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REMARKS

ON AN ARTICLE IN

THE EDINBURGH REVIEW,

IN WHICH THE DOCTRINE OF

HUME ON MIRACLES

IS MAINTAINED.

BY THE

REV. JAMES SOMERVILLE,

MINISTER OF DRUMELZIER.



Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. ST PAUL.

EDINBURGH:

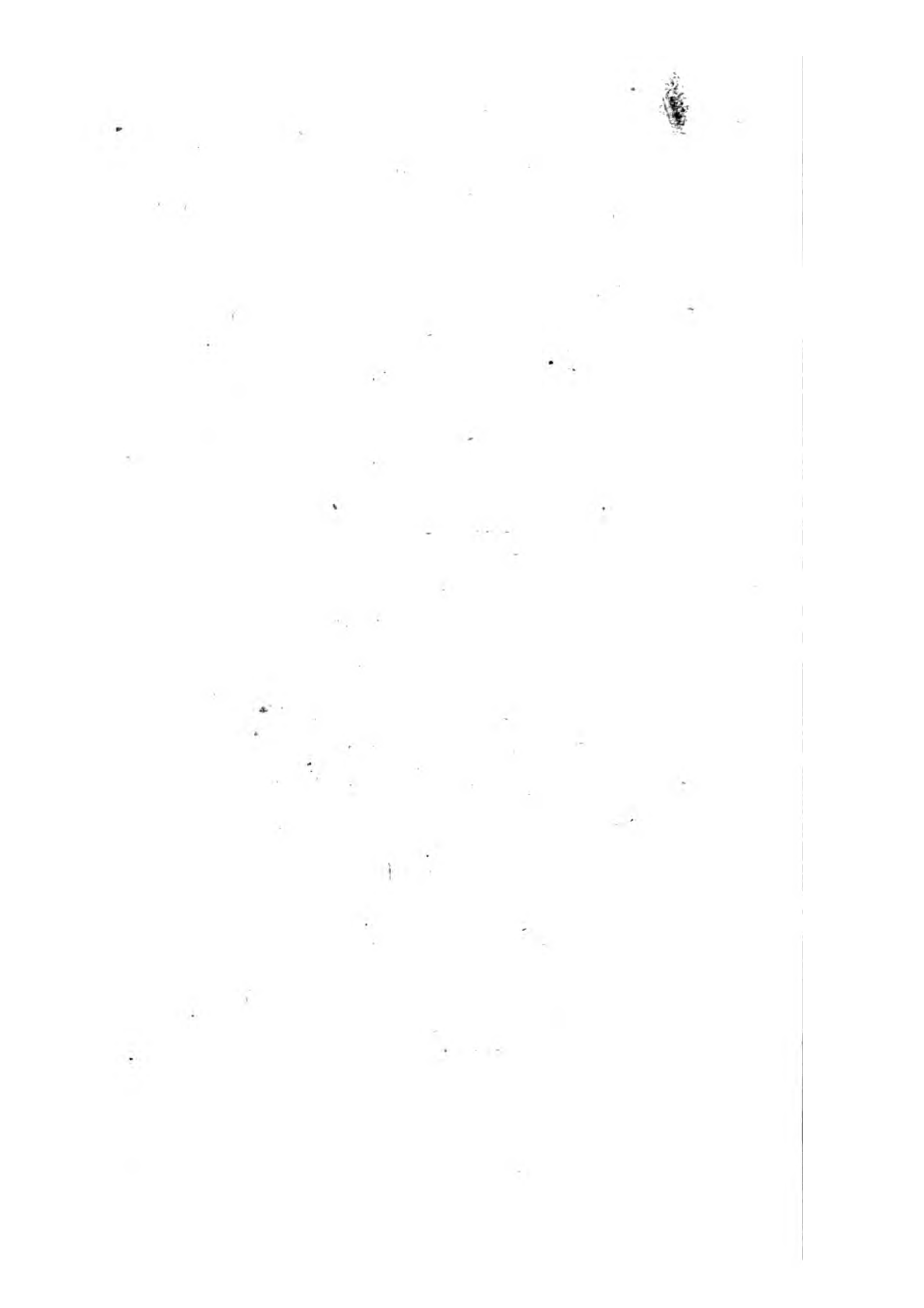
Printed by A. Balfour, Merchant Court,

FOR OLIPHANT, WAUGH & INNES, HUNTER'S SQUARE:

AND SOLD BY W. TURNBULL, AND M. OGLE, GLASGOW; J. HATCHARD, 190,
PICCADILLY; AND T. HAMILTON, 33, PATERNOSTER-ROW,

LONDON.

