hazardous* an employment the preaching of the Gospel would be to them. Secondly, that no *motive* can be conceived sufficient for them to undertake such an employment, but the infallible truth of the doctrine which they preached. Thirdly, that the greatest assurance they had themselves of the truth of their doctrine, was by being *eye-witnesses* of the miracles of Christ.

A. That the Apostles could not but understand the *hazard* of their employment, notwithstanding which they cheerfully undertook it. That men armed with no external power, nor celebrated for their wit and learning, and carrying a doctrine with them so contrary to the general inclinations of the world, having nothing in it to recommend it to mankind but the truth of it, should go about to persuade the world to part with the religion which they owned, and which was settled by their laws, and to embrace such a religion as called them off from all the things they loved in this world, and to enter upon a life of mortification and self-denial, is a thing to human reason incredible, unless we suppose them acted on by a higher spirit than mankind is ordinarily moved by. For what is there so desirable in continual reproaches and contumelies? what delight is there in racks and prisons? what agreeableness in flames and martyrdoms to make men undergo some, nay, all of

these, rather than disown that doctrine which they came to publish? Yet these did the Apostles cheerfully undergo, in order to the conversion of the world to the truth of that doctrine which they delivered to it.

And not only so, but though they did foresee them, they were not discouraged from this undertaking by it. I confess when men are upon hopes of profit and interest in the world, engaged upon a design which they promise themselves impunity in, having power on their side, though afterwards things should fall out contrary to their expectation, such persons may die in such a cause, because they must, and some may carry it out with more resolution, partly through an innate fortitude of spirit, heightened with the advantages of religion, or an enthusiastic temper.* But it is hard to conceive

* "Upon the whole, the general observation, that human creatures are so liable to be deceived, from enthusiasm in religion, and principles equivalent to enthusiasm in common matters, and in both from negligence; and that they are so capable of dishonestly endeavouring to deceive others; this does, indeed, weaken the evidence of testimony in all cases, but does not destroy it in any. And these things will appear to different men to weaken the evidence of testimony in different degrees; in degrees proportionable to the observations they have made, or the notions they have any way taken up concerning the weakness, and negligence, and dishonesty of mankind, or concerning the powers of enthusiasm, and prejudices equivalent to it. But it seems to me that people do not know what they say who affirm these things to DESTROY the evidence from testimony which we have of the truths of Christianity. Nothing can destroy the evidence of testimony in any case but a proof or

that such persons would have undertaken so hazardous an employment, if beforehand they had foreseen what they must have undergone for it. But now the Apostles did foreknow that bonds and imprisonment, nay, death itself, must be undergone in a violent manner, for the sake of the doctrine which they preached; yet, notwithstanding all this, they go boldly and with resolution on with their work, and give not over because of any hardships and persecutions they met withal. One of the chiefest of them, St. Peter, and as forward as any in preaching the Gospel, had the very manner of his death foretold by Christ Himself, before His ascension; yet soon after we find him preaching Christ in the midst of those who had crucified Him, telling them to their faces the greatness of their sin in it, and appealing to the miracles which Christ had done among them, and “bidding them repent and believe in him whom they had crucified, if ever they would be saved” (Acts ii. 22, 23, 38; iii. 13, 14, 15, 19; iv. 5):

probability that persons are not competent judges of the facts to which they give testimony, or that they *are actually* under some direct influence in giving it in such particular case. Till this be made out, the natural laws of human action require that testimony be admitted. It can never be sufficient to overthrow direct historical evidence, indolently to say that there are so many principles from whence men are liable to be deceived themselves, and disposed to deceive others, especially in matters of religion, that one knows not what to believe.”—*Butler's Analogy*, Part ii., chap. vii., § B.

and this he did, not only among the people who gave their consent to the crucifying of Christ, but soon after, being summoned together with John before the Court of the Sanhedrim (probably the very same which not long before had sentenced Christ to death) for miracles wrought by them, with what incredible boldness doth he to their faces tell them of their murdering Christ; and withal, that there was no other way to salvation but by Him whom they had crucified! "Be it known unto you all [saith Peter to the Sanhedrim] and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ whom ye have crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts iv. 10, 12.) What an heroic freedom of spirit appears in these words! what magnanimity and courage was there now in that person, who durst in the face of this court tell them of their murder, and that there was no salvation but by Him whom they had crucified! Well might they wonder at the boldness of the men who feared not the same death which they had so lately brought their Lord and Master to.

Neither was this singly the case of Peter and John, but all the rest of the Apostles undertook their work with the same resolution to undergo the greatest hardships in the world for the sake

of the truths they preached. And accordingly, as far as ecclesiastical history can ascertain us of it, they did, all but John (and that to make good the prediction of Christ, John xxi. 22) suffer violent deaths by the hands of those who persecuted them merely for their doctrine. And which is most observable, when Christ designed them first of all for this work, He told them beforehand of reproaches, persecutions, all manner of hardships, nay, of death itself, which they must undergo for His sake. (Matt. x. 17, 18, 21, 22, 28.) All that He gave them by way of encouragement was, that men could only kill the body and not the soul, and therefore that they should fear Him only who could destroy both body and soul in hell; all the support they had, was an expectation in another world, and that animated them to go through all the hardships of this. Where do we ever read of any such boldness and courage in the most knowing philosophers of the heathens? With what faintness and misgiving of mind doth Socrates speak in his famous discourse, supposed to be made by him before his death? (Plato in Phæd.) How uncertainly doth he speak of a state of immortality? And yet in all probability Plato set it forth with all advantages imaginable. Where do we ever find that ever any of the great friends of Socrates who were present at his death, as Phædo, Cebes, Crito, and Simmias, durst enter the Areopagus, and condemn them there for the mur-

der of Socrates, though this would be far short of what the Apostles did? Why were they not so charitable as to inform the world better of those grand truths of the being of God and immortality of souls, if at least they were fully convinced of them themselves? Why did not Plato at least speak out, and tell the world the truth, and not disguise his discourses under feigned names, the better to avoid accusation and the fate of Socrates? It may not be an improbable conjecture that the death of Socrates was the foundation of the academy: I mean of that cautious doctrine of withholding assent, and being both pro and con, sometimes of this side, and sometimes of that, for Socrates' death made all his friends very fearful of being too dogmatical. And Plato himself had too much riches, and withal too much of a courtier in him, to hazard the dear prison of his soul, viz., his body, merely for an ethereal vehicle. He had rather let his soul flutter up and down in terrestrial matter, or the cage it was pent up in, than hazard too violent an opening of it by the hands of the Areopagus. And the great Roman orator, among the rest of Plato's sentiments, had learned this too; for although in his discourses he hath many times sufficiently laid open the folly of the heathen worship and theology, yet he knows not how to bring himself off safe enough with the people, and will be sure to be dogmatical only in this—that nothing is to be innovated in the reli-

gion of a commonwealth, and that the customs of our ancestors are inviolably to be observed.

These principles, had they been as true as they were safe for the persons who spake them, the Christian religion had never gained any entertainment in the world; for wherever it came it was looked on as an innovation, and therefore was shrewdly suspected by the governors of commonwealths, and the preachers of it punished as factious and seditious persons, which was all the pretext the wise politicians of the world had for their cruel and inhuman persecutions of such multitudes of peaceable and innocent Christians. Now, when these things were foretold by the Apostles themselves before their going abroad so plainly, that with the same faith they did believe the doctrine they preached to be true, they must believe that all these things should come to pass, what courage and magnanimity of spirit was it in them thus to encounter dangers, and, as it were, court the flames? Nay, and before the time was come that they must die, to seal the truth of their doctrine, their whole life was a continual peregrination, wherein they were encountered with perils and dangers on every side. And one of the most painful and successful Apostles, St. Paul (2 Cor. vi. 4, 5, 8, 9) hath given such a large inventory of his perils, that the very reading of them were enough to undo a poor Epicurean philosopher, and at once to spoil

him of the two pillars of his happiness—the quietness of his mind and ease of his body. Thus we see what a hazardous employment that was which the Apostles went upon, and that it was such as they very well understood the difficulty of before they set upon it.

B. Motive of the Apostles.

We cannot find out any rational *motive* which could carry them through so hazardous an employment, but the full conviction of their minds of the undoubted truth and certainty of the doctrine which they delivered.* Could they be led by ambition and vainglory who met with such reproaches wherever they went, and not only persecutions of the tongue, but the sharper ones of the hands, too? We never read of any but the primitive Christians who were

* That the Christian religion is an historical religion, one based on events which have happened, not on opinions or discoveries which have been held or made, is the fact which gives all the force to the following argument. The martyrs did not die for a creed, but for one whom they had seen, or whose name and works were yet fresh in the Church's memory. And those who argue that the New Testament was not known as such for several hundred years after Christ, would do well to answer the question—For what did the primitive martyrs die? and if not for the truth of the facts recorded in the Gospels, for what, then? It is by thus setting themselves to give any other historical explanation of the conduct of the primitive Christians, that unbelievers may become best aware of the shadowy and unsubstantial character of their negative hypothesis.—ED.

ambitious of being martyrs, and thought long till they were in the flames; which made Arrius Antonius, being Pro-consul of Asia, when Christians in multitudes beset his tribunal and thronged in to be condemned, say to them, "O miserable people, had ye not ways enough to end your lives at home, but ye must crowd for an execution!" (Tertull. ad Scapul. c. 5.) This was a higher ambition by far than any of the heathen philosophers ever reached to, who were, as Tertullian expresseth it, "Insatiable thirsters after the honour and eloquence of the world" (Idem Apolog. c. 47); but the spirit of a Christian did soar too high to quarry on so mean a prey.

When the more sober heathens had taken a stricter notice of the carriages and lives of the preachers of the Gospel and all their genuine followers, they, instead of the common and rude name of impostors, gave them a more civil title of philosophers, and looked upon their doctrine as a sublimer kind of philosophy, because the philosophers pretended so much to moral virtues which they saw the Christians so excellent in; but, as Tertullian replies, "The devil was never afraid of a philosopher, nor were diseases cured by the touch of a philosophic pallium." There was something more Divine in Christians than in the grave philosophers; and that not only in reference to their lives, and the Divine power which was seen in them, but in reference to the truth and certainty

of their doctrine, it being a true character given of both by that same excellent writer in behalf of the Christians of his time: "What the philosophers desired only, the Christians enjoy, which was Truth;"* and, as he elsewhere more fully speaks, "Truth is the philosopher's mistress, which by courting he vitiates and corrupts, looking at nothing but his own glory; but truth is the Christian's matron, whose directions he observes and follows, because he regards no glory but that to come."

And to let them further see what a difference there was between a Christian and a philosopher, he concludes that discourse with these words: "As much distance as there is between Greece and heaven, between applause and eternal glory, between words and things, between building and destroying, between truth and error, between a plagiary and corrupter of truth and a preserver and advancer of it; so much is there between a philosopher and a Christian."† The heathens might suspect indeed some kind of affinity be-

* "Mimice philosophi affectant veritatem, et affectando corrumpunt, ut qui gloriam captant; Christiani eam necessario appetunt, et integri præstant, ut qui salutis suæ curant."—Idem *Apol.* c. 46.

† "Quid adeo simile philosophus et Christianus? Græciæ Discipulus et cæli? famæ negotiator et vitæ? verborum et factorum operator? rerum ædificator et destructor? amicus et inimicus erroris? veritatis interpolator et integrator? furator ejus et custos."—Idem *Conclus.*

tween the first preachers of the Gospel and the ancient Sophists of Greece, because of their frequent going from place to place, and pretending a kind of enthusiasm as they did: but as much difference as there is between a knight-errant and Hercules, that and much greater there is between a Greek Sophist and an Apostle. Socrates hath excellently discovered the vanity and futility of those persons under the persons of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, and so likewise in his Protagoras; their intent was only to catch their adversaries in a net, to entangle them with some captious question or other. But how vastly different from this was the design of the Apostles, who abhorred those endless contentions which then were in the heathen world, and came to show them that truth which was revealed, with the sole intent of making them better men here, and showing them the way to eternal life hereafter.

We see the Apostles were not carried forth by any mean and vulgar motives, neither did they drive on any private ends of their own; all that they minded was the promoting of the doctrine which they preached. Nay, they accounted no hazards comparable to the advantage which the world enjoyed through the propagation of the Christian religion. This showed a truly noble and generous spirit in them, which would not be hindered from doing the world good though they

found so bad entertainment from it; yea, they rejoiced in the greatest sufferings which they underwent in so good a cause; wherein those primitive Christians who were the genuine followers of the Apostles did so far imitate them, that they gave the judges thanks that they thought them worthy to lose their lives in a cause which they had reason to triumph in though they died for it. And when any of them were apprehended, they discovered so little fear of punishment, that nothing troubled them so much as that they had been Christians no sooner, as one of their number speaks. And when the heathens usually scoffed at them, and called them Sarmenitii and Semaxii, because they were burned upon the cross, one of them, in the name of the rest, answers, "The cross was only their triumphant chariot, which carried them sooner to heaven."*

Now this courage and resolution of spirit which was seen in the first planters of Christianity in the world, made all serious and inquisitive persons look more narrowly into those things which made men slight so much the common bug-bears of human nature, sufferings, and death. "These sufferings made men inquire; this inquiry made them believe; that belief made them as willing to suffer themselves as they had seen others to do it

* "Hic est habitus victoriæ nostræ, hæc palmata vestis, tali curru triumphamus."—(Tertullian, Apol. c. 5.)

before them.”* Thus it appeared to be true in them. “The cruelty of their enemies did but increase their number; the harvest of their pretended justice was but the seed-time of Christianity, and no seed was so fruitful as that which was steeped in the blood of martyrs.”† Thence Justin Martyr ingeniously saith of himself, that while he was a Platonic philosopher he derided and scoffed at the Christians; but when he considered their great courage and constancy in dying for their profession, he could not think those could possibly be men wicked and voluptuous, who, when offers of life were made them, would rather choose death than deny Christ. By which he found plainly that there was a higher spirit in Christianity than could be obtained by the sublime notions and speculations of Plato, and that a poor ignorant Christian would do and suffer more for the sake of Christ than any of the Academy in defence of their master, Plato.

Now, since all men naturally abhor sufferings,

* *Quis enim non contemplatione ejus concutitur, ad requiring quid intus in re sit? quis non ubi requisivit accedit? ubi accessit pati exoptat?*—(Id. ib.)

† It is needless to adduce evidence of the sufferings of the early Christians for the sake of the faith. The reader may consult “Paley’s Evidences,” chapter ii., for examples from Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal, Pliny, Martial, Epictetus, &c. Any ecclesiastical historian will supply the details of these sufferings, willingly endured for the Gospel. See, for example, Canon Robertson’s *History*, Vol. I., pages 4, 5, 12, 29, 67, 70, &c.—ED.

what is it which should so powerfully alter the nature and disposition of Christians above all other persons, that they alone should seem to have forgot humanity, in that, not only with patience, but with joy, they endured torments and abode the flames? What! were they all possessed with a far more than stoical apathy, that no sense of pain could work at all upon them? or were they all besotted and infatuated persons that did not know what it was they underwent? It is true some of the more blind and wilful heathens derided them as such; but who were the more infatuated let any sober person judge: they who slighted and rejected a doctrine of so great concernment, which came attested with so much resolution and courage in the professors of it; or they who were so far persuaded of the truth of it that they would rather die than deny it? "They were not ashamed to believe in the blood of Christ, even when their own blood ran down before their eyes, and confess Christ with their mouths, when their bodies were upon the rack."* Certainly, then, there were some very powerful and convincing arguments which buoyed up the spirits of true Christians in that deluge of sufferings which they were to swim through. It must be a strong and well-grounded faith which would hold out under so great trials,

* "Dicimus et palam dicimus, et vobis torquentibus lacerati et cruenti vociferamur, Deum colimus per Christum."—(Tertulian, Apol. c. 21.)

and they could not be at a loss for the most persuasive motives to faith, who were so ready to give an account to others of the hope that was in them, and to persuade all other persons to the embracing of it. With what face and confidence otherwise could they persuade men to embrace a doctrine so dangerous as that was, had there not been motives sufficient to bear up against the weight of sufferings, and arguments persuasive enough to convince them of the undoubted certainty of that doctrine which they encouraged them to believe.

