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Brahmic Dogmas

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BRAHMIC DOGMAS.

BY

THE REV. S. DYSON.

PART III.

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CHAPTER III.

A MIRACLE IS AN IMPOSSIBILITY.

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BRAHMIC DOGMAS.

(PART III.)

CHAPTER III.

A MIRACLE IS AN IMPOSSIBILITY.

§ 1. *This Brahmie Dogma is opposed to Brahmie Revelation.*

This assumption in the Brahmie creed is fundamental. It is asserted even in the enunciation of those doctrines which, on the face of them, seem to imply a supernatural operation. The prophets of God, however startling and irregular in their manifestation and course, are all, Babu K. C. Sen informs us, * "the sequence of a regular and constant law which regulates the moral interests of mankind." "Wherever and whenever peculiar circumstances demand a great man, the very pressure of that demand drags him forth perforce." This very "short and easy way" of accounting for the character and effects of the life of Jesus Christ, for instance, cannot be justified by any fair survey of the facts of Jewish and Gentile History, † but follows necessarily and legitimately from the primary assumption that all the fundamental doctrines of Brahmism are primitive and self-evident convictions of the human mind, and that *the impossibility of a miracle is one of them.*

This *alleged* primitive conviction is unquestionably clear, decisive, and of very extensive range. The proposition,—a miracle is an impossibility—is so brief that we are in some danger of not duly realizing the comprehensiveness of the predication. Our imagination needs to be furnished with a variety of concrete details involved in this short statement, in order that the magnificence of the assertion here advanced may in some measure be apprehended. Every event of a supernatural origin and character which has been and is alleged as a *fact* is, in this proposition, formally affirmed to be a *fiction*. All the miracu-

* *Great Men*. English Edition. pp. 64-67.

† Nor, equally as little will it account for the uprising and career of Napoleon Buonaparte, whom Babu K. C. Sen, instances as a *Great Man* in another department, and therefore as an illustration of this alleged *Law of Great Men*.

lous occurrences alleged to have accompanied the life of Jesus Christ, and the spread of Christianity; all the miracles recorded in the Hindu *Shasters*; all the miracles handed down by Mussulman Traditions; all the miracles, accounts of which are current among other portions of the human race, savage or civilized, whether of the Old or New World, are, one and all, pronounced to be fictions, and that on the basis of this *a priori assumption* that the impossibility of a miracle is a "primitive and self-evident conviction established in the constitution of men."

Even supposing that Brahmos were not acquainted with or do not believe in the unanimous testimony of Universal History, as to the *asserted* existence of miraculous elements in human religions, yet they cannot refuse assent to the overwhelming *sensible* and *direct* evidence of the prevalence of the Hindu religion, which is saturated with Supernaturalism, in the midst of which they are passing their lives. Every evening around their homes the air resounds with the beating of gongs and blowing of shells in worship of various idols, representations of deities, whose lives are asserted to be miraculous. In truth it is wearisome and superfluous to dwell on this point. In whatever direction we extend our view, and however far back we look into the records of history, to learn the character of the religious practices of mankind, we are confronted with this phenomenon, *asserted reality of miracles*. And it would be altogether irrelevant, *besides being untrue*, if it were asserted that this phenomenon is confined to savages and illiterate men, or people of former ages. No degree of mental endowment, no extent and depth of learning, no holiness of life and devotion to God, can be claimed for any portion of the human family which has not been owned and exhibited by men who have accepted the Christian Revelation, the *essential* and *constituent* elements of which are *miraculous*.

Now this phenomenon of miracles, which has always characterized the religious history and condition of mankind, is universal, and, like every other incontestable and world-wide fact, requires an adequate cause. What is that cause? If we grant that the Brahmo Somaj has, as in duty bound, carefully studied and truthfully reported, the "self-evident convictions" of the human mind, then this phenomenon of the miraculous is an appalling mystery. "The impossibility of a miracle is a self-evident conviction of the human mind," says the Brahmo Somaj; but acceptance of miracles is the universal characteristic of all religions, which, again say the Brahmos, are only the product of the constitutional and natural religious instincts of the human mind. Can we conclude that men, all their life-long, have deliberately stifled this SELF-EVIDENT conviction;—

that having the conviction, they have, with an unintentional unanimity and uniformity,—which itself is an astounding miracle—smothered this conviction? Or can we conclude that, although they possessed this self-evident conviction, yet, somehow, strangely, they were not aware of it? This would not be a miracle indeed; it would be a preposterous absurdity. Or must we suppose that this conviction does exist germinally and potentially but is not recognized till it is pointed out? This may be true, but if so, it would be tantamount to an admission of an external revelation, and opens questions as to the authority and trustworthiness of the revealer which, in their being discussed, would imply both the need and possibility of miracles. Or finally, should we not rather conclude from this undeniable universal phenomenon that the *possibility* of miracles is a belief, certainly not in violation of but rather in harmony with the primitive and self-evident convictions of the human mind, and that the Brahmō Somaj has not dealt faithfully with its own professed authoritative Revelation?

But the reader may reasonably urge that it is scarcely fair to adduce patent facts which certainly, taken by themselves, seem conclusive; and totally to ignore the facts which Brahmōs adduce in favour of their dogma of human nature. These also, it may be urged, should be referred to and their worth estimated. A decision based on *ex parte* statements *only* cannot be worth much.

But, *the Brahmōs adduce no facts. They bring forward no evidence. They dogmatically and oracularly assert, and there an end.*

Should any, however, urge, by way of parrying our conclusion, that so many of the alleged miracles are absurd, or immoral, or puerile, or unsupported by evidence, that we may reasonably conclude that *no* miracle is deserving of credence, and that all are fictions. Very well. Be it so. We do not endorse this reasoning; counterfeit coin proves the existence of genuine. But we may legitimately show that its consequences are very *damaging* indeed to the pretensions of the Brahmō Somaj. Be it so that these alleged miracles are generally unworthy of credit; the *fact* remains that men *have* accepted them, and therefore argues a strong predisposition, sometimes amounting to credulity, in the human mind to accept any thing which pretends to be supernatural however feebly supported by evidence, and all the more cogently proves the falsehood of the Brahmic dogma. For it must be understood, it is not a question at all concerning *miracles*, whether possible or impossible, which is now being dis-

cussed, but a question concerning the existence of a "self-evident conviction of the human mind," which Brahmos assert and which we, on the testimony of universal consciousness, deny. It would be altogether irrelevant to the decision of *this* issue to enter upon enquiries, as to the range of the operation of the laws of nature, or the competency of human testimony. The simple question is this; *Is the Dogma, that a miracle is an impossibility, a radical and fundamental conviction of the human mind or not?* Trustworthy evidence is to be found in the practically unanimous witness of contemporary and past credible History, and that evidence overwhelmingly proves that this dogma of the Brahmo Samaj is false.