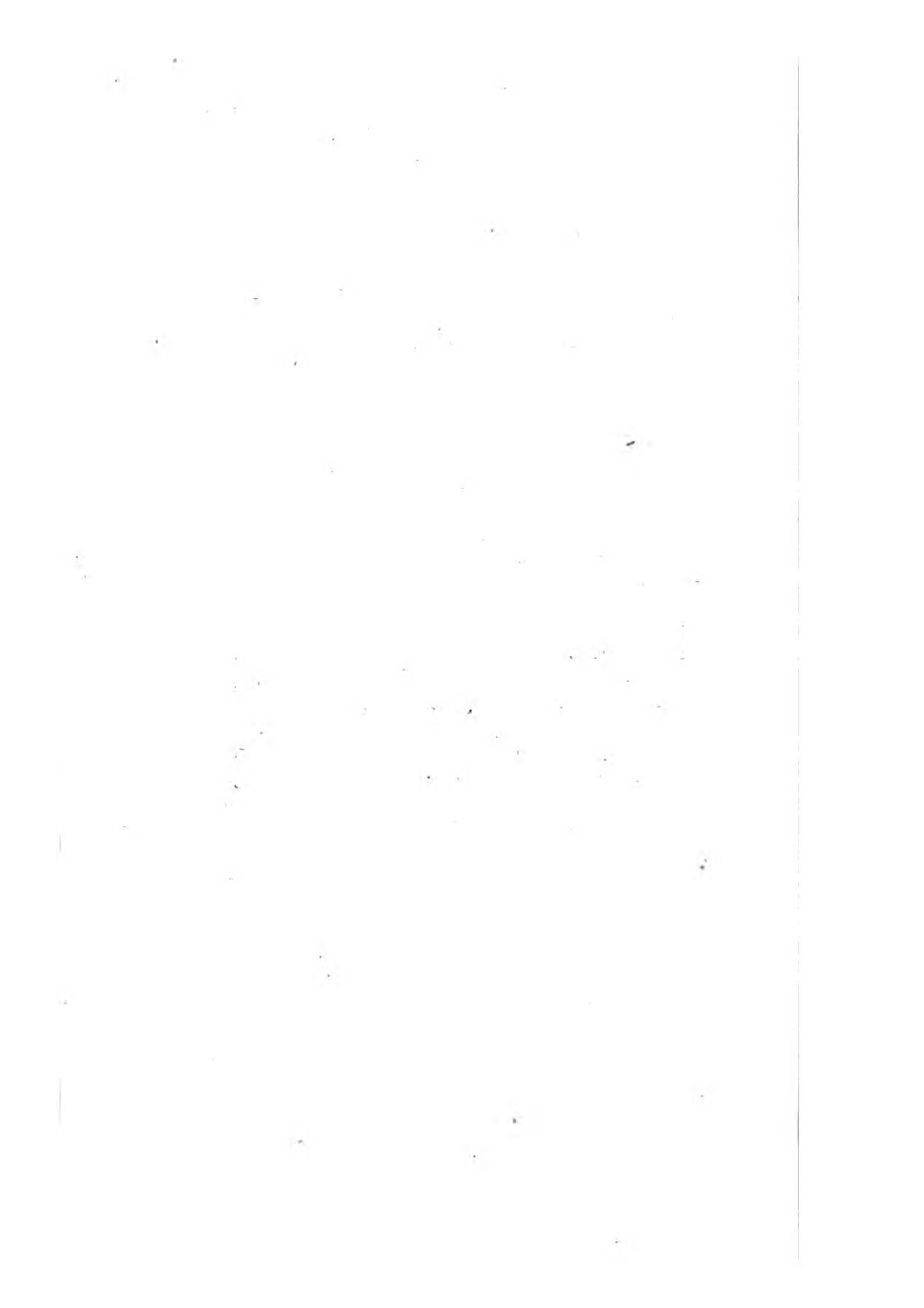
1815.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE substance of the following remarks was originally published in the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, in the month of December last. Some friends, for whose judgment the Author had the highest respect, conceiving that it might serve the cause of religion, to print and circulate them in a separate form, applied to him for that purpose. The respectable Editor of the *Instructor* readily gave his consent. The whole has been revised and considerably enlarged by the Author. The profits, if there are any, will be devoted to religious purposes.

Feb. 6th, 1815.



REMARKS, &c.

INTRODUCTION.

THE world has been much surprised at an article which appeared in Number XLVI. of the Edinburgh Review, on a work of La Place, *Sur les Probabilités*, in which the doctrine of Hume, “*that miracles cannot be proved by any testimony*,” is revived. It was not expected that, after the complete exposure of the weakness of Hume’s arguments, his sophisms and self-contradictions, by Dr Campbell and others, any person would again have asserted his doctrine. But this has been done in the broadest manner, in the above article, and a very high compliment paid to Hume, as having been the first who ever gave a fair view of that doctrine. It is true, there is a *salvo* added in favour of religion, but as it is certain that Hume intended his doctrine to militate against religion, and as not a word is said to shew how it does not apply to religion, there is reason to apprehend that this will be considered as a mere compliment to general opinion. The whole reasoning of Hume, of the Reviewer, and of the author whom he reviews, bears as strongly against miracles in support of religion, as against those of any other kind, and however it may be

meant, there is reason to believe that both the friends and enemies of religion will consider it as an attack against the argument in favour of Christianity, arising from miracles.

I cannot help observing here, the eagerness of the enemies of Christianity, in turning all sciences into weapons against religion. Natural philosophy, geography, geology, history, politics, chemistry, are all made vehicles for conveying infidel opinions. Geometry and algebra, one would have thought, could never have been so employed; yet such is the earnestness of infidels in promoting their cause, and such their dexterity, that even these sciences have been forced to contribute their aid; and so far do they carry it, that, in a pamphlet on Backgammon, or Whist, they will contrive to have something against religion.

Some persons may consider it as quite superfluous to publish any thing on this subject, after what has been written by others, and particularly after the able work of Dr Campbell, which is so well known in this country. But when the enemies of revelation are found considering it as useful to their cause to publish anew their old and refuted arguments, it may also be useful to the cause of religion to meet them with new answers, suited to the present circumstances. New publications will always find some readers, who might be disposed to neglect old works, though of greater merit. This little tract is not to be considered as a full or elaborate discussion of the question, nor as intended to supersede the more extensive work of Dr Campbell,—a work which is earnestly recommended to every reader;—but merely to furnish, in a small compass, an antidote to the poison so widely diffused by the Edinburgh Review. *

* Dr Campbell informs us, that it excited much surprise in his days, that Hume continued to publish one edition after another of his Essays, without taking the least notice of the answer, though he had, in a letter to the author,

It may be thought an arduous attempt to enter the lists with the first geometrician, whom France has produced in the present day, and with the Reviewer, who is also, perhaps, the first in his profession in this country. And, indeed, were it in any degree a question of geometry or calculation, I would leave it to others. But it is a question of pure reasoning; and it is well known that the most eminent geometricians, however gigantic their powers are in their own field, are often, when they leave that, less than other men.* The most moderate talents on the side of truth, have often been found an overmatch for the greatest on the side of error; and I apprehend there will be very little difficulty in this case, in shewing the inconclusiveness of the whole reasoning. I shall, first, examine the reasoning of La Place, and then that of the Reviewer.

SECTION I.

Examination of the Reasoning of La Place.

The following is the passage from La Place, on which the whole is built.

