

The Simon Greenleaf



Law Review

**A Scholarly Forum of Opinion Interrelating
Law, Theology & Human Rights**

**featuring
in this number**

**Cyprian, Lawyer and Bishop:
The 1985 Warburton Lecture
at Lincoln's Inn, London**

**The Theological Thought of Bishop Thomas
Sherlock, Master of the Temple Church
and Apostle to the Deists**

**The Fitness and Credibility of the
Resurrection of Christ:
Two 18th-Century Apologetic Essays**

**A 17th-Century Barrister in Church:
The Sermonic Diary of John
Manningham of the Middle Temple**

**Lloyd Paul Stryker Pleads
for a Divided Bar**

**Critical Reviews on the U.S. Supreme Court,
Human Rights, The Moonies**

VOLUME VI

ACADEMIC YEAR 1986-1987

A publication of The Simon Greenleaf School of Law
Anaheim, California and Strasbourg, France

Price: (U.S.) \$15.00
or FF 105

The Simon Greenleaf Law Review is published annually by the Faculty and Students of the Simon Greenleaf School of Law, a non-profit institution of higher learning incorporated under the laws of the State of California and authorized by the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the California State Department of Education to grant degrees and by the California Committee of Bar Examiners to prepare students for the Bar.

Copyright © The Trustees of the Simon Greenleaf School of Law. All rights reserved, including rights of translation and reproduction in any form except for brief extracts for scholarly purposes.

*The Simon Greenleaf Law Review is indexed in
Religious and Theological Abstracts.*

Editorial Offices:

The Simon Greenleaf School of Law

3855 E. La Palma Avenue
Anaheim, CA 92807, U.S.A.

1, rue de Palerme
67000 Strasbourg, France

Back numbers of the Simon Greenleaf Law Review may be ordered from the publisher at either of the above addresses. The current catalog of the School may also be obtained from the same address at a price of \$2.00, postage paid.

Institutional libraries and individuals desiring to establish a subscription or standing order for the Simon Greenleaf Law Review should contact: Wm. W. Gaunt & Sons, Inc., Law Book Dealers & Subscription Agents, Gaunt Building, 3011 Gulf Drive, Holmes Beach, Florida 33510 (Cables: "GAUNTSON"), exclusive subscription agent for the Review.

CONTENTS

Editor's Introduction to Volume VI	1
Cyprian, Lawyer and Bishop: A Study in Christian Leadership. The 1985 Warburton Lecture at Lincoln's Inn, London, by the Rev. Felix V.A. Boyse	3
The Theological Thought of Thomas Sherlock (1678-1761): Master of the Temple, by Edward Carpenter	31
The Fitness of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ Consider'd; In Answer to the principal Objections against them, by William Webster	65
The Credibility of the Resurrection of Christ, upon the Testimony of the Apostles, by William Webster	99
A 17th-Century Barrister in Church: The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602-1603	147
Barristers and Solicitors — A Plea for a Divided Bar, by Lloyd Paul Stryker	233
Reviews	257
Coming in the Next Issue	269

**EDITOR'S
INTRODUCTION
TO
VOLUME VI**

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME VI

This number of the *Simon Greenleaf Law Review* focuses on the English heritage in law, theology, and apologetics.

This "Reader's Feast" (to misapply an expression still in common use at the Inns of Court!) features the publication of the 1985 Warburton Lecture delivered on July 14, 1985, at Lincoln's Inn, London, England, by the Rev. Felix V.A. Boyse, Preacher to Lincoln's Inn and former Chaplain of Her Majesty the Queen at Hampton Court Palace. His topic: "Cyprian, Lawyer and Bishop: A Study in Christian Leadership." The Warburton Lectureship was founded in 1768, with the object, as expressed in the last will and testament of its founder, "to prove the truth of revealed religion in general, and of the Christian in particular" Lecturers have included such great names as Alfred Edersheim, author of *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.^{*} The Simon Greenleaf School of Law is deeply gratified that its *Law Review* has been chosen for the dissemination in print of such a distinguished scholarly contribution.

Also included in this number of the *Law Review*: an analysis of the theological thought of one of the greatest 18th-century English apologists, Thomas Sherlock, Master of the Temple Church and author of *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus* (the text of *The Tryal* is reprinted in my *Juris-*

^{*}Edersheim's Warburton Lectures were delivered in 1880-1884, and are still in print under the title, *Prophecy and History in Relation to the Messiah* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980).

prudence: *A Book of Readings***); the photolithographic reprinting of the full texts of two other forgotten apologetic classics, William Webster's *The Fitness of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ* consider'd; *In Answer to the principal Objections against them* (1731), together with its sequel, *The Credibility of the Resurrection of Christ, upon the Testimony of the Apostles* (1735); trial lawyer Lloyd Paul Stryker's essay, "Barristers and Solicitors — A Plea for a Divided Bar"; and a selection of the deeply moving sermon notes recorded in 1602-1603 by young barrister John Manningham of the Middle Temple, who sat under future translators of the King James Bible such as Lancelot Andrewes — and who also attended the first performance of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (in Middle Temple Hall), with Shakespeare himself in the company.

In bringing such materials to the legal and theological public, the Simon Greenleaf School of Law evidences its commitment to a biblical and cultural philosophy of legal education unique on the American scene today, but characteristic of the English Bar in the days of "Old Western Man" (to use C.S. Lewis' expression).

Good reading!

J.W.M.

**Strasbourg, France: International Scholarly Publishers, 1974; available in the United States from the Simon Greenleaf School of Law.

**THE THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF
THOMAS SHERLOCK (1678-1761)
Master of the Temple**

by

**Edward Carpenter
M.A., B.D., A.K.C.**

EDITOR'S NOTE: The essay to follow is reproduced from Edward Carpenter's *Thomas Sherlock 1678-1761* (London: S.P.C.K., 1936), where it comprises chap. 8 (pp. 231-62) of this comprehensive monographic treatment of the life and thought of that great 18th-century Christian apologist and Master of the Temple Church, London. Sherlock's most influential work was *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ* (1729), photolithoprinted in its entirety in Dean Montgomery's *Jurisprudence: A Book of Readings* (Strasbourg, France: International Scholarly Publishers; available from the Simon Greenleaf School of Law for \$22 postage paid).

THE THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF THOMAS SHERLOCK (1678-1761)

THE eighteenth century witnessed an attack on official Christianity which was both serious and severe.¹ The fires of seventeenth century religious fervour soon burnt themselves out, and the early eighteenth century watched the smouldering ashes with a certain cynical disdain. In the light of the Newtonian discoveries, and the general acceptance of the reign of law which was the inevitable result, the religious struggles of the Commonwealth appeared almost indecent. The arbitrary God of the Puritans gave way before the rational God of the new cosmology, and to many who could remember the extravagance and excesses of a century before, this came as a profound relief. The universe and God Himself were subject to one uniform law and this law could be apprehended by the reason. The collapse of the regime of Cromwell, on the other hand, led to a licence in morals which the Church could not restrain, and which its patron, the King, appeared to do his best to encourage. Contemporary literature and diaries show only too plainly how great was the reaction from the strictness of the Puritans. The result was that those interested in the general welfare of the country proclaimed the rule of right living as the end and purpose of religion, and to this end moralist and theologian, philosopher and bishop worked together. It seemed possible, therefore, on philosophical and practical grounds, that the eighteenth century would usher in a period when the personal God of the Christians would be swallowed up in the mechanical law of the universe, and the specific doctrines of Christianity displaced by the simple rules of right conduct.