The very fact that various attempts in various directions have been made by disbelievers in Christianity to shew that miracles are impossible, is a striking illustration of the ignorance or unfaithfulness which characterizes the Brahmic interpretation of their own Revelation—human nature. If only the "short and easy method" of disposing of miracles, which the Brahmos have struck out, could be depended on by truth-seeking souls, how much heart-ache, and anxious thought, and painful and laborious searching should we all be delivered from! The *Supernatural* claims of Christianity, even if no selfish and worldly interests were concerned, are, it must be confessed, a tremendous difficulty, and if disbelievers could only produce for us some probably true theory of its falsity, which is not encompassed with greater and more difficulties than the theory which it is to supersede, there might be some hope of this troublesome, obtrusive, and pertinacious Christianity being silenced! * But disbelief is *always* boastful of what it is *going* to accomplish, and its predictions are in-

* We have just and reasonable ground of complaint with reference to the mental attitude towards Christianity which Brahmos and most anti-christian theists maintain. It is equivocal and, upon any intelligible and consistent view of Christianity indefensible. If subjected to the test of fair reasoning, it cannot be shewn to be consistent, *either* with the supposition that Christianity is historically false, *or* that it is historically true. It is impossible to define and characterise the state of mind of Brahmos in reference to the historic reality of the person and life of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to say what they believe, and what not, and on what grounds. But the historical facts of Jesus Christ's Life do not depend upon our subjective notions, any more than any other historical facts do. "This ambiguous faith could never hold a place in a disciplined mind but by an act, repeated from day to day, and similar to that of a man who should refuse to have the shutters removed from the windows on that side of his house whence he might desery the residence of his enemy. If Christianity be historically true, it must be granted to demand more than a respectful acknowledgment that its system of ethics is pure; or, were it historically false, we ought to think ourselves to be outraging at once virtue and reason in allowing its name to pass our lips." E. Taylor's *Spiritual Christianity*, p. 35.

variably falsified.* But if the Brahmic assertion could only be *substantiated*, what a simple thing would be the demolition of Christianity! No need of this extensive and difficult research into the laws of nature; no need of this laborious collection of facts to construct a platform strong enough to support the conclusion of the impossibility of miracles; no need of hunting up and arranging instances of the mendacity of men and the falsity of human testimony; no need of weaving subtle metaphysical arguments to shew that it is incredible that God should purpose to make a revelation and that miracles should be employed to make an alleged revelation credible, &c., &c.; all this labour would be superfluous. A little cursory examination of own *self-evident convictions* only is requisite, and lo! There it is;—a miracle is an impossibility!

Now as all this learned investigation and metaphysical argumentation *would* be unnecessary, *if* the Brahmic dogma were a fact, it is plain that Brahmos, *on their own principles*, are precluded from resorting to these methods, valid or not, to establish the truth of this dogma. But it is a remarkable and noteworthy fact, that when challenged to prove the truth not only of this but of *all* their *distinctive* dogmas, the Brahmos never do appeal to that very revelation of Human Nature on whose declarations their dogmas are professedly based. They invariably have recourse to various metaphysical reasonings based generally on an assumed adequate knowledge of the character and proceedings of the Supreme Being. "There is a natural and legitimate revolt in man" says Mr. Hutton † "against any supernaturalism which does not do full justice to nature," and it is one satisfying evidence of Christianity, in congruity with its claim to a supernatural origin, that it does recognize and provide for *all* the real wants and religious instincts of Human Nature. ‡

* "It is most instructive to consider how many predictions of the enemies of Christianity between Julian and Strauss have ignominiously failed. Take for example, the boasted historic discrepancies and asserted "immoralities" to be found in the Bible. Many of them have been reiterated by all infidel writers from the earliest times till now. Many of them are just the same in the "Phases" of Mr. Newman, in the "Age of Reason," of Thomas Paine in Bolingbroke, in Celsus. As a *fact*, the objections *do* not prevail against the persuasion which the New Testament *somehow* inspires, that it is history, and true history, not fiction nor a lie. "If the Bible," says Paine, "perish, from an exposure of the absurdities and errors, which fill it, mind, it is not *my* fault." Poor soul!—"Tis sixty years since;" and in that time, the Bible has found its way into scores of new languages and dialects of man. Christianity has dotted over the earth with its missionary stations, schools, and churches, and now presents a picture of unwonted activity of *propagandism* in nearly every community that professes it!" *Defence of the Eclipse of Faith*, p. 159.

† Hutton's *Essays*, Vol. I. p. 130.

‡ See the Rev. J. Angus' Essay, Man a witness for Christianity. *Faith and Free Thought*, p. 437.

But what are we to think of Brahminism, which is confessedly based on "the primitive and self-evident convictions of human nature," and which yet in all its defences and apologies *either* ignores these self-evident convictions altogether, *or* plays "fast and loose" with them just as it serves its turn,—just as they seem to support or oppose a foregone conclusion?

§ 2. *The assertion, irrespective of Brahminism, cannot be proved.*

However, following the Brahmos in their abandonment of their professed Revelation, and turning aside from the question whether the impossibility of a miracle is a primitive conviction of the human mind or not, the discussion of impossibility of miracles does not, as we proceed to shew, improve the position of the Brahmos. Granting, as Baboo K. C. Sen, does abundantly grant, that the Laws of Nature are called so only metaphorically and improperly, and are only human generalizations of observed facts, regular established modes in which God operates, not independent agents and causes,—it cannot be proved, either by examination of our own minds, or by any extensive induction of events in Nature, that the Author of Nature *can not* interpose, *for any reason whatever*, to suspend or modify those laws, which He Himself has imposed and enforces.* No extensive and profound acquaintance with physical science and no subtle analysis of the human mind can invalidate this conclusion. No induction, however far-reaching and extensive, can establish the conclusion that miracles are *impossible*. A miracle is very highly improbable, but whether God has wrought a miracle or not is a different question altogether from the question whether God *can* work a miracle or not.

