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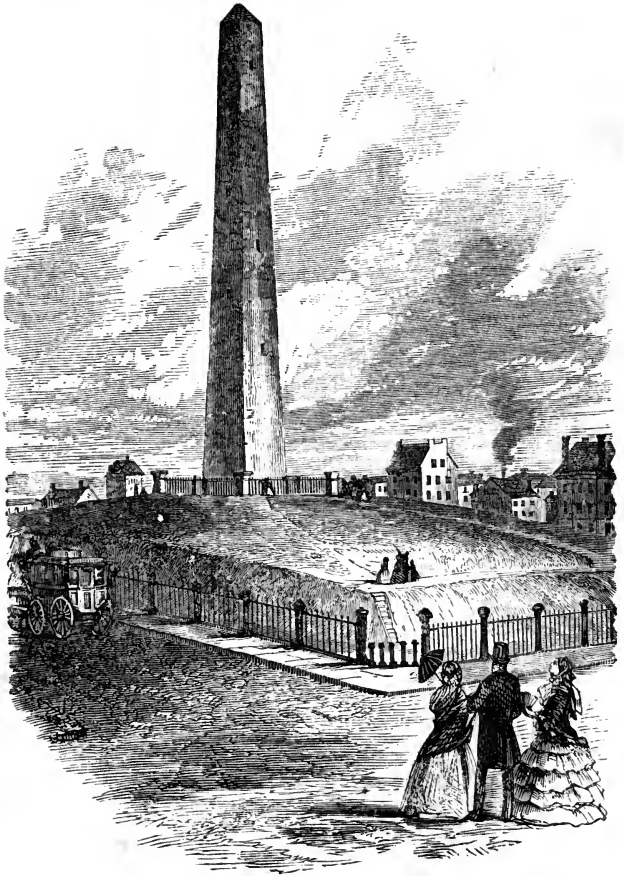
CONCERNING

THE BATTLE OF BUNKER'S HILL.









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THE BATTLE OF BUNKER'S HILL.

ADDRESSED TO THE CHRISTIAN PUBLIC.

BY

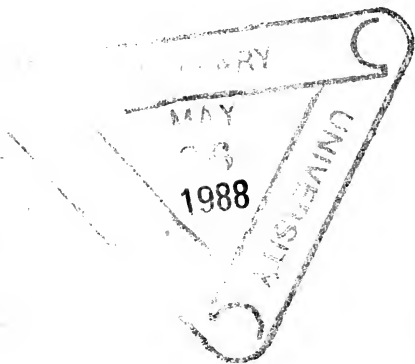
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# D O U B T S

CONCERNING

THE BATTLE OF BUNKER'S HILL.\*

ADDRESSED TO THE CHRISTIAN PUBLIC.

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DEAR BRETHREN,— I address you by the appellation of *Brethren*, for, as a man of the world, I wish to set an example of friendship and charity, in which Christian sects are too often wanting; and besides, as no unbeliever with whom I am acquainted is satisfied with his present opinions, and as we are at all times liable to give up the opinions we now hold, and to embrace something more consoling in the hour of affliction, I am not disposed to be more exclusive without faith, than some professed Christians are with it.

You profess to be believers in Christianity; and I have no reason to doubt your sincerity. But while I accord to you sincerity and honesty of purpose, you will agree with me, that faith and

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sight are two different things, and that the fact that we are fallible beings, should teach us that we are not infallible in all our speculations.

Man is naturally a credulous being. The bump of marvellousness is so fully developed in this race of ours, that the great mass of mankind are prepared to believe any story, which has a degree of mystery connected with it; and especially if the tale has come down from ancient times,—the hero of the story be particularly ignorant or vicious,—or the scene is laid in a distant part of the world. Hence the most popular fortune-tellers are those whose word would not be taken on any ordinary subject; and those who are thought to know the most of the future invisible world, are, for the most part, those who have the least knowledge of this. It is a striking fact in relation to belief, that the object of belief must be a little extraordinary. And it matters not for what the person or event is distinguished, provided it be something out of the usual course.

I know I shall be met with the declaration, that man is a combative being, and that what is advanced or believed by one, will be assailed by another, and hence error is sure to be put down. I readily admit the position, but I deny the inference

altogether. Error grows in the midst of controversy. So anxious are controversialists to fall upon others, that when a new theory is advanced, they seldom take the trouble to examine the theory itself, but content themselves with attacking some immaterial point; or they fall out upon some verbal criticism, or question of construction, thus suffering what in parliamentary language is called the "main question," to pass without debate as a sort of admitted truth. Thus in the great controversy about *consubstantiation* and *transubstantiation*, the disputant forgot to inquire whether there was any *substantiation* in the case. So in the Romish Church, while disputing whether infallibility resided in the Pope or in a General Council, they neglected the more important inquiry, whether either possessed this attribute of Divinity. In this way many a theory grows up, and claims prescription for its support, while its friends and enemies are contending about some collateral question.

It is also manifest, that if a doctrine be permitted to grow up, even if this permission arise from the fact of its insignificance or absurdity, those who have been its abettors, dupes, or victims if it were possible, will adhere to it from a sense of pride, or even shame. A man deceived at an insignificant

show, will pretend that it is worthy of public patronage, that he may draw others into the same ridiculous position with himself; for no one likes to be the sole victim of a cheat.