The seventeenth century again was one of political unrest and this gave little opportunity for the calmer spirits to influence the nation. The issue between Protestant and

¹ This introduction has been drawn from: (1) Sir Leslie Stephen: *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. (2) *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Ninth Edition.

Catholic was, till 1688, still undecided, and the relation of the Church of England to the various sects involved many difficulties. One thing, however, was abundantly clear: the seamless robe of medieval Catholicism was broken for ever, and the Church of England could not take its place: dissent had come to stay. The breaking up of Christendom into sects and parties could not fail to impress itself on many minds, and it suggested that all parties could not be right in the narrow spirit which they professed. As early as 1650 Selden wrote: "Religion is like the fashion: one man wears his doublet slashed, another laced, another plain, but every man has a doublet, we differ about the trimming." This division, unfortunately, impaired the effectiveness of Christianity as a social force, and suggested to many that some bases of morality should be found independent of the shifting sands of religious controversy. Hobbes saw in the will of the Prince the criterions of conduct, and religion his humble servant. This feeling after universality in religion was further deepened when Newton by his epoch-making discoveries banished for ever the notion of an arbitrary and capricious Deity. As long however as the Church of England was fighting against the claims of the Roman Catholics, the rationalizing process was carried on under the guise of Protestantism: not till the primary liberties which were assailed by the Catholics had been safeguarded by the expulsion of James II. in 1688 did Deism really emerge as distinct from any "official" branch of Protestantism. Protestantism in its very essence, was, of course, rationalist, and the arguments which Chillingworth and his school used against the Catholics were later adapted by the Deists against revelation itself. Arminianism also revived the rational side of English theology.

John Locke was the parent of the eighteenth century in all branches of thought, and he marked out the whole trend of English theology for a century in his work, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, published in 1695. In this, he claimed to have approached Christianity through the Scriptures alone, and to have come to the conclusion that the only qualification necessary for a Christian was that he should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. This facile proposition was subsequently

explained as necessarily implying belief in the personal utterances of Christ and in His Miracles, but this does not radically alter the fact that the work was rationalistic to the core. Certain fundamentals of religion had been taught by Christ; apart from these, all attempts to fix a catalogue of fundamentals were illusory.

This work of Locke's was followed in 1696 by John Toland's *Christianity not Mysteriorious*. This consisted largely in a logical working out of the philosophical principles of Locke. His main thesis was, briefly, that "there were no facts or doctrines of the Gospel or the Scripture which when revealed were not perfectly plain, intelligible and reasonable: that the supposition of the doctrines of the Gospel being repugnant to clear and distinct ideas and common notions led into absurdities and inevitable scepticism, because (in Locke's philosophy) it was impossible to know anything but by its attributes." The mysteries of Christianity were not really mysterious except in so far as they had been disclosed by revelation; once disclosed they were perfectly intelligible. Certain mysteries had, however, crept into the Church by the admission of many Levitical rites and ceremonies, and by the mixing up the simple religion of Christ with heathen philosophy.

The passage from Locke to Toland was clear, but it is important to remember that Toland claimed to be fighting for Christianity, and he regarded his work as "a vindication of God's revealed Will against the most unjust imputations" which occasioned "so many atheists & Deists." The importance of his work was great, and was felt, almost instinctively, at the time. He was bringing the New Testament to the bar of reason and rejecting what was not agreeable: reason was becoming legislative. He regarded the teaching of Christ as simple and clear, and thus the whole emphasis was on the moral standard and not on the doctrinal and specifically Christian truths. Also, he had attempted an historical criticism of the canon itself, which, though rudimentary and hardly historical, was sufficient to indicate the way.

The main currents of early eighteenth century theology were thus foreshadowed, and as the century dawned the Deists

emerged more and more into the open, and the covering mask of Protestantism was often completely thrown aside. The march of events was shown clearly in Tindal's *Christianity as old as creation* (a title borrowed from a sermon of Sherlock's), published in 1730. The rules of morality, he maintained, were immutable, simple and eternal, and as fixed as the mechanical laws of the universe. This unalterable law could be discovered by the reason of man and true religion consisted in following its dictates. Christianity was only a republication of this law, and was valid only so far as it was consistent with this natural religion apprehended by the reason. Therefore, much of the New Testament was rejected on this *a priori* test. Priestcraft and all dogmatic doctrines were simply unnecessary. "The religion of nature is absolutely perfect; revelation can neither add to nor take from its perfection."

Enough has been said to illustrate the general trend of the attack on Christianity. Against positive religion was placed the religion of nature. The specific revelation of God in the Old and New Testament was attacked in the name of reason. Lord Herbert, brother of the devout Christian poet, rationalized religion into five concrete propositions, thereby attempting for religion, what his friend Grotius had done for law. Blunt and Toland brought to the fore the historical accuracy of the canon: Woolstan devoted his crazy intellect to the refutation of the Christian miracles, by maintaining an analogical interpretation. Annet endeavoured to explain away the resurrection of Christ.

The Old Testament came under the especial disfavour of these sponsors of natural religion. The Jewish race was despised "as worshippers of a local deity which they carried about in a trunk." Morgan delighted in recording the "immoralities" of the Old Testament, and Collins in his *Discourse on Free Thinking*, opposed the argument of prophecy on which he contended (rather arbitrarily) the claim of Christianity must ultimately rest.

Specifically Christian truths such as the Trinity and the Atonement were rejected as antagonistic to reason, and encumbrances to religion which should be rational, intelligible

and accessible to all men without the need of learned study. Briefly, then, religion was to be rationalized, simplified and clarified. The immutable principles or morality were to be the keystone of the new arch of knowledge and life in accordance with its rules was to be the aim of man. The Deists formed no single school and were independent men of various views: some wrote under the name of Christian, others of Christian Deists: others simply as Deists.

