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E S S A Y

In ANSWER to

Mr. *HUME*'s ESSAY

ON

M I R A C L E S.

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By WILLIAM ADAMS, D. D.

Minister of ST. CHAD's, SALOP,

And Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of ST. ASAPH.

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The THIRD EDITION, with Additions.

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*— it fumus ad auras. VIRG.*

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MDCCLXVII.

# ERRATA.

Page 8. line 19. *for of read or.*

16 — 5. *for events read the events.*

32 — 9. *for whoever read who ever.*

47 — 23. *dele an.*

77 — 25. *for miraculo read miracula.*

115. *in the Note of reference, for ascal read Pascal.*

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*Lately published, Price 1 s.*

By the AUTHOR of this Essay,

**T**HE NATURE and OBLIGATION of VIRTUE.  
A Sermon preached in the Parish-Church of St. Chad, Salop, at the primary Visitation of the Lord Bishop of Litchfield; and published at his Lordship's Request. With an Appendix, containing Notes on the same Subject.

*Also, Price 6 d. The Second Edition,*

THE DUTIES of INDUSTRY, FRUGALITY, and SOBRIETY. A Sermon preached before a Society of Tradesmen and Artificers, in the Parish-Church of St. Chad, Salop, on Easter-Monday, 1766. Published at the Request of the Society.


\* *Dr. Richard Boscawen calls this "an excellent discourse  
Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind  
Vol. 2. p. 8. Note. Edit 2. 1762.*





A N

# ESSAY, &c.

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

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

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See also a paper in *The Christian Observer*, Vol. 1  
for 1802 p. 291, by O. H. J.

it carefully, and for guarding ourselves against being deceived by the artifice or eloquence of the writer.

He begins with challenging, a little indirectly, the thanks of the public, for a discovery, which, he apprehends, will be of universal service to mankind. This is nothing less than an infallible cure for superstition. “ I “ flatter myself,” says he, “ that I have discovered an argument, which, if just, will, “ with the wise and learned, be an everlasting “ check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, “ and, consequently, will be useful as long as “ the world endures; for so long, I suppose, “ will the accounts of miracles and prodigies “ be found in all profane history \*.” The virtues of this specifick are such, that it exterminates all religions alike; as he shews, by trying its strength upon the *Christian*, which, where it prevails, is, perhaps, more obstinate and hard of cure than any other. Here, however, it has been known to fail. I have given it a fair trial, and known it tried by others, without the least effect, and think I can prove that

\* *Philosophical Essays concerning human understanding*, p. 174, first edition.

there is no one ingredient of any virtue or efficacy in it.

The secret itself is contained in the compass of a few lines: and therefore, to give some port and figure to it, the author has thought necessary to introduce it with some preliminary observations.

In the first of these, his meaning seems to be to lay down this as a principle — that all our reasonings concerning matter of fact are founded wholly on experience: “ ‘Tho’ experience  
 “ be our only guide in reasoning concerning  
 “ matters of fact, it must be acknowledged,  
 “ that this guide is not altogether infallible,  
 “ but in some cases is apt to lead us into errors  
 “ and mistakes. One, who in our climate  
 “ should expect better weather in any week of  
 “ *June* than in one of *December*, would reason  
 “ justly and conformable to experience; but  
 “ ’tis certain, that he may happen in the event  
 “ to find himself mistaken. However, we may  
 “ observe, that in such a case he would have  
 “ no cause to complain of experience; be-  
 “ cause it commonly informs us before-hand  
 “ of the uncertainty, by that contrariety of

“ events which we may learn from a diligent  
 “ observation \*.” In illustrating this observa-  
 tion, both here and elsewhere, he seems to con-  
 fine it to such events as are future: “ An  
 “ hundred instances or experiments on one  
 “ side, and fifty on another, afford a very  
 “ doubtful expectation of any event; tho’ an  
 “ hundred uniform experiments, with only  
 “ one contradictory one, do reasonably beget  
 “ a very strong degree of assurance †.” Here  
 then I readily allow, that in reasoning concern-  
 ing future contingencies experience is the best  
 guide we have, tho’ in many cases, as will here-  
 after be seen, a very uncertain one.

This observation is followed by a prudent  
 caution. “ A wise man,” he tells us, “ pro-  
 “ portions his belief to the evidence. In such  
 “ conclusions as are founded on an infallible  
 “ experience he expects the event with the last  
 “ degree of assurance, and regards his past ex-  
 “ perience as a full proof of the future ex-  
 “ istence of that event. In other cases he pro-  
 “ ceeds with more caution: he weighs the  
 “ opposite experiments; he considers which  
 “ side is supported by the greatest number of

\* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 174.

† P. 175.

“ experi-



“ experiments ; to that side he inclines, with  
 “ doubt and hesitation ; and, when at last he  
 “ fixes his judgment, the evidence exceeds not  
 “ what we properly call probability. — In all  
 “ cases we must ballance the opposite experi-  
 “ ments, where they are opposite, and deduct  
 “ the lesser number from the greater, in order  
 “ to know the exact force of the superior evi-  
 “ dence \*.” This logick is very just, and what,  
 I am persuaded, every man of the plainest un-  
 derstanding knows how to practise, without  
 learning it from the schools, or from the au-  
 thor’s refinements on the *curious and sublime*  
*subject* (as he calls it) of probability †.

He then proceeds — “ To apply these prin-  
 “ ciples to a particular instance : We may ob-  
 “ serve, there is no species of reasoning more  
 “ common, more useful, and even necessary to  
 “ human life, than that derived from the testi-  
 “ mony of men, and the reports of eye-wit-  
 “ nesses and spectators. This species of reason-  
 “ ing perhaps one may deny to be founded on  
 “ the relation of cause and effect. I shall not  
 “ dispute about a word. ’Twill be sufficient

\* P. 175.

† *Essay on Probability*, p. 97.

“ to observe, that our assurance, in any argument of this kind, is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses\*.”

’Tis difficult to say what the author would here exemplify, there being no clear connection betwixt this and the preceding paragraphs. But, if I may presume to explain it, his argument stands thus: The principle he set out with, was, that our reasoning about matters of fact depends wholly upon experience. This he hath proved concerning such events as are future: he now wants to prove the same concerning facts that are past. Here he is aware, that, besides experience, we have another guide, which is the testimony of history, that of witnesses, &c. These he does not chuse to distinguish from the former, but insinuates, that the evidence of testimony is included in that of experience, or that every argument from testimony is only an argument from experience, for as much as the truth of that depends ultimately upon this†. “The ultimate standard,” he

\* P. 176.

† It may with more propriety be said, that the evidence of experience is included in that of testimony, than

he tells us below, “ by which we determine  
 “ disputes of this kind, is always derived from  
 “ experience and observation.” Now it is true,  
 that the evidence of testimony must be resolved  
 at last into experience : but this experience is  
 of a species entirely distinct from that on which  
 the natural probability of any fact attested rests :  
 nor does it consist, as this author asserts, in our  
*observation of the veracity of human testimony, and*  
*of the usual conformity of facts with the reports of*  
*witnesses.* It is built upon other principles, to  
 which the author himself leads us in the words  
 that follow : “ Did not men’s imagination na-  
 “ turally follow their memory — had they not  
 “ commonly an inclination to truth, and a senti-  
 “ ment of probity—were they not sensible to  
 “ shame, when detected in a falsehood—Were  
 “ not these, I say, discovered by experience to  
 “ be qualities inherent in human nature, we

than the contrary. Our own experience reaches around  
 and goes back but a little way. But the experience of  
 others, upon which we chiefly depend, is derived to us  
 wholly from history and tradition, that is, from testi-  
 mony. And it is obvious to observe, that, in a question  
 of fact, the testimony of negative witnesses how many  
 soever, is, for the most part, no evidence at all ; while  
 positive testimony must, more or less, have its weight.

“ should never repose the least confidence in  
 “ human testimony \*.” The first of these mo-  
 tives I do not understand. Of the rest I shall  
 observe, that their force we collect, not so  
 much from our observation of other men, as  
 from our own feeling, and a consciousness of  
 what passes within our own breast. We per-  
 ceive in ourselves, that a love and reverence  
 for truth is natural to the mind of man : and  
 the same self-experience teaches us, that there  
 are certain other principles in human nature,  
 by which the veracity of men may be tried,  
 and the truth of testimony be often put out of  
 doubt, as will be hereafter seen.

The next observation is, that, “ as the evi-  
 “ dence derived from witnesses and human testi-  
 “ mony is founded on past experience, so it  
 “ varies with the experience, and is regarded  
 “ either as a proof of probability, according as  
 “ the conjunction betwixt any particular kind  
 “ of report and any kind of objects has been  
 “ found to be constant or variable †.” Here  
 again the author’s meaning is lost in a thicket  
 of words, which it is difficult for a common  
 eye to penetrate. Let the reader try what he

\* P. 177.

† Ibid.



can make of the *conjunction varying betwixt any particular report and any kind of objects*. The credibility of an historical fact depends upon the credibility of the fact itself, and that of the historian or witnesses who relate it. These should be always considered distinctly; tho' the author, for reasons of his own, chuses to confound them. The latter of these depends in part upon principles that are fixed and invariable, such as those the author has just mentioned, which are general principles of human nature; and in part too on the personal character of the relator, the interest he has in the fact related, and other circumstances. As these circumstances vary, the evidence varies, and the fact becomes more or less credible. And so, concerning the natural credibility of the fact, this is greater or less, according as our own, and the observation of others, in cases of a similar nature, has been more or less uniform. Something like this I take to be the author's meaning in this place: and this is the amount of all that follows in this and the next paragraph. My design, therefore, in this remark, is, not to contest the author's principles, which, as far as I understand them, are right enough; but to shew that his style and manner of writing

ing tend to embarrass the subject, and perplex the reader.

We are now coming nearer to the matter in question. "Suppose," says the author, "that the fact, which the testimony endeavours to establish, partakes of the extraordinary and the marvellous; in that case, the evidence resulting from the testimony receives a diminution, greater or less, in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual.—When the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences; of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains. The very same principle of experience, which gives us a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of witnesses, gives us also, in this case, another degree of assurance against the fact which they endeavour to establish\*." Here the author seems to suppose, that a want of experience, in any case, is the same with experiencing the contrary. *When a fact attested hath seldom fallen under our observation, "here is,"* says

\* P. 179.

he, “ *a contest of two opposite experiences:*” but, in reality, here is no experience at all ; only a fact not observed on one side, and positive evidence, or the fact attested, on the other — a very unequal contest ! as we shall presently see ; the slightest positive testimony being, for the most part, an over-balance to the strongest negative evidence that can be produced. I grant, however, all that the author’s argument requires, *viz.* that experience teaches us, of many things, that they are improbable, and not to be hastily believed ; of others, that they are naturally incredible : but these are so, not because they are unusual or unobserved, but because there is a known disproportion betwixt the cause assigned and the effect, or because the fact asserted is a contradiction to some known and universal truth.

These premises he now draws to a point, and makes them center in one conclusive argument against miracles : “ To increase the  
 “ probability against the testimony of witnes-  
 “ ses, let us suppose, that the fact which they  
 “ affirm, instead of being only marvellous, is  
 “ really miraculous ; and suppose also, that  
 “ the testimony, considered apart and in itself,  
 “ amounts

“ amounts to an entire proof: in that case,  
 “ there is proof against proof, of which the  
 “ strongest must prevail, but still with a di-  
 “ minution of its force in proportion to that of  
 “ its antagonist \*.” I have just allowed, that  
 there are facts which experience assures us are  
 wholly incredible: but of these I shall assert,  
 that no good testimony can be produced in their  
 favour. Truth is always consistent with itself;  
 and no one truth can ever be contradicted by  
 another. The author is, therefore, too kind in  
 supposing that miracles may admit of full proof  
 from testimony. I shall take no advantage of  
 this concession, but readily acknowledge, that,  
 if they are proved *à priori* to be incredible, it  
 will be a vain attempt to prove them by testi-  
 mony. Let us see, then, what the author al-  
 lleges in bar of this proof. His batteries are  
 now mounted, and he begins the attack.

“ A miracle,” says he, “ is a violation of  
 “ the laws of nature; and, as a firm and un-  
 “ alterable experience hath established these  
 “ laws, the proof against a miracle, from the  
 “ nature of the fact, is as entire as any ar-  
 “ gument from experience can possibly be

\* P. 179.

“ imagined.



“ imagined. Why is it more than probable,  
 “ that all men must die—that lead cannot by  
 “ itself remain suspended in the air—that fire  
 “ consumes wood, and is extinguished by water  
 “ — unless it be, that these events are found  
 “ agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is  
 “ required a violation of these laws, or, in  
 “ other words, a miracle, to prevent them?  
 “ Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever hap-  
 “ pens in the common course of nature. ’Tis  
 “ no miracle, that a man in seeming good  
 “ health should die of a sudden; because such  
 “ a kind of death, tho’ more unusual than any  
 “ other, has yet been frequently observed to  
 “ happen: but ’tis a miracle, that a dead man  
 “ should come to life; because that hath ne-  
 “ ver been observed in any age or country.  
 “ There must, therefore, be an uniform expe-  
 “ rience against every miraculous event, other-  
 “ wise the event would not merit the appella-  
 “ tion. And, as an uniform experience amounts  
 “ to a proof, there is here a direct and full  
 “ proof, from the nature of the fact, against  
 “ the existence of any miracle: nor can such  
 “ a proof be destroyed, or the miracle ren-  
 “ der’d credible, but by an opposite proof that  
 “ is superior \*.”

\* P. 180.