“Events may be so extraordinary, that they can *hardly* be established by any testimony. We would *not* give

expressed himself in terms very different from those of contempt, concerning that work. It has excited no less surprise at present, that the Reviewer has republished Hume's doctrine, and maintained as profound a silence about any answer to it, as if none had ever been made. But there is no occasion for any surprise. They wish to produce a certain effect, and that effect is to be produced by promulgating their own doctrines, not by noticing the answers. They have, perhaps, taken the hint, from these persevering personages, the quack doctors, who continue year after year to advertise their nostrums, long after their pernicious effects have been detected. They persevere, because they hope that many will read and believe, and purchase and swallow, who never heard of the detection.

* No man ever fell into grosser absurdities in general reasoning than Whiston.

credit to a man who affirmed that he had seen an hundred dice thrown in the air, and all fall on the same faces. If we ourselves had been spectators of such an event, we would not believe our own eyes, till we had scrupulously examined all the circumstances, and assured ourselves that there was no trick nor deception. After such examination, we would not hesitate to admit it, notwithstanding its great improbability ; and no one would have recourse to an inversion of the laws of vision, in order to account for it. This shews, that the probability of the continuance of the laws of nature, is superior, in our estimation, to every other evidence, and to that of historical facts the best established. One may therefore judge of the weight of testimony necessary to prove a suspension of the laws of nature, and how fallacious it is, in such cases, to apply the common rules of evidence." *Edin. Review*, p. 327.

The first remark I shall make on this paragraph, is, the author's apparent hesitation and diffidence with regard to the doctrine he is advancing. He reminds us of a boy venturing on the ice, uncertain whether it will bear him or not. He first says, we would *hardly* believe extraordinary events : then he gives a particular instance, and says, we would *not* believe it. There is certainly a wide difference betwixt *hardly* believing, and *not* believing at all ; and though the author seems to use the first as a stepping-stone to carry him on to the last, yet there is still so great a difference between them, that we may grant the first, and utterly deny the second.

In order to sift his reasoning more thoroughly, it will be necessary to draw it out in a somewhat more logical form. I shall endeavour to do it all justice, under the conviction that this paper can be of no service, unless the argument is met both fairly and fully. There are three premises, and a conclusion, as follows.

First, We would not believe a man who said that he had seen a hundred dice fall on the same faces.

Secondly, We would believe our own eyes, if we actually saw such an event.

Thirdly, The reason why we would believe our own eyes, is our belief of the immutability of the laws of vision.

Therefore, our belief of the continuance of the laws of nature, is greater than our belief of any testimony.

Now, I shall endeavour to shew that both the first and third of these premises are false, and therefore the conclusion must be false also.

The whole rests on the first assertion, that we would not give credit to a man who related that he saw such a wonderful event. The truth of that proposition is therefore to be examined most particularly. But before proceeding to the examination of it, I must take the liberty of introducing a little change into the statement. The author merely says, we would not give credit to a man, that is, literally, to *one man*; but, in using this language, he either did not intend to go so far as Hume and the Reviewer, or if he did intend to go as far, it must have been an oversight; for his argument required that he should have said, we would not believe *any number of men, however great that number may be, and with whatever circumstances their testimony may be attended.* His conclusion is universal, against our belief of *any* testimony; but that conclusion will not follow, though we had good ground not to believe *one* man. I suppose, therefore, he means to say, We would not believe any number of men, however intelligent, however disinterested, however circumstanced, who should tell us that they had seen an hundred dice fall on the same faces. Unless he says this, he says nothing to the purpose.

If La Place intended to go the same length with

Hume and the Reviewer, there must also be an oversight in the instance he has given in illustration of his doctrine. He meant to shew that no testimony can prove a suspension of the laws of nature. Now, the falling of a hundred dice on the same faces, is no suspension of any law of nature. It is perfectly possible, in consistency with the laws of nature, and even in some degree probable. The author could easily have pointed out by numbers, the degree of its probability. I shall therefore, without taking advantage of this, strengthen his argument, by supposing a case which would really be a suspension of the laws of nature, such as the sun standing still, a dead person rising to life, a stone thrown into the air and not falling, or a piece of iron swimming in the water. La Place is to be understood, then, as saying, that we would not give credit to any number of witnesses, in any circumstances, who should assert that they saw an hundred dice thrown into the air, and all fall on the same faces, or a stone thrown up and remain suspended.

On this I would make two observations; 1st, That it is a mere assertion without proof; and, 2dly, That it is altogether unfounded.

First, *It is mere assertion without proof.* The author has not so much as attempted any proof. In all sound reasoning, the premises from which any conclusion is drawn, ought either to be self-evident, or be proved by others which are so. But here is a proposition which lies at the foundation of the whole fabric, which is neither a self-evident axiom, nor supported by the shadow of proof.

Secondly, *It is an assertion altogether unfounded.*—In order to see this more clearly, we must examine it a little more particularly. It is an assertion respecting a matter of fact, “We would not believe.” But who are

they who are included in this word *we*? Does it include only La Place, the Reviewer, and two or three more; or does it include mankind at large? If the former, it may be granted without any detriment to the cause; for as some men's enmity to the truth has been so great as to cause them to believe a lie, so others, from the same cause, may work themselves up to disbelieve the truth, even when most clearly proved. If the latter, it is asserting a fact which he could not be sure of, unless he had examined all the people in the world, and found them unanimous, or at least, all of them who had any claims to be considered as possessed of any measure of understanding. It is a question concerning a fact in human nature, which is to be settled only by a very extensive induction of particulars, by a careful and extensive examination of existing individuals, and by a thorough knowledge of the history of mankind in times past. When La Place says, that we would not believe extraordinary or miraculous occurrences on any testimony whatever, he is contradicted by the whole history of mankind; for it is the unquestionable fact, that mankind have, in all ages, believed the most extraordinary occurrences on what they considered as good testimony. Indeed, it never entered the head of one of the human race from the beginning of the world, to imagine that they ought not to believe extraordinary facts, when well attested, until about sixty years ago, this idea was started by Hume; and even since that time, the great body of mankind think themselves warranted to believe in good testimony just as they did before, notwithstanding all the new light which that author has thrown upon the subject. So far as regards the past time, then, the assertion of La Place, that mankind will not, upon any evidence, believe extraordinary facts, appears completely contrary to truth.