It was amongst such times as these that Thomas Sherlock's labours as a Christian Bishop were placed, and he has an honoured place among such names as Bishops Butler, Berkeley, Gibson, and Archbishop Secker. His writings against Benjamin Hoadley in the famous Bangorian controversy (*circa* 1715), first made him well known as one of the most able writers on the orthodox side. In 1725 he published six sermons under the title of *The Use and Intent of Prophecy in the Several Ages of the World*. These were written against Anthony Collins' *Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, published in 1724, which had maintained that the fulfilment of prophecy by the events in Christ's life was all "secondary, secret, allegorical and mystical" but that a strict fulfilment of prophecy was the only valid proof of Christianity. In 1729 appeared Sherlock's most famous work, *The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus*, an answer to Woolstan's *Discourses on Miracles and a vindication of the Resurrection*. In 1749 he republished his *Use and Intent of Prophecy* with two dissertations added, one on "The Sense of the Ancients before Christ upon the Circumstances and Consequences of the Fall," and the other on "The Authority of the Second Epistle of S. Peter." The last of his published works were the four volumes of his *Discourses* which appeared during the years 1754—8, of which collection a fifth, containing his "Occasional Discourses," was published after his death. These, for the critic of his theological views are the most valuable, containing the sermons which he preached, as Master, in the Temple Church. Not directly aimed against the Deists, they yet bear on all sides the imprint of their attacks: delivered before an eminent and learned society, Sherlock was able to adopt a legal phraseology and

presentation of his case which best suited his particular talents. It is from these Discourses that most of the following material is taken.

Thomas Sherlock was one of the most prominent of the Anglican Churchmen who opposed the criticism of the scriptural revelation. In religion, as in politics, he adopted the authoritarian position, and he was a vigorous defender of the *Ecclesia Anglicana* in matters theological as well as secular. He was "convincingly orthodox," and even Gibson never impugned his lack of zeal in these matters. He was not an original thinker and no such claim can be made for him: but he possessed a keen intellect which, well applied, made him the master of the common tendencies of his day. He wrote, above all, as a lawyer to whom the New Testament was the *Scripta Lex*, and he analysed the case of the infidels and Deists as a prosecuting counsel would that of a prisoner at the bar. Yet he was always cautious and rational and reflects admirably the mind of his time. The searching doubts which perplexed the honest spirit of Butler, or the conscientious scruples which made Samuel Clarke browse in the perilous fields of unorthodoxy, never came within his experience. He had little confidence in subtle sophisms which, he wrote "afford Speculation rather than Profit,"² or in philosophy which "has furnished Difficulties on every Side"³ and was the "Origin of Infidelity."⁴ Here Sherlock had a lesson for his own and future generations in stressing the limitations of the human reason when it abandons the salutary discipline of facts and history. His style is clear and masculine, which admirably suits his precise ideas. The force of his English is meritorious in an age which delighted in the rounded periods of a pedantic school. His terseness of expression may be seen in such typical phrases as: "Bread is the Nourishment of the Animal, but Knowledge is the Food of Man"⁵; "All Men will have some Religion either good or bad."⁶

The value of Sherlock's works to the historian of religious

² Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 337.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁵ *Ibid.* Vol. III., p. 116.

⁶ *Ibid.* Vol. I., p. 157.

thought for the period 1720—50 is therefore great: they give the answer which the Church made to the rationalists and unorthodox of the day, not with the limitations and refinements of Butler, but with the certainty and conviction of the orthodox. In the forceful and logical language of a lawyer, they give the substance of what was produced, albeit a little less elegantly, in many a country pulpit.

From what has been said it will be seen that Thomas Sherlock wrote essentially as a practical theologian, and as a defender of the faith, and it was for this undoubtedly that he was best fitted. He made no effort to frame a philosophical system upon which Christianity might be supported, but he did attempt to show that Christian truths were not antagonistic to philosophy rightly understood. His emphasis was always on the facts of history as against the speculations of men, and Christianity was to him essentially a historical deposit.

It will be necessary to examine first Sherlock's attitude to natural religion which (as already stated) aimed at displacing positive religion by a pure and undefiled Deism, purged of superstition and positive institutions. He devoted the first sermon of his first volume of *Discourses* to an examination of its claims; this sermon is undoubtedly a powerful piece of work and is among the best brief examinations of this topic produced by an orthodox divine.⁷ Throughout the whole of his works also, he has the claims of natural religion constantly in view.

Sherlock is eager to show not the differences between natural religion and Christianity but their affinities, and is very careful not to depreciate the claims of the reason. "I cannot listen to Revelation," he writes, "but in consequence of the natural Notion I have of God, of His Wisdom, Power and Goodness. Destroy the Principles of Reason and there is no Room left for Revelation."⁸ Thus the reason is so far from being ignored that it is held to be the last criterion by

⁷ Cf. *Some Remarks on the Excellent Discourses lately published*, etc. by a Searcher after Religious Truth, 1754, p. 28. "The Worthy Bishop in his excellent Discourses, more especially in his first, has brought the most striking and convincing arguments against Deism that I ever met with, and that in a most agreeable manner, peculiar to his genius."

⁸ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. II., p. 422.

which revelation can be tested. Natural religion is the religion of reason, and "'tis impossible that any true Revelation should contradict or evacuate any clear Dictates of natural Religion which stands at least upon as good a Bottom as any Revelation can do . . . and therefore the Principles of Natural Religion must be supposed for the Foundation of Revealed."⁹ As far as this, the most intelligent of the orthodox were prepared to go. The immutable laws of morality can be verified by the reason, and here Deist, latitudinarian Christians such as Clarke and Hoadley, and orthodox such as Sherlock, are all agreed: but Sherlock, as we shall see later, was to point out that it is one thing to verify the laws of morality by the reason, another to discover and maintain them by it. Morality all agreed is independent of revelation, and is founded "upon that Reason which is the common Gift of Mankind."¹⁰ The proof of this law to which mankind is subject as rational and accountable creatures, Sherlock finds in the conscience under whose impression "all Men live."¹¹ So deeply has rationalism penetrated, and so firmly was the doctrine of the supremacy of law established, that the most orthodox did not hesitate to admit the most extreme claims for reason in the moral sphere. Hence Sherlock has to face the same problem which perplexed Clarke, the danger lest Christianity should be swallowed up in the general rules of abstract morality, revelation rendered unnecessary and God Himself reduced to a mechanical being. If the laws of God are but declaratory of the original law of nature and reason, and contain the fairest copy of it, purged of all superstition, it is difficult to claim for Christianity a unique value. Certainly it is difficult for Clarke in his carefully worked out system to find room or purpose for any specific disclosure: if the laws of morality are as fixed as the laws of the universe and the reason as able to comprehend the one as the other, then the particular sanctions of the Gospel seem unnecessary.

Sherlock is fully aware of this difficulty: insistent as he always is on the rule of law, yet he is careful to point out that

⁹ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 276.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Vol. II., p. 121.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

this law is the will of God and not an external law to which God Himself is subject. "All Powers are the Gift of the Creator and every Being subsists not by the Law and appointment of Nature but by the Law and Appointment of God, Who is Master of His own Laws and Appointments, and can change them whenever He pleases; and Nature will follow and obey His Command, and ever be what He intends it should be."¹² It is important for another reason that Sherlock should make this distinction, as on it his whole proof of miracles depends.