"Unbelievers use the antecedent argument from the order of nature against our belief in miracles. Here, if they only mean that the fact of that system of laws, by which physical nature is governed, makes it antecedently improbable that an exception should occur in it, there is no objection to the argument; but if, as is not uncommon, they mean that the fact of an established order is fatal to the very notion of an exception, they are using a presumption as if it were a proof. They are saying,—What has happened 999 times one way cannot happen on the 1000th time another way, *because* what has happened 999 times one way must happen in the same way on the 1000th. If, however, they mean that the order of

* Law can only prevent miracles by "*compelling* and making necessary the succession of nature, *i. e.* in the sense of causation; but science has itself proclaimed the truth that we see no causes in nature; that the whole chain of physical succession is to the eye of reason a rope of sand, consisting of antecedents and consequents, but without a rational link or trace of necessary connexion between them." Mozley, *On Miracles*, p. 39.

nature constitutes a necessity, and that a law is an unalterable fate, this is to assume the very point in debate, and is much more than its antecedent probability.

“Facts cannot be proved by presumptions, yet it is remarkable that in cases when nothing stronger than presumption was ever professed, scientific men have sometimes acted as if they thought this kind of argument taken by itself decisive of a fact which was in debate.” *

The phrase “*order of nature*” is used in two distinct senses, and it is necessary to specify which of these is intended, when a miracle is asserted to be a violation or contradiction of the order of nature. It may mean arrangement, the beautiful complicated and subtle adjustment of component parts; or it may mean simply uniform continuance and recurrence. In the former sense, as signifying harmonious system, it is plain the miraculous does not contradict the order of nature. The working of some intricate machine, *e. g.*, a locomotive steam-engine, is intentionally stopped for some purpose by the driver; no one imagines that the exquisite contrivance and design of the machinery is affected. This remains just as it was. The order of nature as signifying mutual relation and adjustment, in the same way remains as striking and as wonderful, whether in a few instances, the action of nature is or is not interrupted by a competent agent for an adequate purpose. What a miracle does oppose, undoubtedly, is the order of nature in the *second* sense specified. The *expectation* of a recurrence of similar phenomena, which we all unavoidably entertain, and which serves as the practical basis for carrying on the affairs of life and human society, is unquestionably disturbed by a miracle, and constitutes a presumption, and a strong one, against it. † The nature of this Expectation or Belief in the Uniformity of Nature’s operations has been explained by Bishop Butler ‡ We expect that the future will be *like* the past. The fact that we all have this expectation is obvious. But it is not so very clear on what this expectation itself is based. If we propose the further question—*Why* do we expect the future to resemble the past? On what *ground of reason* can we justify this expectation? The answer to this question will determine the mental character of this belief, and what is the real worth of the presumption against miracles which grows out of it. It will be found that no such ground of reason is producible. If for the nonce we suppose we can trace this belief to some rational principle on which it is

* Newman’s *Grammar of Assent*. p. 376.

† See Mozley’s *Bampton Lectures on Miracles*. 3rd Ed. p. 43.

‡ *Analogy*. Introduction.

grounded, this principle will be ascertained, on careful examination, either to assume the fact of the belief, or in another form to re-state it; but it will not be found to justify it, or account for it.

“What ground of reason, then, can we assign for our expectation that any part of the course of nature will the *next* moment be like what it has been up to *this* moment, i. e., for our belief in the uniformity of nature? None. No demonstrative reason can be given, for the contrary to the occurrence of a fact of nature is no contradiction. No probable reason can be given, for all probable reasoning respecting the course of nature is founded *upon* this presumption of likeness, and therefore cannot be the foundation of it. No reason can be given for this belief. It is without a reason. It rests upon no rational ground and can be traced to no rational principle. Everything connected with human life depends upon this belief, every practical plan or purpose that we form implies it; every provision we make for the future, every safeguard and caution we employ against it, all calculation, all adjustment of means to ends, suppose this belief; it is this principle alone which renders our experience of the slightest use to us, and without it there would be, so far as we are concerned, no order of nature and no laws of nature; and yet this belief has no more producible reason for it, than a speculation of fancy. A natural fact has been repeated; it will be repeated:—I am conscious of utter darkness when I try to see why one of these follows from the other: I not only see no reason but I perceive that I see none, though I can no more help the expectation than I can stop the circulation of my blood. There is a premiss and there is a conclusion, but there is a total want of connection between the two. The inference, then, from the one of these to the other rests upon no ground of the understanding; by no search or analysis, however subtle or minute, can we extract from any corner of the human mind and intelligence, however remote, the very faintest reason for it.”

“This belief not having itself its foundation in reason, the ground is gone upon which it could be maintained that miracles as opposed to the order of nature were opposed to reason. There being no producible reason why a new event should be like the hitherto course of nature, no decision of reason is contradicted by its unlikeness. A miracle in being opposed to our experience is not only opposed to necessary reasoning, but to any reasoning. Do I see by a certain perception the connexion between these two—It *has* happened so; it *will* happen so; then may I reject a new reported fact which has *not* happened so, as an impossibility. But if I do

not see the connexion between these two by a certain perception, or by any perception, I cannot. For a miracle to be rejected as such there must at any rate be some proposition in the mind of man which is opposed to it: and that proposition can only spring from the quarter to which we have been referring, *viz.*, that of elementary experimental reasoning. But if this experimental reasoning is of that nature which philosophy describes it as being of, *i. e.*, if it is not itself a process of reason, how can there from an irrational process of the mind arise a proposition at all,—to make which is the function of the rational faculty alone? There cannot; and it is evident that the miracle does not stand in any opposition whatever to reason.”*

The logic of unbelief, as Mr. Mozley remarks, wants a *universal* proposition but no such proposition is forthcoming or producible. As regards Deism, or antichristian Theism of whatever form or shade, very slight consideration will make it clear, that the mere assertion of a supposed *universal* proposition in reference to the impossibility of miracles is just suicidal. No Theist *as such* can, without laying himself justly open to the charge of self-contradiction, *profess* to believe that a miracle is impossible.