With regard to the present time, whether or not mankind would believe any number of witnesses in any circumstances, who should assert, that they had seen a stone remain suspended in the air, or a dead man rise to life, the fact can only be ascertained by a reference to mankind at large. It is a point on which every man must judge for himself, and, if we can by any means come to know what is the mind of mankind at large, we must abide by their decision. For, let it be observed, the question is not, what mankind ought to believe, but what they do, or will believe in a given case. It is a reference to the actual state of human nature, and to the existing constitution of the human mind, on the question, what mankind do believe, or will believe in any particular case. Now, there is not the shadow of a doubt, as was already stated, that in times past not only the vulgar, but the most enlightened of the human race, have believed miraculous facts when well attested. There is as little doubt, that the great body of mankind, learned as well as unlearned, still do the same, without being the least moved by the subtile arguments of Hume and his few followers. Thus far, belief in testimony appears to be an essential part of the constitution of human nature; and if it be so, we may depend upon it, that if any new extraordinary fact were to occur, such as a hundred dice falling on the same faces, or a stone remaining suspended in the air, they would still believe such facts if supported by satisfactory evidence. It is not probable, that mankind will be put to an actual trial by the occurrence of any new miraculous fact; but if we may judge of what they would do in such a case, from what they have done in similar cases in all times past, we may be sure they would believe it if well attested.

It was already stated, that what mankind will or will not believe in any given case, must be left to every in-

dividual to determine for themselves. We are apt to be imposed upon by great philosophical names, and to allow the dogmatical assertions of such men as La Place and the Reviewer to pass as unquestionable truths. This might be in some measure reasonable, if it were a point on which they were well qualified to judge, and the rest of the world quite unqualified, as any question concerning Jupiter's satellites, or Saturn's ring. But this is a question, in which every man is qualified to judge for himself, and where these philosophers can only decide for themselves as individuals. If the great body of mankind declare, that their minds are so constituted, that they would believe miraculous events when well attested, the whole reasoning of La Place falls to the ground; and, from such a decision there can be no appeal.

An individual can speak only for himself, but, for my part, if La Place or the Reviewer had asserted that they had seen these events, I would be disposed to give much credit to them, especially if I was sure they had carefully examined every circumstance, and had no particular interest to bias them. If, in addition to this, all the philosophers of Paris and Edinburgh, and all the intelligent people in both these cities, were to join in the same testimony, I believe, that, in fact, no person, unless void of understanding, would refuse his assent. We would act in this, as we do in all cases which depend on testimony, first examine the capacity of the witnesses, and, when satisfied in that point, would next examine with great care, if they had any particular interest to serve by their testimony. We know that mankind will testify what they consider as falsehood for interest. An Infidel, we know, may be so destitute of common honesty, as to declare his belief of the Bible, and even the Scottish Confession of Faith, for a church living, or a

professorship. Hume would not have scrupled at this, had he succeeded in his canvass for the moral philosophy chair. But if we found that the witnesses had capacity, and no interest to serve, I believe that no person would reject their testimony. And if, in addition to all these circumstances, we discovered that their interest was to be greatly hurt by their testimony; that they were quite certain of losing their situations of emolument, their ease and comfort; of incurring hatred, persecution and death; under such circumstances as these, their testimony would be altogether irresistible.

I have proceeded all along on the supposition, that the author says, "We would not give credit to *any number of men*, in any circumstances, who declared, that they had seen an event which was a suspension or change of the great laws of nature;" because if he only means that we would not believe *one man*, it may be granted without the least detriment to the argument, for there are thousands of cases in which we do not give credit to a single witness, where our belief is compelled by a great number.

The badness of the author's logic is here also to be noticed. This, which is the first of his premises, is, in reality, the conclusion itself. It is assuming the very question in dispute, and then making that assumption the medium of proving it, which is just proving it by itself. The thing to be proved is, that we would not believe any number of witnesses, testifying what was inconsistent with the laws of nature, and he begins by laying it down as to be granted.

I shall now examine the reason which he assigns why we would believe our own eyes in case of our seeing a hundred dice fall on the same faces, or a stone suspended in the air. It is, says he, our belief of the immutability of the laws of vision.

This, like the former, is mere assertion, without an attempt towards proof: and, like the former, it must also be referred to general opinion. The question is, Why do we believe, in such a wonderful instance, that our eyes have not deceived us? That we do not see *deuces* on the dice when they are really *aces*? La Place says, Because we are persuaded of the immutability of the laws of vision. But the fact is, we are persuaded of no such matter; for we know that in many instances a man sees a single object as double; and in many cases, as of drunkenness and disease, he believes that he sees objects which have no existence at all. In any particular instance, therefore, whether common or extraordinary, a man believes his eyes, because he is convinced by a rapid, and perhaps unobserved process of reasoning, that the general laws of vision have not, in that particular instance, been changed or suspended. The process of reasoning on which he arrives at that conclusion, is, that on all other objects with which he has been long acquainted, his eyes are doing their office truly as usual. He looks up to the sky, and sees not two suns, but one; and he observes all the people who are about him, not having two heads, or four eyes, but the usual number. Finding his eyes testifying truly in all these matters, he believes that they are doing the same in the case of the dice or the stone. All this, like many other processes of reasoning, may be so rapid as to be unobserved; but that this is really the ground of belief, and the process by which a person arrives at it, will appear evident from this circumstance—that if any doubt were formally to arise in his own mind, or to be suggested by another, this is the very plan he would have recourse to in order to be sure what was the fact. He would not rest on the general ground, that any change in the laws of vision was impossible; but knowing that such changes are not only

possible, but frequent, he would proceed to try his eyes upon other objects, or to examine the objects in question by his other senses, that he might know whether or not any such change had taken place in the laws of vision in the present instance. The credit, therefore, which we give to our own eyes, when we see any wonderful appearance, is not founded on our persuasion of the immutability of the laws of vision, but on this, that in that instance we have abundant proof that the laws of vision are not changed.