His criticism of natural religion is interesting as it shows his historical approach to the question. He admits quite frankly that "if Nature can instruct us sufficiently in Religion, we have indeed no Need to go anywhere else, but whether Nature can do so or no, is in truth rather a Question of Fact than mere Speculation for the Way to know what Nature can do is to take Nature by itself and try its Strength alone."¹³ Thus he opposes any *a priori* speculation as to whether the unaided reason is sufficient, maintaining that the question is one of fact and can therefore be examined from evidence. To examine this question Sherlock goes to the countries which "know not Christ" and exposes the barbarity of their customs. Here reason is found to be impotent to condemn those follies and superstitions, and mankind unable either to discover the eternal rules of morality, or to live up to their standards. "No Antiquity affords an Instance of any People great or small, who served God upon the Principles of Natural Religion."¹⁴ On the contrary it is just in those countries which have the benefits of the Christian dispensation, that the light of reason shines in its fullest. No one can deny that "since the Light of the Gospel has shone throughout the World, Nature has been much improving."¹⁵ Natural religion itself therefore owes much to the Gospel for the very precepts which it

¹² Sherlock: *The Use and Intent of Prophecies in the Several Ages of the World to which are added Four Dissertations*, Fifth Edition, 1749, p. 274.

¹³ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Vol. IV., p. 107. Cf. also "Had Nature but done her Part, Men could not have been imposed on by such gross or palpable superstition." Vol. I., p. 264.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Vol. I., p. 4.

professes with such pride, and "in every Nation that names the Name of Christ even Reason and Nature see and condemn the Follies which others still for Want of Help are held in Subjection to."¹⁶ Even ancient Greece, where arts and philosophy reached a height unsurpassed since those days, was unable to emancipate itself from the worship of idols. Socrates himself confessed at his trial that he had regularly performed the religion prescribed by the state which included sacrifice to the various gods. If Socrates could not emancipate himself, what right have we to hope, that without the Gospel we should surpass him?

This argument from Sherlock's own point of view might be regarded as sufficient but he goes further. Supposing "you have found a Way by which some thoughtful Men obtained true Notions of Religion you are far from having found a Way of propagating true Religion in the World," for "to suppose that the Speculations of a few contemplative Men can be reduced to common Use and Practice is downright Enthusiasm."¹⁷ The people have no time for study but must proceed upon "the Cares and Burdens of Life," and they must have "Religion at a cheaper Rate or not at all." Thus if a few philosophic spirits can arrive at this pure religion, the mass of the people will be in no way helped. The ploughman would still have to accept his religion on authority and the philosopher could have no means to convince him of his commission.¹⁸

On the historical side, therefore, Sherlock maintains that the reason has not been sufficient in the past, and that nations where the Gospel is still unknown still live in ignorance. The general argument may seem contradictory to his former exaltation of the reason and does involve difficulties. Facts, he maintains, however, can be consistent with reason, though

¹⁶ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Vol. III., p. 322.

¹⁸ Charles Bulkley in *Observations upon Natural Religion and Christianity Candidly Proposed* made a noble reply to this argument, pp. 87, 88. He contended that all should think and question about the things of religion "as religion is an affair in which every Man feels himself to be deeply interested," and again, "Numerous Examples might easily be produced of those in common Life who notwithstanding their material Engagement in secular Affairs have found Time to apply their Thoughts very successfully to the Study of Religion."

not discoverable by it: they are "above reason," and the objection against them consists only in "that finite Minds cannot comprehend the Reasons and Limits of the Divine Justice."

Nevertheless the historical argument can go no further than to show the necessity of the Gospel to awaken the moral sense: it cannot prove the necessity of a positive religion to a man whose reason has been enlightened by the Gospel. We shall see now how Sherlock treats this question in relation to the historical doctrine of the fall of man.

Having attacked the claims of natural religion on the historical side, Sherlock also opposes it on more religious grounds. How comes it, he asks, that reason is so powerful, and yet so impotent, so great in its claims yet so weak in its fulfilment? The answer is that man, created perfect, has fallen. Natural religion is right in insisting on the purity and holiness of God's nature, the essential difference between good and evil, and in insisting on a worship pure and holy: but it "prescribed it to Men who have lost their Purity and Holiness, and are no longer able to perform its rigorous Conditions; it requires Brick without allowing Straw: exacting of Men in their present degenerate State, the Purity and Holiness of uncorrupted Reason and Nature; it affords no Strength and Assistance to Men to secure against Sin."¹⁹

To prove that man has fallen, Sherlock labours hard to establish the historical accuracy of the Fall as recounted in Genesis. That there is evil in the world no one denies, whether the story of the Fall is accurate or not, but the case would be stronger if based on an historical account.²⁰ In a "Dissertation on the Sense of the Ancients before Christ upon the Circumstances and Consequences of the Fall," he attempts by independent references from the Book of Job, "the oldest Book we have remaining," to prove its historical certainty. In an appendix to this written against Collins, but published after his death, he examines the story of the Fall itself, as written in the Book of Genesis, and argues against a metaphorical interpretation, maintaining that Adam and Eve

¹⁹ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. II., p. 26.

²⁰ Sherlock: *The Use and Intent of Prophecy*. Dissertation 2, p. 205.

really saw a being in the form of a physical serpent.²¹ The result of the Fall of man is that "the Religion and Morality which Nature teaches is such as Nature in the present weak Condition cannot perform. Reason teaches us what is right; but alas! it wants no proof to show that the best of us fall short of Perfection."²² Thus "the Hopes of God's Mercy and Pardon is the Voice of Nature concurring with the Sacred History, to shew us that we are fallen from the State in which God first placed us."

Also Sherlock attempts to demonstrate the necessity of some such fact as the Fall by conclusions drawn from the sorrowful condition of the heathen in superstition and folly. Finally he falls back on a favourite *a priori* argument of the Deists to the effect that God as a perfect Being, would not have created man imperfect: therefore the fact that he is imperfect shows that he must have fallen from his original state of perfection.

It is useless, therefore, to hold before the sinner the rules of conduct as he is born in a state of weakness and cannot unaided live up to the standard which is set before him: natural religion in effect, sends the malefactor to study the law by which he is condemned. Reason may point out the way, but "it is too weak a Restraint upon the Inclinations to Evil, which are become natural to Man."²³ Grace must be given "to restore use to the Obedience of Reason."

The main line of Sherlock's argument is clear. Man from the very constitution of his nature is prone to sin: and the life of righteousness can only be achieved through the assistance of God. Help is imperative in order that the reason may be liberated from the power of sin and thought translated into action. The most that natural religion can hope to do is to proclaim the law: it can offer no help to its fulfilment.²⁴

Sherlock, finally, accepting as a principle of natural religion the need of repentance,²⁵ asks how it can ever guarantee

²¹ Collins had maintained that in early mythological fables, animals, etc., were always allowed to speak.

²² Sherlock: *The Use and Intent*, etc. Dissertation 2, p. 288.