I have

I have endeavoured to preserve the strength of this argument entire, by collecting every thing that is of any import to it in the observations that precede it: and, that the reader may see it in its strongest light, I shall here repeat it, as it is again summ'd up by the author at the end of his Essay:

“ It appears, that no testimony for any kind  
 “ of miracle can ever amount to a probability,  
 “ much less to a proof; and that, even sup-  
 “ posing it amounted to a proof, 'twould be  
 “ opposed by another proof, derived from the  
 “ very nature of the fact which it would en-  
 “ deavour to establish. 'Tis experience alone  
 “ which gives authority to human testimony;  
 “ and 'tis the same experience which assures us  
 “ of the laws of nature. When, therefore,  
 “ these two kinds of experience are contrary,  
 “ we have nothing to do but subtract the one  
 “ from the other, and embrace an opinion,  
 “ either on the one side or the other, with  
 “ that assurance which arises from the re-  
 “ mainder. But, according to the principle  
 “ here explained, this subtraction, with regard  
 “ to all popular religions, amounts to an entire  
 “ annihilation: and therefore we may establish

“ it as a maxim, that no human testimony can  
 “ have such force as to prove a miracle, and  
 “ make it a just foundation for any such system  
 “ of religion \*.”

This is the author's great discovery. The whole secret is out. And here one cannot but wonder to see a position, which is laid down by all that write in defence of miracles, pleaded as a decisive argument against them, and to find the experience of all mankind brought in evidence against all the religions of the world. An experienced uniformity in the course of nature hath been always thought necessary to the belief and use of miracles. These are indeed relative ideas. There must be an ordinary regular course of nature, before there can be any thing extraordinary. A river must flow, before its stream can be interrupted. It is strange, therefore, that this uniformity, which is implied in the nature of a miracle, should at the same time be inconsistent with it. This is to suppose, that the existence of a miracle is a contradiction in terms ; and as such indeed the author seems to treat it : “ A miracle sup-  
 “ ported by any human testimony is more

\* P. 198.

“ properly

“ properly a subject of derision than of argu-  
 “ ment \* :” And again, “ What have we  
 “ to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the  
 “ absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of  
 “ events † ?” A modest reader can scarce  
 look such assurance as this in the face : he will  
 be apt to mistrust his own apprehension, and  
 think there is more in these big words than he  
 readily sees. The first reading gave me suspi-  
 cions of this kind ; but, having recovered my-  
 self, and taken courage to review it, I fear not  
 to assert, that all the experience the author can  
 bring will amount to neither proof nor argu-  
 ment against the belief of miracles. Let him,  
 if he pleases, plead his own experience—that  
 he has never seen or been witness to any mi-  
 racle—that he has always found the course of  
 nature to be the same and unchanged : but  
 does this experience teach him, that the laws  
 of nature are necessary and immutable—that  
 there is no power in being sufficient to suspend  
 or alter them—or that there can be no reasons  
 to induce such a power to act ? ’Till one or  
 other of these can be proved from experience,  
 it is no evidence in the present case, and, in-  
 stead of deciding the matter in question, is

\* P. 194.

† P. 195.



wholly impertinent and foreign to it. Can the southern climates experience that there is no frost in the north? Or, can Mr. *Hume* experience that I have never seen fire kindled by a touch from ice? This negative evidence, tho' multiplied infinitely, would still be negative: and the fact last mentioned might be true, and capable of very easy proof from testimony, as I shall presently shew, though all the world should agree that they had never seen the like.

The uniformity of nature is no way impeached or brought in question by the supposition of miracles. The concurring testimony of mankind to the course of nature is not contradicted by those who have experienced contrary appearances in a few instances. The idea of a miracle unites and reconciles these seeming differences. By supposing the facts in question to be miraculous, the uniformity of nature is preserved, and the facts are accounted for upon another principle entirely consistent with it. Thus, experience teacheth us that lead and iron are heavier than water: but a man, by projecting these heavy bodies, may make them swim in water, or fly in air. Should the same be done by any

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

The question then will remain—Whether any such invisible agents have ever interposed in producing visible effects? Against the *possibility* of this, tho' the author is pleased to pronounce it impossible, he hath offered no argument (and, indeed, none can possibly be offered): Against the

*credibility* of it, the experience which he pleads is no argument at all. This experience proves a course of nature; but, whether this is ever interrupted, is still a question. This experience teaches what may be ordinarily expected from common causes, and in the common course of things: but miraculous interpositions, which we are enquiring after, are, by their nature and essence, extraordinary and out of the common course of nature. Miracles, if at all, are effects of an extraordinary power upon extraordinary occasions: consequently, common experience can determine nothing concerning them. That such occasions may arise, both in the natural and moral world, is easy to conceive. The greatest of natural philosophers \* hath thought, that the frame of the world will want, in a course of time, the hand that made to retouch and refit it. The greatest of moral philosophers † hath thought it a reasonable hope, that God would some time send a messenger from heaven to instruct men in the great duties of religion and morality.

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

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

As to the question of *fact* — Whether any such interpositions have been ever known or observed? this must be tried, like all other historical facts, by the testimony of those who relate it, and the credit of the first witnesses who have vouched it; and not, as this author would have it, by the testimony of others — of those who lived in distant times and places. There is mention of a comet, a little before the *Achaian* war, which appeared as big as the sun \*. If this were well attested by the astronomers of that time, it would be trifling to object against it that the like had never been observed before or since. And just as pertinent is it to alledge the experience of ages and countries against miracles which are said to be wrought in other times and other countries.

But, in truth, were the world to give evidence in the present question, they would, I am persuaded, depose very differently from what this author expects. A great part of mankind have given their testimony to the credibility of miracles: they have actually believed them. By this author's account, all the religions in the

\* *Seneca Nat. Quaest.* lib. 7. cap. 15.



world have been founded upon this belief. If this be true, we have universal testimony to the credibility of miracles. How then can there be universal experience against them? The author tell us that we must judge of testimony by experience. It is more certain that we must judge of the experience of men by their testimony.

It is far from true that all religions have been founded on miracles. None but the *Christian* and *Jewish* appear to be so founded. But there is a sort of miracles, which men of all religions have agreed in believing. "A miracle," as this author says, "may be either discoverable by men, or not. This alters not its nature and essence\*." Many things appear to us to be effected by natural means, the first springs of which may be moved by the immediate hand of God. But every such interposition, in overruling or giving a new direction to the course of nature, is, as the author allows, miraculous. If then Providence ever interposes in punishing exemplary wickedness, or in the support of eminent virtue—in averting evil, or bestowing good—these are miracles. But these have been

*Locke's  
of Miracles  
Vol. 3 Wm*

\* P. 181.

universally believed. These blessings of heaven have been implored and acknowledged, and these judgments deprecated, in the publick and private prayers of mankind, from the beginning of the world to this time.

We cannot indeed argue, from these supposed interpositions, that therefore Providence will interpose in a visible and sensible manner. But it follows, that such interpositions are possible; it follows, that they are credible. If we believe these miraculous interpositions, when they do not appear to our senses, what should hinder us from believing the like upon the report of our senses, or of credible persons who give witness to them? If there are general reasons for concealing these interpositions, may there not too be special reasons for signalizing them at times to the senses and notice of mankind? It is certain, that, if any such reasons can be assigned, all that is difficult of belief in miracles will be removed. Now, tho' we cannot indeed look into the counsels of Providence, nor, without presumption, pronounce what is fit for God, in any supposed circumstance, to do; yet, in judging of past facts or miracles that are questioned, we can readily see whether any great end, worthy

thy of God, hath been answered by them : and if this appear to be the case, it will create a presumption in their favour : and if, farther, it shall seem that this end could not have been compassed by any other means, this will amount to some proof of their reality.

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

The credibility of any fact in itself, as this author frequently tells us, depends upon its analogy with the known course of nature \*. But the powers of nature are so imperfectly known to us, that in most cases we argue with great uncertainty from this principle. A consequence of this is, that testimony is, for the most part, of much greater force to establish the truth of past facts, than experience. It would have been thought highly incredible a few years ago, that

\* P. 165.

an animal might be propagated by cutting it in pieces—that you might, by dividing one living creature, give life to an hundred of the same species. Yet this sort of *Hydra* has been discovered ; and the fact, tho' contrary to the whole analogy of nature, was readily believed, when it had been experienced and testified by very few. In like manner, I have no doubt that the magnet loses its polarity in very cold latitudes. I believe this upon the testimony of one man \*, tho' the experience of travellers in all climates before attests the contrary. Here the most uniform experience is outweighed by a single evidence. The reason is, that the experience of other countries is only a negative evidence in the question. The experience was indeed, before the fact was tried, a very strong presumption against it. The most cautious sailor would have ventured his fortune and life upon it. Yet is this presumption of no weight in the question of past fact, when compared with the slightest testimony †.

In

\* Mr. *Ellis*, in his account of the North-west Passage.

† Every proposition or fact asserted is *certainly* true or false. By credible or probable we mean, not any thing real in the character of the proposition or fact, but only

*its*  
 \* *Angels Stewart Phillos of Herin Mains*  
 Part 2 Chap 2 Sect 4 Vol 2 p 252



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

its appearance to us, or to the person who estimates this credibility. A thing is said to be credible, when it wants and is thought capable of proof—to be probable, when there appear more reasons for than against believing it. *Credible* is more than *possible*, and *impossible* more than *incredible*. Again, *probable* is more than *credible*, and *incredible* is more than *improbable*. But these words are used in common language somewhat promiscuously. Thus, what is highly probable is said to be highly credible, and what is very improbable to be very incredible. Hence, there are all degrees of incredible and credible, before you arrive at probability. After this, credible and probable are the same, and admit again of all degrees, 'till you arrive at moral certainty. The same thing then may be credible in all these different degrees to different persons. That the earth is round—that it is constantly spinning about like a top, and travelling with a very swift motion, while the sun and the heavens stand still—This to one part of mankind is wholly incredible, and to another morally certain. The credibility, therefore, or comparative incredibility of any fact is, for the most part, too loose a bottom to ground any argument or inference upon. The same testimony may likewise be variously credible to different persons. But the evidence of this is far more distinct, and its force more easily ascertained. The truth of testimony, where it is doubtful, may

be kindled by a touch from ice, is contrary to the experience of some thousand years. But electricity is a cause given equal to the effect.

From

may be proved many different ways: that of doubtful facts can be made clear only by testimony, which is indeed, after all, the proper proof of facts.

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

From this time, then the fact becomes credible, and even probable, tho' it were not tried and proved by any one witness.

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if their veracity is proved, as I assert it may, even to our eyes and senses, (I mean, by sensible and visible facts) I have then nearly as good evidence for the fact, as if I had seen it myself. I might perhaps conclude, that the effect was produced by some invisible agent; but, whether this can be discovered or not, the fact must still be admitted. All this is unwarily allowed by the author himself, in terms as strong as can be desired: "Suppose all authors in all languages agree, that from the first of *January*, 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days: Suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people; that all travellers, who return from foreign countries, bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction: 'Tis evident, that our present philosophers, instead of doubting of that fact, ought to receive it for certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived." P. 199.

The author of the *Free Inquiry into the miraculous Powers of the primitive Church* has stated this matter in a very different light. He supposes, that we have the evidence of sense for the natural credibility of facts, and seems to infer, that, when we argue from hence, we go upon surer ground than when we argue from testimony, which he represents as ever dark and doubtful, and amounting only to a reasonable presumption,

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In moral or intelligent agents we look for moral causes—for reasons or motives to induce them to act, as well as for the natural powers of

at best : the contrary to which, in almost every particular, is, I think, the truth. As the principles laid down by this author are very general, and may be easily misapplied, beyond his intention, in the present question, it will not be improper to compare them with what has been said. “ The question concerning these “ miraculous powers depends,” says he, “ upon the “ joint credibility of the facts pretended to have been “ produced, and of the witnesses who attest them : if “ either part be infirm, their credit must sink in proportion, and, if the facts especially be incredible, must “ of course fall to the ground, because no force of testimony can alter the nature of things. The credibility of facts lies open to the trial of our reason and “ senses : but the credibility of witnesses depends on a “ variety of principles wholly concealed from us ; and, “ tho’ in many cases it may reasonably be presumed, “ yet in none can it certainly be known : for it is common with men, out of crafty and selfish views, to “ dissemble and deceive : but plain facts cannot delude “ us — cannot speak any other language, or give any “ other information, than that of truth. The testimony, therefore, of facts, as it is offer’d to our senses, “ carries with it the surest instruction in all cases, “ which God, in the ordinary course of his providence, “ has thought fit to appoint for the guidance of human “ life.



of acting. And, where both a final and efficient cause appear equal to the effect, the effect, however strange in itself, will become credible by

“ life \*.” In answer to which, I shall not deny that the credibility of facts may in many cases be tried by our senses ; but this is generally learnt from experience, or the common testimony of mankind : And, 2dly, this credibility, however learnt or proved, is no direct evidence of the reality or existence of any doubtful fact ; since the fact may be highly credible, and yet never exist—may be in a great degree incredible, and yet certainly true. What the author calls *the testimony of facts offered to our senses* is in this case only the testimony of our senses, or that of other men, to the existence, not of the fact in question, but of other facts that are supposed analogous or similar to it ; which, tho’ in many cases it may amount to a very high presumption, yet is *in none a direct proof of any doubtful fact* : Whereas, 3dly, testimony is a direct evidence to the existence or reality, not of similar facts, but of the fact itself : and therefore, in judging of past or distant facts, where we cannot have the evidence of our senses, the testimony of those who have this evidence is, not only the surest, but the only *method of instruction which Providence has appointed for our guidance thro’ life*. All that we *certainly know* of such facts is derived from this source. The truth of testimony is always presumed, where there are no particular reasons to suspect it. This presumption alone will give more weight, as we have seen, to a single tes-

\* Preface, p. 9.

timony,

by testimony, if not probable without it. It is possible for a man to swim across the *Hellepont*. The possibility of this fact will make it credible upon sufficient testimony: but, if a competent reason is assigned for this hazardous enterprize (such as the escaping certain death) this will make it credible upon the slightest testimony, or even probable without any.