“In a word,” says Paley, “once believe there is a God, and miracles are not incredible.”† It should seem that there could not, *in reason*, be any controversy on this subject with the Brahmos, and we must suppose that it has arisen from the fact, that they have not patiently and thoughtfully traced the implications of their own creed, and the implications of this denial of the possibility of miracles. Brahmos accept, as we shall see, the *Christian Doctrine of Creation*, which must be recognized as having the nature of a miracle. Belief in the fact of creation certainly implies a belief in the *possibility* of a miracle either at the commencement or during a course of nature. ‡

* Mozley. *On Miracles*, p. 30 and p. 38. Where also a long interesting quotation is given from Hume's *Enquiry*. *Sect. IV. expressing in other words the view of the text.*

† Paley's *Evidences. Introduction.*

‡ “Strauss *avowedly*, and very many modern opponents of Christianity, *tacitly* assume the principle of the impossibility of a miracle; that is, they reduce every thing to the uniformities of present experience, and then decide easily enough, that what professedly presents phenomena at variance with that experience, is to be rejected. Having laid it down as an axiom that a miracle is *impossible*, Christianity, of course must be false. But it is in vain to reason in this way until the impossibility of miracles has been distinctly proved. But *then*, it is well to remind the Deist (or Brahmo) that when it *is* proved that we must take the uniformities of present experience as an invariable standard,—that we must assume that nature *never* varies, never has varied, never will vary beyond the limits of present experience;—that the antecedents and consequents we see now have always followed, and will always follow, one

The fallacy of *Hume's* well known dilemma concerning miracles and testimony has been clearly exposed by many competent writers, some of whom have shared his philosophical opinions, and we think very few persons, who are anxious to maintain their character for honesty and learning, will be found now-a-day to rest much upon it. *

§ 3 *The Nature of Scripture Miracles.*

We have now, under this section, examined *two points*; *first*, whether the impossibility of miracles is a self-evident conviction of the human mind or not, and *secondly*, whether miracles are possible or not. Many things may reasonably be believed to be possible, but which never have and never will become actual facts. If the question of the *actual occurrence* of miracles be mooted, it must be mentioned, that, as far as *we* are concerned, the question must be restricted to Scripture miracles *exclusively*. If *these* are proved to be fictions, no other, we are certain, will survive enquiry and discussion. And apart from the *practical* interest of the Christian religion, we do not think it worth while to discuss the subject in the interest of mere *speculation*.

Such, then, being the range of the enquiry, we are *bound* to accept and profess *that* view of miracles which Scripture reveals, and, that being done, have a right to assert that those objections only of disbelievers, which are directed against that view of miracles which Christians are required to believe, are relevant and deserving of consideration.

Now there are *three terms*, which are consistently employed throughout Scripture to denote miracles. These terms are not synonymous but complementary. Each regards miracles from a different stand-point, exhibits them in a separate aspect, and indicates a different element in their constitution. These three terms are "*marvel*," "*mighty work*," and "*sign*." The another:—that the *origination* of the present system, or, in fact, any condition of things at variance with our present experience becomes an absurdity. Every immediately *preceding* generation—the men of yesterday, the day before that, and so on, *ad infinitum*—have as much reason to argue in the same manner as we do; and there is left nothing for us but a blank Atheism or an equally blank Pantheism, "with an eternal recurrence of similar phenomena or an eternal succession of finite cycles of similar phenomena." *Defence of 'The Eclipse of Faith'*, p. 154, 3rd Ed. Most of the objections and arguments advanced by antichristian theists against Christianity are *suicidal*. A little consideration by the Brahmos would make it plain to them that they cannot consistently hold this doctrine of the impossibility of miracles, and *also* the doctrine of Creation. Would that the Brahmos were better acquainted with their own system and creed!

Butler's *Analogy* Part II. Chapter 2. See especially *Eclipse of Faith*, p. p. 213—246.

* J. S. Mill's *Logic* Vol. II. Book, III. Chapter 25, Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, Chapter 8 p. 298, and for a full and complete discussion, Warrington's *Can we believe in Miracles?* Chapter II. p. 64.

complete conception of a Scripture miracle is obtained, *not* from *any one*, but from a *combination of all three*.

Miracles are described as, "*marvels*," with respect to their effect, as extraordinary occurrences in arousing attention and enquiry. They are *phenomena* in human experience.

Miracles are described as, "*mighty works*," with respect to the agency by which they are brought about. They are asserted to have a special cause, *Divine action*. They are *effects* of special Divine action.

Miracles, again, are described as, "*signs*," with respect to their purpose. They are wrought for an end which is something beyond and higher than themselves. They are an *instrument* for the attainment of *moral* ends.

These three terms, then, are not designations of different kinds or sorts of miracles, but indicate *constituent elements* of every miracle, each of which is essential to the nature and conception of a *Scripture* miracle. Any objection against miracles considered in one of these aspects only, while the others are tacitly ignored, is then, confessedly, an objection with which we, *as Christians*, are not concerned. It is an objection to what Scripture does not ask us to believe in. If an objector has in his mind "*marvels*" only, and were to ask whether we should not disbelieve any story of such marvellous phenomena as are recorded in the Gospels occurring now-a-days, on the ground of their extreme improbability, even if supported by strong evidence, we may answer in the affirmative, safely enough. We are not required by the Bible to believe in *mere* "*marvels*," but in *marvels*, wrought by an adequate cause, for a sufficient end. Supply these elements, and the marvel becomes credible.—Or, again, objections urged against miracles, on the *mere* ground of their infringing the uniform laws of nature, are not valid against Scripture miracles, for *these* miracles do not belong exclusively to the *physical* world, but also to the moral. It is in their relation to the *moral* world, (indefinitely higher than the physical,) that the *purpose* of their occurrence lies. * Now

* "It must be observed, too, that it is not only the physical occurrence itself which in the case of these miracles has to be reduced to the order of nature, but the physical occurrence as corresponding to and fitting in with a command, an announcement, a whole set of pretensions on the part of the person who is the agent or centre of them. Should the question *e. g.*, ever be raised, whether the miracle of our Lord's Resurrection was a fact ultimately referrible to natural law; the fact about which the question would lie, *i. e.*, about which we should have to inquire whether it might be ultimately natural or not, would be, not the simple resurrection of a man from the dead, but that resurrection as coinciding with the whole nature, mission and office of Christ, His whole character, life and ministry, as well as with the previous announcements of the events. It is impossible not to see, even when the occurrence itself is of the most marvellous kind, how immensely this correspondence to a notification and adaptation to a whole set of circumstances add to the

most of the objections, which are popularly urged against miracles, are really objections to the objector's own one-sided and incomplete notion of what a Scripture miracle is, and are often completely dissipated and shewn to be irrelevant, as soon as the missing and complementary elements are added. We must rigidly adhere to the definition which Scriptural induction furnishes us, *viz.*; a miracle is a *marvellous phenomenon, brought about by special Divine agency, for the attainment of moral ends.* All these elements must be fully considered before the question of their credibility can be finally decided on.