²³ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. III., p. 299.

²⁴ It seems to me that this aspect of eighteenth century religious thought is not sufficiently stressed, but it needs to be born in mind as the Christian theologians so frequently met the Deists on their own ground.

²⁵ Cf. Lord Herbert's five propositions of Natural Religion.

forgiveness: surely stressing as it does the righteousness of God it is impossible for a Deist to hope that He will ever overlook sin without exacting full punishment from the offender. The "deistical" logic is seen to go back on itself.

Behind his attack on natural religion there may be seen an insistent opposition to speculation which although noble may have no counterpart in fact. To regard man as self-sufficient is a splendid fiction, but is useless against the historic fact of the Fall of man. Natural religion deals with the hopes of man, but the hoping after a thing is no guarantee that it will be obtained. The glory of the Gospel is that it has fulfilled the hopes of nature and given direct evidence that God rewards the virtuous. Christ has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.²⁶

The mere inadequacy of natural religion, however, is in itself no positive argument for revelation, which needs to be substantiated on independent grounds. Sherlock deals first with revelation in general. He dismisses, as irrelevant, the *a priori* arguments against the possibility of a revelation "as being inconsistent with the Wisdom of God who has given Reason to Man as a sufficient Guide."²⁷ Also the fact that there has been many false revelations cannot prove that there has not been a true one.²⁸ Here again he approaches the question in an historical spirit, in marked contrast to the metaphysical spirit so much then in fashion. Supposing a revelation to be possible, he continues, and further assuming for purposes of argument, that God has revealed himself, then of necessity this "Revelation must be a more perfect Rule for

²⁶ Though Sherlock has many words of praise for natural religion and was eager not to oppose it on moral grounds, the general feeling was that this attack on natural religion was a severe one. This may be seen in the replies of (1) an opponent and (2) a supporter of Sherlock.

(1) Charles Bulkey: *Observations upon Natural Religion*, 1756, p. 96. "For my own Part I am persuaded that by thus attempting to establish the Gospel upon the Disparagement of Natural Religion; upon its supposed Insignificance and utter Incompetency for answering the Purposes of human Happiness, we are in the greatest Danger of losing them Both."

(2) *Some Remarks on the Excellent Discourses lately published*, by a Searcher after Religious Truth, 1757, p. 28. "And tho' it does not seem to be his Intention to prove there is no such Thing as natural Religion strictly speaking, yet his Arguments I think go very near to prove it."

²⁷ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Religion than Reason and Nature can possibly provide us with," since religion consists in obedience to the will of God and it can never be supposed that "Nature and Reason in all their Glory can be able to know the Will of God as well as he himself knows it."²⁹ From this it follows that a revelation must be entirely rejected as a forgery or entirely submitted to, and the "only Debate between Natural Religion and Revelation must be whether we really have a Revelation or no; and not whether Revelation or Nature be in the Nature of Things the best and surest Foundation of Religion."³⁰

Such an argument had great force in days when comparative religion as a study hardly existed. The possibility of a revelation being admitted, and its binding force, if bestowed, acknowledged, it is necessary for Sherlock to prove that Christianity, of all revelations, is the one unique deposit. The question, he has himself suggested, is one of history, but he here abandons history for an *a priori* test of a very definite type. There are two methods, Sherlock states, of determining the claims of the various religions to be the one word of God. It is impossible for God to contradict himself "whether he speaks to one Nation or to all the World," and as God most certainly has declared himself originally in nature, "for the Voice of Nature is the Voice of God," there is a criterion ready to hand. No revelation it follows, can entitle itself to be even considered as a revelation of the divine will if it so much as contradicts any one plain principle of natural religion. Mohammedanism is as a result immediately condemned in that it has never set out to appeal to the reason, being first promulgated by the sword, and also because the life of Mohammed and many of the tenets of his religion are repugnant to the reason. Christianity is unique in its lofty moral tone and in its insistence on the virtue of holiness, and is the only religion which can justify itself at the bar of natural religion. Thus reason is competent in virtue of the primary revelation of nature to decide which among the claimants is the voice of God.

His argument is curious in that he founds the necessity of

²⁹ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

a revelation on the weakness of the unassisted reason, and the strength of reason in the world of his day, to the fact that it has been quickened by the republication of the law of nature in Christianity. Thus reason, educated in Christianity and by it, is yet fitted to decide the claims of its teacher. It is not surprising that some of the Deists suspected a biased jury.³¹

In a later sermon he suggests another way of testing a given revelation, by means of a number of questions which should be put to it. These questions are: (1) The qualifications of the person who was sent to give the revelation. (2) The main end and purpose of his coming. (3) The miracles which he gave in evidence of his commission.³² Here, of course, Sherlock is merely generalizing from the given facts of the Gospel dispensation, and is not applying to the Gospels an exterior test. The argument from miracles, however, was regarded as of the highest importance and plays a very great part in Christian apologetics and rationalist attacks. The rule of law being established in the universe, a miracle if it can be proved has much greater significance than when God's general dealings with man were regarded as arbitrary. On the other hand, just because the rule of law is established, the miracles are bound to be the subject of rationalist attacks and consequently difficult of proof.

On the whole subject of miracles Sherlock's exposition is particularly clear and is still of some value. Woolston devoted himself to a refutation of the miracles by means of an allegorical interpretation, and it was in reply to him that Sherlock

³¹ This dilemma of Sherlock's as to the claims of the reason was not unnoticed by contemporaries. Charles Bulkey in *Observations upon Natural Religion*, etc., p. 32, writes: "When the Necessity of the Christian Revelation is to be proved, then Reason is dark, blind, stupid, impudent and unavailing to any one Purpose of Religion. But upon other Occasions she can even in his Lordship's Opinion open her Eyes & exert herself very rigorously and successfully. Thus we have seen when the Excellency, not the Necessity of the Christian Religion is to be proved, Reason and the Voice of Nature, is the Voice of God, no Revelation can entitle itself to be considered if it contradicts one plain Principle of Natural Religion."

³² Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. II., p. 7. But in Vol. I. Discourse IX., he puts another test: (a) Which of the Revelations so much as pretends to the essentials necessary to constitute a law either human or divine? (b) Where was it published and declared? (c) By whom and how qualified? (d) Can you name the persons and produce the Gospel of such a religion?

wrote his *Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus*, which, published in 1727, ran through several editions, being reprinted as late as 1816 in a separate tract by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. In this work Sherlock brings his legal intellect to bear on the subject of miracles, and deduces a systematic and carefully worked out scheme on their use and purpose. It was in reply to this work that Peter Annet wrote his *The Resurrection of Jesus considered by a Moral philosopher*.