The result then is — that whatever is possible, or in the lowest degree credible, is capable of a proof from testimony—that the strongest presumption from experience is of

timony, and make it better evidence for the truth of facts, than a very high degree of presumption drawn from analogy is against it. 4thly, This presumption may be increased to any degree by the concurrence of other testimony; which concurrence too is itself a distinct proof of the fact attested. Lastly, The veracity of every single witness may be proved by plain and indisputable facts, as will be seen more fully hereafter. If then improbable or incredible facts require stronger evidence to support them, the weight of testimony may be increased, and the proofs that support it multiplied, infinitely; and, consequently, whatever is not absolutely impossible may be thus proved. The force of testimony cannot indeed *alter the nature of things*: but it can make things improbable become probable — it can give credibility, and even certainty, to things that were before incredible.

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little force against positive evidence—and that, where a cause is assigned equal to any effect, the event is rendered credible upon common testimony, and sometimes probable without any.

But there are, it is granted, many cases, which we may, from nature and experience, pronounce to be impossible. It is impossible that a fact or proposition should be true, when the cause assigned is unequal to the effect. Now, the proportion of causes to effects, the natural powers of agents, and the force of moral causes on the mind, we know to a good degree, from experience. If we cannot precisely determine the force of natural agents, we can, in most cases, assign limits which they cannot pass. For instance : We cannot precisely mark out the bounds of human power ; but we can, in all cases, say to what it does not extend. If the strength of men, at a medium, be equal to one, that of king *Augustus* or *Hercules* may be equal to two ; but it cannot be equal to two hundred. A physician may restore a dying man to health ; but he cannot restore a dead man to life. Of all such events, as raising the dead, calming the winds or seas, curing diseases with a word, we  
may

may fairly pronounce, that they are impossible to human strength, and therefore, when imputed to it, are incredible ; because a force equal to two cannot produce an effect equal to two hundred. In this case experience decides with sufficient authority against the fact. And this, I suppose, the author mistook for an argument against miracles.

But whoever attributed these facts to human power ? Those who record, and those who believe, miracles, universally ascribe them to a power superior to man. They agree, that they far exceed all human strength, and therefore are an argument of the concurrence and agency of some superior power. Against the interposition of such superior power, experience, as we have seen, can determine nothing. If common experience does not attest or acknowledge such interpositions, the answer is given—common occasions do not call for them. The common wants of nature are provided for by the common course of nature. Extraordinary occasions only can call for extraordinary interpositions. Of these occasions we are not the proper judges : but, that many such may arise in the



the government of free agents, seems obvious even to us.

If men, by a bad use of their liberty, should sink themselves into a moral incapacity of answering the ends of their creation—If they should lose sight of God and religion and all the great motives to holiness and virtue, and this evil should become general and past all natural hopes of recovery—it is very supposeable that God may interpose, by a special act of his Providence, in restoring them to a capacity of serving him, and of attaining that happiness for which they were created. If virtue, and that knowledge which is necessary to it, are worthy the care of Providence — and if these were in danger of perishing out of the world——why should it be thought incredible that God should send a righteous man to teach the doctrines and enforce the duties of religion, with a clear and express authority? This mission of a prophet would be miraculous: but the miracle would not appear; and therefore other miracles would be necessary to attest its truth. Superior knowledge and virtue are not sufficient to characterize a prophet: he must do such things as no man can do, except God were with him,

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before

before his mission or character will be acknowledged for divine. Here then is a reason, which, whenever it can be pleaded, will make miracles every way credible, and as capable of proof from testimony as any matter of fact whatsoever.

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

We come next to consider the credibility derived to facts from testimony. This depends in general upon the principles of human nature, which we can argue with the more certainty from, because we experience them in ourselves,

as well as observe them in others. We are made naturally to love truth, and to hate and abhor falshood and deceit. The shame of being detected in a lye, and the reproach that ever follows it, is a full proof of this. Even in matters of no moment, in the most transient discourse, where men think it unnecessary to attend to what they say, were there no temptation from vanity or a desire of pleasing, they would never deviate from truth. But this principle will operate far more strongly, where men are called upon to attend, have leisure to consider, and give their testimony deliberately: it will operate more strongly on good men than bad—in cases of great moment than in matters of indifference.

Could we be absolutely certain, in any case, that a man had no interest, real or supposed, in deceiving—that he had no motive to deceive—we might depend with absolute certainty upon the truth of his evidence. Now, this assurance we may have from circumstances that cannot deceive us. Incapable as we are of penetrating into all the reserves and recesses of the human mind, there is yet a certain and infallible test, by which the veracity of men may in many

cases be tried. For example: If the person attesting gives up every known interest for the sake of his testimony, without any known prospect of advantage — if he is exposed by it to present sufferings, and is threaten'd with yet greater — if he persists under all the discouragements that can be thought of, and goes through a long series of evils, which, by receding from his testimony, he might prevent — and, lastly, if he gives up life itself for a painful and ignominious death — this is such a proof of sincerity as cannot be resisted. In this case, we are not only assured that the witness is free from every corrupt bias, but that he has the highest regard for truth. Nothing but a conscious sense of this, with the hope of a future reward from the God of truth, can support men under a loss of all things, and under the actual suffering of all the evils of life. A good man may give up his interest for the sake of truth: a bad man will sacrifice truth to interest: but no man will give up interest and truth together for nothing, or for the sake of falsehood, which is worse than nothing.

The maxims we here argue from are the most certain and uncontroverted of any in morality



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

It remains, indeed, that witnesses the most upright and unsuspected may be mistaken in their testimony : they may be deceived themselves ; and therefore their testimony, even thus proved, is not to be securely relied on. But, happily, miracles, at least all that we dispute

with this author, are of such a nature, that it is impossible to be deceived about them. Facts that are visible and palpable to the senses of mankind, that are done in open day-light, that lie open to scrutiny and observation for a long time together, present witnesses must know whether they see or not. They who report them as eye-witnesses cannot be deceived themselves in the belief of them, however they may intend to deceive others.

I conclude then, that miracles, when there appears a sufficient cause for working them, are credible in themselves — that, when they come under the cognizance of our senses, they are proper matter of testimony, and, when attested by witnesses who have sufficient opportunities of convincing themselves, and give sufficient proof of their conviction, have a right to command our faith.

And here I accept the author's alternative, without complaining of the insidious terms in which it is expressed. "The plain consequence," says he, "is (and 'tis a general maxim worthy of our attention) that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, un-

“ unless the testimony be of such a kind, that  
 “ its falshood would be more miraculous than  
 “ the fact which it endeavours to establish :  
 “ and even in that case there is a mutual de-  
 “ struction of arguments, and the superior  
 “ only gives us an assurance suitable to that  
 “ degree of force which remains after deduct-  
 “ ing the inferior.— If the falshood of any  
 “ person’s testimony would be more miracu-  
 “ lous than the event which he relates, then,  
 “ and not ’till then, can he pretend to com-  
 “ mand my belief or opinion \*.” By miracu-  
 lous it is plain that the author here means, in  
 the popular sense of the word, wonderful or in-  
 credible. I assert then, that miracles may be  
 made so credible by circumstances and con-  
 curring facts, and so supported by testimony,  
 that, if we reject them, we must believe things  
 more incredible, or, as the author would have  
 us speak, more miraculous than the miracles  
 themselves.

The miracles I shall mention are those in  
 the *Christian* Gospel—healing the sick without  
 any visible means, giving sight to the blind,  
 raising the dead to life, &c. all which are said

\* P. 182.

to be performed by the power of God for ends the most worthy of himself, *viz.* to restore religion and morality to their true principles, and to establish the practice of them in the world. The character of those who were appointed to this work, and the doctrines which they taught, correspond perfectly with this design: great as it was, they undertook it with alacrity and confidence, declaring from the beginning that their commission was to go and teach all nations: the miracles which they attest, as giving authority to their doctrine, they assert from their own knowledge, as what they saw with their eyes, and handled with their hands: the number of these facts, and the numbers attesting them, were very great: they concurred, without variation, in the same doctrine, and in the same testimony: they submitted, with the same courage and constancy, to the greatest persecutions and afflictions, in confirmation of their truth; and, when called to it (as many of them were) laid down their lives for its sake: they foresaw from the beginning the opposition they met with, and foretold, with the fullest assurance, their success against it: and the event justified their predictions;

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duty and a strong conviction of the truths they taught, is still more incredible.

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

The success of this design is yet a greater miracle. In this chain of wonders the event is the most miraculous part. The establishment of the Gospel in an hundred different nations, its victory over *Jews* and *Gentiles*, over the power and policy of the wisest and greatest people, over the pride of learning and the obstinacy of ignorance, over the prejudices of religion and those of sin and irreligion, is an event the most wonderful of any in history. But this is a miracle which we see before our eyes: it is a miraculous fact that must be ascribed to a miraculous cause. Even granting the truth of the Gospel miracles, the instruments in propagating it were so unequal to the work, that nothing but the power of God, accompanying and  
working

working with them, can account for its success. It was still a miracle that it should prosper in their hands. But, without either truth or providence to support it, this success would be more than miraculous—it would be impossible.

The testimony directly given to these miracles is strongly confirmed by the character of the witnesses, who, as far as appears even from the testimony of their enemies, were unblameable in their lives and manners—men of conscience and religion. Their writings breathe a spirit of piety, a zeal for God and good works, that is not equalled by any writings in the world: they carry in them such marks of candor, truth, and simplicity, as cannot be imitated: all which can never consist with the daring impiety of usurping the most sacred of all characters, and preaching a false religion to the world.

The numbers that engaged in this design, tho' dispersed in different regions, agreed perfectly in the same report. It was in the power of any of these, or of the accomplices that must be concerned with them, to defeat the whole by discovering the fraud: and it cannot  
be,

be, that not one should, by fear or interest, persuasion or torture, be prevailed on to discover it.

They put their testimony to the trial, by claiming a power of working miracles themselves: they displayed this power frequently and publickly, and so submitted their truth to the eyes and senses of all about them. This pretence, if false, must have defeated the most probable and hopeful scheme; if true, it was no more than necessary to the difficulties of this. The event was — great numbers were every day converted to the faith. But this conduct cannot, any more than the event, be reconciled to the character or supposition of imposture.

Lastly, they gave the highest proof that can be given to the veracity of testimony, by going thro' the fiery trial of persecution, in all its various forms of imprisonment, torture, and death. This began with the very beginning of Christianity. They saw it evidently before their eyes, and plainly devoted themselves from the first to a life of sufferings and affliction. They gave up ease and security, country, kindred, family, and friends, to be treated every-where  
with



with contempt and contumely, to conflict with poverty and want, to be persecuted from city to city, sentenced to imprisonment and stripes, and, at last, to die by stoning, by the sword, or the cross. But this, in support of falsehood and wrong, is so contrary to human nature, that it is absolutely incredible.

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

And what now is that contrariety to nature, which is pleaded against the possibility of miracles? "A miracle," the author tells us, "may be accurately defined a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity or by the interposal of some invisible agent \*." But this definition is neither accurate nor consistent with itself. The laws of nature are the laws of God: and, if God should occasionally change or invert any of these, there is no law, that I know of, against it — no law of God or nature broken by it. But, in fact,

\* P. 181.

where

where miracles are supposed, there is no change made in these laws. I have shewn, that all that is unnatural in miracles is only appearance. There is nothing contrary to nature in supposing the dead to be raised, or the winds controlled by a power equal to the effect. It was no way contrary to the nature of God to reveal his will to mankind, in order to reform their corruptions, and to conduct them to virtue and happiness. On the contrary, this might be piously hoped for from his wisdom and goodness. It was no way contrary to the nature and condition of men. It appears from the history of mankind, that natural religion was at this time universally corrupted, and that no other probable means were left of restoring it. Reason and philosophy had tried their strength in vain. It was, therefore, on the part of man, highly expedient and desirable. In fact, to this revelation, whether real or pretended, and to no other cause, it is owing, that the great truths of nature, concerning God, a Providence, and a future state, are now so widely spread, and that half the world, instead of dumb idols, are serving the living God: and, if all the good ends, that might be expected, are not yet answered by it, yet the seed of the word is

sown, the foundations of true religion are laid, and there is hope that it will in time enlarge its borders, and prevail, where it is received, with more effect and influence. It cannot be denied, that the Gospel is an adequate provision for the wants, a remedy for all the infirmities of mankind. There is nothing, that can be wished for in a rule of duty, that is not comprehended in it. The miracles, then, that attest it, are accounted for to our reason: we have God, the cause of all things, for their author: and a sufficient reason is assigned for the divine interposition. And this will, at the same time, account for all the wonders that followed: the actions, sufferings, and success of the Apostles will, upon this scheme, appear easy, consistent, and natural.

But, if this account be not admitted, these will remain so many contradictions to nature and experience, and it will lie upon the author to reconcile them to our belief. If the common motives to human actions, interest, passion, and prejudice, cannot be pleaded in an answer to these difficulties, what other account can be given of them? Some cause must be assigned adequate to the effect. For men to act without motives

motives is as unnatural, as it is for a body to sink without weight—to act against the force of motives is as contrary to nature, as it is for a stone to ascend against the laws of gravity. Hear what this author says himself in another Essay: “ We cannot make use of a  
 “ more convincing argument, than to prove  
 “ that the actions ascribed to any person are  
 “ directly contrary to the course of nature, and  
 “ that no human motives, in such circum-  
 “ stances, could ever induce him to such a  
 “ conduct \*.”