§ 4 *Function and position of Miracles in the Christian Religion.*

It is a disadvantage, arising from the unalterable nature of the human mind, that the many and varied proofs of the Divine origin of Christianity, which are all mutually consistent and congruous, and to be regarded as simultaneously converging to one point, can only be exhibited in successive lines or chains; and not unfrequently, in consequence, the conclusion is often assumed to rest on the single line of evidence to which the attention is for the moment directed, while the others are temporarily out of view. This condition of things is not only a serious difficulty to the honest enquirer, but also gives room and presents a temptation to the prejudiced, to attack these various *catene* of proofs separately and independently, and very often, on inconsistent and mutually destructive principles. The evidence of Christianity presents itself to us in the same way as that by which our firmest convictions in other matters are reached, *not* in the way of a *sequence* of evidences, but in the way of the *congruity* of co-ordinate evidences, meeting in the conclusion. Our deepest convictions in all other analogous matters are the product of independent causes, which are so felt to fit into each other, that each, as soon as it is seen in combination, authenticates the other.* In the present case, it has been too much the custom to view the miracles recorded in the New Testament as *isolated facts* out of all connexion with the Life and Character of the Author of Christianity on the one side and with the history and present position of Christianity on the other. The right

supernaturalness of the miracle, and to its inexplicableness upon natural grounds. Because all this points, upon the argument of design or coincidence, to an especial interposition of God, as distinguished from unknown physical causation. Those circumstances of a miracle which distinguish it from an isolated marvel are also great evidences of its supernatural character. No physical explanation of it as an isolated marvel is an explanation of those circumstances which distinguish it *from* a marvel. Mozley, *On Miracles*. Pref. p. XVI.

* See Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, Chapters VIII, IX. I. Taylor's *Restoration of Belief*. p. 94 and p. 211.

position to take in viewing these miracles is, not on the plane of our mundane experience and in reference to our worldly life, but on that which was occupied by the Founder and Promulgator. We should, in that case, view them in connection with their actual history, and regard them in their true relation,—their relationship to the Infinite. Viewing them in their connection with that discernment of the whole scheme of Christian Redemption and of the far-reaching and unchanging realities of this vast moral and religious system, which Christ and the Apostles possessed; viewing them, that is, simply in relation to the circumstances in which they arose, they are no longer stupifying and irritating marvels, to which we find it difficult to yield assent and the evidence of which we yet cannot get rid of, they are the natural and reasonable outcome of the impulses of human affections and sympathy combined with the consciousness of union and fellowship with the Supreme Will. The “mighty works” are in strict harmony with the tone, demeanour, language, and teaching; and this *congruity* between the two exercises a persuasive force; and is intelligible, on *one* supposition *only viz.*, that He is what He Himself with the modesty and firmness of conscious truth asserted Himself to be—the God-man. Hence, as is natural and satisfactory, these “mighty works” are in strict keeping with that supposition, possessing distinguishing characteristics which mark them off by a broad line of demarcation from those miracles which are the products of *human imagination*;—such as are to be found in the “*Gospel of the Infancy*,” the Hindu Puránas, and the classical mythologies. They are not portents, nor things monstrous, nor theatric displays, nor grotesque exhibitions. They are the outcome of *that*, in the presence of which, the distinction of natural and supernatural is obliterated, by the ceaseless outflowing of *which* this world persists, *viz.*, a *Personal Will*, at once *perfectly intelligent, absolutely good, and infinitely powerful*. We have not before us in the Gospels such a conception only as the mind of that age was able to frame,—a *Thaumaturgus*,—a wonder worker, astounding the multitude, by unintelligible sombre mysteries of magic; but we have a conception of a distinct individuality in whose course of life and ethical teaching, *love* was the substance, and the supernatural faculty, the *secondary but congruous adjunct*. *

* “When we object to the use often made of these ‘works’ it is only because they have been forcibly severed from the whole complex of Christ’s life and doctrine, and presented to the contemplation of men apart from these; it is only because, when on his head are many crowns, one only has been singled out in proof that he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The miracles have been spoken of as though they borrowed nothing from the truths which they confirmed, but those truths every thing from the miracles by which they were

It is not a matter of opinion, but an undeniable fact, that the Gospels do convey and have conveyed to all Christianized nations, however different may be their ideas in other matters, nay, not merely that, these Gospels convey to every one who reads them, the idea of a *Person*, characterized by unity, harmony of character, consistency of purpose, coherence of principle. Now this dramatic conception was utterly beyond the range of the imagination as well of writers as of readers of the age in which the Gospels originated. And this harmony of elements, which constitutes the idea of Jesus Christ, which the child perceives and manhood does not revise or reject, comprises the ordinary as well as the extraordinary, the natural and supernatural, alike. *The most striking illustrations of the moral fitness of the character are often most clearly exhibited in those portions of the narrative which describe miracles in detail.* There are no seams in the history to be discerned indicating where the spurious has been added to the genuine. The texture of the history combines the web of the natural with the woof of the supernatural. Let Christianity solve its own problem, and there are no perplexities and contradictions. The personal character of Christ and the miraculous adjuncts are in perfect congruity. *

confirmed; when indeed the true relation is one of mutual interdependence, the miracles proving the doctrines and the doctrines approving the miracles, and both held together for us in a blessed unity, in the person of Him who spoke the words and did the works, and through the impress of highest holiness and of absolute truth and goodness, which that person leaves stamped on our souls;— so that it may be more truly said that we believe the miracles for Christ's sake, than Christ for the miracles' sake." Trench, *On the Miracles*, p. 94, 5th Ed.