I have made these remarks, to show the natural propensity in man to believe something, his unwillingness to abandon any opinion however hastily formed, and the great danger there is in believing what will not stand the test of close examination. I cannot perhaps better illustrate these principles than by selecting a case from the midst of us, and one too which has now become a subject of general, I had almost said, of universal belief. I allude to the Battle of Bunker's Hill. There is scarcely a man, woman, or child, who doubts the fact of that battle; and yet, if they were called upon for the ground of their faith, they would be compelled to admit that they believed it, because others do; that is, because such a belief is *fashionable*. They believe it, because others do; and would just as readily disbelieve it, if the tide of opinion set the other way. They believe it on the same principle that the Mahometans believe in the Koran, not because they know anything of the evidence on which their belief rests, but because they have never heard it called in question.



You may perhaps be startled at the idea of rejecting what is so generally believed, and is so intimately connected with the history and glory of our country, as the Battle of Bunker's Hill is supposed to be. But I would ask, whether the glory of the country rests upon facts, or falsehoods. I have no desire to disturb what may be called the hallowed associations which cluster around that spot, but a faithful inquirer after truth should take nothing for granted; but should be governed by the weight of evidence, to whatever conclusions it may lead him. I am no more bound to believe in that battle, because such a belief is general, than I am to believe in any other popular error. If it be a fact that such a battle was ever fought, let it be proved; and if it be not a fact, the sooner it is discarded, the better for the honor of our country. The Romans, for ages, supposed that the glory of their country required a belief in the ridiculous story of Romulus and Remus being nursed by a wolf; but where is the sober man at the present day, who gives any credit to that idle tale? All nations have been disposed to rest their glory upon some remarkable exploit of their citizens, or some special interposition of Providence. On this principle our own people are disposed to recur to the

battle of Bunker's Hill, and have regarded it as an event fully sustained by proof, — a sort of "fixed fact." This principle is so riveted into the minds of our people, has so fastened itself upon the wisest and ablest of them, that the great "ex-pounder of the Constitution," when vindicating the character of Massachusetts, appeared to think that a reference to this battle-field would establish the patriotism of his adopted State. "There is Concord, and Lexington, and *Bunker's Hill*, — and there they will remain forever."

Now, is it not by uses such as these, more than by any positive proof, that the belief in that battle is sustained? Is there not a degree of local or State pride, which greatly strengthens this faith? People always find it convenient to have some admitted principle, some uncontroverted position, some foregone conclusion, to which they can recur at a moment's warning in any emergency. Such is the Battle of Bunker's Hill. Read the political addresses, and the Fourth of July orations, and you will find that Bunker's Hill is an essential ingredient, — as indispensably necessary as the Heathen gods are to ancient poetry. This labor-saving principle, which takes things for granted, and uses them without the disagreeable task of proving

them, has been a source of most of the errors in the world. And may we not ascribe the general belief in this battle to the same principle? It is also very difficult to correct any long established opinion, and especially if the belief be general, however feeble the evidence on which it rests. So strongly inclined are most people to cherish preconceived opinions, especially when these coincide with their wishes or interests, that they will hardly yield to any authority however decisive.

I fear, therefore, that I may not be able to convince the public, that the battle in question is a mere fiction. But I will discharge my duty, whether the people will hear or forbear. Those of you who admit the force of reasoning, — and those who do not, I despair of convincing; for you cannot reason that *out* of a man, which was never reasoned *in*, — will agree with me, that faith, to be valuable, must rest upon evidence; and that before you can consistently call upon a man to believe, you should place sufficient evidence within his reach. Now what evidence have we of the Battle of Bunker's Hill? You will probably appeal to history. But what court of justice would receive mere hearsay evidence? The historians who have written and the poets who have sung of this

famous battle, do not pretend that they were eye-witnesses of the scene they describe. There seems to be a kind of sacredness attached to history, to which it is not entitled. What are the elements of history? From what sources do historians gather their facts? Either from tradition, or from some hasty and imperfect accounts published at the time. Now does not every one know, that little or no reliance can be placed upon tradition? And the published accounts are equally uncertain. We naturally receive such accounts with great allowance; and upon flying rumor we place still less reliance. But are these hasty and imperfect accounts, or these rumors, entitled to any more credit after they are embodied in what is called history? If the historian live at the time the event took place, he is as liable to be biased by prejudice as other men; and if he live long after the event, he may not possess the best means of information. In either case his authority is of a questionable character. But in this very incidence we find that historians differ, and differ too in some very important particulars, as we shall have occasion to show hereafter.

But before we proceed to examine this wonderful page in our country's history, it will be necessary

to settle certain principles in relation to evidence. One of the most acute logicians, Mr. Hume, says, "Experience is the only sure guide to reasoning concerning matters of fact. Experience in some things is variable, in others uniform. A variable experience gives rise only to probability; an uniform experience amounts to proof. Our belief or assurance of any fact from the report of eye-witnesses, is derived from no other principle than experience; that is, our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses."