3. The author tells us, that in this case we must reject the greater miracle. But miracle is too soft a name for these inconsistencies. Could he shew, that God, or some invisible agent, had interposed in confounding the reason and understanding of all that preached or believed the Gospel, in changing their nature, and giving a contrary direction to their passions, affections, and instincts, they would then be miracles, and proper objects of our belief. But this I shall presume impossible to be proved, because no end can be assigned for such interposition, but merely to deceive mankind—an end so unwor-

\* P. 135.



thy of God, and contrary to the perfections of his nature, that we may pronounce it impossible for him to promote, or even to permit it to take effect.

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

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*subtraction*

*subtraction will certainly amount to an entire annihilation.*

Let us now see the poor case which the author puts at last to illustrate and crown his argument, “ When any one tells me, that he saw  
 “ a dead man restored to life, I immediately  
 “ consider with myself, whether it be more pro-  
 “ bable that this person should either deceive  
 “ or be deceived, or that the fact he relates  
 “ should really have happened: I weigh the one  
 “ miracle against the other, and, according to  
 “ the superiority which I discover, I pronounce  
 “ my decision, and always reject the greater  
 “ miracle \*.” The author’s argument requires him to prove, that no miracles, however circumstanced, can be made credible by any testimony whatsoever. But, in the case supposed, the miracle has not one circumstance to make it credible, nor the testimony one condition to confirm its truth. A dead man we may suppose raised to life without any reason, use, or end whatsoever: and a dead man may be raised for some extraordinary purpose of Providence, as to give authority and character to the special messengers of God. Now, tho’

\* P. 182.

the former of these cannot be made credible by the naked testimony of one man, the latter may be made credible by the attestation of many, especially, if they give proof, that they were neither deceived themselves, nor intended to deceive others. Though one man, unassisted, cannot lift a weight of twenty tuns, twenty men, with the help of engines, may lift the weight of one. I agree with the author, that, when a man is said to rise, like the ghost in *Prince Edward*\*, only to set again, it is more credible, that the testimony is false, than the miracle true: but, when I see an effect worthy of Providence, in which the religion, virtue, and morality of a great part of mankind are concerned, brought about by the belief of this or such-like miracles, and find, upon inquiry, that this miracle is attested by a great number of persons who lived and died confessors and martyrs to it, the falshood of such testimony appears to me far more miraculous than such a miracle.

The author puts the same case, with the addition of some particulars, in the second part

\* A late play, called *Edward the Black Prince*.

of his Essay : “ Suppose that all the historians  
 “ who treat of *England* should agree, that, on  
 “ the first of *January*, 1600, queen *Elizabeth*  
 “ died—that, both before and after her death,  
 “ she was seen by her physicians and the whole  
 “ court, as is usual with persons of her rank—  
 “ that her successor was acknowledged and  
 “ proclaimed by parliament — and that, after  
 “ having been interred a month, she again ap-  
 “ peared, took possession of the throne, and  
 “ governed *England* three years : I must confess  
 “ I should be surprized at the concurrence of  
 “ so many odd circumstances, but should not  
 “ have the least inclination to believe so mira-  
 “ culous an event \*.” Here, again, the fact  
 supposed is the strangest and most unac-  
 countable that the author could well conceive,  
 because no final cause appears to make it in any  
 degree credible. But when was any such fact at-  
 tested by historians ? If the author thinks the  
 story incredible, I think it as incredible that any  
 good historian should relate it : if he thinks it  
 incredible, because it is a miracle, I think it in-  
 credible that God should work such a miracle  
 for nothing.



But the importance of miracles is, it seems, with the author, a thing of no consideration : this, which we considered as a circumstance that gives the highest credibility to the Gospel miracles, is, at last, the very reason why he rejects them as incredible. “ I beg,” says he, “ that the limitation here made may be re-  
 “ marked, when I say, that a miracle can never  
 “ be proved, so as to be a foundation of a sy-  
 “ stem of religion ; for I own, that, otherwise,  
 “ there may possibly be miracles, or violations  
 “ of the usual course of nature, of such a  
 “ kind, as to admit of proof from human testi-  
 “ mony, tho’ perhaps it will be impossible to  
 “ find any such in all the records of history \*.” This concession is very remarkable, and appears to me to be fairly giving up the argument : for, if miracles may be wrought in cases of less moment, why may they not in greater ? or, is religion the last and least of all things in the opinion of this author ? I confess myself at a loss to guess what can be his intention in this place. If, in compromise for the other miracles which he here grants us unasked, he expects us to give up all that have religion for

\* P. 199.

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

\* P. 200.





## P A R T II.

**L**ITTLE as it is that the author has done in the first part of his Essay, he seems to think it more than enough, and that half his pains might have been spared: “ In the  
 “ foregoing reasoning, we have supposed, that  
 “ the testimony upon which a miracle is found-  
 “ ed may possibly amount to an entire proof,  
 “ and that the falshood of that testimony would  
 “ be a kind of prodigy. But ’tis easy to shew,  
 “ that we have been a great deal too liberal in  
 “ our concessions, and that there never was a  
 “ miraculous event, in any history, established  
 “ on so full an evidence\*.” But, if the author  
 was so sure of his strength, why this *corps de  
 reserve*, a body of troops that have been for  
 ever harrassed, and are yet untired, in the ser-  
 vice of infidelity?

The first of these veteran bands is drawn up  
 as follows: “ There is not,” says he, “ to be

\* P. 183.

“ found, in all history, any miracle attested by  
 “ a sufficient number of men of such unques-  
 “ tioned good sense, education, and learning,  
 “ as to secure us against all delusion in them-  
 “ selves—of such undoubted integrity, as to  
 “ place them beyond all suspicion of any design  
 “ to deceive others—of such credit and repu-  
 “ tation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a  
 “ great deal to lose, in case of being detected  
 “ in a falshood—and, at the same time, attest-  
 “ ing facts performed in such a publick man-  
 “ ner, and in so celebrated a part of the world,  
 “ as to render the detection unavoidable : all  
 “ which circumstances are requisite to give us  
 “ a full assurance in the testimony of men \*.”

The reader will allow me to suppose, that the  
 author has in view, both here and throughout  
 his Essay, the *Christian* miracles, which we  
 have been considering. Now, the objections  
 here made have been so frequently and fully  
 answered by the advocates of Christianity, that  
 it is quite piteous to see the author, after pro-  
 claiming a victory, calling in such poor auxili-  
 aries to his relief.

\* P. 183.



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

The Apostles and first Disciples had not, many of them, the advantages of education and learning. But what learning is required to enable men to see with their eyes and hear with their ears? The miracles they attest were plain facts, the objects of sense. Folly itself could not be deceived in them: and sure folly could never so successfully deceive. These men, illiterate as they were and void of art or elo-

quence, did what this author, with all his arguments, will never be able to do: they got the better of all the religions in the world about them, and established their own in different and distant countries. They had, therefore, we may hope, sense enough to testify what their eyes had seen and their hands had handled.

They had not perhaps any great reputation to lose. But the good name of a poor man is as dear to him as that of the greatest. If they had no publick character to lose, they had publick infamy to dread: and this they incurred, not by being detected in a falsehood, but by persevering in the truth. If it was little that they gave up to follow *Christ*, it was, however, all that they had. And what they gained was a negative quantity, and must be put to the side of their losses: they gained hunger and thirst, toil and labour, watchings and fastings, scorn and reproach, scourgings and death. They lost, then, enough to evidence their sincerity. They gave every proof, that ever was given by man, to the truth of their testimony.

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

The author is well aware, that the testimony of the Apostles and first Christians, if the miracles were false (I mean, the fact of giving such

\* P. 198.

testimony) and the miraculous events that followed in consequence of them, will be thought, upon reflection, at least as incredible as the miracles themselves : and therefore, to abate our wonder on this head, he observes, “ secondly, “ that there is a principle in human nature, “ which, if strictly examined, will be found “ to diminish extremely the assurance we might “ have from human testimony in any kind of “ prodigy. The maxim, by which we commonly conduct ourselves in our reasonings, “ is, that the objects of which we have no experience resemble those of which we have— “ that what we have found to be most usual is “ always most probable. But, tho’, in proceeding by this rule, we readily reject any “ fact that is unusual or incredible in an ordinary degree, yet, in advancing farther, the “ mind observes not always the same rule ; but, “ when any thing is affirmed utterly absurd and “ miraculous, it rather the more readily admits “ such a fact upon account of that very circumstance which ought to destroy all its authority. The passion of surprize and wonder “ arising from miracles, being an agreeable “ emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards “ the



“ the belief of those events from which it is  
 “ derived \*.”

The love of novelty is, indeed, a natural passion; it is no other than the love of knowledge, which God hath implanted in the mind for the wisest reasons: and for the same reasons we may be assured that he hath not laid snares to betray us into error, and much less hath placed in us a principle, as the author here supposes, the tendency of which is to make us believe things, merely because they are incredible. “ With what greediness,” saith he, “ are the miraculous accounts of travellers received, their descriptions of sea and land monsters, their relations of wonderful adventures, strange men, and uncouth manners !” It is true that every new discovery gratifies our love of knowledge, and gives pleasure to the mind: but it must have the appearance of truth to do so. Tho’ we love to be informed, we do not love to be deceived. A single miracle would risk the credit of the best-esteemed travels. But, according to this author’s principle, the voyage to *Lilliput* or

*Laputa* must meet with more credit than that of *Anson* or *Ellis*.

But, if the love of novelty will not reconcile us to miracles, that of religion will make us believe any thing. “If the spirit of religion joins itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense\*.” If the author means, that men are more apt to believe miracles in the cause of religion than in any other case, he is so far in the right. Where should men expect or believe miraculous interpositions, but where it is most worthy of God to interpose? But it does not follow, that religion is a friend to false miracles, or an enemy to common sense. On the contrary, right notions of the divine nature and perfections, which religion teaches, are a necessary help to distinguish true miracles from false. Now, the *Jews*, in general, were better instructed in these points than the wisest of the Heathens. The men of *Athens* were far more superstitious than the most ignorant of the *Hebrews*. The false wonders of magick, witchcraft, and necromancy, these were taught by

\* P. 185.

their law to hold in contempt, and, consequently, were less liable to be practised upon by appearances of this sort. And, of the Apostles and first Christians, it is certain, that they had all the security against delusion and error of this kind, that a rational piety and the noblest sentiments of God and a Providence could give them.

But “ a religionist may be an enthusiast, and  
 “ imagine he sees what has no reality : he may  
 “ know his narration to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the  
 “ world, for the sake of promoting so holy a  
 “ cause : or, even where this delusion has no  
 “ place, vanity, excited by so strong a temptation, operates on him more powerfully than  
 “ on the rest of mankind in any other circumstances, and self-interest with equal force :  
 “ his auditors may not have, and commonly  
 “ have not, sufficient judgment to canvas his  
 “ evidence ; what judgment they have they renounce upon principle in these sublime and  
 “ mysterious subjects \*.” Here, it is confessed, the author has touched upon a very powerful

\* P. 185.

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



sinuate, that men should renounce their judgment in inquiries of this sort : on the contrary, they are enjoined carefully to examine the truth of miracles and doctrines, before they believe them.

But, granting the author's principles in their full extent, the miracles of the Gospel will be no way affected by them : For, first, the Apostles are free from all tincture and appearance of enthusiasm; witness the writings which they have left behind them, and that system of doctrines and morals contained in them : in their piety nothing over passionate, rapturous, or ecstatick appears, but all is rational, sober, and temperate : their zeal for their master and his religion never transports them into complaints or invectives against his enemies or their own, or into any strained elogiums or panegyricks upon his character : they recite all that is wonderful in his actions, without exclamation, without vehement asseveration, with an undoubting, unguarded simplicity, that is highly singular and remarkable : their whole conduct, in like manner, was void of ostentation, steady, uniform, and regular throughout : they were not only consistent each with himself (which a fa-

natick spirit seldom is) but all pursued the same plan, without varying or change, with the most perfect harmony and agreement. And, secondly, whatever influence, from passion or prejudice, the witnesses to Christianity were under, this operated the contrary way, and must dispose them to reject, rather than receive, the miracles: the Apostles themselves were *Jews*, and zealous of the traditions and customs of their ancestors: the other converts, whether *Jews* or Pagans, were prejudiced, as strongly as they could be, by religion, against the Gospel: bigotry and enthusiasm rose up every-where in persecution against it; nothing but reason and conviction could induce men to declare for it: every passion, every interest, and every prejudice persuaded against this belief: and, in fact, every single conversion to it was not barely the testimony of an unprejudiced judge, but the testimony of an enemy to its truth.

“ The wise,” says the author, in another place, “ lend a very academick faith to every  
 “ report which favours the passion of the repor-  
 “ ter, whether it magnifies his country, his fa-  
 “ mily, or himself, or in any other way strikes  
 “ in with his natural inclinations and propen-  
 “ sities.

“fities. But what greater temptation than to  
 “appear a missionary, a prophet, an ambassador  
 “from heaven? Who would not encounter  
 “many dangers and difficulties to attain so su-  
 “blime a character \*?” Where this character  
 is indeed attended with honour and respect, it  
 will be natural for ambitious men to desire it.  
 But the head and leader of this sect had been  
 every-where reviled and persecuted, and was  
 crucified as a malefactor: his followers every-  
 where shared the same fate. What temptation  
 was there to appear his prophet or ambassador?  
 What vanity or self-interest was gratified  
 by it?

But thirdly, the author tells us, “it forms  
 “a very strong presumption against all superna-  
 “tural and miraculous relations, that they are  
 “always found chiefly to abound amongst ig-  
 “norant and barbarous nations; or, if a civi-  
 “lized people has ever given admission to any  
 “of them, that people will be found to have  
 “received them from ignorant and barbarous  
 “ancestors, who transmitted them with that  
 “inviolable sanction and authority which al-  
 “ways attends ancient and received opinions†.”