Before La Place, therefore, can establish his theory, he must first prove, that we would not believe the greatest number of the most intelligent and upright witnesses who should assert that they had seen a hundred dice fall on the same faces ; and he must prove, that when we believe the testimony of our own eyes, we do it from a persuasion of the immutability of the laws of vision. He has made no attempt to prove either the one or the other ; and we believe he did not make the attempt, because he knew he had no such proofs to offer. He comes not forward here as a geometrician, but as an observer of human nature. Geometry could afford no proofs ; and all the proofs which could be brought from the observation of the sense and conduct of mankind were against him ; for in all ages mankind have actually believed the most astonishing events when well attested ; and they still go on to do so, in spite of all that Hume and the enemies of revelation have said to the contrary. If it is a question which must be referred to the general judgment of mankind,—there is no doubt of that being against them.

SECTION II.

Examination of the Reasoning of the Reviewer.

THE passages in the Review on which it is intended to animadvert, are as follows:—"The first author we believe who stated fairly the connection betwixt the evidence of testimony, and the evidence of experience, was Hume, in his Essay on Miracles; a work full of deep thought and enlarged views: and if we do not stretch the principles so far as to interfere with the truths of religion, abounding in maxims of great use in the conduct of life, as well as in the speculations of philosophy." P. 329.

"Conformably to the principles contained in it, and also to those in the Essay before us, if we would form some general rules for comparing the evidence derived from our experience of the course of nature, with the evidence of testimony, we may consider physical phenomena as divided into two classes, the one comprehending all those of which the course is known, *from experience*, to be *perfectly uniform*; and the other comprehending those of which the course, though no doubt governed by general laws, is not perfectly conformable to any law with which we are acquainted. The violation of the order of nature among phenomena of the former class, the suspension of gravity, for example, the deviation of any of the stars from their places, or their courses in the heavens, &c.; these are facts, the improbability of which is so strong, that *no testimony* can prevail against it. It will always be more wonderful that the violation of such order should take place, than that any number of witnesses should be deceived themselves, or be disposed to deceive others."

“ Against the uniformity of such laws (as the motions of the heavenly bodies, &c.) it is impossible for testimony to prevail.” P. 330.

“ Supposing the greatest antiquity to which history goes back is 5000 years, or 1,826,213 days, the probability that the sun will rise to-morrow is, according to this rule, $\frac{1,826,214}{1,826,215}$, or there is, 1,826,214 to 1, to wager in favour of that event.” P. 333.

One of the most common sophisms, is the substituting of one term in the place of another, which are totally different in their meaning, and then arguing from them as if they meant the same thing. Of this the Reviewer is glaringly guilty in his reasoning, as contained in these extracts. He calls that experience, which really is, and ought to have been called, testimony; and then he argues from it against testimony. Thus he asserts, that our knowledge of the great laws of nature, such as the rising and setting of the sun, gravity, &c. is founded on *uniform experience*. Now this is not the fact. The word experience can, with no propriety, be applied to any thing except what falls under the personal observation of an individual. The knowledge that any person has of the regular rising and setting of the sun, from experience, is exactly commensurate with his own life, or rather with that part of it, in which he has been able to make observations. With regard to all the time that elapsed before, he has no experience; if he knows any thing about it, he knows it solely by testimony. It might be experience with each of the successive generations which preceded the present one, but it comes to the present generation only in the shape of testimony, and must therefore be subjected to all the rules by which testimony is usually tried. Supposing history to reach back 5000 years, all the experience that exists in the

world of the regular rising and setting of the sun, is only the experience of the oldest men who are alive, and the remainder of the 5000 years depends entirely on testimony.

If it was owing to the want of acumen that the Reviewer did not perceive this confusion of ideas and terms, he must be placed very low in the class of reasoners. If he did perceive it, but adhered to it, because he easily saw that the distinction would overthrow all his reasoning, he must stand still lower as a man of integrity. Had he confined himself to the just sense of the word experience, his argument would have been, "No testimony can prevail against 70 or 80 years experience." But such a conclusion would have little answered the purpose, which either Hume or he had in view.

That the Reviewer has made this unwarranted use of the word experience, where testimony should have been used, will appear plain from the way in which the word is daily used in other cases. There are at present many discoveries making in chemistry. Would the Reviewer think himself warranted to say that he knew the truth of these by experience, if in fact he had never seen one of the experiments? We hear much of meteoric stones:—Would any man who understood language, say he had experience of stones falling from the air, who had never seen one of them? Equally false is it to say, that it is from uniform *experience* we know the rising and setting of the sun from the remotest times to the present day.

But if they are determined to call that by the name of experience, which comes to us by the testimony of persons who lived before our days, then they must in justice apply the same word to that testimony which has transmitted miracles to us. If it is by experience we know the rising and setting of the sun from the beginning of the world, it is also by experience we know that

in the days of Joshua the sun did not set for a whole day, that in the days of Moses the Red Sea was divided, and many other facts of the same kind. The ordinary facts which happened in those times, and these extraordinary ones, come to us precisely in the same way, by the testimony of persons who declare that they were founded upon their personal experience. We must therefore give them all one denomination; either call them all experience, or call them all testimony; and whichever of the terms we adopt, *uniformity* is excluded, by the very fact of the record which is in our hands testifying to the deviations.

The Reviewer, after Hume and La Place having falsely assumed, that all our knowledge of the great laws of nature is *experience*, and also that experience is *perfectly uniform*, goes on to state that *no testimony* can prevail against it. A most unquestionable truth, without doubt, if his premises are granted, and far from requiring the metaphysical talents of Hume, or the mathematical powers of La Place or of his Reviewer to establish. For, if experience be uniform, that experience must consist of the personal experience of every individual of the human race in every age. Nothing less can constitute uniform experience; and if there be uniform experience on any point whatever, it is plain that no testimony can prevail against it, for this obvious reason, that no person could possibly be found giving such testimony. The uniformity of experience, which is assumed as the very basis of the argument, precludes the possibility of any opposite testimony. The proposition, therefore, which assumes that no testimony can prevail against perfect uniformity of experience, is a mere childish truism. It first of all assumes, that experience is perfectly uniform, and then argues, that if it is perfectly uniform, it must be perfectly uniform!