*C. The Testimony of the Apostles that of
Eye-witnesses.*

Now that which appears to have been the main ground of satisfaction to the primitive Christians as to the truth and certainty of the doctrine of Christ was this, that the doctrine of the Gospel was at first delivered to the world by those persons who were themselves *eye-witnesses* of the miracles which our Saviour wrought in confirmation of the truth of what he spake.* They were persons who had been themselves present, not only to hear most of our Saviour's admirable discourses

* The apparent exception is the case of St. Paul; but we are distinctly told—(1.) That he was not numbered, as Matthias was, among the twelve; and (2.) That Christ did appear to him risen and in glory, and thus made him an eye-witness of the resurrection in its essential fact. See Acts ix. 17, and xxii. 14; 1 Cor. ix. 1; xxv. 8.—ED.

when he was in the world, but to see those glorious things which were done by him to make it appear that he was immediately sent from God. Let us now appeal to our own faculties, and examine a little what rational evidence could possibly be desired that the doctrine of the Gospel was true which God did not afford to the world? What could the persons who were the auditors of our Saviour desire more as an evidence that he came from God than his doing such things as were certainly above any created power, and therefore must needs be Divine, and that in confirmation of the noblest doctrines which the world has ever heard? What could other persons desire more, who were not present at the doing of these miracles, but that the report of them should be conveyed to them in an undoubted manner by persons who were eye-witnesses of them, and who made it appear to the world that they were far from any intention of deceiving it? Now this makes the Apostles themselves in their own writings (though they were divinely inspired) appeal to the rational evidence of the truth of the things, in that they were delivered by them who were eye-witnesses of them. Thus St. Peter speaks to the dispersed Jews: "For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty." (2 Peter i. 16.) The power and coming of Christ which the Apostle speaks of

was not, as some improbably conceive, either his general coming to judgment on the world, or his particular coming upon the nation of the Jews ; but by an hendiadis, by his power and coming is meant his powerful appearance in the world, whereby he mightily discovered himself to be the Son of God.* Now this, saith the Apostle, was no cunning fable like the heathen mythology concerning their gods, “for,” saith he, “we ourselves who declare these things were eye-witnesses ; we fully understood this great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, for we saw that great majesty which attended him in all he spake or did ; we saw all those great things of God, which were manifest in him, all those miraculous operations which were wrought by him.” (Acts ii. 11.) Therefore, as this was a great confirmation of the faith of the Apostles themselves that they saw all these things, so we see it was of great concernment to the world in order to their belief that the Gospel was no cunningly-devised fable or myth, in that it was delivered by such as were eye-witnesses of what they declared.

To the same purpose St. John speaks, to make

* This interpretation of Stillingfleet is supported by Bengel (*majestatem præsentissimam*). But some commentators refer *παρουσίαν* to the glorious second Advent. It seems to me that the two are in fact one, that the historical and prophetic interpretation meet in one, when we remember that the Transfiguration which is spoken of, was a present exhibition of a future glorious coming.—ED.

it appear how true what they delivered was, in the entrance of his Epistle: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us). That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you." (1 John i. 1-3.) We see what great force and weight the Apostle lays upon this, that they delivered nothing but what they had seen and heard; as they heard the doctrine of Christ, so they saw the miracles which he wrought in confirmation of it. St. Luke likewise, in the beginning of his Gospel, declares that he intended to write nothing but "what he had a perfect understanding of from persons who had been eye-witnesses and instruments themselves in part of what was written" (Luke i. 1-3); for, being matters of fact, there could be no stronger proof of them than by such who were eye-witnesses of what they spake.

And this personal witness we find the Apostles themselves very cautious about in the choice of a new Apostle in the room of Judas. "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken from us, must

one be ordained to be a witness of his resurrection." (Acts i. 21, 22.) For, because Christ "was mightily declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead," therefore we find the Apostles so frequently attesting the truth of the resurrection of Christ, and that themselves were eye-witnesses of it. "This Jesus," saith Peter, "hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." (Acts ii. 32; iii. 15.) And again, "And killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised up from the dead, whereof we are witnesses;" and both Peter and John to the Sanhedrim: "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts iv. 20.) And the whole college of Apostles afterwards: "And we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." (Acts v. 32.) In which words they give him that twofold rational evidence which did manifest the undoubted truth of what they spake; for they delivered nothing but what themselves were witnesses of, and withal was declared to be true by the power of the Holy Ghost in the miracles which were wrought by and upon believers. Afterwards we read the sum of the Apostles' preaching, and the manner used by them to persuade men of the truth of it, in the words of Peter to Cornelius and his company: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that

were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him : And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree : Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead." (Acts x. 39, 40-42.) By all which we see what care God was pleased to take for the satisfaction of the world in point of rational evidence as to the truth of the matters which were discovered concerning our Saviour, Christ, because he made choice of such persons to be the preachers and writers of these things as were best able to satisfy the world about them—viz., such as had been eye-witnesses of them.

Now, in order to the making it more fully evident what strength there was in this testimony given by the Apostles to the miracles of Christ, we shall more fully manifest the rational evidence which attended it in these following propositions :

PROP. I.—When the truth of a doctrine depends upon a matter of fact, the truth of the doctrine is sufficiently manifested if the matter of fact be proved in the highest way it is capable of.

Thus it is in reference to the doctrine of Christ ; for the truth of that is so interwoven with the truth of the story of Christ, that, if the relations concerning Christ be true, his doctrine must needs be Divine and infallible. For if it be undoubtedly true that there was such a person as Jesus born at Bethlehem, who did many miracles, spake so noble preaching as to God, and man's duty, and at last suffered the death of the cross, and after he had lain three days in the grave rose again from the dead, what reason imaginable can I have to question but that the testimony of this person was certainly Divine, and consequently whatever he preached to the world was most certain and undoubted truth? So that if we have clear evidence as to the truth of these facts concerning our Saviour, we must likewise believe his doctrine, which came attested with such pregnant evidences of a Divine commission which he had from God to the world. No prince can think he hath any reason to refuse audience to an ambassador when he finds his credentials such as he may rely upon, although himself doth not see the sealing of them ; much less reason have we to question the truth of the doctrine of the Gospel if we have sufficient evidence of the truth of the matters of fact concerning Christ in such a way as those things are capable of being proved.*

* This position of the author may be indefinitely strengthened by observing the force of a concurrence or congruity of

PROP. II.—The greatest evidence which can be given to a matter of fact is the attesting of it by those persons who were eye-witnesses of it. This is the foundation whereon the firmest assent is built as to any matter of fact; for although we conceive we have reason to suspect the truth of a story as long as it is conveyed only in a general way by an uncertain tradition, yet when it comes to be attested from the first by a sufficient number of credible persons, who profess themselves the eye-witnesses of it, it is accounted an unreasonable thing to distrust any longer the truth of it, evidence. For the miracles strengthen and confirm the doctrine, the doctrine exhibits the character of Christ, the mercy of his works adds force to the evidence of their might, while the fact that all was foretold increases the resulting conviction. The argument from the force of congruity has been ably stated by Mr. Isaac Taylor. Having reminded us that while miracles would be received with gaping credulity by mediæval crowds, would simply astound and perhaps drive to madness a person of the modern sophisticated scientific temper, but would come harmoniously and helpfully in any age to one occupied supremely in conversing with the Infinite, he says, "The miracles of the Evangelic history come to us with the force of CONGRUITY, just so far as we can bring ourselves morally within the splendour of those eternal verities which are of the substance of the Gospel. While we stand remote from that illuminated field, they are to us only a galling perplexity; for we can neither rid ourselves of the evidence that attests them, nor are prepared to yield ourselves to it."—(*Restoration of Belief*, p. 224.) "Miracles," says Rev. T. R. Birks, "are in every case fulfilments of a higher law of God's moral government, which may be discerned in them more or less clearly when the understanding has been purified by faith and prayer, and has learned to meditate with reverence on the ways of the Most

especially in these two cases—(*a.*) When the matter they bear witness to is a thing which they might easily and clearly perceive. (*β.*) When many witnesses exactly agree in the same testimony.

a. When the matter itself is of that nature that it may be fully perceived by those who saw it: *i.e.*, if it be a common object of sense. And thus it certainly was as to the person and actions of Jesus Christ.* For he was of the same nature with mankind; and they had as great evidence that they conversed with Jesus Christ in the flesh, as

High.” If we may venture to hazard a speculation on so abstruse a subject, is it not possible that the Divine Author of the Old and New Testaments chose the miraculous evidence in preference to any other, because he addressed an unsophisticated age, and one which had not yet learned to say that miracles violated nature and all established law? Were the same Being to bring in now a new religion (which we know He will not), it is conceivable that He might take other than openly miraculous means of evidencing it. He might present us with solutions of all our metaphysical difficulties, and with practical plans of relieving existing evils. He might, in fact, appeal to the eye of the mind, and not to that of sense.

And yet, although this is conceivable, two things may be added—1. That in the strict sense even this revelation would be miraculous, and if it did not go contrary to the known course of physical nature, it would be a miracle in the metaphysical world. 2. This metaphysical proof would only be for philosophers. The evidence of sight is what the common folk would still rely on most. And it is hard to conceive by what other means a certainty of a Divine origin could be guaranteed to the majority.—ED.

* In Mahometanism the miracles were secret, and had to be received as objects of faith, not as helps to faith.—ED.

we can have that we converse one with another. The miracles of Christ were real and visible miracles ; they could be no illusions of senses, nor deceits of their eyes ; the man who was born blind and cured by our Saviour was known to have been born blind through all the country, and his cure was afterwards as public as his blindness before, and acknowledged by the greatest enemies of Christ at the time of its being done. (John ix. 26 ; Luke vii. 12.) When Christ raised up the dead man at Nain, it was before much people, and such persons, in all probability, as were many of them present at his death. But lest there might be any suspicion as to him, that he was not really dead, the case is plain and beyond all dispute in Lazarus, who had been, to the knowledge of all persons thereabouts, dead four days ; here could be no deceit at all when the stone was rolled away, and Lazarus came forth in the presence of them all.*

* The raising of Lazarus was just as incomprehensible when it first happened as it is now. It needed no modern *savans* to tell us that a state of death is, according to the known laws of nature, irreversible. The rudest peasant of India was just as good a judge of this miracle as we could be, and was just as likely to be astonished by it. But we do not find that the least effort was made to *deny* the fact of this resurrection. On the contrary, in the assembly of Pharisees summoned to consider the matter, it was admitted "that this man doeth many miracles." (John xi. 47.) They counselled to put him to death, not to refute him or expose him. No effort whatever was made, then or afterwards, to deny what had happened. And we find by the sequel, that the matter became widely known, and the

(John xi. 39.) And yet further, the death and passion of our Saviour was a plain object of sense done in presence of his greatest adversaries. The soldiers themselves were sufficient witnesses of his being really dead, when they came to break his bones, and spared him because they saw he was dead already. At his resurrection the stone was rolled away from the sepulchre and no body found therein, although the sepulchre was guarded by soldiers, and the disciples of Christ all so fearful, that they were dispersed up and down in several places. And that it was a real body which he rose withal appears by Thomas's scrupulosity and unbelief, "who would not believe unless he might put his hands into the hole of his side, and see in his hands the print of the nails" (John xx. 25, 27); now our Saviour, condescending so far as to satisfy the incredulity of St. Thomas, hath made it thereby evident that the body which our Saviour rose from

people crowded in to witness so wonderful a spectacle as a man living who had been dead and buried; so much so, that ere long Lazarus, too, was involved in the plot of assassination. In all this we have the most convincing evidence that there was no denying the reality of the miracle. Need we point out how far-fetched and incredible is the hypothesis (upheld by M. Renan and others), that the so-called resurrection was a conspiracy between Lazarus, his sisters, and the Lord, to lay him (sick, but not dead) in the tomb, in order that a miracle might seem to have been performed. We may well believe, that to lay a man, known to be seriously ill, in a sepulchre for four days, would be the surest way to kill him, and the last plan his family would possibly have resorted to to give Christ honour.

the grave with was the same individual body which before was crucified and buried in the sepulchre. And we find all the Apostles together upon our Saviour's appearance to them after his resurrection, so far from being credulous in embracing a phantasm instead of Christ, that they suspected it was either a mere phantasm, or an evil spirit which appeared among them; upon which it is said, "They were terrified and affrighted, and supposed they had seen a spirit" (Luke xxiv. 37); which our Saviour could not beat them off from, but by appealing to the judgment of their senses, "Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have" (Luke xxiv. 39); and afterwards more fully to convince them, "he did eat in the midst of them." (Luke xxiv. 43.) Now the more suspicious and incredulous the Apostles themselves at first were, the greater evidence is it how far they were from any design of abusing the world in what they after preached unto it, and what strong conviction there was in the thing itself, which was able to satisfy such scrupulous and suspicious persons.*

* It is well to remember this. Too often, in modern times, the attempt has been made to ridicule the witness of the Apostles, by accusing them of a hasty and uncritical credulity. But if there be any outline of historical truth in the narrative of their conduct which is preserved to us in the Gospels, the very contrary was their habit. A slowness to believe, which Christ rebuked as "hardness of heart," made them cautious, and the instance of St. Thomas is but a strong example of the incredulity of all. (See Luke xxiv. 25; Mark vi. 52; and viii.

β. When many witnesses concur in the same testimony. Nothing can disparage more the truth of a testimony than the counter-witness of such as were present at the same actions; but when all the witnesses fully agree not only in the substance, but in all material circumstances of the story, what ground or reason can there be to suspect a forgery or design in it, especially when the persons cannot by any fears or threatenings be brought to vary from each other in it? Thus it is in our present case, we find no real dissent at all mentioned either as to the birth, miracles, life, death, or resurrection of Jesus Christ; all the witnesses attest the same things, though writing in different

17, 18; and xvi. 14.) Moreover, they were not persons educated in the midst of miracles, to whom, therefore, there was no difficulty in believing them, for several centuries had gone by since a prophet, or worker of miracles, had arisen in Judea, and it was acknowledged by all that the power of miracles had been lost. It is quite another thing to accuse the Christian Church two or three centuries later of credulity. But this was because the Church had been trained by witnessing Apostolic miracles, to give too uncritical attention to pretenders. In the case of miracles, much familiarity breeds credulity. The rarity of miracles is the best guarantee for their truth, because it prompts to close, reluctant inquiries. It is important to remember that *we* have ourselves, to a certain extent, the power of testing the evidence of the disciples, by observing the *character* of the miracles they record. Did they describe fantastic, vindictive, or useless works, we should seriously question their assertion; but the sobriety of their records looks so little like the wild credulity of ignorance, or the composition of falsehood, that our judgment assents to their's, and we become, as it were, confirmatory witnesses of their narratives.—ED.

places, and upon different occasions; no alteration appears in the story, out of any design of pleasing or gratifying any persons by it. Most of our Saviour's miracles, not only his Apostles, but the people and his very enemies were witnesses of, whose posterity to this day dare not deny the truth of the works which were wrought by him. And for his resurrection, it would be very strange that five hundred persons should all agree in the same thing, and that no torments or death could bring any of them to deny the truth of it, had there not been the greatest certainty in it.