\* P. 196.

† P. 186.

This argument we presume, has been already answered. The miracles of the Gospel were, as we have said, performed where they were most suspected. The *Jews* were by no means a barbarous people, and they were freer from superstition than any other nation in the world. These miracles were immediately canvassed with all the severity that the prejudice of enemies could suggest. Some who were healed of their diseases were sent immediately to the priests, on purpose, as it seems, that they might undergo the strictest inquisition. Others were called before the council, examined, and threatened, and every means tried to refute and silence them. This religion did not get strength in the dark, and then adventure itself by degrees into the light: it was openly proclaimed, from the first, in the temple, and in the synagogue, where the *Jews* always resorted: and, when the Apostles had filled *Jerusalem* and *Judæa* with their doctrines, *Rome* and *Athens* were some of the next scenes of their ministry.

Under this head we are entertained with a long story from the *Pseudomantis* of *Lucian*. “It was,” saith the author, “a wise policy  
“in that cunning impostor, *Alexander*, who,  
“tho’



“ tho’ now forgotten, was once so famous,  
 “ to lay the first scene of his impostures in  
 “ *Paphlagonia*, where, as *Lucian* tells us, the  
 “ people were extremely ignorant and stupid,  
 “ and ready to swallow even the grossest de-  
 “ lusion. People at a distance, who are weak  
 “ enough to think the matter at all worth  
 “ inquiry, have no opportunity of receiving  
 “ better information. The stories come mag-  
 “ nified to them by an hundred circumstances,  
 “ Fools are industrious to propagate the delu-  
 “ sion ; while the wise and learned are con-  
 “ tented, in general, to deride its absurdity,  
 “ without informing themselves of the parti-  
 “ cular facts, by which it may be distinctly  
 “ refuted. And thus the impostor above-men-  
 “ tioned was enabled to proceed, from his ig-  
 “ norant *Paphlagonians*, to the inlisting votaries  
 “ even among the *Grecian* philosophers and  
 “ men of the most eminent rank and dis-  
 “ tinction in *Rome*——nay, could engage the  
 “ attention of that sage emperor, *Marcus*  
 “ *Aurelius*, so far as to make him trust the  
 “ success of a military expedition to his delu-  
 “ sive prophecies\*.” But what, if this famous  
 impostor never pretended to miracles? It is

\* P. 188.

said, indeed, that he had his emissaries in distant countries, who reported this, among other things, to his honour: but there is no appearance in his history of his ever counterfeiting or pretending to this power. It was his policy not to hazard his reputation on so dangerous an issue. Ignorant and stupid as his *Paphlagonians* were, it might have been too much for all his art to impose false facts upon their eyes and senses. He had, by a bold and successful cheat of another kind, established his character among this people, who, *Lucian* tells us, differed from brutes in nothing but their outward form. He had the fortune too to gain the ear of a famous *Roman* general, who, by the same author's account, was formed to be the dupe of every pretender. This seems to have got him some name in *Rome*. But I find none, that deserved to be called philosophers, among his votaries. It is certain, that the sight of a *Christian* or an *Epicurean* disconcerted all his management. They were always drove from his presence, having the confidence, no doubt, to deride the prophet and his oracles. Every one must believe, upon the representation here made, that the emperor *Antonine* had undertaken the expedition mentioned at the insti-

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

The author adds, as a fourth reason which diminishes the authority of prodigies, “ that  
 “ there is no testimony for any, even those  
 “ which have not been expressly detected, that  
 “ is not opposed by an infinite number of witness-  
 “ nes; so that not only the miracle destroys  
 “ the credit of the testimony, but even the testi-

“ many destroys itself. To make this the bet-  
 “ ter understood, let us consider, that, in mat-  
 “ ters of religion, whatever is different is con-  
 “ trary, and that 'tis impossible the religions of  
 “ antient *Rome*, of *Turky*, of *Siam*, and of  
 “ *China* should, all of them, be established on  
 “ any solid foundation. Every miracle, there-  
 “ fore, pretended to have been wrought in any  
 “ of these religions (and all of them abound  
 “ in miracles) as its direct scope is to establish  
 “ the particular system to which it is attri-  
 “ buted, so it has the same force, tho' more  
 “ indirectly, to overthrow every other system :  
 “ in destroying a rival-system, it likewise de-  
 “ stroys the credit of those miracles on which  
 “ that system was established : so that all the  
 “ prodigies of different religions are to be re-  
 “ garded as contrary facts, and the evidence of  
 “ these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as  
 “ opposite to each other \*.” This argument,  
 he is apprehensive, will appear too subtle and  
 refined : but the only fault of it is, that it has  
 no foundation in truth. The author cannot  
 name a single miracle, that was ever offered as  
 a test of any of these religions, before their esta-  
 blishment, or to authorize any pretended pro-

\* P. 190.



phet to teach such religion. *Mahomet* expressly disclaims this power in many places of his *Koran*. It appears from his manner of speaking of it, that he knew what advantage this pretence would give to his cause, and even felt the want of it : yet, with all the assistance that art and power could give him, he durst not hazard so dangerous an experiment. There is a wide difference betwixt establishing false miracles, by the help of a false religion, and establishing a false religion by the help of false miracles. Nothing is more easy than the former of these, or more difficult than the latter. The author would make us believe that miracles are to be met with in almost every page of antient history : “ When we peruse the first histories of all na-  
 “ tions, we are apt to imagine ourselves tran-  
 “ sported into some new world, where the whole  
 “ frame of nature is disjointed, and every ele-  
 “ ment performs its operations in a different  
 “ manner from what it does at present. Battles,  
 “ revolutions, pestilences, famines, and deaths,  
 “ are never the effects of those natural causes  
 “ which we experience \*.” But the truth is, they are very thinly sown in the writings of the heathens. Portents and prodigies I call not by

\* P. 187.

that name. These are to be accounted for from natural causes, or owe their existence to a frightened or disturbed imagination. Of miracles, properly speaking, there are very few upon record: most of these are given up, by the historians who relate them, as vulgar fables, unworthy of belief, and none are so attested as to make them in any degree credible. Of this the author has undesignedly given us a full proof in the story which immediately follows :

“ One of the best-attested miracles in all  
 “ profane history is that which *Tacitus* reports  
 “ of *Vespasian*, who cured a blind man in *Alex-*  
 “ *andria* by means of his spittle, and a lame  
 “ man by the mere touch of his foot, in obedi-  
 “ ence to a vision of the god *Serapis*, who had  
 “ enjoined them to have recourse to the emperor  
 “ for these miraculous and extraordinary  
 “ cures\*.” This, the author seems to insi-  
 nuate, is as well attested as any *Christian* mira-  
 cle, and may be made as good an argument  
 for the religion of the antient *Egyptians* as any  
 miracle for any religion whatsoever : “ Every  
 “ circumstance,” says he, “ adds weight to the  
 “ testimony, and might be displayed at large

\*. P. 192.

“ with all the force of argument and eloquence,  
 “ if any one were now concerned to enforce the  
 “ evidence of that exploded and idolatrous su-  
 “ perstition.” The occasion being so tempting,  
 he has tried his hand, and shewn us how far this  
 miracle may be parallell’d with those of the Gos-  
 pel: “ The gravity, solidity, age, and probity of  
 “ so great an emperor, who, thro’ the whole  
 “ course of his life, conversed in a familiar way  
 “ with his friends and courtiers, and never af-  
 “ fected those extraordinary airs of divinity as-  
 “ sumed by *Alexander* and *Demetrius* — The  
 “ historian a cotemporary writer, noted for  
 “ candor and veracity, and, withal, the great-  
 “ est and most penetrating genius, perhaps, of  
 “ all antiquity, and so free from any tendency  
 “ to superstition and credulity, that he even  
 “ lies under the contrary imputation of atheism  
 “ and profaneness—The persons, from whose  
 “ testimony he related the miracle, of established  
 “ character for judgment and veracity (as we  
 “ may well suppose) eye-witnesses of the fact,  
 “ and confirming their verdict, after the *Flavian*  
 “ family were despoiled of the empire, and  
 “ could no longer give any reward, as the  
 “ price of a lye: *Utrumque, qui interfuere, nunc*  
 “ *quoque memorant, postquam nullum mendacis*  
 “ *pretium.*

“ *pretium*. To which if we add the publick  
 “ nature of the fact, as related, it will appear,  
 “ that no evidence can well be supposed stronger  
 “ for so gross and so palpable a falshood.” As  
 to the character of this wise emperor, *Suetonius*, who has wrote his life, tells us, that he  
 had long before this conceived hopes of the  
 empire, from certain idle dreams and omens,  
 of which he has reckoned up eight or ten, as  
 ridiculous as any in history: that immediately  
 before this, when he was now proclaimed em-  
 peror by some of the legions, and had strengthen-  
 ed himself by several alliances, he condescend-  
 ed, notwithstanding his probity and gravity, to  
 give out a miracle upon his own authority, to  
 make himself considerable in the eyes of the  
 people; pretending that, in the temple of *Sera-  
 pis*, where he went alone, *de firmitate imperii  
 auspiciū facturus*, one *Basilides*, who was known  
 at the time to be far distant and unable to tra-  
 vel, had appeared to him, offering him crowns  
 and garlands — a certain omen (as he and his  
 courtiers interpreted the word *Basilides*) of the  
 royal dignity. As for the credit of the historian,  
 he was no witness of the fact, nor, for ought  
 we know, ever conversed with those that saw  
 it; and the testimony he gives to it does by no  
 means



means amount to a proof that he believed it himself. To what purpose, then, is the character he gives us of his veracity, penetrating genius, and incredulous turn of mind? But, if the testimony of the historian be not admitted, the witnesses, from whose testimony he related it, were of established character for veracity and judgment. This, indeed, is to the purpose. On this point the whole merits of the cause must rest. How, then, is this proved to us? Why, the author says *it may well be supposed*, and the historian tells us that they persisted in the report, when they could gain nothing by the fraud. But how does it appear that they had never received any reward for their verdict? The emperor, tho' he affected not the airs of divinity, yet was well pleased with his new title, and, no doubt, was well understood to look with a favourable eye on those who contributed to support it. The good uses to which this miracle served are honestly told us both by *Suetonius* and *Tacitus*: *Auctoritas, et quasi majestas quædam, ut scilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principi deerat, hæc quoque accessit*, Suet. *Miraculo evenere, queis celestis favor et quædam in Vespasianum inclinationum innum ostenderetur*, Tacit. The *Alexandrians* could not

but have an interest in gaining the favour of this prince: the persons cured are said to be *è plebe Alexandrinâ*, probably unknown to these witnesses and to all the *Romans* about *Vespasian*: the partisans of the new emperor were prepared to welcome and improve every thing that looked in his favour: the physicians, who were consulted whether these disorders were curable, declared that they were: Where, then, is the wonder that two men should be instructed to act the part of lame and blind, when they were sure of succeeding in the fraud, and of being well rewarded (*as we may well suppose*) for their pains?

This story is followed by two others, as remarkable proofs of the credulity of mankind, which, having obtained in *Christian* countries, may perhaps be thought more apposite to the author's purpose of discrediting the *Christian* miracles. "There is also," saith he, "a very  
 "memorable story related by cardinal *de Retz*,  
 "and which may well deserve our consideration: When that intriguing politician fled  
 "into *Spain*, to avoid the persecution of his  
 "enemies, he passed thro' *Saragossa*, the capital of *Arragon*, where he was shewn, in  
 "the

“ the cathedral church, a man who had served  
 “ twenty years as a door-keeper of the church,  
 “ and was well known to every body in town  
 “ who had ever paid their devotions at that  
 “ cathedral: he had been seen for so long a  
 “ time wanting a leg, but recovered that limb  
 “ by the rubbing of holy oyl upon the stump;  
 “ and, when the cardinal examined it, he found  
 “ it to be a true natural leg, like the other.  
 “ This miracle was vouched by all the ca-  
 “ nons of the church; and the whole com-  
 “ pany of the town was appealed to for a  
 “ confirmation of the fact, whom the cardi-  
 “ nal found, by their zealous devotion, to be  
 “ thorough believers of the miracle. Here  
 “ the relater was also contemporary with the  
 “ supposed prodigy, of an incredulous and  
 “ libertine character, as well as of great ge-  
 “ nius—the miracle of so singular a nature  
 “ as could scarce admit of a counterfeit——  
 “ and the witnesses very numerous, and all  
 “ of them, in a manner, spectators of the  
 “ fact of which they gave their testimony:  
 “ and what adds mightily to the force of the  
 “ evidence, and may double our surprise on  
 “ this occasion, is, that the cardinal himself,  
 “ who relates the story, seems not to give  
 “ any

“ any credit to it, and, consequently, cannot  
 “ be suspected of any concurrence in the holy  
 “ fraud \*.” The story is, indeed, remarkable,  
 as the author has told it. First, the rela-  
 ter was *a cardinal and a man of great ge-  
 nius*; and, tho’ he had never seen the wooden  
 leg, yet he satisfied himself that the man had  
 now *two natural legs, like another man*. It does  
 not, indeed, appear, that he examined all or  
 any of the canons, or that he discoursed with  
 any body in town about it: but he found, *by  
 the devotion of the people*, that they believed  
 the man to have had a wooden leg. Then  
 the cardinal was a man of a libertine cha-  
 racter, *and, which is still more wonderful, and  
 adds mightily to the evidence, he did not believe  
 the story himself*. This climax of evidence and  
 wonder still rising upon us is very extraordi-  
 nary. The relater of the story was a *cardinal*,  
 and therefore a good evidence of a *Romish*  
 miracle: he was of *a libertine character*, and  
 therefore had the better right to be believed;  
 but, what puts the evidence out of question,  
*he did not believe the story himself*; which,  
 again, is *doubly surprizing*, as the author ob-  
 serves, because he was naturally *of an incre-*



*dulous temper.* This is the first story. The second deserves a more serious attention.