Let us apply these principles of the great metaphysician to the case before us. Many of you, as well as myself, have seen the town of Charlestown, — and what has been our experience concerning it? Have we seen Bunker's Hill the camp of Mars, and the town in flames? Nothing like it. We have seen it repeatedly, and have witnessed no such spectacle. Our experience, our uniform experience, leads us to the conclusion that no such battle was ever fought there. Now, according to Mr. Hume, "a uniform experience amounts to proof." We have then proof positive, that Charlestown has never been the scene of blood that has been represented. If we rely upon our own experience, the



matter is decided at once ; and decided against the commonly received opinion. And if we take into the account the experience of others, we shall come to nearly the same conclusion. Of our acquaintances more than ninety-nine out of a hundred, who have visited that place, will testify that their experience corresponds entirely with ours. The experience of our acquaintances, then, is as ninety-nine to one against the actual occurrence of the battle. There are, it is true, a few individuals among us, who profess to have been eye-witnesses of the scene which is reported to have occurred on the 17th of June, 1775. But what is our experience in relation to human testimony ? We know that most men may easily be deceived, and that there are not wanting those who will willingly deceive others. We must bear in mind, that we have the experience of ninety-nine to one against this pretended battle ; and that the experience of the ninety-nine is uniform, whereas the experience of the one is variable. The few who profess to have seen the battle, will themselves allow that they have visited this famous spot at other times, and have not beheld anything like what appeared to their vision on that day. Their experience of the battle, therefore, is not only contrary to

the experience of others, but contrary to their own experience at all other times. Now by adopting Mr. Hume's system of balancing the different experiences of individuals, we shall find that the weight of experience is altogether against what has been generally believed on this subject.

There are other considerations which go far to weaken the testimony of the few, who pretend to have been eye-witnesses of the scene. They are now old, superannuated men, whose memories are so treacherous that they can scarcely relate the events of yesterday. Surely these are not the most trustworthy witnesses of what took place seventy years ago. But there is another consideration which should not be overlooked. The Battle of Bunker's Hill is a public affair, and such is the degeneracy of the age, that most men think it fair play to cheat the public. Men of honest minds, who would disdain to misrepresent in any case between individuals, will in relation to public affairs testify to what they know to be untrue, without seeming aware that a wrong has been committed. Now the witnesses in favor of the Bunker's Hill affair are thus situated. The testimony, though false, does not injure directly any individual; and they can

keep themselves in countenance by saying, that they have not borne false witness against their "neighbor," but have sustained a glorious page in their country's history.

But there are objections to these witnesses of a graver character. They are *interested*, and hence, by every rule of law, are not competent witnesses. Or if it should be said, that their interest is not of such a character as to destroy their competency, it must certainly affect their credibility, and greatly weaken the force of their testimony. For the last seventy years there has been a sort of charm in this pretended battle, and a kind of glory has seemed to gather around the head of every one who has succeeded in making the public believe, that he was an actor in that scene. This has led many a boasted pretender to assert, that he was one of the choice few who stood forth in defence of liberty on that eventful day,—that he was one of those gallant spirits, who "fought, bled and died on Bunker's awful mount." To such excess have the public run upon this subject, that many are desirous of retaining the honor in their family, of having been on that venerated spot during the battle in the loins of their ancestors; hence we frequently meet in the graveyards, among the inscriptions,



(which are generally more remarkable for their extravagance and want of truth, than for their modesty or fidelity,) a declaration that the deceased was a "Revolutionary hero," or that he was "in the battle of Bunker's Hill."

Under these circumstances, and with such an enthusiasm of feeling, the testimony of all the pretended actors in that drama must be received with great allowance. But for the last twenty years there has been another, and greater disqualification. Congress has adopted the pension system, a system which in all other countries has exerted a corrupting influence. By this system all who served for a certain period in the war of the Revolution, are entitled to the bounty of the Government. Thus a direct motive has been held out for false witness on this subject. Not that we accuse those of perjury, who have made oath that they were in the Battle of Bunker's Hill. We know the propensity of some men to believe. They will begin with desiring to have been actors in a certain scene; they will soon fancy that they were in some way or other connected with it; they will go on adding little by little, and repeating the tale so often, that at length they will not be able to distinguish between what they saw in early

life, and what they have often repeated; and hence, by this progressive faith, will really become believers in their own idle tales. This principle may operate upon some of the witnesses of this pretended battle. Under this system of pensions from the General Government, and gratuities from our State Government, the surest road to honor and profit has been, to be a hero of Bunker's Hill. It is unnecessary for me to labor the point, that this direct influence greatly weakens the credibility of the witnesses.

But according to Mr. Hume, when the event itself is improbable, a greater degree of evidence is necessary to sustain it. Now there are on the face of this story many improbabilities. The Battle of Bunker's Hill and the burning of Charlestown are to be regarded as one event. We know that by the then existing laws of Great Britain,—which has been denominated the “bulwark of the religion we profess,”—no person was eligible to office, unless he belonged to the Established Church; and is it credible that a professor of the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus, a religion full of mercy and good fruits, should be guilty of such wanton barbarity as General Gage must have shown, in burning the

dwellings of the peaceable inhabitants, and turning the women and children of Charlestown, houseless, into the streets? The manifest inconsistency of such conduct with the character of a professed Christian, compels us to ask for the strongest possible evidence.