But if it be true that a very small part of our knowledge of the laws of nature is founded on experience; that the far greater part of it depends on testimony; and that these gentlemen, by a dexterous manœuvre, have substituted experience for testimony,—we must restore this word to its proper station, and then try their reasoning according to this view of the case. They ought then to have said, that *uniform testimony*, for 5000 years, or deducting the life of the present generation, which is justly placed under the head of experience, for about 4920 years, bore, that the sun had risen and set every day; and then their argument would have been, that *no testimony* can prevail against *uniform testimony*,—just such a precious truism as we had in the former case. For if the testimony be uniform, where are the persons to be found to testify the deviations; and if there be any persons testifying the deviations, where is the uniformity of testimony?

This will lead the reader to see why they have substituted experience for testimony. Real experience furnished too narrow ground for such an extensive conclusion as they wished to draw. Had they restricted the term experience to what is really experience, and called all the rest testimony, they would have been deprived of the plausible ground of opposing testimony to uniform experience; and instead of saying that no testimony is to be credited against uniform experience, they would have been obliged to say, that no testimony is to be credited against uniform testimony;—a proposition too trifling and harmless to meet with any attention. Had they called that part of our knowledge testimony which really is testimony, then it would have followed, that the facts concerning the ordinary laws of nature, and the facts concerning miracles, as all standing on the same ground, the ground of testimony, must all be tried by the same laws, the laws by which testimony is tried.

Let them then confine the term experience to what is experience, and testimony to what is testimony, and they must either say, 1st, That no testimony is to be credited against a man's personal experience; or, 2dly, That no testimony can prevail against uniform testimony. If they adopt the first, it will destroy all historical evidence, and all credibility of facts, except the few which have fallen under an individual's personal observation. If the second, it is such a childish truism, as to be perfectly harmless, though the reasoning were allowed to be just; but it assumes what is not true, for testimony is not uniform with regard to the great laws of nature. The testimony which attests the existence of miracles, whether that testimony be true or false, at all events exists, and therefore destroys the uniformity of testimony on the other side.

These miracles, therefore, being thus attested, must be tried by the ordinary rules by which other testimony is tried. There actually is testimony for them: if there be any against them, let it be brought forward, and fairly weighed; but let them not be rejected by the sweeping assertion, that uniform testimony is against them, an assertion evidently false: nor by the more plausible assertion, that uniform experience is against them, which can mean no more than that no man living has had experience of them,—a point which may readily be granted without the smallest injury to miracles, unless we are prepared to involve in one common destruction our belief of every fact which is beyond our personal observation.

I argue, therefore, against Hume, La Place, and the Reviewer, that no argument can be brought against miracles from uniform experience of the regularity of the great laws of nature, because no such uniform experience exists, if by experience we understand, as they do,

the knowledge that is conveyed to us by all mankind in all ages.

If they give up the word *uniform*, and adopt the word *general* instead of it, and say that no testimony is to be credited against general experience and general testimony, this will as little serve them. This word, when deliberately adopted, supposes the want of uniformity, of universality ; it supposes only a very large majority of cases to be regular, but it also supposes a number of deviations, otherwise the word *uniform* would be adopted. Now the granting of any cases of deviation, leaves all the room for miracles which can be desired.

They must therefore be compelled to give up the argument, or to say, *that no testimony is to be credited beyond our own observation*. I know not whether they will occupy this ground or not ; but, as it is all that remains to them, it may be proper to shew that it is quite untenable.

If we are to believe nothing but what agrees with our personal observation and experience, it will reduce our knowledge and belief within very narrow limits indeed. The records of history would in a great measure be useless: the greatest part of the inhabitants of this island could never believe the existence of volcanoes, earthquakes, or any of those natural phenomena which have not fallen under their own observation. The course of nature, according to their experience, has been as uniform against these, as against the sun standing still, or a dead person rising to life. The inhabitants of those regions where ice is never seen, ought not to believe in its existence. The readers of Mr Locke have generally been disposed to smile at his account of the king of Siam, who hearkened with great deference to the narrative of the Dutch ambassador concerning the wonders of Europe, until he came to mention, that at one period

of the year the rivers became so hard as to bear the heaviest carriages ; but, on hearing this, stopt him, and said he had hitherto believed him, because he appeared to be a sober man, but now he could believe him no longer. According to the principles of the Reviewer, he was perfectly right ; and Mr Hume expressly says so. Nor do I mean entirely to deny it ; for he had only a single witness testifying it ; and, moreover, that witness was a traveller, and perhaps the Siamese prince knew, that in all ages travellers have had the same privilege to tell lies, as philosophers have had to maintain absurdities.* But on the principles of the Reviewer, he ought not to have believed that in this country the rivers freeze, though a million of persons had gone from Europe to testify it—though he had found all these to be men of the most perfect integrity in every thing else—though they had offered to go to death, rather than deviate from their testimony—and though, in addition to this, he had become acquainted with all the European books which take notice of that circumstance. All should have weighed as nothing in opposition to his own unvarying experience of the course of nature. Yea, though he and all his countrymen, except one, had come here to see it, and had gone home and unanimously declared that it was true, still that one ought not to have believed it. In fact, the inhabitants of those regions ought on no account to believe this, unless either they come here to witness it, or some of our professors go there to exhibit their experiments concerning the formation of ice. Such, without the least straining, is the doctrine of the Reviewer. We may safely leave this to the common sense of mankind.

* Cicero says, that in his days there was nothing so absurd which had not been maintained by some philosopher. Had he lived in the present times, he would not have been of a different opinion.

Perhaps the Reviewer will say, that the incredulity of these men would be unreasonable, because there is a wide difference betwixt their country and Europe ; and as there is a degree of cold here which they have not experienced, so they could not know what might be the effects of that cold upon water. Very true. Neither has the Reviewer experienced the particular circumstances in which miracles were wrought, viz. when the divine authority of a particular religion was to be demonstrated ; and, as he has no experience of these circumstances, he is not qualified to say what would take place under them.