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

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“stances agreeing to the corroboration of one  
 “fact? And what have we to oppose to such  
 “a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute im-  
 “possibility or miraculous nature of the events  
 “which they relate? And this, surely, in the  
 “eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be  
 “regarded as a sufficient refutation\*.”

The author has here asserted many things  
 that he will not be able to support. The mi-  
 racles pretended were, many of them, refuted  
 upon the spot: a judicial inquest was made  
 by the archbishop of *Paris* into one of the  
 most celebrated, and the cheat was fully de-  
 tected: the lieutenant of the police brought  
 many to confess that the part they had acted  
 was all artifice and pretence; and an ordon-  
 nance was hereupon issued from the court for  
 apprehending all that were concerned in such  
 frauds: the archbishop of *Sens* exhibited a pub-  
 lick charge against more than twenty, as pal-  
 pable and discovered cheats: and Mr. *Mont-*  
*geron*, the professed advocate of these miracles,  
 of whom we shall have more to say hereafter,  
 does not, in his answer, pretend to defend a  
 fourth part of these: and the author may see

\* P. 195.

his defence of these, and of all the other miracles he defends, *distinctly refuted* in the *Critique générale* of Mr. *Des Vœux*. The most usual effects of this sepulchre were not cures, but distempers — a sort of convulsions, which seized alike the sound and the sick, and were attended with such strange appearances as brought great contempt and ridicule upon the other miracles of this saint. These convulsions, we are told by skilful physicians, are easily counterfeited, and, from being counterfeited, frequently become real and habitual: they are too so communicable, by a sort of sympathy, to persons of weak nerves, that this distemper, it is well known, is for this reason excluded some of our great hospitals; it having been found that, when one is seized, it spreads, like infection, thro' a whole ward. This will account for the great numbers who are said to have felt this extraordinary effect from visiting the *Abbé's* tomb.

I deny not that there were real cures wrought upon the sick that were brought there: but the same, I dare pronounce, would happen, if a thousand people, taken at a venture, were at any time removed from their sick cham-

bers in *London* to *St. Paul's Churchyard* or the *Park*, especially, if they went with any strong hope of a cure: in such a number, some are always upon the point of recovery — many only want to fancy themselves well—others may be flattered for a time into this belief, while they are ill—and many more, by fresh air and motion, and especially by forbearing the use of other means, will find a change for the better: but, that the blind received their sight, or the deaf were restored to hearing, by these visits, I deny that we have any competent or tolerable evidence. This sanguine writer does, indeed, take upon him to answer for *the credit of the witnesses* and *the integrity of the judges*. But these miracles were never proved in a judicial way. The vouchers produced for them are only certificates collected from all sorts of persons, who were neither interrogated by judge or council, nor confronted by other witnesses: they only left their depositions or affidavits in the hands of a notary, who was not concerned to examine, or even to know, the persons who made them, or whether they gave in their own or fictitious names. The credit, therefore, of the witnesses



witnesses was never proved by any trial whatsoever \*.

Doctor

\* In the second edition of the *Metaphysical Essays* there is an additional note to p. 195, &c. in which the author observes, that “ the *Molinist* party had tried to discredit these miracles in one instance, that of *Madamoiselle le Franc*. But, besides that their proceedings were the most irregular in the world, particularly in citing only a few of the *Jansenists*’ witnesses, whom they tampered with : besides this, I say, they soon found themselves overwhelmed by a cloud of new witnesses, one hundred and twenty in number, most of them persons of credit and substance in *Paris*, who gave oath (—for what? not for the miracle in question, but) for the miracles.” \*

The pretended cure of *Anne le Franc* was the most celebrated and best-attested of all the first miracles of this saint ; and was, therefore, very fitly pitched upon for examination, in order to give all the advantage to the miracles that could be wished, and to put the trial of them upon the fairest issue. It was tried by a judicial process directed for that purpose ; and, whatever formalities the author may think wanting in the proceedings, it was so clearly convicted of imposture, that one of the ablest advocates for these miracles, *M. le Gros*, could find nothing to reply in its defence ; nor does *M. de Montgeron* himself pretend to defend it. It was proved, by five of the witnesses to this miracle, that the certificates, which they had given into the hands of the notary, and which were countersigned by *Madamoiselle*

G 3

damoiselle

\* In the note at p. 140 Vol. 2 of the *Essays* 1764 8vo  
it is, who gave oath for the miracles.

Doctor *Middleton*, who has likewise set out the evidence of these miracles with great parade, is pleased to tell us that “ the reality of  
“ them

*damoiselle le Franc* herself, were afterwards falsified, and many material circumstances added which they had never attested : by others, that she was, in great measure, recovered before she visited the tomb ; and that many of the disorders alledged as cured were entirely chimerical : and by others, that she returned from the tomb in the same condition that she went there, and still wanted the help of farther medicines : which last circumstance may seem confirmed by the non-appearance of *le Franc* herself, who was not to be found at the trial.

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

“ them is attested by some of the principal  
 “ physicians and surgeons in *France*, as well  
 “ as the clergy of the first dignity, several of  
 “ whom were eye-witnesses of them, who  
 “ presented a verbal process of each to the  
 “ archbishop, with a petition, signed by above  
 “ twenty curés or rectors of the parishes of  
 “ *Paris*, desiring that they might be authen-  
 “ tically registered, and solemnly published to

these miraculized cheats, after the conviction of *Anne le Franc*, and after he had brought many to a voluntary confession of the fraud, this power is particularly reserved to the archbishop.

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

“ the people, as true miracles \*.” Any one, who reads this in connection with what goes before it, will be led to believe that a great number of these miracles had been confirmed by this verbal process †: but there never were, as far as I can inform myself, more than four or five thus proved by order of the cardinal *Noailles*. Whether the petition mentioned was presented by physicians and clergy of the first dignity, as the doctor’s words seem to import, I will not take upon me to controvert: but, in all that I have read, I find only that it was presented by the twenty-two curés who signed it ‡. The doctor might have told us too that

\* *Free Inquiry*, p. 225.

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

‡ Mr. *Hume*, in the additional note to page 196, speaking of Mr. *de Ventimille*, who was successor to cardinal *Noailles* in the archbishoprick of *Paris*, tells us, that twenty-two rectors or curés of that city, whose general character, for strictness of life and manners, he celebrates very justly, but very little to the purpose, did,



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

did, “ with infinite earnestness, press him to examine “ these miracles, which they assert to be known to the “ whole world, and indisputably certain : but he wisely forbore.” But it is certain, that this prelate was so far from forbearing or declining this task, that he caused a publick judicial inquest to be made into them ; and, in an ordonnance of *November 8, 1735*, has published the most convincing proofs, that the miracles, so strongly warranted by these curés, were forged and counterfeited.

who were consulted on the other pretended cures, declared the whole to be fiction and imposture \*.

All that was real in these phænomena may be accounted for from nature: but a great part was certainly appearance, and owing to art. The *Abbé Paris*, as doctor *Middleton* has told us, “ was a zealous *Jansenist*, and a warm  
“ opposer of the bull or constitution *Unigenitus*,  
“ by which the doctrines of this sect were ex-  
“ pressly condemned: he died in 1725, and  
“ was buried in the churchyard of *St. Medard*

\* See letter 7th of the *Critique* of Mr. *Des Vœux*. This judicious writer, who is now minister of the *French* church in *Dublin*, was himself a *Jansenist* and an inhabitant of *Paris* at the time when these miracles were celebrated. This circumstance, which adds to the credit of his verdict, doctor *Middleton*, who had seen his book, and therefore must know it, chuses to conceal, and to represent him only as a *Protestant* writer. This may be excused. But it is too much to assert that  
“ he does not deny the facts, but only endeavours to  
“ make the miraculous nature of them suspected:” for near a fourth part of this book, which consists of nine letters, in two volumes, 12mo, is taken up in disproving these facts, and the title at the head of one of the longest letters is *Ou l'on fait voir, par les pieces même que Mr. de Montgeron produit, que les faits qu'il publie ne sont pas vrais.*

“ in

“ in *Paris*, whither the great reputation of his  
 “ sanctity drew many people to visit his tomb,  
 “ and pay their devotions to him as a saint ;  
 “ and this concourse, gradually increasing, made  
 “ him soon be considered as a subject proper  
 “ to revive the credit of that party, now  
 “ utterly depressed by the power of the *Jesuits*,  
 “ supported by the authority of the court \*.”  
 Half the city of *Paris*, and many among them  
 of rank, took part with the appellants against  
 this bull. The saint was, therefore, sure to  
 have justice done him. Most of these, if they  
 did not believe, yet wished well to his miracles,  
 for the sake of mortifying the *Jesuits* and their  
 party.

“ But the evidence of these miracles is still  
 “ preserved in a pompous volume of *Monf.*  
 “ *de Montgeron*, a person of eminent rank in  
 “ *Paris*, who, *Dr. Middleton* tells us, dedicated  
 “ and presented it to the king in person, be-  
 “ ing induced, as the author declares, by the  
 “ incontestable evidence of the facts, by which  
 “ he himself from a libertine and professed  
 “ Deist, became a sincere convert to the *Chris-*  
 “ *tian* faith †.” As the credit of these boasted

\* *Free Inquiry*, p. 223.

† *Free Inquiry*, p. 224.

miracles rests almost wholly on this book of Mr. *Montgeron*, the reader will not be displeased, if we stop a little to consider the character of the work and its author.

This book was published, as we are advertised at the beginning, to demonstrate, among other things, the justice of the cause of the appellants against the bull *Unigenitus*: but it was so far from answering the purpose of reviving the credit of the *Jansenists* or their miracles, that from this time they sunk into greater disgrace than ever; while the author was cashiered from his employment, sent first to the *Bastille*, and afterwards into banishment. The author declares himself converted to Christianity by the evidence of these facts: but it is strange to observe, from his own history of this conversion, that it was wrought without his either seeing or examining the evidence of any one of these miracles. It appears, from this history, that the author was early impressed with a sense of religion—that, having given himself up to a life of pleasure and debauch, he was, on a certain occasion, so struck with remorse, as to shut himself up in a convent, with design to spend his days in penitence



penitence and retirement—that, returning again to his former life, he endeavoured to free himself from the checks of conscience by reading the books of Deists, and persuading himself that religion was a cheat—that the famous bull *Unigenitus*, which just then appeared, helped much to confirm him in this belief: But the fears of religion still kept hold of him, and, particularly, on the first report of our *Abbé's* miracles, his conscience took the alarm, and put him upon inquiring in earnest into the truth of religion—that, upon hearing a second time of these miracles, he resolved to visit the tomb, and make a strict inquiry into their truth—that, coming there, he was immediately struck with the ardor that appeared in the devotion of the people; strongly impressed with which, he fell himself on his knees, and addressed a short prayer to the saint, beseeching him, “That, if indeed he still lived, and had any power with the Almighty, he would pity his blindness, and intercede for him, that his mind might be enlightened, and the cloud removed which held him in darkness!” Upon which, immediately, while he continued some hours on his knees, all the arguments for religion, which he had ever heard

heard

heard or read, presented themselves to his mind, and passed in review before him, with such force and conviction, that he became from that moment a zealous and confirmed Christian. Here, you see, the author, without waiting for any miracle, or inquiring into those which he had heard, was not only converted to Christianity, but became a determined believer of all the miracles of this saint. And from this short sketch we may easily make out his character, which was plainly that of a wrong-headed and violent man, that could think coolly about nothing, changing, as fancy or temper led him, from one opinion, from one extreme, to another, and governed throughout by passion or prejudice, and not by reason.

His book was published ten (or according to Dr. *Middleton*, twelve) years after the *Abbé's* death; and 'tis a collection of only nine cures, selected out of the great number which are said to have been wrought in all this time; the first of which I shall present my reader with, in a few words, as a specimen of the rest: A *Spanish* youth, at the age of ten years, lost entirely the sight of the left eye by a violent rheum and inflammation: a few years after,

receiving

receiving a blow upon the right eye, he became almost blind for some days, but, by proper remedies, recovered his sight again : at the age of sixteen, this eye was attacked with a fluxion and inflammation like to that which had destroyed the other, but was soon recovered, by the application of a certain water, so far as to allow him for two or three months after to prosecute his studies : but, the disorder then returning, and the same remedy being found ineffectual, he continued in this state, without the application of any remedy, near two months ; at the end of which, hearing of the *Abbé Paris's* miracles, he resolved, with the consent of his governors, who were zealous *Jansenists*, to apply to the *Abbé's* tomb : he entered upon a neuvaine, or nine-days devotion, in honour of the saint, and to supplicate his assistance : the effect was, that his pains redoubled, and the inflammation increased ; but towards the end of the term these bad symptoms abated, and his eye at last became strong enough to bear the light, and to permit him to return to his studies : and all this without the use of any other means than saving the eye from reading for three months, shutting out the light, and bathing it the two last days with a little decoction of mallow-roots

4

with

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



inconsistencies and prevarication of the witnesses detected, he may find this done, to his entire satisfaction, in the letters above-mentioned, and in the nineteenth and twentieth tomes of the *Bibliothèque raisonnée*; from which, and Mr. Vernet's *Traité de la Vérité de la Religion Chrétienne*, most of these remarks are taken.