* We may, of course, apply *force* to this narrative, and arbitrarily reject the *cohering* mass of the supernatural; but then, the credit of the narrative is irreparably destroyed. You cannot maintain the cloth, and also tear asunder the warp and the woof. The narrative may contain elements of truth, but we cannot recognize them. We have no evidence of any portion being true. We shall have no right nor any *pretence* of right to cite words from the Gospels as if they were the utterances of Christ. Baboo K. C. Sen, in his '*Addresses*,' continually cites the Gospels as being an authentic and trustworthy record of what Jesus Christ really said. A very full outline of the life of Jesus Christ may be gathered from his Lecture, *Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia*, delivered May 5th, 1856, and he expresses "the profoundest reverence for the character of Jesus and the lofty ideal of moral truth which he taught and lived" and "it was to impress his (Jesus') moral excellence on his countrymen that he delivered that speech." (page 1). What the moral reason however demands, as in the precisely analogous case of M. Renan's concessions and panegyrics, is, not merely that these admissions should be carried to the natural and logical consequences, but that they should have *some congruity* as related to the real evangelical Person. The strange, not to say grotesque disagreement between Baboo K. C. Sen's real mental attitude to the historical characteristics of Jesus Christ and these rhetorical encomia, which was disclosed in his subsequent Lecture on *Great Men*, delivered Sep. 1856, has rather been aggravated by all his succeeding deliverances. Thus in his last Lecture, (*Inspiration*, January 25th, 1873) we find him quoting certain words as really authentic and uttered by Jesus

And from this elevated but true view of the nature of the connexion of Miracles with the Divine Revelation of

Christ, and inferring from them, as follows;—"They furnish the most conclusive evidence of the impossibility of charging that great prophet with a proud attempt to arrogate Divinity." We ask Baboo K. C. Sen on what evidence he concludes that these are the very words which Jesus Christ uttered? We would challenge him to give his reasons for quoting the words of the Gospel at all as if he knew them to be trustworthy evidence of the existence of a Jesus Christ, and accepting them as authentic reports of what Jesus Christ said, even supposing such a person did exist. Whatever be the evidence, if it is valid, it is valid for much more than the passages which he quotes. The substantial truth of the whole record, ordinary and miraculous elements equally, rests on the same grounds. Passages cannot, honestly and with any regard for the laws of historic evidence, be accepted or rejected arbitrarily, according to our preconceived notions. It is simply a question of objective historical fact, and *a priori* notions cannot avail to reverse or modify the course of history. *A priori* notions are either altogether irrelevant, or, if relevant, they apply to the history as a whole.

Maintaining that the rejection of the supernatural portions of the memoirs of Jesus Christ as unhistorical and the acceptance of the moral and spiritual parts as historically true cannot be justified by the principles of sound criticism, let us enquire further whether such a process if applied to the Life of Christ, as the Brahmos seem to apply it, will present us as a residuum, with a historical reality. We submit the following brief remarks to their serious and candid consideration.

The portraiture of Jesus Christ, depicted in the Gospels, is not that of a character artificially delineated by the composers of the Gospels. It is the combined results of the actions and of the teaching which have been ascribed to him, each of which stands in the closest relation to the other. The most supernatural portions of the character present us with the same moral aspects as the ordinary ones. Both the supernatural and ordinary narratives are indelibly stamped with the impress of the same moral character. The moral teaching is most intimately connected with the supernatural element, and this latter constitutes the larger portion of the Gospels. If these are divorced from each other, the proportions of the character are destroyed. The moral teaching grows out of the supernatural element and if the latter is eliminated as false, a large portion of the other cannot be true. There remains no solid foundation of historic fact. Again, even supposing that the miraculous element could be eliminated from the narratives of the Gospel, which it cannot, yet the *character* of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be divested of this element. The entire person and work of Jesus Himself essentially belongs to the region of the supernatural. There is not such diluting or retrenching, cutting or paring away of the miraculous element possible, as will bring the person of Jesus Christ as it is portrayed in the Gospel, within the region of the natural. This is abundantly manifest as the outcome of the processes of excision which M. Renan applied to the Gospel History. He rigidly excludes the whole of the miraculous stories as unhistorical, on the foregone, unproved conclusion that the miraculous *as such* cannot be true. When this has been done, he is still confronted with certain aspects of the character of Christ and His moral teaching which admit of no natural explanation. After all, Jesus Christ is, to all intents and purposes, a *moral* miracle. M. Renan *practically* admits, as Baboo Keshub Chunder Sen does *expressly*, that he was the greatest man that ever lived. If *such* a man was produced in the moral atmosphere of the Judaism of the first thirty years of the first century, such a person, growing up under these influences to such greatness, is an exception to the moral laws of the universe, and constitutes a *moral* miracle. It is as great a violation of one class of laws as the cure of a man born blind by a word is of those of physical nature. The question, then, which is proposed to the honest and thoughtful consideration of Brahmos is:—Can they propound a consistent *humanitarian* theory of the life and character

Christianity, and of supernatural power with the character and life of Jesus Christ we are able to understand, what is other-

of Jesus Christ, as portrayed in the Gospel, and justify their professed reverence for Him? (See Row's *Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, Ch. VI. from which the above remarks are condensed.)

Perhaps, again, they may allege that they accept the trustworthiness of the Records on precisely the same evidence as Christians do, but they differ from them as to the *interpretation*.

Now after striking out the word '*proud*' from the passage quoted above, since it is an assumption of the point in dispute and therefore unwarranted, we can assure our Brahmo friends that the humanitarian interpretation of these records cannot be established by any fair and scholarly and consistent explanation of the whole. Putting aside the fact of the uniformity of the interpretation accepted by all branches of the Christian Church, who have scarcely one other thing in common, it is conclusively established that the Divinity of Christ *is* taught in the New Testament by the researches of scholars in Germany, *who are infidels*. They looked upon the *whole* record as false, no matter for what reasons, but they would have laughed to scorn the shallowness of any student attempting to prove that the doctrine of Christ's Divinity was *not* taught, nor *intended* to be taught in the Gospels. The Unitarian theories of Belsham and his co-adjutors are simply demolished and utterly expelled from the domain of scholarly criticism. If the Brahmos do not accept this statement, let them produce for us a *revised* edition of the Unitarian Translation, and we shall have a *second* decisive proof of the untenableness of their position. In the present advanced stage of Biblical criticism we may afford to smile at or pity Baboo K. C. Sen's complacent dogmatism in asserting the *impossibility of charging* Jesus Christ with claiming Divinity.

The range of discussion with reference to the *Historic reality* of the Gospels has been greatly narrowed in modern times, and mainly, if not altogether, through the antagonism of antichristian scholars. The succession of antichristian advocates have done "yeomans service" to the cause of Truth, although, like Nebuchadnezzar, "they meant not so neither did their heart think so. (Is. X. 7). The ribaldry of Voltaire was refuted by the Rationalists, the Rationalistic Theory was effectually demolished and ridiculed by Dr. Strauss, and his mythic theory is again formally and somewhat indignantly rejected by M. Renan, who demands the *Historic Reality* of the person of Christ.