The sum of this Section is this. We have no knowledge of past events from experience, but wholly from testimony ;* testimony does not bear that the course of nature has been uniform, but expressly bears that there have been many deviations. There is no other experience than an individual's personal observation ; and to say that we ought to believe nothing but what agrees with our personal observation, leads to absurdity, and contradicts common sense.†

SECTION III.

Examination of the Reviewer continued.

THE assertions which I intend to examine in this Section, are the following. “ The suspension of gravity,

* Hume in a great measure acknowledges this in his letter to Dr Blair, printed in Dr Campbell's work on miracles

† The Reviewer himself shews, that he does not make experience his rule of judging. In the very article we are examining, he labours to establish the belief of *meteoric stones*, though it is presumed he never saw any of them fall.

the deviation of any of the stars from their places, &c. are facts, the improbability of which is so strong, that *no testimony* can prevail against it. It will always be more wonderful, that the violation of such order should take place, than that any number of witnesses should be deceived themselves, or be disposed to deceive others." "Against the uniformity of such laws, it is impossible for testimony to prevail."

We might safely have left the subject with what is said in the last Section; but as both Hume and the Reviewer repeat these assertions so often, and lay them down in such an unqualified manner, it may be useful to give them a little farther consideration.

I would first observe here, that the Reviewer has made a concession which appears to overthrow his whole argument. He computes that the probability of the sun rising to-morrow, is as $\frac{1826214}{1826215}$, or that a person may wager 1826214 to 1 in favour of it. This implies, that if a person should wager more, as, for instance, a hundred millions to one, he would act against the laws of probability. Here it is taken for granted, that there is some probability of the sun not rising to-morrow: it is very small, but still it is something. Now, I should be glad to know, by what mood or figure he will attempt to prove that an event which is not only possible, but to a certain degree probable, to-morrow, cannot by any evidence be established to have happened in any past period. If he say, that it is in itself impossible, we deny it upon his own showing, for he has proved that it is possible, and even to a certain degree probable. If he say, that uniform experience is against it, we deny it, and say that only the experience of the present generation is against it. If he say that uniform testimony is against it, this we deny also; for it is testified by the

author of the book of Joshua, that in his days the sun stood still for a whole day ; and there is no testimony at all on the other side, as applicable to that particular day. The same observations may be applied to all the miracles recorded in Scripture. Experience is not applicable to them, for it is limited to the objects under our notice ; and testimony is so far from being against them, that there *is* testimony for them, and *none* against them. Many persons testify that they saw them happen, and none testify that they were upon the spot, and examined all the circumstances, and saw that they did not happen. As to the testimony of those who were not there, however uniform it might be, it does not bear at all upon the subject.

The principles of calculation, therefore, are more in support of miracles than against them. Hume's metaphysics would readily excite that suspicion of sophistry which naturally arises in every mind acquainted with metaphysical reasoning, taken in connection with his inveterate enmity to revelation. But when the first mathematicians of the age are seen coming forward in support of the same doctrines, it might be by many taken for granted, that now something of the certainty of geometrical demonstration had been introduced into the subject. But this is mere deception ; for after all that La Place and the Reviewer have said, they have not been able to bring their own science to bear upon the subject in the slightest degree.

Perhaps the Reviewer will say, that the passage just now commented on, no doubt admits the possibility of the sun's standing still ; but there is no inconsistency in granting this, and yet maintaining that no testimony ought to lead us to believe it. The fact is possible : we ought to believe if we saw it ; but *no testimony* ought to induce us to believe it. If he argues in this manner, he

argues fairly upon his own principles ; and this will bring us directly to the subject of this Section,—Can *any* testimony be sufficient to lead us to believe such facts ? It is no small matter that the possibility of such facts is granted ; we have only now to inquire if any testimony can be to us a sufficient ground of belief. Instead of using abstract arguments, I shall here send the Reviewer to his master, Hume, and leave the reader to common sense ; and we would wish it to be particularly observed, that in appealing so often to the sense of mankind, we place the whole matter before the tribunal which alone is competent to give a final decision. For, as was already observed, in remarking on La Place, mankind at large are the only judges of what they will or will not believe—what testimony is credible, and what is incredible—what is sufficient to command their belief, and what not.

Mr Hume says, “ I own there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of a proof from human testimony. Suppose all authors, in all languages, agree, that from the 1st of January 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days ; suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people ; that all travellers who return from foreign countries, bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction : it is evident, that our present philosophers, instead of doubting of that fact, ought to receive it for certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived.” *

* The Reviewer has put a case, “ that we would not believe the inhabitants of London, though they should tell us that the moon had not set there for 24 hours ;” but this is a case not in point, and therefore a mere sophism : for the moon could not be actually above the horizon at

Dr Campbell, after quoting this passage, charges Hume strongly with inconsistency ; and declares that he has given up the argument. “ Was there ever,” says he, “ a more glaring contradiction, than to declare, on the one hand, ‘ *that no testimony for any kind of miracle can ever possibly amount to a probability, much less to a proof, and yet supposing a case, the testimony for which would amount not only to proof but to CERTAINTY?*’” Whether the Reviewer will agree with Mr Hume in the above quotation, or not, I cannot tell. If he agrees with him, then he gives up the argument, and stands contradicted by himself. If he disagrees with him, he contradicts common sense.

Upon the supposition, that to preserve consistency, and maintain his principles, he disagrees with Hume, we shall put another case, though it is scarcely possible that a stronger one can be put than the one just now stated. Suppose that, fifty or sixty years ago, two hostile armies had been marching across this island ; that they had come to Edinburgh, and marched to the seaside ; that, at the word of one of the generals, the sea had opened, and allowed his army to pass on dry ground ; that, at his word, the waters had returned, and swept away the opposing army ; that this fact had been testified by every individual of the surviving army, and by a hundred thousand spectators who had seen it from the neighbouring shores ; and that it had been mentioned by all cotemporary writers ;—upon the principles of

London, without being equally so in every other place from which it was visible. Any testimony then to prove that it had been in such a position at London alone, would not be a testimony to prove an extraordinary fact or a miracle, but to prove a contradiction, that the same thing might be, and might not be, at the same time,—an assertion which could not be the subject of any proof, as an impossibility is not the object of any power. The above case from Hume is truly put ; the Reviewer’s is quite sophistical.

the Reviewer, we ought not to believe it. Nay, though it had happened last year—though all the army which passed were still alive—though all the inhabitants of the surrounding countries were to come forward and declare that they saw it—yea, though all the fraternity of the Edinburgh Reviewers had seen it, except the writer of the article we are examining, who had happened not to be present, he could not have believed all this accumulation of evidence.