But there is another improbability, of greater weight. The Americans are said to have acted under the direction of General Putnam, who from his having served in an earlier war against the French in Canada, must be supposed to have had some knowledge of military operations. Every one who is acquainted with the localities, knows that Charlestown is a peninsula connected with the main land on the west by a narrow belt called "the neck;" and that the place said to be fortified by the Americans with their temporary breastwork, is situated towards the easterly part of the town. Now no experienced General, no man of ordinary military skill, would presume to post his troops in a position so hazardous. He would perceive at once, that the enemy, by crossing Charles River in his boats, and taking possession of the neck and the high land near it, would render their retreat impossible; and thus the whole party would be cut off. It is altogether incredible, that

an officer of the reputed talent of General Putnam should have been guilty of such an egregious blunder,— such an exposure of his men to certain destruction. But if General Putnam had been guilty of such a stupid arrangement, it is altogether incredible, that a commander of the reputation of General Gage should have failed to avail himself of this error. He could see from Copp's Hill, at the north end of Boston, and also from Beacon Hill, the exact position of the Americans and the character of their temporary works ; and he must have known, that by crossing the river, and taking possession of "the neck" and Bunker's Hill in their rear, the whole body would be completely in his power. But, as the story goes, he embarked his troops at Long Wharf, and landed them near the present Navy Yard in Charlestown, so giving the Americans every opportunity to escape. Now I submit it to any military man to say, whether it is at all probable that General Putnam would have been guilty of so great an oversight, or that the experienced commander of the British forces would have failed to avail himself of such an error of his enemy. Such a series of blunders as the account ascribes to these distinguished commanders, renders the account itself highly suspicious. But admit

that the whole story was got up by some person or persons unacquainted with military operations, and the difficulty is solved.

There is also an improbability in the success of this pretended battle. Who can believe, that a few undisciplined troops brought together on a sudden emergency, with poor arms and a very scanty supply of ammunition, could for so long a time withstand the veteran troops of Great Britain, led on by experienced and brave commanders, and supported by the battery on Copp's Hill and by three or four ships of war? There is so much of romance in this page of pretended history, that we are even called upon to believe, that after the Americans had expended their powder and ball, they sustained themselves for a time by throwing stones at the enemy.

But what is still more conclusive in this case is, that the pretended eye-witnesses of this famous battle differ in some of the most important particulars in relation to the events of that day. Some twenty years ago, when many of the pretended actors in that drama were living, who are now in their graves, an account was published by a distinguished citizen of this Commonwealth, who professed to have been present, and to have com-

manded a company in that battle. He denied to General Putnam the honor of commanding the troops in person on the Hill, and ascribed that honor to Col. Prescott. This account drew forth a reply from the friends of General Putnam, accompanied with numerous affidavits of pretended eye-witnesses, declaring that Putnam was present in command upon the Hill during the action. Thus called upon, the author of the account alluded to, procured and published a large number of affidavits sustaining his position, that Putnam was not upon the Hill during the battle. Here we have a striking instance of conflicting testimony from the very persons who professed to have been eye-witnesses, and this difference relates not to some trifling circumstance, but to an essential fact in the history, viz. the name of the commander. Every person acquainted with the history of military exploits, knows that the chief glory of a battle consists in conferring a sort of immortality upon the officer in command. The question, therefore, who commanded on Bunker's Hill, is important, and to men of military sensibility the most important one connected with this whole subject. And yet on this all-important point, the eye-witnesses, though under oath, ex-

pressly contradict each other. Who would expect such discrepancy, such flat contradiction, among eye-witnesses? And what confidence can be placed upon testimony of this character? The testimony of one class of these deponents, *must* be false, and the testimony of both may be. The question of the existence of the battle itself was not raised during that controversy; if it had been, may we not fairly infer that there would have been as great a contradiction in the testimony in that case as in the other? With men of "military mind" you might as well have no battle at all, as to be in doubt to whom the honor of command belongs. On supposition that the whole story is a fabrication, we can easily account for this conflicting testimony; but if such a battle were ever fought, it seems incredible that there should be a dispute as to the commander, among the officers and men who were in the engagement. But as it is, we have two conflicting accounts, and two heroes claiming the honors of that eventful day.

There is also just that confusion in localities, which we might naturally expect in fiction. It is called the Battle of *Bunker's Hill*, when all the people in that region will tell you, that there never was a battle fought upon Bunker's Hill. Even

those who have been so fearful that the whole account would be disbelieved or forgotten, as to attempt to perpetuate the fiction by the erection of a monument, have virtually confessed that there was no battle on Bunker's Hill, by placing their monument on *Breed's Hill*. Does not this confusion of names and localities cast suspicion over the whole account? When we read the genealogies of the Heathen deities, where similar confusion occurs, we account for it by the fact that the whole is fabulous. Must not the same confusion lead to the same result in this case?