Many writers (including Woolston and, of course, Hume,) wished to rule out miracles on *a priori* grounds, as incapable of proof, raising difficulties which "if well grounded excludes all evidence in the case."³³ Their argument was that the course of nature is seen to be so regular and uniform that the presumption is always against belief in the witnesses rather than belief in the miracles. It was therefore necessary before any discussion of the purpose of Christian miracles could be of value to refute this argument and this Sherlock attempted in his *Trial of the Witnesses*. In this work Sherlock makes the council for Woolston object that, the Resurrection "being a thing out of the course of nature," he thought "the testimony of nature held forth to us in her constant method of working a stronger evidence against the possibility of a resurrection, than any human evidence can be for the reality of one."³⁴ This, of course, merely denies the validity of any proof whatsoever. To this objection the Counsel for the Apostles replies: (1) That the Resurrection and the miracles are all facts which can be judged by the reason. Such events demand no greater ability of detection in the witnesses themselves than the testifying to the ordinary happenings of nature, because any rational being is capable of telling whether a man is dead or alive, palsey stricken or cured. (2) That it is impossible to rule out any event as being contrary to the laws of nature "because men form a notion of nature from what they see; and therefore in cold countries all men judge it to be according

³³ Sherlock: *The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus*. Ed. S.P.C.K., 1819, p. 77.

³⁴ *Ibid.* It will be seen, of course, that this is the argument of Hume.

to the cause of nature for water to freeze, in warm countries they judge it to be unnatural."³⁵ Thus when we say anything is contrary to the laws of nature we mean no more than that it is contrary to our own experience, but we have no right to say that it is against "the real laws of nature." If any fact is to be believed according as it conforms to our experience, this is to rest the proof of all facts upon the skill or ignorance of the individual concerned. (3) That the miracles are not contrary to the principles of right reason. This argument is developed more at large in the *Discourses* and consists in his doctrine of "cause." "The Credibility or Incredibility of Anything depends on knowing whether there is or is not a Power adequate to the Undertaking."³⁶ Thus "if we consider the Strength of Children it is impossible that they should build Castles, but if we consider the Strength and Ability of Men it would be ridiculous to doubt whether they could or not."³⁷ Hence it follows that there is nothing irrational in miracles as such, because we cannot doubt that God is an adequate cause to produce so great an effect. It should be noticed, however, that if this argument be used—that miracles are credible because the result of God's almighty power—it is not possible to see also in miracles the proof of Christ's divine commission. Sherlock, however, uses both arguments in different parts of his work, although he defends himself against the similar but cruder charge of proving the divinity of Christ from the miracles, and the miracles from the divinity of Christ.

The second of the above three arguments was, and still is, very cogent: its effect, with the first argument, is to transfer the question of miracles from a philosophical to a historical problem to which it rightly belongs. The question, Sherlock reiterates, is not one of speculation but one of fact. If miracles have been performed, it is clearly ridiculous to prove their absurdity on any *a priori* grounds. Turning to the historical problem, the Bishop frankly admits that miracles "require more Evidence to give them Credit than ordinary Cases do."³⁸ Historical criticism and enquiry were in their infancy in

³⁵ Sherlock: *Trial*, etc., p. 78.

³⁶ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 219.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

³⁸ Sherlock: *Trial*, etc., p. 49; also *Discourses*, Vol. I., p. 257.

Sherlock's day, and Sherlock himself never really enters into the purely historical question, except in the case of the Resurrection where he does indicate the way by a very detailed internal examination of this against Woolston. One other argument Sherlock also brings forward in proof of miracles, later dear to the heart of Paley; that the disciples attested the miracles even unto death which makes their testimony of particular value, and that the miracles "were not so much as questioned by the Adversaries of the Gospel in the first Ages."³⁹

What Sherlock has done, and to us it seems successfully, is to oppose the *a priori* objections against miracles, leaving to future generations the problem of internal and external criticism of sources which is essential to an historical treatment of the question: even here he does indicate the way.

To Sherlock the purpose of miracles is clear. They are not intended "to prove the Being of a God, nor the Doctrines of Morality."⁴⁰ nor were they designed "merely to astonish or surprise People."⁴¹ Their purpose is "to prove the Authority of the Person and the Authority of the Person is the Ground for receiving the Doctrine."⁴² They show that the person who performs the miracles has a commission and that the commission and doctrines he proclaims do really proceed from God.⁴³ Therefore the doctrines which are proved by the miracles are not the laws of morality, which are quite independent of the specific revelation of Christianity, but the new revealed doctrines not discoverable by the reason. From the Old Testament he endeavours to show that historically miracles have always been used to assert the supremacy of God and that it is a method of proof which appeals both to the learned and unlearned.⁴⁴ The miracles of Christ are a sign of His commission and prove that He was in fact sent from God, in virtue of which His doctrines have the authority of God. Hence Christ carefully chose His miracles to show

His supremacy over the natural world, life and death, pain and disease.

Miracles are clearly necessary to the publication of a revelation because they alone are proof sufficient that a revelation comes from God.⁴⁵ This, as has been said, is clearly in conflict with his arguments as to the credibility of miracles. Also he falls into another error attacked by Woolston. Sherlock admits that events contrary to usual experience require a greater weight of evidence to carry conviction.⁴⁶ Revelation in his opinion comes under this heading and this can only be accepted if "declared by one extraordinarily qualified and commissioned for that Purpose": but such a person can only prove his commission by the performance of miracles so that the one extraordinary event needs for proof another equally extraordinary.

Sherlock has thus secured Christianity from attack on its outworks: he has replied to the champions of natural religion and the opponents of revelation. It is now time to examine some of his views on Christianity itself.

Thomas Sherlock was regarded by his contemporaries as a most orthodox divine, and orthodox he certainly was if by the dubious title is meant a belief in the historical accuracy of the scriptural canon and a willingness to defend the interpretation of it as expressed in the Thirty-nine articles. This does not prevent him, however, from rationalizing Christianity and reducing it to a carefully worked out legal system. An initial difficulty in such attempt, however, is that Christianity as a positive religion contains many mysteries, such as the Atonement and the Virgin Birth, which were repulsive to the rationalists of the day, and often very unpalatable to the latitudinarian divines. In the moral teaching of Christ Sherlock experiences no difficulty, seeing in it only the republication of the law of nature, "purged of all the Superstitions which had spoilt its beauty." "Do you know the Man that ever despised the Gospel for the Immorality of its Precepts?" he asks, and here all the Deists were in agreement with him.⁴⁷

³⁹ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 41.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Vol. I., p. 275.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Vol. II., p. 295.

⁴² *Ibid.* Vol. I., p. 275.

⁴³ *Ibid.* Vol. I., p. 289.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Vol. I., p. 285.

⁴⁵ Sherlock: *Discourses*, p. 289.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Vol. III., p. 337.