PROP. III.—There can be no reason to suspect a testimony which is given by eye-witnesses, but either from questioning their *knowledge* of the things they spake of, or their *fidelity* in reporting them. Now, there is not the least ground to doubt either of these, in reference to those persons who gave testimony to the world concerning the person and actions of our blessed Saviour.

For first, they were such as were intimately conversant both with the person and actions of Jesus Christ, whom he had chosen and trained up for that very end, that they might be sufficiently qualified to acquaint the world with the truth of things concerning himself after his resurrection from the dead. And accordingly they followed him up and down wheresoever he went; they were with him in his solitudes and retirements, and had

thereby occasion to observe all his actions, and to take notice of the unspotted innocence of his life. Some of his disciples were with him in his transfiguration, others in his agony and bloody sweat; they heard the expressions which came from his mouth; in all which he discovered a wonderful submission to the will of God, and a great readiness of mind to suffer for the good of the world. Therefore the first thing cannot at all be questioned: their means of knowing the truth of what they spake.

Neither, secondly, is there any reason* to suspect their *fidelity* in reporting what they knew: For *a.* the truth of this doctrine wrought so far upon them, that they parted with all their worldly subsistence for the sake of it. Although their

* The mere general assertion that marvellous stories are improbable is not sufficient to overthrow positive evidence; neither is it so regarded by courts of justice. Distinct counter-evidence, or else proof of absolute incredibility in the particular case must be adduced, as shown by *Butler's Analogy*, Pt. ii. chap. vii. In almost all books written to impugn Divine history or Divine revelation, we meet with innumerable *general* accusations. But these have no weight whatever when opposed by distinct evidence. For example, a writer disputes the genuineness of our Gospels by the assertion, that "many books, such as the 'Sybilline Oracles,' were palmed on the Church in the second century." Will any reasonable man allow such an assertion to be sufficient to overthrow the positive testimonies to the previous existence and authenticity of our Gospels, which Justin Martyr, Origen, and Irenæus, to say nothing of the Apostolic Fathers, give? It is only when the mind is strongly prejudiced against the conclusions of Christianity, that this mode of argument can hold good.—ED.

riches were not great, yet their way of subsistence in the world was necessary; they left their houses, their wives and children, and all for Christ, and that not to gain any higher preferments in this world (which had they done, it would have rendered their design suspicious to the curious and inquisitive world), but they let go at least a quiet and easy life for one most troublesome and dangerous.* So that it is not how much they parted withal, but how freely they did it, and with what cheerfulness they underwent disgraces, persecutions, nay death itself, for the sake of the Gospel. Now, can it be imagined, that ever men were so prodigal of their ease and lives as to throw both of them away upon a thing which themselves were not fully assured of the truth of? It had been

* Though the Christian religion has, in more modern times, given fortunes to bishops and temporal power to popes, it commenced in the opposite way. The Son of Man had not where to lay his head, and, for several generations, the servants were, in this respect, scarce better off than their Lord. Previous to the ascension of Jesus, there seems to have been in the minds of at least some of the Apostles strong expectations of a shortly appearing temporal kingdom, but no trace of that view appears after the effusion of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost. The heavenly witness assured them that the cross was the only glory to which they were to aspire, and that tribulations and imprisonments were to be their normal condition. This fortifies Dr. Stillingfleet's proposition, that we have no reason to question the Apostles' fidelity on the grounds of attributing to them ambitious motives. Judas may, indeed, be possibly accused of such (see Rev. W. Hanna's *Last Day of our Lord's Passion*, pp. 17, 18); but none of the rest can for a single moment.—ED.

the highest folly imaginable to have deceived themselves in a thing of so great moment to them, as the truth of that doctrine which they preached was, because all their hopes and happiness depended upon the truth of that doctrine.

Besides, what probability is there that men should lie for the sake of that religion which tells them that those which do so will not receive the reward which is promised to those who cordially adhere unto it? Nay, they declared themselves to be the most miserable of all persons "if their hopes were only in this present life." (1 Cor. xv. 19.) Can we now think that any who had the common reason of men, would part with all the contentments of this world and expose themselves to continual hazards, and at last undergo death itself, for the sake of something which was merely the fiction of their own brains? What should make them so sedulous and industrious in preaching such things, that they could say, "necessity was laid upon them, yea, woe was unto them if they preached not the Gospel" (1 Cor. ix. 16), when yet they saw so many woes attending them in the preaching of it, had there not been some more powerful attraction in the beauty and excellency of the doctrine which they preached, than in the ease and tranquillity of this present world? Thus we see the fidelity of the Apostles manifested in such a way as no other witnesses were ever yet willing to hazard theirs. And there-

fore Origen deservedly condemns Celsus of a ridiculous impertinency, when he would parallel the relations of Herodotus and Pindarus concerning Aristeus Proconnesius with those of the Apostles concerning Christ; for, saith he, "Did either of these two venture their lives upon the truth of what they writ concerning him, as the Apostles did to attest the truth of what they preached concerning our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?" (Origen. c. Celsum. l. 3.)

β. The fidelity of the Apostles is evident in their manner of reporting the things which they deliver. For if ever there may be anything gathered from the manner of expression concerning the particular temper and disposition of the person from whom it comes, we may certainly read the great fidelity in the Apostles from the peculiar manner of their expressing themselves to the world. Which they do—

(1.) With the greatest impartiality; not declaring only what was glorious and admirable to the world, but what they knew would be accounted foolishness by it. They who had sought only to have been admired for the rare discoveries which they brought to the world, would be sure to conceal anything which might be accounted ridiculous; but the Apostles fixed themselves most on what was most contemptible in the eyes of the world; and what they were most mocked and derided for, that they delighted most in the preaching of,

which was the cross of Christ.* Paul was so much in love with this, which was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks, “that he valued the knowledge of nothing else in comparison of the knowledge of Christ, and him crucified.” (1 Cor. ii. 2; Phil. iii. 8.) Nay, he elsewhere saith, “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ.” (Gal. vi. 14.)

What now should be the reason that they should rejoice in that most which was most despicable to

* In a sermon of Dr. Stillingfleet’s on Rom. i. 16, he opens up the same idea, showing how our Lord and his Apostles afforded by the simple and undignified character of their preaching an evidence of its truth. “Had Christ come into the world, *μετὰ πολλῆς φαντάσιας*, subduing kingdoms and nations unto him; had St. Paul been a general for the Gospel instead of an apostle for it, the great men of the world would then allow he had no cause to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, or of his employment in his Master’s work. But to preach a crucified Saviour amid the glories and triumphs of Rome, and a doctrine of so much simplicity and contempt among those who were the masters of it, and managed it with so much art and cunning; to persuade them to be followers of Christ in a holy life, who could not be followers of their own gods without debauchery and vice, seems to be an employment so liable to the greatest ridicule and contempt, that none but a great and resolved spirit would ever have undertaken it. For if our religion now can hardly escape the bitter scoffs and profane jests of men who pawn their souls to be accounted witty, what may we think it suffered then when it was accounted a part of their own religion to despise and reproach ours? Although St. Paul could not but be sensible how much the world despised him and his religion together, yet that was the great satisfaction of his mind that his religion had enabled him to despise the world as much.”—*Sermons of Bishop Stillingfleet, 1692.*

the world, had they not seen far greater truth and excellency in it than in the most sublime speculations concerning God or the souls of men in the school of Plato, or any other heathen philosophers? That all men should be bound, in order to their salvation, to believe in one who was crucified at Jerusalem, was a strange doctrine to the unbelieving world; but if the Apostles had but endeavoured to have suited their doctrine to the school of Plato, what rare persons might they have been accounted among the heathen philosophers! Had they only in general terms discoursed of the benignity of the Divine nature, and the manifestations of Divine goodness in the world; and that, in order to the bringing of the souls of men to a nearer participation of the Divine nature, the perfect idea of true goodness, and the express image of the person of God, and the resplendency of His glory, who had veiled Himself in human nature, and had everywhere scattered such beams of light and goodness as warmed and invigorated men with higher sentiments of God and themselves, and raised them up above the feculency of this terrestrial matter to breathe in a fresher air; and that after this incarnate Deity had spread abroad the wings of His love for a while upon this world, till by His gentle heat and incubation He had quickened the more pliable world to some degree of a Divine life, He then retreated back again into the superior world, and

put off that veil by which He made Himself known to those who are here confined to the prisons of their bodies; thus, I say, had the Apostles minded applause among the admired philosophers of the heathens, how easy had it been for them to have made some considerable additions to their highest speculations, and have left out anything which might seem so mean and contemptible as the death of the Son of God! But this they were so far from, that the main thing which they preached to the world was, the vanity of human wisdom without Christ, and the necessity of all men believing in that Jesus who was crucified at Jerusalem.

The Apostles, indeed, discovered very much, infinitely more than ever the most lofty Platonist could do, concerning the goodness and love of God to mankind; but that wherein they "manifested the love of God to the world" was, "that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16); and that "herein was the love of God manifested, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8); and that "this was a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." (1 Tim. i. 15.) They never dreamt of any Divine goodness which should make men happy without Christ. No; it was their design to persuade the world that all the communications of God's goodness to mankind were

wholly in and through Jesus Christ; and it is impossible that any should think otherwise, unless Plato knew more of the mind of God than our blessed Saviour, and Plotinus than St. Paul. Can we think now that the Apostles should hazard the reputation of their own wits so much as they did to the world, and be accounted babblers, and fools, and madmen, for preaching the way of salvation to be only by a person crucified between two thieves at Jerusalem, had they not been convinced not only of the truth but the importance of it, and that it concerned men as much to believe it as it did to avoid eternal misery? Did St. Paul preach ever the less the words of truth and soberness, because he was told to his face, "that his learning had made him mad?" But if he was "beside himself, it was for Christ;" and what wonder was it if the "love of Christ" in the Apostle should make him willing to lose his reputation for Him, seeing "Christ made himself of no reputation," that He might be in a capacity to do us good? We see the Apostles "were not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," because they knew "it was the power of God unto salvation;" and therefore neither in their preaching nor their writings would they omit any of those passages concerning our Saviour's death which might be accounted the most dishonourable to his person. This is certainly as great an evidence of their fidelity as can be expected; which makes Origen

say, "that the disciples of Christ writ all things with a great deal of candour and love of truth, not concealing from the world those passages of the life of Christ which would be accounted most foolish and ridiculous."

(2.) Again, the Apostles preached to the world with the greatest plainness and simplicity of speech. Those whose design is to impose upon the minds of men with some cunningly-devised fables, love as much ambiguity as ever Apollo did in his most winding oracles. Servius tells us that Jupiter Ammon was pictured with ram's horns, because his answers had as many turnings and windings as they had. Impostors always cast a mist of many dark and cloudy words before them; but when they are once brought into the open light, their vizard falls off, and their deformity appears. Such persons delight in soaring quite out of the apprehensions of those who follow them, and never think themselves better recompensed for their pains than when they are most admired and least understood. But never was Christianity more dishonoured, never did men depart further from the primitive type, than when they brought it from its native simplicity and plainness into a company of cloudy and insignificant expressions. The Apostles tell us they speak with "great plainness of speech" (2 Cor. iii. 12), and for that end purposely lay aside all excellency of words and human wisdom (1 Cor. ii. 1, 4), that men

might not have to seek for their meaning in a matter of so great moment; that the Gospel was hid to none but such as are lost, and whose eyes are blinded by the god of this world (1 Cor. iv. 3, 4); that the doctrine revealed by them is a light to direct us in our way to heaven, and a rule to walk by; and it is a strange property of light to be obscure, and of a rule to be crooked.

But it is not only evident from the Apostles' own affirmations that they laid aside all affected obscurity, ambiguous expressions, and philosophical terms wherein the world might have had to seek for what they were to believe, but it is likewise clear from the very nature of the doctrine they preached, and the design of their preaching of it. What need of rhetoric in plain truths? or affected phrases in giving evidence? How incongruous would obscure expressions have been to the design of saving souls by the foolishness of preaching? For if they had industriously spoken in their preaching above the capacities of those they spake to, they could never have converted a soul. But, saith the Apostle, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." (2 Cor. iv. 5.) If they had sought themselves or their own credit and reputation, there might have been some reason that they should have used the way of the Sophists among the Greeks, and by declamatory speeches have enhanced their esteem among the vulgar.

But the Apostles disowned and rejected all these vulgar artifices of mean and low-spirited men; they laid aside all those enticing words (*ἀνθρωπίνης σοφίας*) of the way of the heathen Sophists (1 Cor. ii. 4), and declared the testimony of God with spiritual evidence; they handled not the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commended themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Cor. iv. 2.) Now what could be so suitable to such a design as the greatest plainness and faithfulness in what they spake? We find in the testimony of the Apostles, as Origen speaks, "Nothing that is spurious or counterfeit, nothing savouring of the cunning craftiness of such as lie in wait to deceive; and," saith he, "it is impossible to think that men never bred up in the sophistry of the Greeks, nor experienced in the rhetorical insinuations used among them, could ever be able so suddenly to persuade the world to embrace that which had been a figment of their own brains." The truth is, the Apostles speak like men very confident of the truth of what they speak, and not like those who were fain to fetch in the help of all their topics, to find out some probable arguments to make men believe that which it is probable they did not believe themselves, which was most commonly the case of the great orators among the heathens. We find no pedantic flourishes, no flattering insinuations, no affected cadences, no

great care of the rising and falling of words in the several sentences, which make up so great a part of that which was accounted eloquence in the Apostles' time. These things were too mean a prey for the spirits of the Apostles to quarry upon; everything in them was grave and serious, every word had its due weight, every sentence brimful of spiritual matter, their whole discourse most becoming the majesty and authority of that spirit which they spake by.

And herein was seen a great part of the infinite wisdom of God in the choice He made of the persons who were to propagate the doctrine of Christ in the world, that they were not men who by reason of their great repute and fame in the world, might easily draw whole multitudes to embrace their dictates, but (that there might not be the least foundation for an implicit faith*)

* "*An implicit faith.*"—It should be clearly seen that there is a wide difference between receiving *evidence*, and receiving *doctrine*, with implicit faith. Evidences are the ground of faith, and are addressed to the eye, the ear, the judgment, the reasoning faculty of man. To receive them with implicit faith would be to deny that they are evidences at all, and to ignore the very object for which they were afforded (as is the case with the miracles of Mahomet). It is quite otherwise with the *truths* and *doctrines*, which these evidences are given to uphold and reveal. These are above the reach of sense, and sometimes of reason; they are emphatically "things not seen" (Heb. xi. 1), and *they* must be received with implicit faith. Faith takes its stand on the evidences of truth, but it takes the doctrines of religion simply on the credit and authority of their revealers, and is justified in doing so when

they were of so mean rank and condition in the world, that in all probability their names had never been heard of, had not their doctrine made them famous. To this purpose Origen excellently speaks: "I am of opinion that Jesus did purposely make use of such preachers of his doctrine, that there might be no place for suspicion that they came instructed with the art of sophistry; but that it might be manifest to all that would consider it, that there was nothing of design in those who discovered so much simplicity in their writings, and that they had a Divine power which was more efficacious than the greatest volubility of expressions or ornaments of speech, or the artifices which were used in the Grecian compositions."—(Origen. c. Cels. l. 3.)