He himself, however, violates the established chronology of Jesus' Life, and while *excusing*, really *accuses* Him of wilful and conscious imposture. (See I. Taylor's *Restoration of Belief*, p. 365. Hutton's *Essays*, Vol. I. Ch. VIII. McCosh's *Christianity and Positivism*, Ch. VIII, p. 220 &c.) As appears in the record of the progress of many physical science, we are thus gradually and certainly approximating by the method of *exhaustions*, to the *true and single issue*, viz., Atheism or Christianity.

The two questions, of the *Historic Reality* of Christianity as of Divine origin, and of the *Inspiration* of the canonical books, are separable, and in this discussion of the solution of the *historical* problem of Christianity should be separated. The former question is logically prior. We cannot infer the historic truth of the Gospel from the alleged and assumed inspiration of the books which bring it to our knowledge. The discussion of the various theories of Inspiration is not by any means unimportant *in its place*, but when the substantial truth of the orthodox theory of Christianity as a *historic fact* is impugned, and a Humanitarian Theory is substituted, the *inspiration* of the records must be waived by the Christian advocate as not first in the order of enquiry and importance, and as not being essentially connected with what is really a question of *matter of fact*, to be determined by the application of the Laws of Historical Criticism, which are resorted to in all similar cases. It is *disbelievers*, and not believers, who need the inspiration of these books to bolster up their case. It is they who always lay stress upon the *Inspiration* of the Documents, and on *that* ground adduce minute discrepancies, e.g. the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, which may or may not affect our view of the fact of *Inspiration*,

wise on the established principles of human nature, simply inexplicable, *viz.*, the *general sobriety* of tone which characterizes the New Testament Narrative, and, along with that, the *paucity* of references to miracles in the apostolic Epistles. Excepting the resurrection of Jesus Christ, * which is asserted or implied in *every* book, there are as many as *fourteen* books out of the whole number which constitute the Canon of the New Testament, which, as containing *no* allusion to miraculous elements, may be designated *non-supernatural*. This fact, which has not been adequately recognized, shews of itself that the writers were not men of *heated imagination*, unthinking enthusiasts, who lived in a wonder-world, and were blind to the dull and sober realities of this practical life. A careful study of the books from this point of view only will disclose that there *are* references to miracles, but only as there has been the performance of miracles, *when there is sufficient cause*; and when these references *are* made, they are made, with a quiet tranquil assurance, as to well-known *notorious occurrences*, and the writer immediately passes on to earnest moral and religious admonitions bearing on the predominant end,—practical spiritual religion. †

but which have very little influence indeed upon the *general historical accuracy* of the records. (Vide Newman's *Phase's of Faith, passim*). In the discussion with Humanitarians, we abandon, as non-essential, the doctrine of Inspiration, and challenge them to meet the general historical argument for the *substantial truth* of the orthodox theory of Christianity. If the Christian Records are generally trustworthy and the historical testimony reliable, (and if it is not, we may give up *all* belief in *any* history), the facts substantiated are not upset by the allegation of minute difficulties at specific points or ambiguities in the documents. These may be examined, when and after the *main* question has been settled;—*not before*.

* The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from death is the corner-stone and key-stone of the Christian Religion; upon the assumption that this was a real historical fact Christianity is based and built. Now if any consistent theory can be devised, which harmonizes with the established facts of history, which requires not a flagrant violation of the established laws of human nature, which does adequately and harmoniously account for the phenomena of Christianity, and yet assumes that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead did *not* occur, was *not* a fact but a fiction; Christianity cannot survive. Its disappearance from the face of the earth may be a matter of time, perhaps, but its life is doomed. Let then some of our disbelieving, subtle, learned Bengalis attempt the overthrow of Christianity. We promise them they will succeed; *if* they can devise such a theory as will satisfy the requirements we have mentioned. Christianity has ever courted enquiry, in every generation it has been subjected to sifting enquiry by learned, acute and hostile minds, and yet Jesus Christ's dominion is now the greatest, extensively and intensively, in the world. What *is* impracticable and irresistible is voluntary, stolid, callous indifference,—but it is a terrible condition for those to be in who are guilty of it.

† We have only cursorily alluded to this noteworthy and evidential feature of the New Testament Records; but those who wish to see the proof of it, in elaborate and illustrative detail, in a separate examination with reference to these points only of the varied treatises which constitute the inspired

There is another distinguishing feature of Miracles as connected with Christianity, which even at the risk of being tedious, we cannot forbear alluding to. We have already pointed out, and the fact itself is sufficiently obvious, that all the great religions which have dominated the human race, have had miraculous elements connected with them. So far, on this *surface* view, Christianity is identical with, for instance, Hinduism and Traditional Mahomedanism; but a closer examination will reveal a *radical and fundamental difference*. Miracles, *along with other evidence in consistency with them*, were, in the origin, *proofs* upon which the claims of Christianity to men's assent were based. Miracles were, as it has been said, the great bells of the universe, which were rung to call attention to the doctrine inculcated, but, more than that, they were the *credentials* to which the Author of Christianity appealed in attestation of his authority and divine commission. Whether these miracles were realities or impositions is a question which we may legitimately and ought to investigate, but this fact cannot be denied, that a *profession* of ability to work miracles and the *acceptance* of this profession as real, were *main elements* of the whole cause of the spread of Christianity. It is not contended that these miracles are not also vehicles of spiritual teaching, but it *is* contended that they were prominently at the commencement *evidences*, submitted to disbelievers, to gain a hearing and generate conviction.

Now we maintain that *in this respect* Christianity stands *alone*. Nothing of this character can be, with historic truth, alleged of any other religion. The miracles of Hinduism are part of the religion believed; they are accepted because of a prior belief in the religion. The Hindu miracles do not support the Hindu Religion but the Hindu religion supports them. Hindus believe in Hindu miracles because they are Hindus to begin with. In the same way, the miracles attributed to Mahommed in the Mahomedan Traditions are the work of Mahomedan *believers*. * As soon as canon, are referred to I. Taylor's *Restoration of Belief*, pp. 101-211. We heartily recommend this book to those educated Hindus who imagine there is nothing in the *historical argument* for the Divine origin of Christianity.