But it may be asked, why such a story should be invented, and how such a general belief should obtain, if the whole is a mere fiction? The same questions might be asked concerning the Heathen mythology, to which I have just alluded; but our inability to answer these questions definitely, does not establish those ridiculous and absurd tales. We may not be able at this late day, seventy years after the event is said to have taken place, to point out the fabricator of this story. But it is sufficient to say, that every age has its own peculiar hobby, and that at that period military exploits were all the rage. There was at that time such a feverish state of the public mind, that any story which went in



any degree to cast reproach upon the "regulars," as the British troops were called in common speech, would be readily received by the great mass of the people. Besides, the people of Massachusetts had a strong motive for wishing to excite the sympathy of the other Colonies. The port of Boston was shut up. The town was occupied by British troops, who had committed many outrages upon the inhabitants. Whether Massachusetts should contend single-handed with such a foe, or whether she should enlist the other Colonies in her behalf, was a question of vital consequence to her. May we not, therefore, safely infer, that some knowing one, judging rightly of the effect that such a battle would have upon the Colonies generally, invented this story in order to bring aid from abroad, and to show the people that England was determined to reduce them to vassalage by fire and sword? I do not say that this was the fact; but is there not a strong probability in its favor? May we not fairly infer, that it was a Yankee trick, got up and played off to answer the purpose mentioned above? We know that the report of the battle did arouse the Colonies; and if the story had been invented, as it answered a good purpose at the time, there would be a strong inducement to keep up the cheat until

the close of the war. Nor could the people of Massachusetts, consistently with their interest, abandon the story on the return of peace. Every State was deeply involved in debt, and all were desirous of obtaining all the aid they could from the General Government. The story of the burning of Charlestown, the bravery of the Yankees on the occasion, and the cost of that battle to the Colony, would plead loudly in her behalf; so that, if we admit the account to have been fabricated, there were strong inducements to keep up the delusion.

But perhaps it may be said, that the erection of the monument is sufficient proof of the fact in question. I have no disposition to overlook the monument, or any circumstance which is supposed to bear upon the question before us; but I wish to inquire, how a monument erected on *Breed's Hill* prove that a battle was ever fought on *Bunker's Hill*? If a monument in one place settles the authenticity of the account of a battle in another, why may not this same monument authenticate the account of the battle at Yorktown, or Waterloo? Besides, who would ever refer to image-worship to prove the truth of Christianity? Does not the introduction of symbols of any kind rather

show, that the belief in the thing or event represented is on the wane? If there was a full and firm belief that Bunker's Hill had been such a field of glory as has been represented, would there be any need of a pile of granite erected on the spot? The people of Charlestown would naturally feel a pride and an interest in keeping up the impression, that the Revolutionary drama was opened within her borders; and the people in the vicinity, and especially in the city of Boston, would naturally partake of the same feeling; and if they saw that the belief in the oft-told tale of the Battle of Bunker's Hill was declining, what is more natural than that they should get up something like the Monument Association, for the purpose of erecting that obelisk which has attracted the gaze of thousands, and gives a sort of notoriety to the place?

The success which attended the erection of that monument, is just what might have been expected on supposition that the whole account of the battle was fabulous. Application was made to the Legislature of Massachusetts for aid in its erection; but with all the local interest which was brought to bear upon the subject, the State did little or nothing in furtherance of the object. Now



is it not almost certain, that the patriotic Legislature of the patriotic State of Massachusetts would have contributed largely to that magnificent undertaking, if they had believed that it was commemorative of an event which had actually taken place? Would a Government which extends its fostering care to pickerel and herring, to woodcocks and the "least wing that flits along the sky," withhold its patronage from an Association whose object was to awaken the patriotic emotions, and pay a deserved tribute to the memory of those who hazarded all for their country's good? Would a State which pours out its treasures like water in aid of every benevolent enterprise, and which encourages science and history by causing a *survey* (for this is the term used by the Legislature) of "bird, beast, fish, insect, what no eye can see" — would such a State suffer such a noble undertaking to linger twenty years, if its citizens really believed that it was designed to commemorate one of the proudest events in our history? The course pursued by our State Government is altogether inexplicable on any other ground than the one we have suggested, — that great doubts existed whether such a battle was ever fought.

In fact, such was the state of public feeling,

(arising from doubts of the truth of this famous exploit, we presume,) that it is very doubtful whether the monument would have been undertaken at all, had not a combination of circumstances favored the commencement of the work. The Masonic Institution, which professes to be perfectly *at home* in everything relating to "geometry and architecture," and especially in building in stone and mortar, had not at that time wholly lost its popularity in the State. And availing themselves of the pageantry of that order, the Association for erecting the monument invited the Masons to lay the corner-stone "in due form." One of the most distinguished statesmen and orators of the country was selected to deliver the Address on the occasion; and the nation's guest, the great and good La Fayette, being at that time in the country, was invited to be present. All these circumstances drew together a vast concourse of people, and gave an impulse to the undertaking. But it is presumed that few, very few, of those who were present on that occasion, intended by their presence to endorse the account of a battle fought there, half a century before. They wished to see La Fayette and Webster, and to witness the pomp and ceremony of the Masonic Institution, with its mystic rites, unintelli-

gible symbols, and "hieroglyphics older than the Nile." It is too great a draft upon human credulity, to ask us to believe, that that vast assembly was a cloud of witnesses in favor of the portion of history under consideration.