(3.) The Apostles delivered their doctrine with the greatest openness and freedom of spirit; they did not give out one thing to the world, and another to their private disciples; but with great freedom and boldness declared their doctrine in the most public places, and before their greatest enemies. They knew they were looked on as deceivers by the world, but yet they knew themselves to be true. (2 Cor. vi. 8.) This is the usual requital good men have from the world, that they

once reason has ascertained that that revealer has made good his claim to be heard. Christians then have use for *reason* in weighing evidence, for *faith* in receiving revealed truth.
—ED.

are looked on as the greatest deceivers of it; if it be so with others, they have much less cause to wonder at it, when even He, who by one prophet is styled "the desire of nations" (Hag. ii. 7), is by another said "to be despised and rejected of men." (Isa. liii. 3.) And when Christ was in the world, He was called *ὁ πλάνος*, "the deceiver" (Matt. xxvii. 63); no wonder, then, if His disciples were accounted such, although they manifested their veracity by their open carriage and free speaking to the faces of their greatest adversaries.

The Apostles neither feared the Jews' skill in their law, nor the wisdom and subtilty of the Greeks: Saint Paul preacheth Christ openly among the Jews in their synagogues, and among the Athenians he encounters the Epicureans and Stoics, and preacheth to them Jesus and the resurrection. If the Apostles had anything of deceivers in them, as to the things they related concerning Christ (Acts xvii. 18), they would not certainly have spoken with so much confidence concerning Christ in the presence of those who had been His murderers; but we see they appealed to themselves, as to the miracles which He had wrought among them, and for His resurrection they were ready to lay down their lives in giving testimony to it. That His body was gone, was evident;* that the Apostles should take it away

* See Paley's admirable argument to prove that the presence or absence of the Lord's body are alike inexplicable on the anti-christian hypothesis.—Ed.

was impossible, considering what a guard of soldiers they had set upon it, and how timorous and fearful the Apostles were, that they fled upon Christ being apprehended. Now, what could it be could make such fearful persons afterwards so courageous and resolute as they were, had there not been some more than ordinary power to convince and encourage them?

(4.) The Apostles deliver their testimony with the greatest particularity as to all circumstances. They do not change or alter any of them upon different examinations before several persons; they all agree in the greatest constancy to themselves and uniformity with each other. As to matters of indifference, we find the Apostles very yielding and condescending; but as to anything which concerned their testimony, most constant and resolved. Had the Gospel been some cunningly-contrived fancy, it had been impossible but so many different persons, in such different places, and under such different conditions, would have varied as to some material circumstance of it; or else they would have been so wise as to have delivered it in general terms, without insisting much upon particular circumstances, which, if they had been false, might have been very easily disproved; but with what particular enumeration of circumstances do the Apostles preach Christ to the world? Peter tells the Jews that it was "Jesus of Nazareth whom he preached" (Acts

ii. 22); and lest they should think it was not the same person who rose again, with great boldness and freedom of spirit he saith to them, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts ii. 36.) Yea, that same individual person who was in the world, and died upon the cross, "is now become a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins." (Acts v. 31, 32.)

If there had been any ground of suspicion as to these things, who had been so able to disprove them, or so ready to do it, as those persons who had crucified Him? For we cannot conceive but those who had a hand in His death, would endeavour, by all possible means, to disprove His resurrection from the dead. For what a case were they like to be in, if those things which the Apostles so confidently preached were true? If Christ had all power now in His hands, and there were salvation in no other name, but only in His whom they had crucified, they were like to be in a most desperate condition; therefore, if any men can be supposed inquisitive after the truth of these circumstances, no doubt these were: and if they could have found the least flaw in their testimony, the world would soon have known of it; the Jews, who were then so much dispersed abroad, would have divulged it into all parts;

the Apostles would have been told of it as they preached Christ in the synagogues. And can we, in any reason, think but those Jews who persecuted Paul as he preached in the synagogues of Asia, and afterwards impeached him so openly in Jerusalem, would there inquire into all the circumstances concerning Christ, and all the other Jews would write to their friends at Jerusalem to be fully informed of those strange things which were told them openly in all places in their synagogues by men of their own nation and language, concerning one Jesus who was crucified and rose again from the dead? Had there been now any so much as plausible pretext that any of these circumstances were not true, can we think but that a people so unmeasurably given to their own ways and traditions, would in all places have vented anything that might have tended to the disparagement of Christ and His Apostles? But we see malice itself could not find any flaw in the Apostles' testimony; for if it had, we should certainly have heard of it, either from the Jews, or from the great opposers of Christianity among the heathens, who pretended to be curious and inquisitive persons, such as Celsus, Julian, Hierocles, and Porphyry were. What reason can we have, then, in the least, to suspect such a testimony, which passed so uncontrolled in that time when it was alone capable of being disproved, and men's interest and design would put them so much upon it?

PROP. IV. No testimony ought to be taken against a matter of fact thus attested, but from persons who had greater knowledge of the things attested, and manifest greater fidelity in reporting them. It is easy to make it appear, that supposing any persons at that time had contradicted the testimony of the Apostles concerning our Saviour, yet there had been no reason in the world to have hearkened to their testimony in opposition to that of the Apostles; and that on these accounts.* The Apostles witnessed the affirmative, which is more capable of being attested than any negative can be. The Apostles were more conversant with Christ than any other persons were, because they were chosen for that very end by Him to be constantly with Him: could any, therefore, be more capable of knowing the truth of all particulars concerning Christ than these were? Had there been any ground of suspicion concerning the design of Christ, why could not the Jews prevail with Judas to discover it as well as to betray His person? Judas had done but a good work, if Christ had been such an

* This proposition (iv.) is scarcely necessary to the argument. For it were sufficient to show that there *is* no counter-testimony, without going on to show that there could not be. In point of fact we can conceive the testimony of the Apostles overborne by men who should bring proof that they continually watched his conduct, and that the works which he did were done by the sleight of hand, or not done at all. But it is needless to say there is no such evidence.—ED.

impostor as the Jews blasphemously said He was : what made Judas, then, so little satisfied with his work, that he grew weary of his life upon it, and threw himself away in the most horrid despair ? No person certainly had been so fit to have been produced as a witness against Christ as Judas, who had been so long with Him, and had heard His speeches, and observed His conduct ; but he had not patience enough to stay after that horrid fact to be a witness against Him : nay, he was the greatest witness at that time for Him, when he who had betrayed Him came to the Sanhedrim when consulting about his death, and told them “ that he had sinned in betraying innocent blood.” (Matt. xxvii. 5.) What possible evidence could have been given more in behalf of our Saviour than that was, when a person so covetous as to betray his Master for thirty pieces of silver, was so weary of his bargain, that he comes and throws back the money, and declares the person innocent whom he had betrayed ? And this person, too, was such a one as knew our Saviour far better than any of the witnesses whom afterwards they suborned against Him, who yet contradicted each other ; and at last could produce nothing which, in the judgment of the heathen governor, could make him judge Christ worthy of death. The Apostles were freer from design than any counter-witness at that time could be ; we have already proved the Apostles could not possibly have any

other motive to affirm what they did, but full conviction of the truth of what they spake; but now, if any among the Jews at that time had asserted anything contrary to the Apostles, we have a clear account of it, and what motive might induce them to it, viz., the preserving of their honour and reputation with the people, the upholding their traditions, besides their open and declared enmity against Christ, without any sufficient reason at all for it; now, who would believe the testimony of the Scribes and Pharisees, who had so great authority among the people, which they were like to lose, if Christ's doctrine were true, before that of the Apostles, who parted with all for the sake of Christ, and ventured themselves wholly upon the truth of our Saviour's doctrine? None ever did so much to attest the negative as the Apostles did, to prove their fidelity as to the affirmative. Had sufficient counter-witness been timely produced, we cannot think the Apostles would have run so many continual hazards in preaching the things which related to the person and actions of Christ. Did ever any lay down their lives to undeceive the world, if the Apostles were guilty of abusing it?

PROP. V. Matters of fact being first believed on the account of eye-witnesses, and received with an universal and uncontrolled *assent* by all persons who have thought themselves concerned in know-

ing the truth of them, do yield a sufficient foundation for a firm assent to be built upon.* I take it for granted that there is sufficient foundation for a firm assent, where there can be no reason given to question the evidence; which, that there is not in this present case, will appear from these following considerations.

That the multitudes of those persons who did believe these things, had liberty and opportunity to be satisfied of the truth of them before they believed them. Therefore, no reason or motive can be assigned, on which they should be induced to believe these things, but the undoubted evidence

* The argument from the assent of many to the first preachers of the Gospel must not be confounded with the argument from the *success* of the Gospel. That is properly the ground and first step to this. The assent here spoken of is simply the assent to the *report of eye-witnesses in their declaration of miracles*, and above all of the resurrection, although in the fourth and fifth (δ and ϵ) heads the author branches off to more modern times. He here argues that numbers of persons would not in the face of death and in the view of no earthly inducement forsake their easy and comfortable religion for this vile and persecuted one, had there not been a marvellous evidence of the truth of the *miraculous narrative*, as distinguished from the faith and practice required by the Gospel. And this is a safe argument, chiefly (α .) Because it deals not with opinions but facts. (β .) Because all conceivable common motives drew men towards the opposite side, and inclined them to reject the Gospel. The argument from assent is parallel to this: We know that a hydraulic press has moved directly a thousand tons, therefore we may be satisfied of its efficacy and soundness: and the greater the opposed weight, the stronger our conviction.—ED.

of truth which went along with them. I confess, in Mahometanism a very great number of persons have for centuries continued in the belief of the doctrine of Mahomet; but then withal there is a sufficient account to be given of that, viz., the power of the sword, which keeps them in awe, and strictly forbids all the followers of Mahomet to dispute their religion at all, or compare it with any other. Therefore I can no more wonder at this, than I do to see so great a part of the world under the tyranny of the great Turk: neither, on the other side, do I wonder that such a multitude of those professing Christianity should, together with it, believe a great number of erroneous doctrines, and live in the practice of many gross superstitions, because I consider what a strange prevalency education hath upon softer spirits and more easy intellectuals, and what an awe an inquisition bears upon timorous and irresolved persons.

But now, when a great multitude of persons, sober and inquisitive, shall, contrary to the principles of their education, and without fear of any human force (which they beforehand see will persecute them), and after diligent inquiry made into the grounds on which they believe, forsake all their former persuasions, and resolvedly adhere to the truth of the doctrine propounded to them, though it cost them their lives; if this give us not reason to think this doctrine true, we must believe

mankind to be the most unhappy creatures in the world, that will, with so much resolution, part with all advantages of this life for the sake of one to come, if that be not undoubtedly certain, and the doctrine proposing it infallibly true.

It is an observable circumstance in the propagation of the Christian religion, that though God made choice at first of persons generally of mean rank and condition in the world to be preachers of the Gospel, thereby making it appear that our faith did not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, and therefore chose the weak things of the world to confound the strong (1 Cor. ii. 5; i. 27); yet soon after the Gospel was preached abroad in the world, we find persons of great place and reputation, of great parts and abilities, engaged in the profession of the Christian Faith.* In the history of the Acts we read of Sergius, a Proconsul, of Dionysius, the Areopagite, converted to the Faith, and in the following ages of the Church many persons of great esteem for their excellent learning and abilities. Justin Martyr, before he became a Christian, was conversant with all sects of Philosophers, Stoics, Peripatetics, Pythagoreans, and at last was a professed Pla-

* This is important. For it might be said only the credulous and uneducated were convinced. The conversion of educated men shows that the evidences were weighed and found good. Justin Martyr has no secular motive for conversion. (See for history of Justin, Robertson's *Eccl. Hist.*, Vol. I. ch. iii; *Neander*, Vol. II., Bohn's Edition.)

tonist, till he was converted from Plato to Christ, and then found that true which he speaks of in his dialogue with Trypho, that after all his inquiries into philosophy, speaking of the doctrine of Christ, "I found this at last to be the only sure and profitable philosophy." (Justin. Dialog. cum Tryph. p. 125, ed. Par.) And when Trypho after derides him as a man of very easy faith, who would leave the doctrine of Plato for that of Christ (for it seems by him the Jews then had a more favourable opinion of the state of Platonists than Christians), Justin is so far from being moved with such reproaches, that he tells him he would undertake to demonstrate to him, "That the Christians did not give credit to empty fables and unprovable assertions, but to such a doctrine as was full of a Divine spirit and power, and flourished with grace."

At Alexandria, moreover, we meet with a succession of excellent persons, all which were not only embracers themselves, but defenders of the Christian faith; for setting aside there Abilius, Justus, Cerdo, Eumenes, Marcus, Celadion, Agrippinus, Julianus, Demetrius, and others who flourished about the second century, I shall only fix on those persons who were famous inquirers after truth, and noted for excellency in heathen learning; yet these persons, after all their inquiries, found nothing to fix on but the Christian faith, and valued no other discovery of truth in compa-

ri-son with that. Such was Pantænus, who, as Eusebius tells us, was an excellent Stoic before he became a Christian, and was after so eminent a one, that, in imitation of the Apostles, he went into India to convert the inhabitants to the Christian faith, and at his return was made rector of the school at Alexandria; which, as the same author tells us, was much frequented by such as were "well skilled in human as well as Divine learning." (Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. v. c. 10.) How excellent Pantænus was in human learning, may appear in that Origen and Hierome both make his example their plea for their studying of it. (Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. vi. c. 20.) After him succeeded Clemens Alexandrinus, Pantænus's scholar, a person of great depth of learning, and exquisitely skilled in all heathen antiquities, as appears by his remaining writings. The learning of Origen is sufficiently known, which was in such great reputation in his own time, that not only Christians but philosophers flocked to his lectures at Alexandria, as Eusebius tells us, wherein he read the mathematics, and other parts of philosophy as well as the Scriptures (Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. vi. c. 18); and the same author informs us, that the philosophers did dedicate their books to him, and sometimes chose him as arbitrator between them in matters of dispute; and Porphyry himself, in his books against the Christians, vouchsafed a high encomium of Origen for his excellent learning.

In Origen's time Heraclas, a presbyter of Alexandria, for five years together frequented the schools of the philosophers, and put on the philosophic pallium, and was very conversant in the books of the Grecian learning. Besides these we read of Pierius and Achillas, two presbyters of Alexandria, who were, as Nicephorus Calistus speaks, persons well skilled in the Grecian learning and philosophy.