This is a very strong case, but we have a right to put the strongest possible case, because the assertion of Hume and of the Reviewer is most unqualified, “that *no* testimony can be a sufficient ground of belief in opposition to experience. It is to no purpose to say, that none of the Scripture miracles are so strongly testified. These gentlemen are not attacking the testimony in favour of Scripture miracles, on account of its weakness; they declare that *no* testimony, be it ever so strong, could induce them to believe the reality of a miracle. We may leave it here to the common sense of the reader.—Had such a miracle, and so attested, taken place, even Hume declares he would have believed it, provided it had been wrought on any other account than for the support of religion. If any person feels disinclined to believe a miracle so strongly proved, as supporting religion, it only shows that his hatred of religion is so great, as in that particular instance to have suspended the right exercise of his reason.

To render the above instance more striking, I have brought it very near our own times. But though our imagination is apt to impose on our judgment with regard to very distant facts, yet, if they were originally well attested, the distance of time makes no difference. On this point I shall give a quotation from the Review-

er, which will be considered of great value by those who are disposed to view him as hostile to revelation.

“ It does not appear,” says he, “ that the diminution of evidence is a necessary consequence of transmission from one age to another. It may hold in some instances ; but in those which most commonly occur, no sensible diminution of evidence seems to be produced by the lapse of time. Take any ancient event that is well attested, such for example as the retreat of the ten thousand, and we are persuaded it will be generally admitted, that the certainty of that event having taken place, is as great at this moment as it was at the return of the Greek army, or when Xenophon published his history.”

CONCLUSION.

Thus have I endeavoured to shew the inconclusiveness of the whole reasoning, both of La Place and the Reviewer. They have assumed the very point in debate, and then reasoned from it as if it had been granted. They have called that experience, which is really testimony, and they have asserted an uniformity in it which has no existence. There are several other matters in the article we have been considering, which would also deserve to be brought under review ; but it does not enter into my present plan to do any thing farther, than merely to point out the sophistry of the great argument which has been brought forward in such a triumphant manner. Neither is it any part of my present design, to bring into view the positive proofs by which the miracles of the Scriptures are supported. Those who wish for information on that point, will find it discussed in almost all the works on the evidences of Christianity. It may be sufficient here, for the sake of the

general reader, to observe, that there are no presumptions against miracles being wrought in support of revealed religion; that there is a strong presumption in their favour; that the Supreme Being is the author of the laws of nature; that as it is by his power that these laws operate, so he must have the power of suspending or altering them when he sees meet;* that the establishment of revealed religion was an event of such importance to mankind, that it might have been expected that the Supreme Being would have interfered, and suspended or altered the laws of nature, to prove that it came from him. It is also to be observed, that the miracles which were wrought in support of revelation, particularly of the gospel, were very numerous; of various kinds; of such a nature, that the witnesses could not have been deceived; that they were wrought before great numbers,—before enemies as well as friends; that those who lived at the time, and had the strongest interest in denying them, never did so; that the witnesses were very numerous, had no worldly interest to serve by their testimony; on the contrary, a very great proportion of them underwent the greatest sufferings, and many of them were subjected to a cruel death on account of their testimony, and that nevertheless not one of them ever drew back, and acknowledged that they had been testifying a falsehood, though by doing so they might have escaped their sufferings. We may here appeal to *experience*, and say, does our experience of human nature, and of the course of human affairs, give us any ground

* This argument must have irresistible force with those who believe in the existence of a God, but can have no effect upon Atheists. It is probable, that the acute mind of Hume perceived this; and, therefore, while he laboured to undermine our belief of revealed religion by his doctrine about testimony, he laboured at the same time to undermine our belief of a great First Cause by his doctrine of cause and effect.

to suspect, that men in such circumstances were not testifying the truth? *

It is a cause of deep regret, that any person should be found so hostile to the best interests of mankind, as to labour to make converts to infidelity. It is still more to be regretted, that a work which often displays such splendid abilities as the Edinburgh Review, should ever contain a single sentence which has even the appearance of such a tendency. The friends of humanity have been delighted with their zealous and persevering efforts in the cause of suffering Africa; and the friends of morality have been no less pleased with the severe chastisements which they have occasionally inflicted on licentious authors. What pity is it, that they do not see that neither humanity nor morals have any firm basis but Christianity? What extensive good might be done, were these talents occasionally employed in behalf of religion? It is long since the Reviewers declared, "That they were ready, whenever a fair opportunity offered, to defend Christianity against the tiger-spring of infidelity." Six years have elapsed since that declaration was made, and yet they have not redeemed their pledge. Can they say, that during that period nothing has occurred in their pages of an opposite tendency?

With regard to the final issue of any attack on Christianity, its friends have no occasion to feel any alarm. The attacks which hitherto have been made, have eventually been beneficial, inasmuch as they have given occasion to bring the evidences of its truth more clearly into view. It is still to be hoped, that every new attack will bring forward new talents in its defence. But

* The reader may consult the work of Mr Chalmers on Christianity, for a very masterly elucidation of this subject. *Quere.* Could it possibly be the appearance of this able work, which brought the long exploded doctrines of Hume again into view?

though the general issue is perfectly safe, yet much partial mischief may be done, which ought to be carefully guarded against by every possible means. If the most popular and widely circulating journal in Europe, shall become a vehicle for infidel sentiments, how much harm may thus be done to the cause of religion? If, in addition to this, persons who are hostile to Christianity, fill such stations as give them easy access to the ductile and unsuspecting minds of youth, it certainly ought to excite no small degree of alarm among those, whose highest wish for the welfare of their children is, that they may be Christians.

FINIS.

EDINBURGH:
Printed by A. Balfour.