The work was commenced under the circumstances we have mentioned; but when this unnatural, or rather artificial impulse had subsided, and the people came to their sober senses, the work was abandoned, and it stood a half finished monument of the credulity of a people long celebrated for their "notions." Several attempts were made to raise funds sufficient to complete the monument, but with little success. At length, the Mechanic Association, probably more from a desire to show the merchants and wealthy men in the Commonwealth, that they were not behind them in liberality, than from any well founded faith in the event to be commemorated, undertook to finish the structure. But active and persevering as they were, their faith and works both failed them, and the labor upon the monument was again suspended. Now all this is perfectly natural on our hypothesis, but totally irreconcilable with the position that the battle was a reality. It is difficult to believe, that the wealthy merchants of Boston, whose liberality

is proverbial, would have suffered this work to linger as it did, if they were satisfied of the reality of the event it proposed to perpetuate. But if the merchants of Boston had for once forgotten themselves, and acted so contrary to their former character, we are confident that nothing but the want of faith could have restrained the intelligent, energetic and noble-spirited mechanics of the Commonwealth, or prevented their finishing that time-enduring work.

As further evidence that real doubts existed, we may mention the fact, that part of the ground, on which the battle was reported to have been fought, was actually sold for building lots! Is it possible that, if it was really believed so important an event took place on that spot, any part of it could have been alienated for so unworthy a purpose?

But there was one expedient more to be tried. The ladies, always noted for their credulity as well as for their generosity and untiring zeal, were at last appealed to; and they were imploringly asked to finish what the men had hardly faith enough to begin. They entered upon the work with alacrity; but even the faith and constancy of woman failed, before the capstone was brought on with rejoicing. Here the "work of faith and labor of love" were

exhausted, and the work would, in all probability, have been abandoned, had not the spirited and energetic contractor, perhaps to save his own reputation, and secure his pay for what he had already done, conceived the plan of levying a tax upon the pilgrims who should resort to this American Mecca. Consequently he provided a steam-engine, (for everything in these galloping days must go by steam,) and the necessary apparatus, by which the pilgrims were raised to the top of this majestic pillar. By the help of this tax he was enabled to complete the monument about twenty years after it was commenced.

Now in view of all the circumstances connected with the erection of this granite pile, have we not reason to suspect, that the public have entertained great doubts of the authenticity of the portion of history under consideration? Or rather is not this great delay inconsistent with a well-grounded faith on the part of the people, and perfectly consistent with the hypothesis we have assumed? And now that the monument is completed, the same system of levying contributions upon visitors is kept up, that was adopted by the Catholic priests in the dark ages. Those who ascend this monastic column, walking up its dark winding passage, with



a dim light in their hands, must pay a tribute, not of respect to the memory of our fathers, but of money to the guardian goddess of Bunker's Hill.

There are at this time many means resorted to, to keep up the impression that the history of this battle is not fabulous. Besides the tax imposed upon those whom credulity or curiosity may lead to the spot, there is also a sort of Dioramic show of this battle, which has been got up with great ingenuity, and which has been exhibited in various parts of the country, by which the owners are enabled to levy a contribution upon hundreds of those who never visited the battle-field. This is a kind of second edition of the devices of the Romish Church, by which those who never saw one of their saints when alive, are enabled to see and to possess, if they are able to pay the purchase-money, some pretended relic of him when dead.

But the boldest expedient is yet to be mentioned. The Masons, it is said, have erected a little monument within the great one, to aid in commemorating the fading glories of this memorable battle. This is drawing upon our credulity in the same manner the Irish monk did upon the traveller, when he showed him two skulls of St. Patrick, the one his skull when he was an adult, the other his skull when he was a boy!

All these influences are brought to bear upon the subject, to keep up the faltering faith in that pretended military exploit. There is also a local interest, a State pride, which fosters this belief. Vermont points to Bennington, New York to White Plains, New Jersey to Princeton, and Virginia to Yorktown, and it is a pity, if Massachusetts cannot divide the glories of the Revolution with her sister States, when she contributed so largely of her blood and treasure to carry on that war. Her efforts in that struggle would justly entitle her to at least one consecrated spot, to which those who have no patriotism themselves can point, and boast of the patriotism of their ancestors. Not that I would call in question the patriotism of our citizens generally; but it is true of Massachusetts men, as well as others, that those who have the most to say of the heroes of the Revolution, and who point to Bunker's Hill the most frequently, have the least of that self-denying spirit, which characterized our ancestors. Such men could hardly sustain themselves, if Bunker's Hill were blotted from their memory. This local feeling, this State pride, this boast of our father's patriotism, uttered so loudly by those who have none themselves, united with pecuniary interests, serves

to keep up a pretended or real belief in the event. And besides, all who have contributed to the erection of the monument, are committed to that belief. For such persons to reject this boasted page in our history, would be confessing either that they had been imposed upon themselves, or that they had endeavored to impose upon others. And the number thus committed is very great; for I believe, in some cases the subscription was restricted to the small sum of five dollars as the maximum, on the plea that no one might be deprived of the opportunity of having his name enrolled among those who cherished a grateful remembrance of the deeds of departed heroes. But may not this limited subscription be fairly construed into an admission, that five dollars was the measure of the strongest faith on this subject; and may we not infer that this was a device to enlist as many as possible, so that if this pretended battle should ever be called in question, these subscribers should ever hold their peace?

Taking all these circumstances into view, it is not at all surprising that the great mass of the people should believe, or pretend to believe, in this opening scene of the revolutionary drama. The mass believe in it, because the belief is fashionable.

The superstitious believe in it, because they think it nearly allied to impiety to call it in question. The worldly wise and prudent acquiesce in it, through fear that an agitation of the question would produce excitement. And the unprincipled demagogue adopts it, because he finds Bunker's Hill a convenient watch-word to excite the passions of the ignorant.