If from Alexandria we go now to Cæsarea, there we not only meet with a school of learning among the Christians, but with persons very eminent in all kinds of learning; such were the famous Pamphilus, and Eusebius, so great an admirer of him, that ever since he is called Eusebius Pamphili. At Antioch was Dorotheus, a person versed in all kinds of ingenious literature. Anatolius, Bishop of Laodicea, was one versed in geometry, astronomy, and all kind of philosophy, as well as the doctrine of Christ. Thus we see, in those early days of the Greek Church what excellent scholars many of those were who were zealous professors of Christianity; and concerning those of the Latin Church, I shall only mention Cyprian, Lactantius, Victorinus, Optatus, Hilarius, Tertullian, Arnobius, and Augustine. But as St. Austin well observes, "Though the Israelites went rich out of Egypt, yet it was their eating the Passover which saved them from destruction;" so, though these were accomplished with those perfections and riches of

the soul, the ornaments of learning, yet it was their eating the true Passover, which was Christ, by their adhering to His doctrine, which would be of more advantage to them, than all their accomplishments would be. Now then, since in the first ages of the Christian Church, we find not only innumerable multitudes of persons of great integrity and sobriety in their lives embracing the doctrine of Christ, but so many persons that were curious inquirers after the truth of things; we can certainly have no reason to distrust a testimony which was received in so unanimous a manner by persons as well able to judge of the truth of things, and as fearful of being deceived in reference to them, as any now in the world can be.

β . As this testimony was received by persons inquisitive after the truth of things, so the doctrine conveyed by it was a matter of the highest moment in the world: and therefore we cannot conceive but persons ordinarily inquisitive about other things would be more than ordinarily so about this, because their eternal welfare and happiness did depend upon it. All persons that are truly religious, must at least be allowed to be persons very inquisitive after the state and condition of their souls when they shall be dislodged from their bodies. And if we do but grant this, can we in any reason think that such a multitude of persons should continue venturing their souls

upon a testimony which they had no assurance of the truth of? And that none of all these persons, though men otherwise rational and judicious, should be able to discover the falsity of that doctrine they went upon, if at least any, upon consideration of it, can imagine it to be so?

γ. The multitude of these persons thus consenting in this testimony, could have no other inducements to this consent, but only their firm persuasion of the truth of the doctrine conveyed by it; because those who unanimously agree in this thing, were persons whose other designs and interests in this world differ as much as any men's do. If it had been only a consent of the Jews, there might have been some probable pretence to have suspected a matter of interest in it; but as to this thing, we find the Jews divided among themselves about it; and the stiffest deniers of the truth of it, do yet inviolably preserve those sacred records among them, from which the truth of the doctrine of Christ may be undoubtedly proved. Had the Christian religion been enforced upon the world by the Roman emperors at the time of its first promulgation, there would have been some suspicion of particular design in it; but it came with no other strength but the evidence of its own truth; yet it found hidden and strange entertainment among persons of all nations and degrees of men. In a short time it had eaten into the heart of the Roman empire, and made so

large a spread therein, that it made Tertullian say, "We have but newly appeared, and yet we have filled all places with our company, except only your temples."* What common tie could there be now to unite all these persons together, if we set aside the undoubted truth and certainty of the doctrine of Christ which was first preached to them by those who were eye-witnesses of Christ's actions, and had left sacred records behind them, containing the substance of the doctrine of Christ, and those admirable instructions which were their only certain guides in the way to heaven?†

δ. Because many persons do join in this consent with true Christians, who yet could heartily wish that the doctrine of Christianity were not true. Such are all those persons who are sensual in their lives, and walk not according to the rules of the Gospel, yet dare not question or deny the truth of it. Such who could heartily wish there were

* "Hesterni sumus, et vestra omnia implevimus, urbes, insulas, castella, municipia, conciliabula, castra ipsa, tribus, decurias, palatium, senatum, forum; sola vobis relinquimus Tempia."—*Tertull. Apol. c. 36.*

† For though a whole nation *believing* a doctrine is no proof of the strength of its evidence, yet a whole nation *changing* its doctrine, without human motives or force, is a great evidence of truth; and when several nations do the same, the thing becomes overpowering. No general assertions of primitive credulity or enthusiasm can justly be pleaded on the other side; for the most credulous do not change their faith without human motives of interest. And even in days of universal toleration to change all the principles of our religion needs the greatest heroism.—ED.

no future state, nor judgment to come, that they might indulge themselves in this world without fear of another; yet their consciences are so far convinced of, and awed by the truth of these things, that they raise many perplexities and anxieties in their minds, which they would most willingly be rid of; which they can never thoroughly be, till, instead of having the name of Christians, they come to live the life of Christians, and become experimentally acquainted with the truth and power of religion. And withal we find that the more men have been acquainted with the practice of Christianity, the greater evidence they have had of the truth of it, and been more fully and rationally persuaded of it. To such I grant there are such powerful evidences of the truth of the doctrine of Christ, by the effectual workings of the Spirit of God upon their souls, that all other arguments, as to their own satisfaction, may fall short of these. A truly enlightened conscience discovers so much beauty and glory in the Scriptures, that they ravish the soul, although it be unable to give a full account of this unto others who want the true spiritual discernment which a heart truly gracious hath.* We see ordinarily in the world, that the attraction of beauty is an unaccountable thing; and one may be ravished by a thing which another looks on as mean and ordinary; and why may it not be much

* See Appendix A.

more thus in Divine objects, to those who want spiritual eyes to discover them? Therefore I grant that good men enjoy that satisfaction to their own consciences, as to the truth of the doctrine of Christ, which others cannot attain to; but yet I say, that such do likewise see the most strong, rational, and convincing evidence, which doth induce them to believe; which evidence is then most convincing, when it is seconded by the peculiar energy of the spirit of God upon the souls of true believers.

But yet we see that the power and force of the truth of these things may be so great, even upon minds which are not yet moulded into the fashion of true goodness, that it may awe with its light and clearness where it doth not soften and alter by its heat and influence. Now whence can it be that such convictions should stick so fast in the minds of those who would fain pull out those piercing arrows, but that there is a greater power in them than they are masters of, and they cannot stand against the force whereby they come upon them, nor find any salve to cure the wounds which are made within them, but by those weapons which were the causes of them? And therefore when wicked persons under conflicts of conscience cannot ease themselves by direct Atheism, or finding reason to cast off such convictions by discerning any invalidity in the testimony whereon the truth of these things

depends, it is a certain argument that there is abundant truth in that testimony, when men would fain persuade themselves to believe the contrary, and yet cannot.

ε. The truth of this consent appears from the unanimity of it among those persons who have yet strangely differed from each other in many controversies in religion. We see thereby this unanimity is no forced or designed thing, because we see the persons agreeing in this do very much disagree from each other in other things. And the same grounds and reasons whereon they disagree as to other things would have held as to these too, were there not greater evidence of the certainty of these things than of those they fall out about. All the divided parts of the Christian world do yet fully agree in the matters of fact—viz., that there was such a person as Jesus Christ, and that he did many great miracles, that he died on the cross at Jerusalem and rose again from the dead. Now these contain the great foundations of Christian faith, and therefore the multitude of other controversies in the world ought to be so far from weakening our faith as to the truth of the doctrine of Christ (which men of weak judgments and Atheistical spirits pretend), that it ought to be a strong confirmation of it, when we see persons who quarrel with each other about some inferior and less weighty parts of religion do yet unanimously consent in the principal

foundations of Christian faith, and such whereon the necessity of faith and obedience, as the way to salvation, doth more immediately depend. And though it be continually seen that in divided parties one is apt to run from anything which is received by the other, and men generally think they can never run far enough from them whose errors they have discovered, that yet this principle hath not carried any considerable party of the Christian world (out of their indignation against those great corruptions which have crept into the world under a pretence of religion) to the disowning the foundation of Christian faith, must be partly imputed to the signal hand of Divine Providence, and partly to those strong evidences which there are of the truth of that testimony which conveys to us the foundations of Christian faith. Thus we see now how great and uncontrolled this consent is, as to the matters of fact delivered down from the eye-witnesses of them, concerning the actions and miracles of our blessed Saviour (which are contained in the Scriptures as authentic records of them), and what a sure foundation there is for a firm assent to the truth of the things from so universal and uninterrupted a tradition.

*Part II.—Evidence derived from the success
of the Gospel.**

Thus far we have now manifested the necessity of the miracles of Christ in order to the propagation of Christianity in the world, from the consideration of the *persons* who were to propagate it in the world. The next thing we are to consider is the admirable *success* which the Gospel met with in the world upon its being preached to it, of which no rational account can be given unless the actions and miracles of our Saviour were most undoubtedly true. That the Gospel of Christ had very strange and wonderful success upon its first

* ANALYSIS OF PART II.

Evidence derived from success of the Gospel.

It triumphed—

A. Over the *inclinations* of the world.

§ 1. In matters of FAITH :

a. The Christian faith or doctrine contrary to *heathen education and prejudice*.

(1.) Pretended antiquity of Paganism.

(2.) Universality of it.

(3.) Its settlement by law.

The law against Conventicles.

” ” Innovations in religion.

” ” Sacrilege.

” ” Treason.

” of Public Festivals.

β. The Christian doctrine seemed *incredible to natural reason*.

§ 2. In matters of PRACTICE :

The precepts and morals of Christians contrary to all the inclinations of the whole world.

B. It triumphed over all worldly *power*.

This double victory argues its truth.

preaching hath been partly discovered already, and is withal so plain from the long continuance of it in these European parts, that none any ways conversant in the history of former ages can have any ground to question it. But that this strange and admirable success of the doctrine of Christ should be an evidence of the truth of it, and the miracles wrought in confirmation of it, will appear from these two considerations. *A.* That the doctrine itself was so directly contrary to the general *inclinations* of the world. *B.* That the propagation of it was so much opposed by all worldly *power*.

A. That the doctrine itself was so opposite to the general inclinations of the world. The doctrine may be considered either as to its credenda, or matters of faith, or as to its agenda, or matters of life and practice. Both these were contrary to the inclinations of the world; the former seemed hard and incredible, the latter harsh and impossible.

§ 1. As to matters of FAITH. The matters of *faith* which were to be believed by the world were not things which we may imagine the vulgar sort of men would be very forward to run after, nor very greedy to embrace. The matters of faith declared by the Gospel were opposed—(*a.*) to the principles of education and the religion of the heathen; and (*β.*) they were such as seemed incredible to human reason.

I now proceed to treat them in order.

a. *The faith of the Gospel was contrary to the principles of the heathen's education.* The generality of mankind is very tenacious of those principles and prejudices which are sucked in in the time of infancy. There are some religions one would think it were impossible that any rational man should believe them; save only on this account, because they are bred up under them. It is a very great advantage any religion hath against another, that it comes to speak first, and thereby insinuates such an apprehension of itself to the mind, that it is very hard removing it afterwards. The understanding seems to be of the nature of those things which are *communis juris*, and therefore *primi sunt possidentis*; when an opinion hath once got possession of the mind it usually keeps out whatever comes to disturb it. Now we cannot otherwise conceive but all those persons who had been bred up under Paganism and the most gross idolatry, must needs have a very potent prejudice against a doctrine which was wholly irreconcilable with that religion which they had been devoted to. Now, the stronger the prejudice is which is conveyed into men's minds by the force of education, the greater strength and power must there needs be in the Gospel of Christ, which did so easily demolish these strongholds, and captivate the understandings of men to the obedience of Christ. To which purpose Arnobius excellently

speaks to the heathens; the substance of whose discourse is, that it is impossible to suppose so many persons of various nations to be so far besotted and infatuated, as not only to believe a religion to be true which was contrary to that they were educated in, but to venture their lives as well as estates upon it, had it not been discovered to them in a most certain and infallible way by men who had been eye-witnesses of the actions and miracles of Christ and his Apostles. Will not this, he adds, persuade the world what firm foundations the faith of Christians stands on, when in so short a time it is spread over all parts of the world? *That by it the most inhuman and barbarous nations are softened into more than civility?** That men of the greatest wit and parts—orators, grammarians, rhetoricians, lawyers, physicians, philosophers, who not?—have forsaken their former sentiments, and adhered to the doctrine of Christ. Now, I say, if the power of education be so strong upon the minds of men to persuade them of the truth of the religion they are bred up under (which Atheistically-disposed persons make so much advantage of), this is so far from weakening the truth of Christianity,

* This argument needs careful weighing. It would be better to appeal to its *tendencies* to soften the various nations, and to the frequent examples of such beneficial effects, than to point to vast successes. In fact, its legitimate tendencies are as strong a moral argument as its known results.—ED.

that it proves a great confirmation of it, because it obtained so much upon its first preaching in the world, notwithstanding the highest prejudices from education were against it. If, then, men be so prone to believe that to be most true which they have been educated under, it must argue a more than ordinary evidence and power in that religion which unsettles so much the principles of education as to make men not only question the truth of them, but to renounce them, and embrace a religion contrary to them.

And this position is strengthened when we consider what strongholds these principles of education were backed with among the heathens, when the doctrine of Christ was first divulged among them, *i.e.*, what plausible pretences they had of continuing in the religion which they were brought up in, and why they should not exchange it for Christianity; and those were—

(1.) The pretended antiquity of their religion above the Christian; the main thing pleaded against the Christians was, that they thought themselves wiser than their forefathers; and Symmachus, Lybanus, and others, plead this most in behalf of Paganism;* their religion pleaded prescription against any other, and they were resolved to follow the steps of their ancestors, wherein they thought themselves happy and

* "Servanda est tot sæculis fides, et sequendi sunt nobis parentes qui secuti sunt feliciter suos."

secure. Cæcilius, in Minutius Felix, first argues much against dogmatizing in religion, but withal says it most becomes a lover of truth “to receive the discipline of our ancestors, to follow the traditional religion, to fear the gods worshipped by our parents, and to believe every opinion of the gods handed down to us.”—(Minutius Felix, p. 6.) So Arnobius tells us, the main thing objected against the Christians was, that our religion was a new one, and only a few days old.—(Arnob. contra gentes, l. ii., p. 90.) And Cotta, in Tully, laid down long before this, as the main principle of Pagan religion, “to believe the tradition of our fathers, although there be no evidence in reason for it.”—(Cicero de Nat. Deor., l. iii.) And after he had discovered the vanity of the Stoical arguments about religion, he concludes with this, as the only thing he resolved his religion into, “It is enough for me that it comes by tradition from our forefathers.” Lactantius fully sets forth the manner of pleading used by the heathens against the Christians, in point of antiquity—“They accounted tradition infallible, and knew no other way whereby to find the truth of religion, but by its conveyance from their forefathers.”—(Lactant. de orig. Error, l. ii., c. 6.)*

* How like herein do they speak to those who contend for the corruptions crept into the Christian Church? who make use of the same pretences for them, viz., that they were delivered down from the Fathers: “Tantaque est auctoritas vetustatis, ut inquirere in eam scelus esse dicatur.” “Who are we

(2.) The large and universal spread of Pagan religion, when Christianity came into the world. There never was so great catholicism as in heathen worship, when the Apostles first appeared in the Gentile world. The great charge against the who will see further than antiquity?" But it is no wonder if antiquity be accompanied with dimness of sight; and so it was undoubtedly as to the Pagan world; and as to the Christian too, when such a mixture of heathenism came into it. And the very same arguments by which the pleaders for Christianity did justify the truth of their religion, notwithstanding this pretended antiquity, will with equal force hold for a reformation of such inveterate abuses, which, under a pretence of antiquity, have crept into the Christian Church. "*Nullus pudor est ad meliora transire,*" saith Ambrose, in his answer to Symmachus: "What shame is it to grow better?" (Ambros. ep. c. Symmach.) "Quid facies?" saith Lactantius, "*majoresne potius an rationem sequeris? Si rationem mavis, discedere te necesse est ab institutis et auctoritate majorum: quoniam id solum rectum est, quod ratio præscribit. Sin autem pietas majores sequi suadet: fateris igitur et stultos illos esse qui excogitatis contra rationem religionibus servierint; et te ineptum qui id colas quod falsum esse conviceris.*" "Where reason and mere authority of forefathers stand in competition, he is more a child than a man that knows not on which side to give his suffrage." (Lactant. de orig. Error, l. ii., c. 6.) But with the greatest strength and clearest reason Arnobius speaks in this case. "When you charge us," saith he, "that we are revolted from the religion of our forefathers, you ought not presently to condemn the fact, but to examine the reasons of it; neither ought you so much to look at what we have left, as what it is we have embraced." "*Nam si mutare sententiam culpa est ulla vel crimen, et à veteribus institutis in alias res novas voluntatesque migrare, criminatio ista et vos spectat, qui toties vitam consuetudinemque mutastis; qui in mores alios, atque alios ritus priorum condemnatione transistis.*" (Arnobius contr. gent., l. ii.) If mere departing from the reli-