It was the doctrinal part of Christianity which was the main point of attack from Deists without and Latitudinarians within. Here Sherlock tries to meet the Deists on their own ground. Much depends, he thinks, on the definition of a mystery and here paradoxically enough he adopts a view identical with that of Toland in his *Christianity not Mystical*, a work which called down on that unfortunate man's head the wrath of the orthodox divines of his time. Sherlock's view may be most clearly expressed in his own words: "A Mystery is no real or positive Thing in Nature nor is it anything that is inherent or belonging to the Subjects of which it is predicated . . . for when we say this Thing is a Mystery, of the Thing we say Nothing, but of ourselves we say that we do not comprehend the Thing. With respect to our Understanding there is no more Difference between a Truth that is and a Truth that is not mysterious, than with respect to our Strength there is between a Weight which we can lift and a Weight which we cannot lift."⁴⁸ In other words, the mind being finite and limited, there must be many truths which although not contrary to reason are above reason: these hidden truths have been revealed to us, and are only mysterious in their disclosure: once revealed they cease to be mysterious. This is true of the mysteries of Christianity, of which mysteries we know clearly the facts, but do not know how these facts come to be: but "the Knowledge of the Essence and Existence of Things are two distinct Kinds of Knowledge and independent of one another; our ignorance of the Essence of Things and of the Relationship they have to each other can never be a good argument against the Belief in their Existence."⁴⁹

In this sense of the word, the mysteries of the Gospel, our Redemption and Justification, are no more mysteries than the other works of God, such as the formation of the world and its maintenance, which are in fact equally mysterious, though we never doubt their reality. Knowledge is clearly impossible if by it we mean the complete understanding of the essence of things.

Turning to the Christian mysteries, Sherlock points out that

⁴⁸ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 43.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Vol. I., p. 59.

Christianity is not mysterious in its rule of life, which is perfectly clear, plain and intelligible. It is only mysterious as to how the fallen sinner may be reconciled to God, purged from sin, and in future able to walk in the laws of God. For forgiveness of sins some great atoning power is necessary, some mystery (in the sense in which he has defined this word) because from natural religion we can have no certain hope of forgiveness, for "'tis certain according to all natural Notions of our Mind, that 'tis just for God to punish Sinners: 'Tis certain likewise that God can do nothing but what is just. If therefore he forgives Sinners and receives them to his Mercy and remits the Punishment 'tis then certain, That 'tis just for God in the Circumstance not to punish Sinners. Now Reason cannot comprehend how it should with respect to the same Individual Sinners be just to punish and just not to punish them."⁵⁰ Hence comes the atonement of Christ. Also, mankind has proved incapable of following the laws of morality in the past even when it has discovered them. Therefore the Spirit of God has been given "to enable us to do our Duty by conveying new Supplies of Spiritual Strength to us, for Want of which we are unable in the State of Nature to extricate ourselves."⁵¹ The question concerning the mysterious is therefore reduced to this: "Whether it can ever be necessary to reveal Mysteries in order to perfect the Salvation of Mankind? Whenever it is necessary it must be reasonable."⁵² The Christian mysteries were given to us for our benefit: we ourselves are not asked to perform anything mysterious but the rule for us is perfectly plain. There is no more absurdity in offering sinners mercy and requiring them to rely on it be "it never so incomprehensible and mysterious" than there is for a malefactor to enjoy a pardon though he does not know what induced the Prince to grant it.⁵³

Sherlock also adopts a well known argument of Butler's. Before we condemn any proceeding as unreasonable, we must

⁵⁰ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 163; also Vol. IV., p. 95. Charles Bulkey took this passage very much to heart (*Observations*, pp. 47, 48, 49) and argued that Sherlock completely ignored the fact of repentance which reconciled God's justice and mercy.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* Vol. III., p. 338.

⁵² *Ibid.* Vol. I., p. 42.

⁵³ *Ibid.* Vol. I., p. 59.

know all the circumstances which condition the proceeding, but in the affairs of God this is clearly impossible. We are not qualified to judge the fitness of the redemption because not only does it relate to us but was probably designed to "answer the general Ends and Purposes of God's Government in the universal and moral world":⁵⁴ for "'tis certain that we are but a small Part of the intellectual World: what Relation we bear to the other Parts or to the Whole we know not: and yet undoubtedly the common Governor of the World must in his Dealings with every Part have Regard to this common Relation whether we understand it or no."⁵⁵

Here Sherlock is on very strong ground, and although very far from depreciating the reason, he yet realizes its limitations and that speculation must give way before fact. Nothing is more absurd than to suggest that because we are unable to discern the reasons of Providence, there is no reason in them.⁵⁶ It is far safer, Sherlock writes, to argue "upon the ways of Providence from the manifest Works of Providence."⁵⁷ In short, "all the complaints against Mysteries in Religion amount to no more than this: that God has done something for us . . . the Reason of which we do not understand."⁵⁸

Thus Sherlock endeavours to make mysteries not mysterious by means of a definition which makes all the universe equally so. He removes some of the prejudices which were stumbling blocks to the Deists by attempting to demonstrate the necessity of some mysterious intervention to supplement the deficiencies of natural religion; and he denies the validity of shallow thinking which rejects everything not perfectly clear to the human reason.

Sherlock is an able exponent of the claims of a practical religion and his work has value as an admirable illustration of the common views on religion held by most hard headed Englishmen in the first half of the eighteenth century. It is to this aspect of his work that we now turn. The great aim of religion, Sherlock insists, is to assist people to live a good life

⁵⁴ Sherlock: *Discourses*, p. 321; also Vol. I., p. 79.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

in order to obtain eternal bliss.⁵⁹ The world to come looms very large in the theology of Sherlock, and the happiness of the good and the torments of the evil are depicted in vivid scenes. Many of the theologians of the eighteenth century could have profited greatly in these matters from the noble philosophy of Shaftesbury. Future life, with eternal happiness, was an argument which could be used to appeal to all minds, and it was used unsparingly.⁶⁰ It was the great incentive to religion and (to judge from some passages) the only one. Sherlock openly admits that "there can be no Ground or Foundation to persuade Men to renounce the Pleasures of this Life, and to expose themselves to the Troubles and Inconveniences which often are the Companions of Virtue and Holiness in Hopes of future Glory and Happiness, unless this future Glory and Happiness are so great and valuable as to recompense all the Losses and Sufferings which Man must sustain in the Pursuit of them."⁶¹ But, in fact, he argues, the prospect for the good is so bright and that of the wicked so awful, that it pays to take the chance and be on the safe side "for should Religion at last prove a mere Deceit we know the worst of it: it is an Error for which we cannot suffer after Death. Nor will the Infidels there have the Pleasure to reproach us with our Mistake: they and we in equal Rest shall sleep the Sleep of Death."⁶² Thus must theology inevitably be depraved in any age where the highest appeal is to "wisdom and prudence." Religion, being regarded mainly as an incentive to right living, the "System of Rewards and Punishments" is regarded as necessary to induce people to live a righteous life by making virtue the best policy.⁶³ As the life beyond is so important it is felt necessary

⁵⁹ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 18. "Religion must be formed on a view of securing future happiness."