The evidence then, for these miracles, tho' set out with so much eloquent pomp, when examined, is found to amount to very little. But this is acknowledged, that the credulity of mankind is very fully proved by this and the other legendary miracles of Popery, and that hence an argument of seeming weight still lies against the miracles of the Gospel: for, if so many other miracles have been believed rashly and without reason, it is possible that these may likewise have been received upon incompetent testimony: and, if this be possible, must it not also be allowed more probable, than that events so strange and contrary to the common course of nature should be true? This is the inference, we may presume, the author would have us make from the stories he hath related; and this objection he has incidentally dropped in several parts of his Essay: “ The many in-  
H “ stances

“stances of forged miracles, and prophecies,  
 “and supernatural events, which, in all ages,  
 “have either been detected by contrary evi-  
 “dence, or which detect themselves by their  
 “absurdity, mark sufficiently the strong pro-  
 “pensity of mankind to the extraordinary and  
 “the marvellous, and ought reasonably to be-  
 “get a suspicion against all relations of this  
 “kind\* :” And again, in the place above  
 cited, “Should a miracle be ascribed to any  
 “new system of religion, men in all ages have  
 “been so much imposed on by ridiculous stories  
 “of that kind, that this very circumstance  
 “would be sufficient, with all men of sense,  
 “not only to make them reject the fact, but  
 “even reject it without farther examina-  
 “tion†.” As this is one of the most spe-  
 cious and prevailing arguments against the  
 miracles of religion, it will deserve a distinct  
 answer.

To the first consequence, then, which the  
 author here draws from the credulity of men, I  
 readily agree — That miracles and facts of an  
 extraordinary nature may be justly suspected,  
 ’till sufficient evidence of their reality is pro-

\* P. 186.

† P. 200.

duced, and ought never to be received, 'till after a previous examination had into this evidence. But, that all miracles should be rejected without examination, because a great number have been forged, is, sure, a most illogical conclusion. The truth of the Gospel miracles does not imply that all the miracles upon record are true : how then does the falshood of other miracles affect the truth of these ? If some men are cheats and impostors, is there no truth in the world ? If some have believed upon too slight evidence, must we, therefore, reject all testimony, and disbelieve or doubt about every thing ? Is the currency of bad coin a proof that there is none good ? The test and assay will always distinguish the true from the false : and it is our own fault, if we are imposed upon by counterfeits. God hath given us reason and understanding to know good and evil, truth and falshood, and, in all things pertaining to life or duty, hath made the difference between them sufficiently clear and discernible. If he speaks to us by miracles, he will, doubtless, cause his voice to be known, and give full evidence of his authority. To those, who are not present witnesses of his power, this evidence will be transmitted with such testimony as cannot be im-

peached — such as will stand every fair and equitable trial. With such testimony, we assert, the Scripture miracles are delivered down to us. Let them be brought to the trial, and, if they are found wanting, be rejected ; but not be condemned, as this supercilious writer would have them, unheard.

I observe, that this author, in common with many others, seems to think every proof of the credulity of mankind a sort of argument against the evidence of the Gospel: they think this sufficient to account for the belief of all miracles, and that it is, therefore, needless and folly to look for any evidence in their favour: “ When  
 “ such reports fly about, the solution of the  
 “ phænomenon is obvious ; and we judge in  
 “ conformity to experience and observation,  
 “ when we account for it by the known prin-  
 “ ciples of credulity and delusion. And shall  
 “ we, rather than have recourse to so natural a  
 “ solution, allow of a miraculous violation of  
 “ the most known and most established laws of  
 “ nature \* ?” But I must deny that there is any such cause or principle in human nature as credulity. If some are more credulous than

\* P. 197.



others—if the same person be more credulous in some points than other—this depends upon other principles: it is a natural effect, and always to be accounted for from natural causes. Interest, when it is opposed by truth, will bias the mind to error: ignorance and indolence will dispose men, the one of necessity, the other of choice, to follow the judgment of others, and to believe as the world about them does: a deference to authority, whether publick or private—a prejudice to opinions in which we have been educated, or which we have long entertained—has the like effect: where men are, as is frequent, divided into parties by opinion, this prejudice will be heightened by pride and resentment; they will hearken greedily to every thing that favours their system, and be obstinately deaf to every thing that opposes it. These are principles in human nature of great force and extent; and, where they induce to the belief of any thing, there we may suspect credulity, and that men will be prepared to believe, without evidence, even things the most difficult of belief. If, in these circumstances, it happen, that not the fact itself, but the miraculous nature of it only, is the point that gratifies our wishes, there, the greater the miracle is, the

greater are these corrupt reasons for believing it, and, the more strange and incredible it is, the more easily sometimes will it obtain belief: as a stone, the heavier it is, and the more unapt to motion, will descend the swifter, if the plane be sufficiently inclined, upon which it moves.

But, on the other hand, where these or such-like principles have no influence, truth will be fairly heard, and the faith of men will be generally proportioned to the evidence that appears: and, where men believe and maintain opinions contrary to the influence of these principles, it is a fair presumption that their faith is well grounded, and that their assent is extorted by the force of truth. The principles, therefore, of credulity will by no means account for all belief alike. Tho' a stone will descend by its own weight, it does not follow that it can move itself upon even ground; and, if it be seen, contrary to its natural gravity, to ascend a steep acclivity, we are sure that there must be some competent power to impell it. Where miracles are wished for or wanted, the strangest and most unsupported may be believed: but, in other circumstances, the miraculous nature

ture of the fact will hang as a weight upon it; and retard its progress; and, if it make its way, in opposition to the wishes, passions, and prejudices of mankind, there must be truth and evidence to support it.

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

The disparity, then, betwixt these and the Gospel miracles is infinite. The end for which the Scripture miracles were wrought is the greatest that can be thought of, and the testi-

mony by which they are supported is confirmed by the surest test of truth. If miracles, therefore, are in any case credible, they are in this; if testimony is in any case to be relied on, it is in this. But what are the ends proposed or answered by the miracles of Popery? More offerings are, perhaps, brought to the shrine at *Loretto*, more gain is made of the relicks of the saints. But are any nations brought to the faith, or is any single infidel converted, by them? Then, the testimony which vouches them is implicitly received, and the veracity of the witnesses confirmed by no proof or trial. There is no one condition here to make miracles credible——no one circumstance to credit the evidence that supports them. There is, therefore, no consequence to be drawn from these to the miracles of the Gospel.

And the same observation will hold, tho' not with equal force, of the miracles recorded in the church before the times of Popery: there were not the same antecedent reasons for working them, nor the same great consequences attending them: and when were any called, at the hazard of their fortunes and lives, to attest them? We are not, therefore, to be alarmed,  
if



if the truth of these miracles is sometimes brought in question, or even if many of them should be proved to be false; since the miracles of *Christ* and his Apostles are no way affected by this, and the Gospel wants no miracles, but its own, to support it: nor, indeed, can we do a greater injury to the cause of Christianity, than to parallel these, even supposing them true, with the canonical miracles of Scripture; since, tho' both may be equally true, yet the evidence upon which we receive them, and, consequently, the reasons for believing them, are not equal, but the one, in its weight and force, infinitely transcends the other. Nor is it any reproach to Christianity, or any just cause of offence to pious Christians, if the fathers of the church, men justly celebrated for their piety and virtue, and even for their learning and abilities, are found to have given too easy credit to these miracles. Learning and piety are no security against errors of this kind. On the contrary, men of this character, as they are often less practised in the arts of men, and less apt to suspect design and fraud in others, may lie more open to be deceived. Men may be prejudiced, even by piety and virtue, to such opinions as are thought favourable to piety and virtue, and,

where

where any thing is thought of good tendency, may think it good to believe it. A little acquaintance with history will teach us, if our own observation does not, that men of great abilities and of the most upright intentions may be hasty in believing and zealous in supporting the belief of fables, especially where the cause of virtue or religion is supposed to be promoted by them.

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

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

there more frequently pretended and counterfeited than in any other place. True miracles, like true money, will give a currency to false; and the authority and character, which they give to those that work them, will excite the crafty and ambitious to imitate them. On the other hand, where no prior miracles are acknowledged, there is less temptation to counterfeit this power, and more difficulty of succeeding in it. In fact, the false pretences of miracles among Christians are no more than might be expected, in consequence of the truth and certainty of the first miracles of Christianity; and, if the number of these has been far greater in the *Christian* world than elsewhere, it is an argument that there, if any-where, true miracles have been wrought. The reader will be pleased to see this argument in the words of *Dr. Middleton*: “ The innumerable forgeries  
 “ of this sort, which have been imposed upon  
 “ mankind in all ages, are so far from weaken-  
 “ ing the credibility of the *Jewish* and *Christian*  
 “ miracles, that they strengthen it: for how  
 “ could we account for a practice so universal,  
 “ of forging miracles for the support of false  
 “ religions, if on some occasions they had not  
 “ actually been wrought for the confirmation of  
 “ a true

“ a true one? or, how is it possible that so  
 “ many spurious copies should pass upon the  
 “ world, without some genuine original from  
 “ which they were drawn, whose known ex-  
 “ istence and tried success might give an ap-  
 “ pearance of probability to the counterfeit?  
 “ Now, of all the miracles of antiquity, there  
 “ are none that can pretend to the character of  
 “ originals, but those of the Old and New  
 “ Testament, which, though the oldest by  
 “ far of all others of which any monuments  
 “ now remain in the world, have yet main-  
 “ tained their credit to this day, through the  
 “ perpetual opposition and scrutiny of ages;  
 “ whilst all the rival productions of fraud and  
 “ craft have long ago been successively explod-  
 “ ed, and sunk into utter contempt — an event  
 “ that cannot reasonably be ascribed to any  
 “ other cause, but to the natural force and  
 “ effect of truth, which, though defaced for  
 “ a time by the wit, or depressed by the power,  
 “ of man, is sure still to triumph in the end  
 “ over all the false mimicry of art and the  
 “ vain efforts of human policy \*.”

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



The remainder of this Essay is little more than a rude insult on the Scriptures and the *Christian* religion. For fear his readers should mistake his meaning, and not apply his argument where he intended, the author proceeds, with a smiling grimace, to tell us, “ that our  
 “ most holy religion is founded on faith, not  
 “ on reason; and ’tis a sure method of ex-  
 “ posing it, to put it to such a trial as it is by  
 “ no means fitted to endure.” This he pre-  
 tends to make evident by examining the mi-  
 racles related in the Pentateuch: “ Here,” says  
 he, “ we are to consider a book presented to  
 “ us by a barbarous and ignorant people, wrote  
 “ in an age when they were still more bar-  
 “ barous, and, in all probability, long after the  
 “ facts it relates, corroborated by no concurring  
 “ testimony, and resembling those fabulous ac-  
 “ counts which every nation gives of its origin.  
 “ Upon reading this book we find it full of pro-  
 “ digies and miracles: it gives an account of a  
 “ state of the world and of human nature en-  
 “ tirely different from the present—of our fall  
 “ from that state—of the age of man extended  
 “ to near a thousand years—of the destruction  
 “ of the world by a deluge—of the arbitrary  
 “ choice of one people as the favourites of hea-

“ ven, and that people the countrymen of the  
 “ author—of their deliverance from bondage by  
 “ prodigies the most astonishing imaginable : I  
 “ desire any one to lay his hand upon his heart,  
 “ and, after serious consideration, declare, whe-  
 “ ther he thinks that the falshood of such a  
 “ book, supported by such a testimony, would  
 “ be more extraordinary and miraculous than  
 “ all the miracles it relates; which is, however,  
 “ necessary to make it be received, accord-  
 “ ing to the measures of probability above esta-  
 “ blished \*.”

If the *Jews* were thus more than barbarous  
 at the time when these books were wrote, whence,  
 without a miracle, could they learn all the great  
 truths relating to the being and attributes of  
 God, which the most learned part of the world  
 were for many ages after in total ignorance  
 about? Whence could the religion and laws of  
 this people so far exceed those of the wisest Hea-  
 then, and come out at once, in their first in-  
 fancy, thus perfect and entire; when all human  
 systems are found to grow up by degrees, and  
 to ripen, after many improvements, into per-  
 fection? The *Jews* had but little commerce

\* P. 201.

with other nations, and, therefore, did not excel in the literary and other arts of *Greece*: but the same Scriptures, which prove that they were earlier in possession of the most useful and sublime parts of knowledge, secured them likewise from ever sinking into that barbarity which the author charges upon them. Let any one compare the book of *Genesis*, which he treats with so much freedom, and which is by many centuries the oldest book in the world, with any of the earliest heathen historians—let him compare the psalms of *David* with the hymns of *Callimachus* or *Orpheus*—let him read the history of *Josephus*, who was just cotemporary with *Christ* and his Apostles—and he will incline to judge more favourably of this people.