Christians was Novellism—that they brought in a strange and unheard of religion. The common question was, “Where was your religion before Jesus of Nazareth?” as it has been since, “Where was your religion before Luther?” and the same

gion of our ancestors be the great fault, all those who own themselves to be Christians were themselves guilty of it when they revolted from heathenism. If it be here said that the case is different, because there was sufficient reason for it, which there is not as to the corruptions of the Christian Church; if so, then all the dispute is taken off from the matter of fact, or the revolt to the causes inducing to it; and if the Protestant be not able, as to the causes of our separation from Rome, to manifest that they were sufficient, let him then be triumphed over by the Romanist, and not before. I assert, then, and that with much assurance of mind, that the principles of the Reformation are justifiable upon the same grounds of reason, which the embracing Christianity was, when men of heathens became Christians; and that the arguments made use of by the Romanists against our separation from them, are such as would have justified a Pagan philosopher in not embracing Christianity. For if it be unlawful for any party of men to divide from others in a matter of religion which pretends antiquity and universality, it had been unlawful for a philosopher to have deserted Paganism, as well as for a Protestant to depart from Rome. For, according to the principles of the Romanists, the judgment in the cause of the separation and of the truth of religion lies in that party from which we depart; if we do now but apply this to the old Roman Senate or Emperors in the case of the Christian religion, and dividing from heathen worship, we shall quickly see how easy a matter it will be to make Christianity itself a schism, and the doctrine of Christ the greatest heresy. But as strong as those pretences were then, or have been since, the power of the doctrine of Christ hath been so great as to conquer them, and thereby to manifest that it was of God, when such potent prejudices were not able to withstand it.

answer which served then will stand unmovable now, "There, where no other religion is—in the Word of God." For this was the weapon whereby the primitive Christians defended themselves against the assaults of Paganism, and the evidences they brought that the doctrine preached by them, and contained in the Scriptures, was originally from God, were the only means of overthrowing Paganism, notwithstanding its pretended universality.

(3.) Settlement by law of heathen worship. This was so much pretended and pleaded for, that as far as we can find, by the history of the primitive Church, the pretence on which the Christians suffered was sedition, and opposing the established laws. The Christians were reckoned, as appears by Tertullian, among unlawful corporations; the politicians and statesmen were all for preserving the laws; they troubled not themselves much about any religion, but only that which was settled by law they sought to uphold, because the acting contrary to it might bring some disturbance to the civil state. There were several laws which the Christians were then brought under, and condemned for the breach of.

The law against hætericæ, or conventicles, as they were pleased frequently to style the meeting of Christians together; thence the places where the Christians assembled for worship were commonly called *conventicula*. Now, the reason of

the name was, because the heathens judged these assemblies of Christians to be illegal societies; for which we are to understand, that in the time of the Roman emperors, when they grew suspicious of their own safety, they severely prohibited all those sodalitia, or societies and colleges, which were very much in use in the Roman commonwealth, in imitation of the *Hetairiai* in the cities of Greece. These were societies of persons, which voluntarily confederated together either for some particular design, or for preserving love and friendship among each other, and thence had their frequent meetings in common together. Now, the more numerous these were, and the more closely they confederated, the more jealous eye the Roman emperors had upon them, because of some clandestine design, which they suspected might be carried on for disturbance of the public peace in such suspicious meetings. Thence came out many particular edicts of the emperors against all such kinds of societies.

Now, when the Christians began to be somewhat numerous, and had, according to the principles of their religion, frequent assemblies for Divine worship, and did confederate together, by such symbols as being washed with water, and eating and drinking together (which was all the heathens apprehended by their use of baptism and the Lord's Supper), the proconsuls and other magistrates in their several provinces brought the

Christians under these edicts, and so punished them for the breach of the laws. Which, as appears by Pliny's Epistle to Trajan (Plin. Epist., l. x., ep. 97), was the only account on which the wiser heathens did proceed against the Christians; for we see he troubled not himself much about the truth and evidence of Christian religion; but such persons were brought before him, and after he had interrogated them, whether they were Christians, or no, several times, if they persisted, he then punished them, not so much for their religion, as for their obstinacy and contempt of authority. For so much is implied in those words of his, "That, whatever their religion was, their obstinacy and disobedience deserved punishment." The reason which the Christians pleaded for themselves, why they should not be reckoned among the factions of the people, was that which they gave to Pliny, that all their fault was, "That they were wont upon their solemn days to meet together for Divine worship, and to covenant with each other only for the practice of those things which were as much for the good of mankind as their own, viz., that they would not wrong and defraud others, as to their bodies or estates." And Tertullian (Tertull. Apol., c. 38) approves of the law against factions, as wisely intended to prevent seditions; but withal pleads, that the society of Christians could not be reckoned "inter illicitas factiones;" "for if," saith he,

“the societies of Christians were like others, there might be some reason to condemn them, under the head of factions : but as long as we meet together for no man’s injury ; that whether divided or assembled, we are still the same ; that we grieve and injure nobody ; when such a company of good men meet together, it is rather a council than a faction.”

Another law the Christians were brought under was, that *against innovations in religion* ; thence it was laid so much to the charge of the Christians, that they did “go contrary to the established law.” Now, Christianity was everywhere looked on as a great innovation, insomuch that the Christians were accused to be “enemies to mankind as well as the laws,” because they drew men off from that way of religion which mankind had generally agreed in. Thence Æmilianus, the prefect of Egypt, when he bids the Christians return to Paganism, he used these expressions, “to return to the common sense of mankind, and to forget what was so much against it,” as he supposed Christianity to be. When Paul preached at Athens, his first accusation was, that “he was a preacher of strange deities, because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.” (Acts xvii. 18.) And Demetrius, at Ephesus, knew no such potent argument against Paul, as that his religion “destroyed the worship of Diana, whom all Asia and the world worship.” (Acts

xix. 27.) So that the primitive Christians were then accounted the antipodes to the whole world, on which account they were so severely dealt with; most commonwealths observing the counsel of Mecænas to Augustus, to be sure to have a watchful eye upon all innovations in religion, because they tend so much to the disturbance of the civil state.

The law of sacrilege. Thence Lactantius calls the persecuting laws “constitutiones sacrilegæ;” and, as he tells us, Domitius Ulpianus had collected all those cruel laws together, which concerned the Christians; from hence it was, that Christianity is called, by Pliny, madness (Plin. Ep., l. x., ep. 97); by Tacitus, a detestable superstition (Tacit. An., l. xv.); by Suetonius, a new and odious superstition. (Sueton. in Nerone.) So much did these three great men agree in condemning the best religion in the world for madness, and new, and detestable superstition; the ground of the great pique was, the enmity declared by Christians against the idolatrous temples and worship of the heathen.

The law against treason; for sometimes they proceeded so high as to accuse the Christians of having insulted the emperors, and thence they are commonly called enemies to all civil government. (Tertull. Apol. xxvii. c. 35.) Which they inferred from hence—1. Because they would not sacrifice for the emperor’s safety. (Tertull. Apol. xxvii.

c. 29.) The accusation for treason lay in their refusing to supplicate *idols* for the emperor's welfare. 2. Because they would not swear by the emperor's genius. Thence Saturnius said to the martyr, if he would but swear by the genius of Cæsar, he should be saved. (Herald. in Tertull. Apol. cap. 29.) Yet, though they refused to swear by the emperor's genius, they did not refuse to testify their allegiance, and to swear by the emperor's safety. (Tertull. Apol. c. 32.) 3. Because they would not worship the emperors as gods, which was then grown a common custom. (Tertull. Apol. c. 33.) Nay, the primitive Christians were very scrupulous of calling the emperor *Dominus*, because the name Lord was an attribute of God's, and applied as His name to Him in Scripture. The reason of this scrupulosity was, not from any question they made of the sovereignty of princes, or their obligation to obedience to them (which they are very free in the acknowledgment of), but from a jealousy and just suspicion that something of Divine honour might be implied in it, when the adoration of princes was grown a custom.

Because they would not observe the public festivals of the emperors in the way that others did, which it seems were observed with abundance of looseness and debauchery by all sorts of persons; and as Tertullian smartly says, "Debauchery is accounted a piece of loyalty, and intemperance a

part of religion.” (Tertull. Apol. c. 35.) Which made the Christians rather hazard the reputation of their loyalty, than bear a part in so much immorality as was then used, and thence they abhorred all the solemn spectacles of the Romans.* We see, then, what a hard province the Christians had, when so many laws were laid, as bird-lime, in their way to catch them, that it was impossible for them to profess themselves Christians, and not to run into a *præmunire* by their laws. And therefore it cannot be conceived that many out of the love of novelty should then declare themselves Christians, when so great hazards were run upon the professing of it. Few soft-spirited men, and lovers of their own ease, but would have found some fine distinctions and nice evasions to have reconciled themselves to the public laws by things which the primitive Christians unanimously refused, when tending to profaneness or idolatry. And from this discourse we cannot but conclude, with the Apostle Paul, that the weapons whereby the Apostles and primitive Christians encountered the heathen world, were not fleshly or weak (2 Cor. x. 4, 5), but exceeding strong and powerful, in that they obtained so great a conquest over the

* “Nihil est nobis,” saith the same author; “dictu, visu, auditu, cum insania circi, cum impudicitia theatri, cum atrocitate arenæ, cum xysti vanitate.” “They had nothing to do either with the madness of the cirque, or the immodesty of the theatre, or the cruelty of the amphitheatre, or the vanity of the public wrestlings.”—(Tertull., cap. 38.)

imaginations and carnal reasonings of men (which were the strongholds they secured themselves in), as to make them readily to forsake their heathen worship, and become cheerful servants to Christ. Thus we see the power of the doctrine of Christ, which prevailed over the principles of education, though backed with pretended antiquity, universality, and establishment by civil laws.

The New Faith undiscoverable by Natural Reason.

β. But this will further appear if we consider that not only the matters of faith were contrary to the principles of education, but because many of them *seemed incredible* to men's natural reason. And we cannot think persons would be over-forward to believe such things, every one being ready to take any advantage against a religion which did so little flatter corrupt nature, either as to its power or capacity; insomuch that those who preached this doctrine declared openly to the world, that persons who would judge of the Christian doctrine by such principles as mere natural reason did proceed upon (such one I suppose it is whom the Apostle calls a natural man (1 Cor. ii. 14), one that owned nothing but natural reason whereby to judge of Divine truths), could not entertain matters of faith, or of Divine revelation, because such things would seem but folly to him that owned no higher principle than

philosophy, or that did not believe any Divine inspiration; neither can such a one know them, because a Divine Revelation is the only way to come to a thorough understanding of them: and a person who doth not believe such a Divine revelation, it is impossible he should be a competent judge of the truth of the doctrine of Christ.* So that the only ground of receiving the *doctrine* of the Gospel is upon a Divine revelation, that God Himself, by His Son and His Apostles, hath revealed these deep mysteries to the world; on

* The Christian religion is strictly supernatural—1, in its facts; 2, in its inspired records; 3, in its doctrines; 4, in its application to the individual conscience. What wonder, then, that its progress should be always slow when only human instrumentality is employed to further it? It is very necessary, in the present state of religious thought, to reaffirm the supernatural character of Christianity. Too many now resolve it into a mere system of Deism, in which all that is undiscoverable or above human reason is explained away, as an obstacle to its progress in the world. The glory of the New Testament is, that it is a revelation of supernatural truths. To abandon these is to abandon all. Bishop Butler well describes Christianity as, 1, a *republication* of natural religion, in its simplicity, with authority and new proofs, with new light, and with a visible Church to guarantee its maintenance; and, 2, a *revelation* of a completely *new* dispensation, with new *truths*, as redemption by the Son of God, and sanctification by His Spirit, and with new *duties*, internal and external, moral and positive. To hold only to the former (1) of these objects of Christianity, destroys it as much as to take the head of a man for his whole body, and to ignore the heart or limbs. And equal violence is done to Christianity when it is offered to the acceptance of *reason*, as contrary to or above faith.—ED.

which account it is we are bound to receive them, although they go beyond our reach and comprehension.* But we see generally in the heathen world how few of those did believe the doctrine of Christ, who were great admirers of the philosophy and way of learning which was then cried up: the reason was, because Christianity not only contained far deeper mysteries than any they were acquainted with, but delivered them in a way of authority, commanding them to believe the doctrine they preached on the account of the Divine authority of the revealers of it. Such a way of proposal of doctrines to the world the philosophy of the Greeks was unacquainted with, which on that account they derided, as not being suited to the exact method which their sciences proceeded in.

No doubt had the Apostles come among the Greeks with a great deal of pomp and ostentation, and had fed men's curiosities with vain and unne-

* In this there is a difference between the facts and the doctrines of the Gospel. The former we do not receive on the sole authority of inspiration, but of distinct external evidence; the latter we base wholly on the spoken and written testimony of those whose commission is evidenced for us by external proofs. It is a common and dangerous error to assert that we receive the historical truth of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, because it is related for us in the inspired books. This is false. We base our knowledge of the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel on these, but look outside the book for our knowledge of the facts, of which the writings in question are only one witness out of many.—ED.

cessary speculations, they might have had as many followers among the Greeks for their sakes, as Christ had among the Jews for the sake of the loaves.* But the matters of the Gospel being more of inward worth and moment than of outward pomp and show, the vain and empty Greeks presently find a quarrel with the manner of proposing them; that they came not in a way of clear demonstration, but stood so much upon faith as soon as they were delivered. Thence Celsus and Galen think they have reason enough to reject the laws of Moses and Christ, because they were doctrines which require faith and obedience, without giving men's reason an account of the things commanded. † (Orig. l. i. c. Cels. Gal. de diff. puls. lib. 2, c. 4.) As though the authority of a legislator, sufficiently manifested, were not enough to enforce a law, unless a sufficient account were given of the thing required to

* Part I., Prop. III. (1.)

† This is, in the present state of religion, very important. The ground of belief in the Gospel is sought to be shifted from the external evidences treated of in this work, to the self-evidencing power of the doctrines, &c. The result of this is the rejection of all non-self-evident parts of the Bible, amongst which miracles take a high place. It is, therefore, needful to recur continually to this. We primarily receive the doctrine of Christ on the authority of Christ, and must judge of that by a variety of evidences far beyond the reach of our verifying consciousness. Afterwards we are at liberty to compare the doctrines thus delivered, with the *lux naturæ*, where we shall receive much corroborative evidence.—ED.

the reason of every individual person acted by passions and private interests, as to the justice and equity of it. For if so, the primary obligation on man's part to faith and obedience would arise, not from the evidence of Divine authority, but of the thing itself which is revealed, to the partial judgment of every one to whom it is proposed. Which those who know how short the stock of reason is at the best in men, and how easily that which is, is fashioned and moulded according to prejudices and interests already entertained, will look upon only as a design to comply with the carnal desires of men, in that thereby none shall be bound to go any further than this blind and corrupted guide shall lead them. Now, these being the terms on which the Gospel of Christ must have expected entertainment in the Gentile world, how impossible had it been ever to have found any success among men, had there not been sufficient evidence given by a power of miracles, that however strange and incredible the doctrine might seem, yet it was to be believed, because there was sufficient means to convince men that it was of Divine revelation.