* Mahometanism, indeed, established itself in the world without even any pretence on the part of its founder to miraculous powers. But the triumph of Mahometanism over human belief, striking as it has been, cannot blind us to the fact that the belief of the Mahometan is in its very principle irrational, because he accepts Mahomet's supernatural account of himself, as the conductor of a new dispensation, upon Mahomet's own assertion simply joined to his success. But this belief is in its very form irrational, and whatever may be the apparent present strength and prospects of Mahometanism, this defect must cling to its very foundation, with this corollary attaching to it, *viz.*, that if the law of reason is allowed to work itself out in the history of human religions, the ultimate dissolution of the Mahometan fabric of belief is

both Hindu and Mahomedan miracles are subjected to the severe test of historical criticism, to which the Christian miracles have all along been subjected, they fall to the ground. Both these series of miracles *viz*; Hindu and Mahomedan, stand on the same foundation, and are the product of similar facts and tendencies of the human mind. It is because there is in the human soul a *deep ineradicable conviction* that miracles are the *authentic and becoming adjuncts and credentials of any religion claiming to be of Divine Origin* that these miracles have been advanced and accepted. Were the Brahmic interpretation of the "self-evident convictions" of the human mind correct, the miracles, which Mahomed himself disclaimed, could never have been invented by his followers to do him honor.

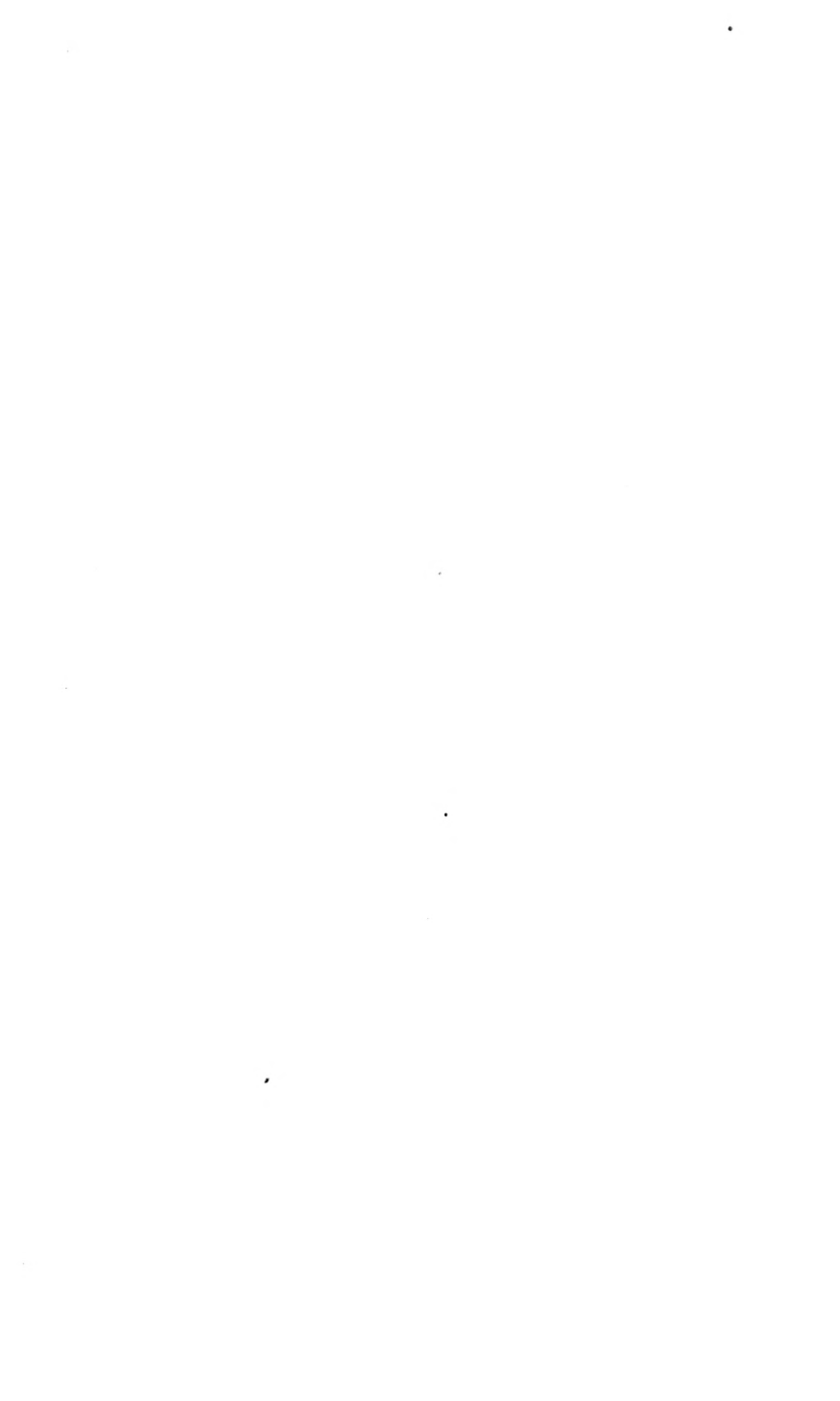
On the whole, as Brahmos themselves exhibit no facts in proofs of their allegation, so also, against them, we allege, that world-wide facts in every age, not only disprove it, but also conclusively shew that the *possibility* of miracles is "a fundamental and self-evident conviction of the human mind."

certain, because its very existence is an offence against that law. But the belief, of the Christian, at all events, is in form, a rational belief, which the Mahometan's is not; because the Christian believes in a supernatural dispensation, upon the proper evidence of such a dispensation, *viz*. the miraculous. Antecedently, indeed, to all examination in the particulars of the Christian evidence, Christianity is the only religion in the world which professes to possess a body of direct external evidence, to its having come from God. Mahometanism avows the want of this; and the pretensions of other religions to it are mockery. One religion alone produces a body of testimony—testimony doubtless open to criticism—but still solid, authentic, contemporaneous testimony, to miracles—a body of evidence which makes a stand, and upholds with a natural and genuine strength certain facts.

And in this distinction alone between Mahometanism and Christianity, we see a different estimate of the claims of reason, lying at the foundation of these two religions and entertained by their respective founders. Doubtless the founder of Mahometanism could have contrived false miracles had he chosen, but the fact that he did not consider miraculous evidence at all wanted to attest a supernatural dispensation, but that his word was enough, shews an utterly barbarous idea of evidence and a total miscalculation of the claims of reason which unfits his religion for the acceptance of an enlightened age and people; whereas the Gospel is adapted to perpetuity for this cause especially, with others, that it was founded upon a true calculation, and a foresight of the permanent need of evidence; our Lord admitting the inadequacy of His own mere word, and the necessity of a rational guarantee to his revelation of His own nature and commission. "If I had not done among them the works that none among them works that none other man did, they had not had sin;" "The works that I do bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent me." Mozley, *On Miracles* p. 24.

Calutta,
July 1873.

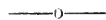
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