I might pursue this subject further, and show other causes which, in want of sufficient evidence, serve to keep up this belief; but I deem it unnecessary. I have shown, on the great principles of Mr. Hume's theory, that the Battle of Bunker's Hill is not entitled to our belief; that experience, that great touchstone of truth, is decidedly against it; that the event itself is improbable; that the witnesses in its favor are interested, and that their testimony is contradictory. We have also seen that the tardiness in the erection of the monument furnishes a strong presumptive argument, that those who erected it had but a wavering faith in the event the structure proposed to perpetuate; and that local feeling, personal interest, and State pride will easily account for the general belief we find in the community, even admitting the history of the event to be fabulous.

I do not intend to be dogmatical, but I would respectfully ask whether we have not made out our case. Have we not shown, on the theory laid down by Mr. Hume, that the people have been grossly deceived on this subject? I think we have. We have followed out the reasoning of the great logician, and are, it seems to me, compelled to admit, either that the accounts we have read from our childhood, of the Battle of Bunker's Hill are all a fabrication, or that Hume's great argument is fallacious, and his positions false. Here, then, is the dilemma. And which horn shall we embrace? If we follow Hume, we shall unsettle the faith of thousands, and destroy all confidence in history; and if we adhere to the common opinion of the events of June 17th, 1775, we assail the great logician, draw upon ourselves the charge of being credulous, and are justly exposed to the sneers of all unbelievers. Nay, more; if we reject Hume's theory, we shall be charged with being led by Campbell, and other priests, who, it is said, are interested in keeping up a great reverence for what is called *faith*. If we discard the theory of Hume, we shall be accused of being priest-ridden, and so wanting in manly independence. Moreover, we shall, in such case, be required to believe not only



in the Battle of Bunker's Hill, but in other events recorded in history. We shall also be compelled to believe in the events recorded in the Scriptures, and to receive the precepts of Christ and his Apostles, which have always been found to be troublesome companions for those of us, who, reject Puritanism, wish not only to think, but to act and live freely—that is, to enjoy our “home-bred and fire-side rights.”

On a full view of the whole subject, I am inclined to adhere to the theory laid down by Hume, who may be regarded as the father of all rational unbelief. His theory makes short work of miracles and the other dogmas of religion. It is too laborious a task, to refute all the arguments which are brought in support of Christianity, even if it were possible. Who can have patience to plod through Lardner's elaborate “Credibility,” or even Paley's “Evidences of Christianity?” Butler's “Analogy” requires more study and thought than most of us wish to bestow upon that subject. West on the “Resurrection of Christ” is a small book, but exceedingly difficult to answer; and Littleton on the “Conversion of St. Paul” has so perplexed me, that I have resolved never to attempt to read it again. Leland's “View of Deistical

Writers" presents the opinions of our friends in such an awkward light, that I have no patience with it; and even Leslie's short and Easy Method with the Deists," is far too *long* and *hard* for me to answer. Now, considering the multiplicity of books in support of Divine revelation, and the great difficulty there is in answering their arguments in detail, I have felt the necessity of some "short and easy method" of meeting these arguments at once; and I find nothing so convenient as Hume's theory. I can answer all these writers, meet all their arguments, and overthrow all their statements, by the talismanic reply of Mr. Hume — *The experience of the world is against it.*

This summary mode of meeting all kinds of troublesome arguments, I have found of great service on innumerable occasions. I therefore cling to it. I regard it as a kind of labor-saving machine, which answers every purpose, and has this additional recommendation, that the superficial can employ it just as well as the profound. I have found it perfectly satisfactory in speculation. I say *in speculation*, for I must confess, that it will not hold good in the common affairs of life. When I first became acquainted with the writings of Mr. Hume, I was so pleased with his theory, that I

resolved to make it the rule of my life in the management of my ordinary affairs. But you can hardly conceive of my mortification, when I found this, my favorite theory, utterly to fail me. I learned by that very experience which Mr. Hume commends, that his theory led me to doubt everything, to withdraw confidence from every body, and refrain from all action whatever. I found it would paralyze all effort, destroy all business transactions, and produce a sort of Mesmeric sleep in the whole community. My embarrassment was extreme; but I soon extricated myself from this difficulty by adopting a theory of my own concerning Mr. Hume's theory, viz. that his grand position of human experience was *merely theoretical*, — well adapted to matters of speculation, but never designed to apply to the tangibilities of life.

This view of Mr Hume's theory, I find exceedingly convenient. I can use it or disuse it, as the case may require. I employ it in all matters of mere opinion, in all abstract speculations, but discard it, or rather lay it aside, in all cases of a practical character. In this way I enjoy all the benefits of his theory without any of its embarrassments. But utility is not the only recommendation of my theory; it avoids many popular objections.



I keep temporals and spirituals entirely separate ; and hence can never be accused of designing to unite Church and State. I keep everything in its place, and have appropriate modes of reasoning for each particular department, thus giving to each a portion in due season.