§ 2. *The moral precepts and power of Christianity.* Neither were the matters of faith only contrary to the inclinations of the world, but so *were the precepts of life*, or those things in Christianity which concerned *practice*. These are the two

things which are the main scope and design of Christianity in reference to men's lives, to take them off from their *sins*, and from the *world*; and of all things these are they which men's hearts are most bewitched with. Now, the precepts of the Gospel require the greatest purity of heart and life, and call upon men "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present evil world;" that "all that name the name of Christ must depart from iniquity;" that all true Christians must be "cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (Matt. v. 8; xvi. 24; Tit. ii. 12; 2 Tim. ii. 19; 2 Cor. vii. 1.) And the Gospel enforceth these precepts of holiness with the most terrible denunciations of the wrath of God on those who disobey them; that "the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ." (2 Thess. i. 7, 8.) That "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." (Rom. i. 18.) That no persons who live in the habitual practice of any known sin "shall inherit the kingdom of God." That "no man should deceive them with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobe-

dience.” (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10; Gal. iv. 20; Eph. v. 5, 6.) That men do but vainly flatter themselves when they seek to reconcile unholy lives with the hopes of future happiness; for “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” (Heb. xii. 14.)

And then, in reference to the things of this present life, which men busy themselves so much about, the Gospel declares, that “they who love this world, the love of the Father is not in them.” (1 John ii. 14.) That “the friendship of this world is enmity with God; and whosoever will be a friend of the world is an enemy to God.” (James iv. 4.) That Christians must not “set their affections on earth, but on the things in heaven.” (Col. iii. 1, 2.) That “the conversation of true Christians is in heaven.” (Phil. iii. 20.) That we ought not to “lay up our treasure on earth, but in heaven.” (Matt. vi. 20.) That “we must not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Cor. iv. 18.) Now, the whole design of the doctrine of Christ being to persuade men to lead a holy and heavenly life while they are in this world, and thereby to “be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light” (Col. i. 12), can we think so many men, whose hearts were wedded to sin and the world, could so suddenly be brought off from both without a Divine power accompanying that doctrine which

was preached to them? And therefore the Apostle saith, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ" (Rom. i. 16), *i. e.*, though the Gospel of Christ be the only true mystery, yet I do not hide it, as the heathens are wont to do with their famous Eleusinian mysteries, which were kept so secret by all the *Mystæ*; but, saith he, "I know no reason I have to be ashamed of anything in the Gospel, that I should labour its concealment to advance its veneration." But the more public the Gospel is, the more it manifests its power; for through it God is pleased mightily to work, in order to the salvation both of Jew and Gentile. And of all the success of the Gospel, that upon the hearts and lives of men deserves the greatest consideration.

The great efficacy and power of the Gospel was abundantly seen in that great alteration which it wrought on all those who heartily embraced it. The philosophers did very frequently and deservedly complain of the great inefficacy of all their moral precepts upon the minds of men, and that by all their instructions men improved more in knowledge than goodness; but now Christianity enforced duties on men with greater power and authority: for the Scriptures, as Saint Austin speaks, do not make much noise, like the philosophers, but awe the souls of men with the majesty of that God from whom they came. Neither was it only a great and empty sound which was heard in the preaching of the Gospel; but when God

thundered therein (Psalm xxix. 5, 8, 9), He humbled the pride of men, unsettled the Gentile world from its former foundations, and wrought great alterations on all those who hearkened to it.

The whole design of the Gospel is couched in those words which Saint Paul tells us were spoken to him by Christ Himself, when He appointed him to be an Apostle, "to open men's eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which were sanctified by faith in Christ." (Acts xxvi. 18.) And the efficacy of this doctrine in order to these great ends, was abundantly seen in the preaching of that Apostle, who was so instrumental in converting the world to piety and sobriety, as well as to the doctrine of Christ. What strange persons were the Corinthians before they became Christians! for when the Apostle had enumerated many of the vilest persons of the world, he presently adds, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. vi. 10, 11.) The more dangerous the distemper is, the more malignant its nature; the more inveterate its continuance, the greater the efficacy of the remedy which works a cure of it. The power of grace is the more seen in conversion, the greater the sins have been before it. It is an easy matter to

remove a disease at its first onset, in comparison of what it is to cure it when it becomes chronic. The power of the Gospel wrought upon all sorts and kinds of persons, to manifest to the world there was no distemper of men's souls so great, but there was a possibility of a remedy for it; and not only so, but pregnant and visible instances were given of the power and efficacy of it. "For they themselves show of us," saith the Apostle, "what manner of entering in we had among you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." (1 Thess. i. 9, 10.) Now, that which manifests the exceeding great power and excellency of the Gospel was, that it not only turned men from one way of worship to another—which is a matter of less difficulty—but that it turned men together with that from their lusts and sensuality, to a holy and unblameable life. For men being more in love with their sins than with their opinions, it must needs be a greater power which draws men from the practice of habitual sins, than that which makes them change their opinions, or alter the way of worship they were brought up in.* This is that which Origen,

* And therefore the moral tendencies of the Gospel are a higher proof of its truth, than even the doctrinal. Which makes this section of the argument an advance on the preceding.—ED.

throughout his books against Celsus, triumphs in, as the most signal evidence of a Divine power in the doctrine of Christ, that it wrought so great an alteration on all who truly embraced it, that of vicious, debauched, and dissolute, it made them temperate, sober, and religious. Therefore certainly the Gospel could not want that commendation among all ingenuous moralists, that it was the most excellent instrument in the world to reform the lives of men, and to promote real goodness in it, when they could not but take notice of so many persons continually so brought off from their follies and vain conversations, to a life serious, sober, and unblameable; nay, and some of the Christians were of so much integrity and goodness, that their greatest enemies were forced to say, that their only fault was that they were Christians. But one would think this should have made them have a higher opinion of Christianity, when it did so suddenly make so many good men in the world; especially when this power was manifested on persons who were supposed incapable of being reformed by philosophy—young, illiterate, and mean-spirited persons. Therefore it may be justly supposed, that it was not by the strength of their own reason that this alteration was wrought within them, but by that Divine power which was able to tame the most unruly, to instruct the most ignorant, to raise up the most sordid persons to such a generous temper

as to slight the good things of this life, in comparison with things to come.

And so remarkable was the difference of life then between those that were Christians and those who were not (as there is still between true Christians and mere professors), that Origen dares Celsus to compare them in point of morality with any other societies in the world. "For the Churches of God, which are disciplined to Christ, being compared with other societies, shine among them like lights in the world. For who can but confess, that even the worsser part of the Christian Churches exceeds the best of the popular assemblies? For," as he goes on to say, "the Church of God which is at Athens, that is very quiet and peaceable, because it seeks to approve itself to God; but the popular assembly at Athens, that is seditious and quarrelsome, and in nothing comparable to the Church of God there. So it is if we compare the Churches of Corinth and Alexandria with the assemblies of the people there." (Orig. contr. Cels. l. iii. p. 128.) So the same author goes on to compare the Church's senate with that of the cities'—the Church's officers with theirs; and appeals to themselves, that even those among them who were most lukewarm in their office, did yet far exceed all the city magistrates in all manner of virtues. From whence he rationally concludes, "If these things be so, how can it but be most rational to adore the divinity of Jesus, who was

able to accomplish such great things?" And that not upon one or two, but upon such great multitudes as were then converted to the Christian faith. We read of one Phædon and one Polemon converted from their vice and immorality by Socrates and Xenocrates; but what are these compared with those who were turned from their sins to God by the Gospel of Christ! And although Celsus (like an Epicurean) seems to deny the possibility of any such thing as conversion, because customary sins become a second nature, that no punishments can reform them; "yet," saith Origen, "herein he not only contradicts us Christians, but all such persons as owned any generous principles of philosophy, and did not despair of recovering virtue, as a thing feasible by human nature" (Origen, l. iii. p. 150); and gives instances, to prove the possibility of the thing, from the ancient heroes, Hercules and Ulysses; from the two philosophers, Socrates and Musonius; and the two famous converts to philosophy, Phædon and Polemon. "But yet," saith he, "these are not so much to be wondered at, that the eloquence and reason of the philosophers should prevail on some very few persons. But that the mean and contemptible language of the Apostles should convert such multitudes from intemperance to sobriety, from injustice to fair-dealing, from cowardice to the highest constancy, yea, so great as to lay down their lives for the

sake of virtue; how can we but admire so Divine a power as was seen in it? And therefore," saith he, "we conclude, *ὅτι τῷ θείῳ λόγῳ ἀμείψαι κακίαν φυσιώσασαν ἔστιν οὐ μόνον οὐκ ἀδύνατον, ἀλλὰ καὶ οὐ παντὶ χαλεπόν.* That it is so far from being impossible, that it is not at all difficult for corrupt nature to be changed by the Word of God."

Lactantius excellently manifests that philosophy could never do so much good in the world as Christianity did, because that it was not suited at all to common capacities, and did require so much skill in the arts to prepare men for it, which it is impossible all should be well skilled in, which yet are as capable of being happy, as any others are.* (Lactant. de fals. sap. l. iii. c. 25.) And how inefficacious the precepts of philosophy were, appears by the philosophers themselves,

* A very striking testimony to the universal suitability of the Christian religion, when received in its purity, to the wants and sins of mankind, is given by M. Colani, a French Protestant minister (Le Lièn, N^o. du 4 Mai, 1861), "As for myself, I have my own opinion and my own ideas, which, acquired in the midst of the conflict of thoughts, have become to me singularly precious. It is needless to say, that I should be glad to see my brethren sharing these opinions; and indeed I trust I should be willing to make considerable sacrifices to extend them. And yet, if it depended on my will to have these views adopted all at once by all the members of our Church, I say, in the sight of God, I should certainly refuse to exercise that power. For I can distinguish between the Gospel and my views of the Gospel. The word of Christ, who is spirit and life, is suitable to all alike; it satisfies every intelligent mind—the most advanced as well as the least, the simplest

who were far from having command by them over their masterless passions, and were fain sometimes to confess that nature was too headstrong to be kept in by such weak reins as the precepts of philosophy were. "But," saith he, "what great command Divine precepts have upon the souls of men, daily experience shows."* How great an alteration is in any who became true Christians, although they were passionate, covetous, fearful, lustful, cruel, unjust, vicious, yet upon their being Christians, they become mild, liberal, courageous, temperate, merciful, just, and unblamable;

and the most soaring. It has an echo for every state of the soul; it is eternally true, because it addresses itself to the very substance of our nature. My ideas, my views on the Gospel, I believe to be true, but something tells me that they are imperfect and incomplete; they answer certainly to one particular state of the soul, but experience may alter that. And though they suit me now, the time may come when they will satisfy me no longer; and consequently I conclude that my views could only satisfy those who are in my present state of development, and who experience the tendencies and needs which I this moment feel."—(Quoted by M. Guizot, in "L'Eglise et la Société Chrétiennes," pp. 15, 16.)

* "Da mihi virum qui sit iracundus, maledicus, effrenatus; paucissimis Dei verbis, tam placidum quam ovem reddam. Da cupidum, avarum, tenacem; jam tibi eum liberalem dabo, et pecuniam suam plenis manibus largientem. Da timidum doloris ac mortis; jam cruces, et ignes, et taurum contemne. Da libidinosum, adulterum, ganeonem; jam sobrium, castum, continentem videbis. Da crudelem, et sanguinis appetentem; jam in veram clementiam furor ille mutabitur. Da injustum, insipientem, peccatorem; continuo et æquus, et prudens, et innocens erit." (Lactant. de fals. sap. l. iii. c. 26.)

which never any were brought to by mere philosophy, which rather teacheth the art of concealing vices than of healing them. But now, when Christianity was so effectual in the cure of those distempers, which philosophy gave over as beyond its skill and power—when it cured them with so great success, and that not in a Paracelsian way, for them to relapse afterwards with greater violence, but it did so thoroughly unsettle the disease, that it should never gather to so great a head again; doth not this argue a power more than philosophical, and that could be no less than Divine power, which tended so much to reform the world, and to promote true goodness in it?*

B. The triumph over worldly opposition.

Thus we have considered the contrariety of the doctrine of Christ to men's natural inclinations, and yet the strange success it had in the world, which in the last place will appear yet more strange, when we add the almost continual opposition it met with from worldly power and policy. Had it been possible for a cunningly-devised fable, or any mere contrivance of impostors, to have prevailed in the world, when the most potent and

* The argument from the salutary effects of Christianity in personal reformation, is always a strong one; but never so strong as when brought into comparison with the effects of philosophy. Even though philosophy gives lessons of virtue, it supplies but weak motives, and yet poorer helps.—ED.

subtle persons bent their whole wits and designs for suppressing it? Whatever it were in others, we are sure that it was the master design of some of the Roman emperors, as Julian and Diocletian, to root out and abolish Christianity; and was it only the subtlety of the Christians which made these persons give over their work in despair of accomplishing it? If the Christians were such subtle men, whence came all their enemies to agree in one common calumny, that they were a company of poor, weak, ignorant, inconsiderable men? and if they were so, how came it to pass, that by their power and wisdom they could never exterminate these persons; but as they cut them down, they grew up the faster, and multiplied by their subtraction of them? There was something, then, certainly peculiar in Christianity, from all other doctrines, that it not only was not advanced by any civil power, but it got ground by the opposition it met with in the world. And therefore it is an observable circumstance, that the first Christian emperor (Constantine) did not appear in the world until Christianity had spread itself over most parts of the Roman world. God thereby letting us see, that though the civil power, when become Christian, might be very useful for protecting Christianity, yet that He stood in no need at all of it, as to the propagation of it abroad in the world. But we see it was quite otherwise in that religion which had Mars its ascendant, viz., Ma-

hometanism: for, like the demon of Paracelsus, it always sat upon the pommel of the sword, and made its way in the world by force; and as its first constitution had much of blood in it, so by it hath it been fed and nourished ever since. But it was quite otherwise with the Christian religion: it never thrived better than in the most barren places, nor triumphed more than when it suffered most; nor spread itself further than when it encountered the greatest opposition.* Because therein was seen the great force and efficacy of the doctrine of Christ, that it bore up men's spirits under the greatest miseries of life, and made them with cheerfulness to undergo the most exquisite torments which the cruelty of tyrants could invent.