The greatest events recorded in this history have no connection with the argument of miracles, and, therefore, do not belong to this place. But these are corroborated by the strongest concurring testimony that can be desired to facts that are, most of them, older than the use of letters itself. The traditions of every country seem all to point to one and the same original. The late invention of arts and sciences, the foundation of cities and empires, the manner of peopling the world,  
and

and the number of its present inhabitants, seem all to prove that the world had its beginning no earlier than the period assigned by *Moses*, and agree perfectly with the account of the deluge. There are no monuments of antiquity which give room to suspect the world of earlier origin. The first authors of *Greece* and *Egypt* speak of the chaos, of the abyss of waters that covered the earth, of man's being formed out of the ground, and of his first innocence. From these, one of the *Latin* poets has described the creation, the state of innocence, the gradual corruption of mankind, and the deluge, in a manner very nearly resembling that of *Moses*. The memory of a general flood, which destroyed the whole race of men and animals, except one family, seems to have been preserved for some ages among almost all nations. *Lucian* tells us, the tradition among both the *Greeks* and *Syrians* was, that this was a judgment from heaven on the wickedness of mankind: he describes the manner of the flood, the ark in which some of every kind were preserved, and many other particulars, just as we have them in the book of *Genesis*. *Plutarch*, alluding to the same tradition, mentions the ark, and even the dove that was sent



sent forth to see if the waters were abated. A great number of antient authors, who mention the deluge, and give witness to the building of *Babel*, the burning of *Sodom*, and many other great events in the *Mosaic* history, are reckon'd up by *Josephus*, *Grotius*, and others. The present surface of the earth, the shells of fish that are found in midland countries, and even on the tops of mountains, and the remains of land-animals at very great depths in the earth, are still surviving monuments of the deluge \*. It is almost certain

\* An universal deluge will, I suppose, be allowed one of the most miraculous facts in the history of the Old Testament. The difficulties that on all sides surround it are as great as can easily be conceived. And hence many *Christian* writers (among whom is the learned Mr. *Wollaston*) have thought it sufficient to believe that this flood was topical, confined to a small part of *Asia*; and that the genius of the language in which the relation is delivered, and the manner of writing history in it, will account for all the rest. But, the more we improve in natural knowledge, the more reasons we see for believing this history in the literal and largest sense. One of the latest and ablest writers upon this subject confirms what the best natural historians have observed—that the shells of fish are found in great quantities in all parts of the world—that the *Lapides Judaici*, which are gathered on the top of mount *Carmel*, are evidently the remains of a sea-animal—that the *Alps* and *Pyrenæan* mountains abound with others—and that there is not a mountain in the world, in which there have been  
I tolerable

certain that the world began to be peopled about the plains of *Babylon* and near where the ark is said to have rested. From the east colonies of men were sent westward : and from thence we can trace pretty distinctly the progress of arts and sciences. The long lives of the first men are

tolerable opportunities of inquiring, where remains of sea-animals have not been found : he tells us, that many of those which are found in great abundance in our island are natives of other seas—that the horns of *Indian* deer are found in great clusters, and always at considerable depths, in many parts of *England*, and sometimes under a stratum of sea-shells : and hence, though writing upon another question, he concludes, “ it is  
 “ equally certain, that, wherever they are found,  
 “ water must have at one time overflowed, since there  
 “ is no other possible means of their being brought  
 “ there ; and, since they are found in every part of  
 “ the earth, the tops of the highest mountains not  
 “ excepted, that overflowing of water must have been  
 “ universal.” *Hill's Remarks on Phil. Transf.* p. 53. Here, then, we have one of the most disputable parts of the Bible-history confirmed and proved by indisputable fact and experiment. In the mean time, it must be observed that the miracles upon which the *Christian* and *Jewish* religions were built have an evidence of their own, distinct from that of the other parts of this history ; and that, tho' it were allowed that many errors may have crept into the historical parts of this book, yet the truth of these religions, and the faith of those miracles upon which they are built, would remain unshaken.

spoken

spoken of by all the Heathens. This fact is so far from discrediting the *Mosaic* history, that Monsieur *Pascal* reckons it a full proof of the fidelity of the author: "This historian," says he, "has brought the deluge, and even the creation, so near his own time, by means of the few generations which he counts between them, that the memory of them could not but be still fresh and lively in the minds of all the *Jewish* nation." In the line of tradition there are but five steps betwixt *Moses* and the first man. "Therefore, the creation and the deluge are indubitably true. This argument," says he, "must be acknowledged for conclusive by those who apprehend its process \*." The longevity of men in the first ages seems necessary for the better peopling the world, the invention and improvement of arts, and for propagating religious and all useful knowledge, when they depended wholly on tradition. And I am persuaded that this author cannot even invent a more probable or rational account of peopling the world than this which he affects to deride.

The other insinuations, which he has thrown out to discredit these books, have been so often refuted, that it is tedious to go over them again.

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

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

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



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

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

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

The books, which record these miracles, were certainly wrote soon after the facts ; since the religion, laws, and polity of the *Jews* were wholly built upon them. These books are the great charter by which they were incorporated into a nation. These miracles are the only sanction which gives authority to the laws they contain. The miracles were wrought in the face of all *Israel*, and many of them under observation for a long time together. The books, that record them, were of publick authority and daily resort. It was, therefore, impossible, if false, that they should obtain credit for a day. The very being of these laws is a proof of the miracles connected with them ; since the latter, if false, must have discovered the falshood of the former. By appealing to these facts, it was put in the power of every one to see through, or, rather, it was put out of their power not to see through, the imposture. The memory of these facts was not only preserved in these records, but they were written, if I may so speak, and recorded in the daily customs and religious ceremonies of the *Jews*. The *Passover* was instituted in memory of their coming out of *Egypt*—the feast of *Pentecost* in token of the law being given upon mount *Sinai* fifty days after—that of *Tabernacles* in remembrance of their encamping in the

desart—and, in the form of dedicating or offering their first-fruits, a solemn commemoration was enjoined of the signs and wonders by which they were delivered out of *Egypt*. The belief, therefore, of the miracles must of necessity be as antient as their religion; and indeed, without these, their religion, government, and even their present existence, as a people, would be more miraculous than all the miracles recorded in the Pentateuch.

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

The author in one of his Essays, complains of a want of politeness and civility in those who

\* P. 203.

defend religion against the attacks of the Free-thinkers, “ whose moderation and good manners,” he tells us, “ are very conspicuous, “ when compared with the furious zeal and “ scurrility of their adversaries \*.” But who can, without some impatience, see a religion which he holds sacred, and which hath established itself purely by reason and argument, treated with this open scorn and abuse? Has this author lived in the time of Sir *Isaac Newton*, Mr. *Locke*, and Mr. *Addison*? Can he know that these men gloried in the name of Christians, that the first of them employed many of his best hours in studying and illustrating the Scriptures, and that the other two have wrote professedly in the defence of this religion, and yet think himself at liberty to treat all that believe it as men that are incapable of reasoning or thinking? The charge, which he has here brought against the advocates of Christianity, is so far from being true, that I dare rest the whole merits of the controversy upon this issue. Let any one read the authors he mentions, *Collins* and *Tindal*, with *Morgan*, *Gordon*, and the later writers in this cause, and compare them with their antagonists, *Chandler*, *Conybeare*, *Leland*, *Foster*, and judge on which

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



side the temper and moderation lies. And yet, if men claim some authority to opinions which have the publick voice on their side, where is the wonder or the blame? It is nothing unnatural for men thus supported to assume a confidence, and to expect some deference and modesty from their adversaries. But, when men oppose established opinions with an air of authority, and decide against the publick—when they profess to doubt, and yet dictate, about every thing, and act at once the Sceptick and the Dogmatist—this is a character, which, however it may be accounted for, can never be excused\*.

And

\* The author tells us, that, “ in all controversies, “ those who oppose the established and popular opinions “ affect a most extraordinary gentleness and moderation, in order to soften, as much as possible, any “ prejudices that may lie against them\*.” But the fact is notoriously otherwise. In establishments of every kind, the party which forms the opposition, if they have the liberty to speak out, is usually the most furious and loud in invective. The reason is, the most furious and vehement spirits are the most impatient of control, and the most forward to oppose. A man that is a tyrant in his own temper is sure to complain of tyranny in his superiors; and a proud man will always think you proud, if you differ from him, whatever authority and whatever modesty you may have on your side. Thus the celebrated author of the *Patriot King* pronounces the most candid of all writers to be a pre-

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

And I here ask my reader, whether he has anywhere met with either a more sceptical, disputatious turn of mind, or a more imperious, dogmatical style, than in the writings of this author?

It

*sumptuous Dogmatist* for daring to differ from his opinion, even before it was known. This consummate writer, not content to shine in his own sphere, assumes the nod, and will give the law in metaphysics as well as politicks. “I would not say,” says he, “that God governs by a rule that we know or may know as well as he, and upon our knowledge of which he appeals to men for the justice of his proceedings towards them, which a famous divine has impiously advanced in a pretended demonstration of his being and attributes: God forbid \*!” I learn from hence, that the famous divine spoken of has the misfortune to have fallen under the displeasure of this author, and that he has a sovereign contempt for all that do so. But, what his offence is, I am still at a loss to conjecture. I think myself certain, that he has no-where said what the author charges him with, “that we know or may know the rule by which God governs as well as he.” He has indeed, said, “that God himself, tho’ he has no superior, from whose will to receive any law of his actions, yet disdains not to observe the rule of equity and goodness as the law of all his actions in the government of the world, and condescends to appeal even to men for the righteousness and equity of his judgments (as in *Ezek. xviii.*) ; that (not barely his infinite power, but) the rules of this eternal law are the true foundation and the measure of his dominion

\* *Patriot King*, p. 94.

“ over

It is remarkable with what ease and alacrity he hath asserted the fact before us. But this cavalier manner is familiar to him. He tells us, in another Essay, “ that the Quakers are perhaps

“ the

“ over his creatures \*.” But what is this more than the author himself has said, in terms as free, in the very page that is stained with this censure? “ That God is “ not an arbitrary, but a limited monarch, limited “ by the rule which infinite wisdom prescribes to infinite “ power—that he does always that which is fittest to “ be done—and that this fitness, of which no created “ power is a competent judge, results from the various “ natures and the more various relations of things.” He adds, “ So that, as creator of all systems by which “ those natures and relations are constituted, he pre- “ scribed to himself the rule which he follows as “ governor of every system of being.” This, though no candid reader will complain of it, is more crude and perplexed than any thing I remember in the author here arraigned. God does always what is right and fit. But right and fit were not made what they are, when this or any other system of beings was made. The fitness of every action, the same circumstances supposed, was always and ever will be the same. This rule is eternal and immutable as truth itself, and its authority is as universal, extending to all beings and to all possible systems of beings; as the author we are speaking of has, with equal modesty and clearness, asserted and proved immediately before the passage here cited. If he has said, farther, that God appeals to men for the justice of his proceedings, he has given his authority for this—an authority which a *Christian* divine must

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

think

“ the only regular body of Deists in the universe :” And again, “ that the leading Whigs have always been either Deists or professed Latitudinarians in their principles, that is,”  
says

think decisive. And what doth this amount to more than saying that God hath implanted in men a sense of what is just, merciful, and good, and that all his dispensations are agreeable to our ideas of justice, mercy, and goodness? Does not the astronomer try the works of God by the laws of mechanism and geometry, when he pronounces that they are done in number, weight, and measure? And must we not have some measure of justice, mercy, and goodness, when we attribute these to the Deity? To say that we can see the wisdom of God in his works is not saying that we are as wise as God himself: nor does our seeing the fitness and equity of his proceedings in some instances imply that we are competent judges of or can see the reason of his proceedings in all. As the author has not pointed out the passages in the writer he excepts against, I can only guess this to be the place. But, if he has any-where dropped an expression that may seem less accurate or proper upon this subject, the author might have pardoned it, who confesses, in the same page, that he cannot express himself on this subject properly, and that, when our ideas are inadequate, our expression must needs be improper. To return: We have here a phænomenon, which, to those who have not studied human nature, will appear altogether singular: Lord *B*——e complaining of the impiety, pride, and presumption of Dr. *Clarke*. Established opinions and an established character provoke his resentment: rather than submit to another, he will contradict himself. And this,  
I take



says he, “ friends to toleration, and indifferent “ to any particular sect of Christians \*.” Now, it is certain that the Quakers profess the belief of Christianity as universally as any sect whatsoever. And what right has the author to charge a whole body of men with such flagrant insincerity? As to the Whigs, the principles of toleration are certainly Christian principles, and do by no means imply an indifference to any sect, much less a coldness to religion in general: and, if the best Christians are usually the best subjects and citizens (which I think an indisputable truth) I should hope their principles would be no impediment to their faith. I am sure, however, they have no reason to thank this author for his compliment.

They who believe religion must think that the cause of virtue and the happiness of mankind are bound up in it: and this will justify a

\* *Essays moral and political*, p. 111.

I take it, is the principle from which most of Mr. Hume’s philosophy is derived; to whose extraordinary gentleness and modesty that of this writer (to speak in the curious phrase of the latter) \* is but as the positive degree to the superlative.

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

\* *Patriot King*, p. 148.

degree

degree of zeal and ardor in its defence. But what is there to call for or excuse this spirit in those who oppose it? If the author be a friend to virtue, which, from his elegance of mind and taste, I scarce can doubt—if he be a friend to natural religion, which a person of so much thought and reflection sure must be—what principles has he in reserve for the support of these, when Christianity is taken away? The best philosophy, as I have already said, availed but little in reforming the religions or morals of mankind: and, as to the philosophy of this author, it is, as far as I understand it, as ill calculated for this purpose as any I have met with\*. But, indeed, religion can never be supported, or virtue taught, with any force or effect, by the reasonings of philosophers. The world will never be governed by metaphysical ideas of honour and beauty, decency of action, and the fitness of things. It is the author's own

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

observa-

observation, that “ an abstracted, invisible object, like that which natural religion alone presents to us, cannot long actuate the mind, or be of any moment in life. To render the passion of continuance, we must find some method of affecting the senses and imagination, and must embrace some historical as well as philosophical accounts of the Divinity. Popular superstitions,” says he, “ and observances are even found to be of use in this particular \*.” The great thing to be wished, then, for the interest of virtue and the good of mankind, is, that the maxims of natural religion should be fixed and assured by an authority that is decisive—that a rule of duty should be taught as the will and law of God—that the sanctions of this law, a future state and a judgment to come, should be known alike to all, both small and great—that the hopes of pardon should be assured to the penitent sinner—that there should be an institution to propagate this knowledge, and to spread it thro’ the world—that there should be a publick worship set up, and a discipline and œconomy prescribed, to train men to piety and virtue: but all this, and much more to the advantage of virtue, we have in the Christian religion.

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

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

\* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 250.

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180 Vol 2

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