I have thus expressed myself freely, and have given my views without reserve ; and I trust that I shall not be discarded for my frankness, or be pronounced an infidel. It is true that I reject revelation, but why should I be denied the Christian name on that account, any more than others ? The difference between us is little more than this. I discard miracles, because I consider them impossible ; while some who call themselves Christian Ministers discard them, because they think them of no consequence, even if they were true. I discard the doctrines of Christ, because they are so far in advance of the spirit of the age, that the world cannot for centuries come up to that elevated standard ; they virtually discard them, because they fancy that they have already outgrown them, and have a higher and purer standard of their own. I regard the Gospel as too abstract and elevated for beings of an earthly mould ; they, as too tangible and grovelling for intellectual society. My faith

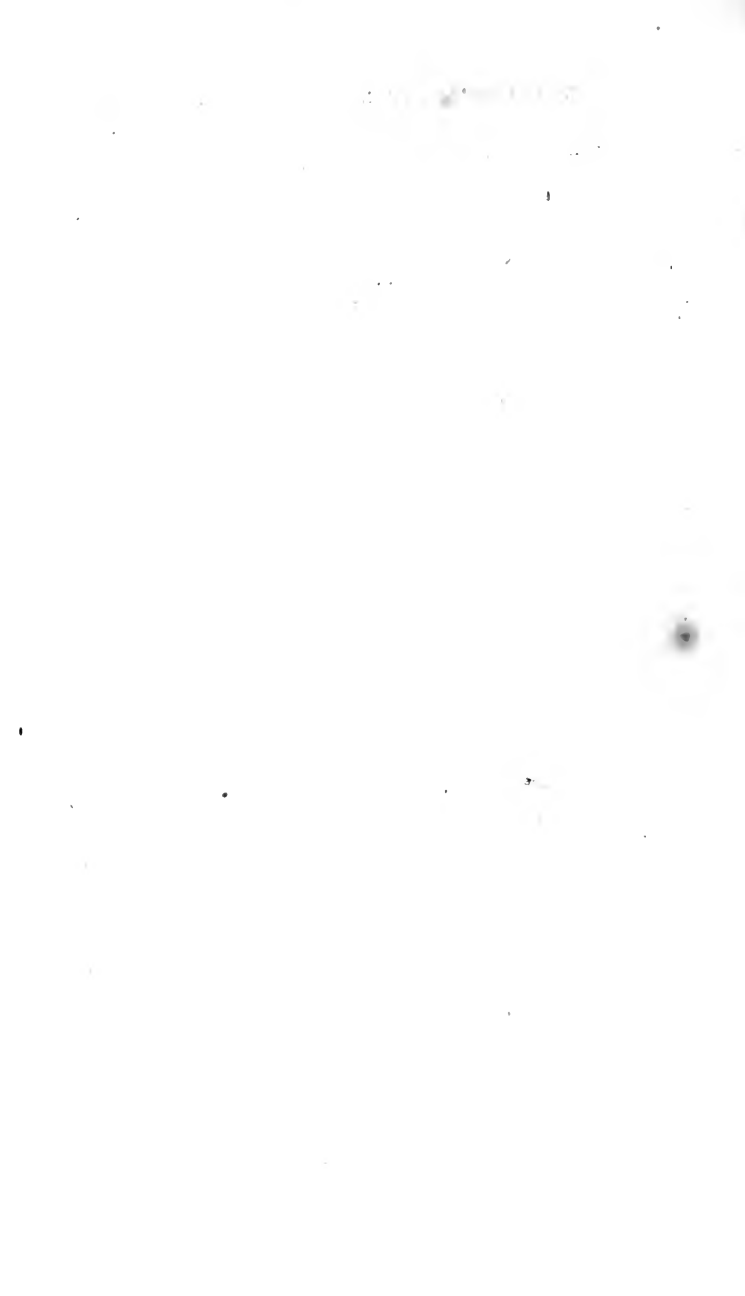
rests upon outward, palpable evidence which all can understand; theirs, upon an inward impulse which no one can comprehend. But while this marked difference obtains between us in these respects, we virtually agree in this, that we can yield no credence to that phantom called *authority*, but must make our own sense of propriety the only standard of truth. Agreeing in this important essential, we stand substantially upon the same platform, and should be called by the same name.

In some respects, I profess to stand in advance of many who call themselves Christians. I may have less of faith, but I claim more of works than some others. I am opposed to vice in all its forms, especially when it appears in its more fashionable and grosser types; and hence I am willing that gambling, and intemperance, and slavery, and aggressive war should be assailed either by the press or from the pulpit. But many professed Christians entertain such refined, abstract, ethereal views of religion, that they will tolerate nothing of the kind; and if their religious teachers say anything on these subjects, they will at once exclaim, —“ This is preaching politics, and not the Gospel — ministers should preach Christ, and him crucified!” Not being troubled with any such exquisite views

of religion and religious duties, I am willing that those we employ as religious teachers, should not only "shoot folly as it flies," but assail spiritual and temporal wickedness, whether it shows itself in high or low places.

THE END.





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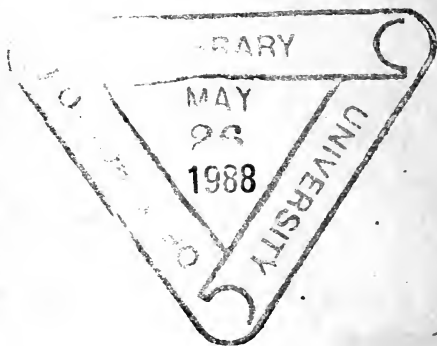
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