The Stoics' and Epicureans' boasts, that their wise man would be happy in the bull of Phalaris, were but empty words, which none would venture the truth of by an experiment upon themselves. It was the Christian alone, and not the Epicurean,

*. Unhappily this is chiefly true of its early history. Once it gained the ascendant, and enrolled the worldly under the name of Christians, it, too, began to persecute as bitterly as it had itself been persecuted. Hence, we may believe, God withdrew His presence, and left those who had chosen the sword to do what they could with the sword. It is remarkable that after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the progress of Protestantism in France was materially checked. In 1598 the French Protestants had 760 churches. In 1619, notwithstanding the increase of the population, they had only 700. Thus the staying of the hand of persecution was followed by a falling off of the adherents of the persecuted faith.—ED.

that could truly say in the midst of torments, "*Suave est et nihil curo;*" and might justly alter a little of that common saying of the Christians, and say, "The Christians did not speak great things, but do and suffer them." And this gained not only great reputation of integrity to themselves, but much advanced the honour of their religion in the world, when it was so apparently seen, that no force or power was able to withstand it. Will not this at least persuade you that our religion is true, and from God, saith Arnobius? "That no fears, penalties, or torments, were able to make a Christian alter his profession; but he would rather bid adieu to his life than to his Saviour." (Arnob. l. ii. c. gentes.) This Origen likewise frequently takes notice of, when Celsus had objected to the novelty of Christianity: "The more wonderful it is," saith Origen, "that in so short a time it should so largely spread itself in the world; for if the cure of men's bodies be not wrought without Divine Providence, how much less the cure of so many thousands of souls which have been converted at once to humanity and Christianity, especially when all the powers of the world were from the first engaged to hinder the progress of this doctrine; and yet, notwithstanding all this opposition, the Word of God prevailed, as not being able to be stopped by men, and became master over all its enemies; and not only spread itself quite through Greece, but through a great

part of the world besides, and converted an innumerable company of souls to the true worship and service of God." (Origen, l. i. c. Cels. p. 21. Vid. etiam, l. ii. p. 110.)

Thus we have now manifested, from all the circumstances of the propagation of the doctrine of Christ, what evidence there was of a Divine power accompanying it, and how useful the first miracles were in order to it.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

THE argument which is now concluded appeals to reason. The emotions are not addressed: no oratorical flourishes are added to lend a false force to what is said. The author states his points with learning, diligence, and an evident conviction of the truth of the holy cause he is engaged in defending. At the conclusion of the discussion, an alternative presents itself for our meditation. It is as follows:—

Taking the argument *as a whole* (for parts may possibly rise above or fall below others in force), that which is sought to be proved by it is either false or true. The proposition, that Jesus Christ (who beyond all dispute truly lived and died, more or less nearly, as related in the Gospels) was a divinely-commissioned agent of God's will, who appeared in Judæa at the time recorded, and worked miracles of healing, &c., and was crucified, and rose again, and left behind him discourses full of the noblest teaching, and commissioned Apostles to write and speak more fully the truths concerning his spiritual kingdom—this proposition is either unsubstantiated and unproved, and is there-

fore shadowy, fanatical, and vain; or else it is true.

I. And I appeal to everyone who, doubting the truth of the Christian religion, has yet honestly perused these pages, to answer, can he be persuaded, in the face of these arguments, that the work of Christ was a piece of bigotry, folly, or fanaticism, and the work of the Apostles and martyrs a senseless self-sacrifice for a false cause? Is any reader persuaded that the whole argument from the sufferings of the disciples, and the success of the new and persecuted faith, is *absolutely nothing*? And that a religion which was confessedly non-existent in A.D. 30, and which was confessedly in existence and believed by thousands A.D. 64 (when Nero persecuted the Church), arose in that interval of four and thirty years by means of the falsehood or enthusiasm of its originators, and without assistance from on high? If so, on what ground is this conclusion formed? Are the evidences themselves false, or is the conclusion false which is drawn from them? And if so, where lies the fallacy?

II. Is the reader, on the other hand, made seriously to doubt whether the religion thus propagated may not perhaps be true? If it be so, let him remember these two things—1. That an apprehension that it *may* be true lays every one, in consideration of the greatness of the interests involved, under a most profound obligation, for

his own sake, to follow up the subject, and not to let it go until a fixed conclusion has been come to; and 2. A belief that it *may* be true is quite sufficient ground to go before the Divine Ruler of the world, and lay the case before Him, and beg Him for guidance and help.

To such readers as may thus suspect that they have been rejecting what may, after all, prove true,* I offer the most earnest and urgent exhortation to act upon this suspicion—to kneel before God, and pour out there all the secret wants and wishes which may be lurking, unspoken, at their hearts. They who have, by a happy experience, proved that the words of Christ are Divine words, will bear witness that there is a power in that prayer which even, *de profundis*, out of the depths of darkness, ignorance, or sin, is sincerely offered up to the Father of Light. Do you wish to know the truth? Then seek thus, and prove whether He who spoke in the Gospel, and whose words were so high and pure, be not the Truth indeed.

And then, the mind and reason being persuaded, or half persuaded, that the Christian religion is, in the words of Justin Martyr, “the only true philosophy,” what remains?

“What remains?” The work is then but begun. Turn then to that marvellous speaker,

* For can there be a more awful position imagined than that of one who has rejected Christ, should his religion, in the end, indeed be found wholly and literally *true*?

and listen to His words. He tells you that it is not by reason or by external works that God is served; but that "God is a Spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Or in other words, that our relations to God must be of a spiritual kind, not merely of a bodily or mental character. The Saviour, then, addresses our hidden spirit and inmost being. And what is His message?

He tells us we are sinners. Lost and ruined by sin. Ready to perish. Going soon and surely before God in our sins. He warns us that "the word which" He has "spoken, the same shall judge" us "in the last day." (John xii. 48.) He tells us we can, although sinners, find pardon and peace with Him, by the merits of His atonement, and through faith in His work. "He is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." (John i. 29.) He has "given His life a ransom for many." (Matt. xx. 28.) He has died, "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." (1 Peter iii. 18.) He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree." (1 Peter ii. 24.) "His blood cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John i. 7.) And how are these benefits to be received by us? (1.) Is it by doing our best? No. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us." (Titus iii. 5.) "Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. ii. 9.) (2.) Is it by a conviction in our

minds that His religion is true—such a conviction as, I trust, the foregoing argument has produced in many a reader? No. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. ii. 14.) There were many, when Jesus Christ walked this earth, quite convinced in general of His truth, but they did not come to Him, partly because they could not give up the world for His sake, but chiefly because their conviction was only of an intellectual character.

Intellect never saved a soul. It was with the heart and will that man first so grievously revolted from God ; it is the heart and will which God must turn and dispose to Himself. It is the faith which His Spirit kindles, the faith which believes in Him and what He has said—not the faith which good arguments produce—by which sinners are saved. “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” “If thou believest with all thine heart,” was the condition which an evangelist required before admitting his convert to baptism. (Acts viii. 37 ; Rom. x. 10.)

Do you then feel drawn towards these verities more than before? Whoever you may be, rest not, I beseech you, until you are able to say, “Lord, I believe,” not in your head merely, but with your whole being. I think the cause has been shown to be a good one. Be encouraged to

risk all, and go to the Saviour whose mighty and merciful works prove both His truth, His power, and His love. Go now ; delay not a day. The reading of this book may be a crisis in your life. A crisis leading to life, if it is acted upon with promptitude, and earnestness, and prayer. But if you let the impression die away—if you do not act upon it by coming as a sinner to Him whose great work the Gospel records, and the Apostles preached, and the martyrs bled for, it will be a crisis leading unto death. The rejection of Christ with the heart will witness against you, though you confess with your mind that He is true. Wait, delay, hesitate, and you may be lost. I am bold to declare to you that to-day is the day of salvation—that Christ is the same to-day as He was when He healed the leper, opened blinded eyes, raised the dead, and blessed the little ones.

III. And if the reader be one who has long accepted the Bible and its great history of redemption as true, but who has stood still there, and has not admitted the record into his heart and life, I beseech you, weigh well your danger. This intellectual conviction will but aggravate your doom. None, surely, will be more deeply judged than they who were assured of the truth of Christianity, but never felt its force, nor sought to know its power. You are in awful danger, but you may come and be saved. Look at these patient and suffering Christians, who, as

the author of this work has told you, used to say of the cross they bore, "Hæc est habitus victoriæ nostræ, hæc palmata vestis, tali curru triumphamus." The only robe they loved was the robe of Christ's righteousness; the only triumphal chariot they sought was the martyr's death. Do you marvel at their faith and constancy? It never sprang from a cold mental conviction. What was it which made Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (A.D. 116), so eager for the crown of martyrdom, that he wrote to the Romans, "I am the wheat of God; let me be ground even by the teeth of beasts; that I may be found the pure bread of Christ"? What was it which enabled the aged Polycarp to witness for Christ in the hissing flames, so that when offered free pardon if he would but forsake his Lord, "Four-score and six years," said he, "have I served Christ, and He hath done me no wrong; how can I now blaspheme my King and Saviour?"

There is but one reply to these questions. These men, and thousands more (as Gibbon unwillingly concedes), witnessed for Christ because they believed in Christ; in other words, their faith was more dear to them than their lives.

Our author has well reminded us (see *ante*, p. 51), that philosophy can count no "noble army of martyrs." Philosophy was an opinion; Christianity is much more: it is a matter of life

or death with each immortal being : it is a matter of life and death with you. Most other subjects you may study or not as you please ; but you must receive this Divine faith, *or die*. You *must* receive it, and yet of yourself you *cannot* ; for “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” (1 Cor. xii. 3.) Reader, I cannot leave you without one searching question : were you offered your choice to-night, to die at the stake or to renounce your Saviour, which would you choose ? Life is ebbing away. Eternity is to come. You shall stand before God’s judgment-seat. Are you ready ? Are you ready now ? If not, the most correct opinions will only deepen your doom. Imagine a man who, when offered deliverance from a burning house, should content himself with admiring the structure of the fire-escape ! Such is your case, if you know the way of salvation, and yet remain unsaved.

APPENDIX.

BY DR. STILLINGFLEET.



CONCERNING THE SUITABILITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE TO
THE NATURE OF GOD AND THE NEEDS OF MAN.

THOUGH the light of nature may dictate much to us of the benignity and goodness of the Divine nature, yet it discovers nothing further than God's general goodness to such as please Him: but no foundation can be gathered thence of His readiness to pardon offenders, which being an act of grace, must alone be discovered by His will. I cannot think the sun, moon, and stars are such itinerant preachers as to unfold unto us the whole counsel and will of God in reference to man's acceptance with God. It is not every star in the firmament can do that which the star once did to the wise men—lead them unto Christ. The sun in the heavens is no Parelus to the "Sun of Righteousness." The best astronomer will never find the "Day-star from on high" in the zodiac. What St. Austin said of Tully's works, is true of the whole volume of the creation,—There are admirable things to be found in them; but the name of

Christ is not legible there. The work of redemption is not engraven on the works of Providence ; if it had, a particular Divine revelation had been unnecessary, and the Apostles were sent on a needless errand, which the world had understood without their preaching, viz., "That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing to men their trespasses ; and hath committed to them the ministry of reconciliation." How was the word of reconciliation committed to them, if it were common to them with the whole frame of the world ? and the Apostle's query elsewhere might have been easily answered, "How can men hear without a preacher?" For then they might have known the way of salvation, without any special messengers sent to deliver it unto them.

I grant that God's long-suffering and patience is intended to lead men to repentance ; and that some general collections might be made from Providence of the placability of God's nature, and that God never left Himself without a witness of His goodness in the world, being "kind to the unthankful, and doing good, in giving rain and fruitful seasons." But though these things might sufficiently discover to such as were apprehensive of the guilt of sin, that God did not act according to His greatest severity, and thereby did give men encouragement to hearken out and inquire after the true way of being reconciled to Him ; yet all this amounts not to a firm foundation

for faith, as to the remission of sin, which doth suppose God Himself publishing an act of grace and indemnity to the world, wherein He assures the pardon of sin to such as truly repent and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel. Now, is not this an inestimable advantage we enjoy by the Scriptures, that therein we understand what God Himself hath discovered of His own nature and perfections, and of His readiness to pardon sin upon those gracious terms? Of His nature and perfections He teaches us in the Scriptures, not only that He is good and kind, but also holy and just. He shows us that sin cannot be admitted into His presence; and doth most fully describe the tendency of corruption, that the wages of sin is death, and the issue of continuance in sin will be the everlasting misery of the soul, in a perpetual separation from the presence of God, and undergoing the lashes and severities of conscience to all eternity. What a great discovery is this of the faithfulness of God to the world, that He suffers not men to undo themselves without letting them know of it beforehand, that they might avoid it! God seeks not to entrap men's souls, nor doth He rejoice in the misery and ruin of His creatures; but fully declares to them in His Word what the consequence and issue of their practices will be, assures them of a judgment to come, declares His own future severity against contumacious sinners, that they might not think themselves surprised,

and that if they had known there had been so great danger in sin, they would never have been such fools as, for the sake of it, to run into eternal misery. Now, God, to prevent this, with the greatest plainness and faithfulness hath showed men the nature and danger of all their sins, and asks them beforehand what they will do in the end thereof; whether they are able to bear His wrath, and everlasting burnings? If not, He bids them bethink themselves of what they have done already, and humbly accept His gracious offers of pardon, lest iniquity prove their ruin, and destruction overtake them, and that without remedy. Now, if men have cause to prize and value a faithful monitor—one that tenders their good, and would prevent their ruin—we have cause exceedingly to prize and value the Scriptures, which give us the truest representation of the state and condition of our souls.

Again: the Scripture discovers to us the only way of pleasing God, and enjoying His favour. That clearly reveals the way (which man might have sought for to all eternity without particular revelation) whereby sins may be pardoned, and whatever we do may be acceptable unto God. It shows us that the ground of our acceptance with God is through Christ, whom He hath made a “propitiation for the sins of the world,” and who alone is the “true and living way,” whereby we may “draw near to God with a true heart, in full

assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." Through Christ we understand the terms on which God will show favour and grace to the world, and by Him we have "access with freedom and boldness unto God." On His account we may hope not only for grace to pardon and subdue our sins, resist temptations, conquer the devil and the world; but having "fought this good fight, and finished our course," we may "look for glory, honour, and immortality," and that "crown of righteousness which is laid up for those who wait," in faith, holiness, and humility, "for the appearance of Christ from heaven." Now, what things can there be of greater moment and importance for men to know, or God to reveal, than the nature of God and ourselves, the state and condition of our souls, the only way to avoid eternal misery, and enjoy everlasting bliss?

But above all other discoveries of God's goodness, His sending His Son into the world to die for sinners is that which the Scripture sets forth with the greatest life and eloquence. By eloquence, I mean not an artificial composure of words, but the gravity, weight, and persuasiveness of the matter contained in them. And what can tend more to melt our frozen hearts into a current of thankful obedience to God, than the vigorous reflection of the beams of God's love through Jesus Christ upon us! Was there ever,

so great an expression of love heard of! Nay, was it possible to be imagined, that that God who perfectly hates sin should Himself offer the pardon of it, and send His Son into the world to secure it to the sinner who believes in His name! Well might the Apostle say, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." How dry and sapless are all the voluminous discourses of philosophers, compared with this sentence! How jejune and unsatisfactory are all the discoveries they had of God and His goodness, in comparison of what we have by the Gospel of Christ! Well might Paul then say, "That he determined to know nothing but Christ, and Him crucified." "Christ crucified" is the library which triumphant souls will be studying in to all eternity. This is that which cures the soul of all its maladies and distempers: other knowledge makes men's minds giddy and proud; this settles and composes them: other knowledge is apt to swell men into high conceits and opinions of themselves; this brings them to the truest view of themselves, and thereby to humility and sobriety: other knowledge leaves men's hearts as it found them; this alters them, and makes them better. So transcendent an excellency is there in the knowledge of "Christ crucified," above the sublimest speculations in the world.

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