⁶⁰ Cf. particularly Sherlock: *Discourses*, Discourse IV., Vol. IV. Sherlock (Vol. I., p. 204) thought that it was more effective to preach hell as a place of physical torment since a ploughman could have no conception "of something within him, purely intellectual" which would suffer to eternity.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Vol. IV., pp. 291, 292.

⁶² *Ibid.* Vol. III., p. 18.

⁶³ A reaction against this took place in the later eighteenth century, and a plea against eternal punishment as being inconsistent with a good and merciful creator was made by a "searcher after religious truth" in *Remarks*, etc., p. 35. He said that he had talked with many Deists and

to prove its reality on other than Christian grounds, and here Sherlock pursues his customary methods of argument. He first deals with the *a priori* objection which would deny any proof of the future life because it cannot be verified on the "Evidence of Sense." It is possible for us, however, he says, to arrive at the knowledge of things we cannot see by means of reason and faith, which provide an adequate evidence as that of the senses. "There are many Things which can be known only from Reason which yet are as well received as any Report of Sense. We see many Productions and Works of Nature every Day, the Cause of which is secret and remote and not discoverable by the Senses; but no Man doubts but that all these Effects have Causes. . . . Hence a Thing not being seen can be no Prejudice or Presumption against its Existence." Therefore, if we are able from other arguments to prove the necessity of a future state, it can be no argument against such a state that we cannot verify it by sense perception. Again, it is no case against the soul's immortality that men "cannot form a Conception of an unembodied soul," because such objections do not touch the fact of immortality but only the method.

Thus it is necessary to see if in the present constitution of

they had told him that "the Defence of that absurd and incredible Doctrine of Eternal Torments, in conjunction with Revelation, a main Bar to their duly examining into, and considering revealed Religion." "This false and most cruel Doctrine," he went on, "prevented their further Enquiry into Revelation as thinking such a Revelation could not come from so Good & Merciful a Creator, as our God appears to be by his Works and Dealings with Man in this World and that it was not possible the Creator of all Things of which he stood in no Need, should ever treat so unnaturally the Workmanship of his own Hands . . . and I am . . . persuaded that the endeavouring to support that most severe and incredible Doctrine of never Ending misery has been one great Cause of Deism and Infidelity."

Many clergy within the Church became of this opinion. Thus, perhaps we may be pardoned if we quote from Rev. John Brown: *An Essay on Universal Redemption*, London, 1798, p. 1. "It is a fact too well known to be insisted upon that Deism has been in the present days remarkably prevalent, and it has, I think, been as generally allowed, that among the causes that have had a share in producing it, must be reckoned false ideas of the nature and doctrines of Revelation . . . among these it appears to me beyond a doubt that the common opinion of the eternity of future torments has made many unbelievers. Whatever indeed represents religion as inconsistent with itself, whatever tends to the supposition of a Deity, acting upon principles contrary to those natural ideas of justice, which he has implanted in our minds, must necessarily have this effect in a thinking and enlightened age."

the world and man there are any indications of a life beyond the grave. He approaches the question as follows. The works of creation declare the wisdom and justice of God, and the conscience tells men that God loves righteousness and hates iniquity. Yet we see in the world the wicked flourish and the good frequently oppressed. This can only be made compatible with the wisdom and goodness of God by supposing that He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness. Such a judgment certainly does not take place in this life, hence it must needs be in another. As Leslie Stephen puts it, "A new world must be called into existence to redress the balance of the old." An argument of this nature is, of course, entirely contrary to Sherlock's own maxim of judging the ways of Providence from the works of Providence, and as he expresses it, there is more of a case against the justice of God than proof of another life. "The other life" is the easiest escape from the fact of human suffering which a rationalist age finds it difficult to explain in terms of its own metaphysic.

As a further proof of the other world Sherlock brings forward what he calls "the Sense of Nature," the almost universal feeling that man will persist in a future state.

The discussion of the future life necessarily involves the practical question: who shall enter into this eternal bliss, and who shall be damned? and here the dogmatism of many divines called on them the irony of the Deists. If salvation is only to be given to those who follow the Christian dispensation—and a particular branch of that—what will happen to the countless myriads of the Chinese who have never so much as heard of the name of Christ. To condemn them would be singularly unfair: yet if they can be saved without Christ, why cannot others? In the handling of this topic, Sherlock's good sense saves him from many absurdities into which a large number of the orthodox divines were too prone to fall. He condemns those who would seek to restrict salvation to their own sect alone, "as it ascribed Partiality to God and tended to introduce Inhumanity into Religion."⁶⁴ Doubtless God will deal with all those who have never heard of Christ in the light of the

"Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. II., p. 103.

advantages which they have received. But we can never be in their place as we have received the benefit of the Christian dispensation, and the disowning it does not free us from obedience to its law.⁶⁵ It more behoves us not to discuss the chances of other people's salvation but to look after "our true, our only Care, the Salvation of our own Soul."⁶⁶ Suffice for us that "God has those whom he will own, in the East and the West, and the North and the South: Leave him to find out those whom he will honour."⁶⁷ As to the position of the Deists, Sherlock, wisely, does not directly say, but he does suggest that their unbelief proceeds from "a vitiated and corrupted Mind which hates to be reformed: which rejects the Evidence because it will not admit the Doctrine not the Doctrine because it cannot admit the Evidence."⁶⁸

Man being a "rational and accountable Creature" and the crown of glory being laid up for the righteous, Sherlock heaps his scorn on those who hold the twin doctrines of election and reprobation. "The great Advocates of Election and Reprobation always reckon themselves in the Number of the Elect . . . they despise the Virtues and moral Attainments of all Men and doom them with all their Virtues to Destruction, whilst they advance themselves with all their Sins to a Throne of Glory prepared for them before the World began."⁶⁹ Such a doctrine cuts right across the whole ground and reason for a religion which finds its outlet in the good life. If all men from birth are numbered either among the elect or the damned, then the future rewards and punishments must be allotted irrespective of the quality of life in this world: if so, the great inducement to good living is gone.

Sherlock's is an essentially practical religion, and with all orthodox divines he is opposed to "Enthusiasm" in religion. This is seen clearly in his examination of the works of the Spirit, of whose influence many enthusiasts made the most extravagant claims. The Spirit of God is necessary, Sherlock says, to free us from the slavery of sin, and to give us power,

⁶⁵ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. II., p. 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Vol. III., p. 37.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* Vol. II., p. 89.

not to know the good, but to follow it.⁷⁰ Grace is necessary to restore us to the obedience of reason. So far he is willing to go, but he is careful to add: "But the Evidence of the Spirit is not any secret Inspiration or any Assurance conveyed to the Mind of the Faithful, but 'tis the Evidence of Works such as by the Spirit we perform and therefore the only Sign of Sanctification is Holiness and the only Mark of Grace is to obey from the Heart the Word of God."⁷¹ There is no certainty or assurance of salvation but we must work it out with fear and trembling. Any other marks than holiness of life as a sign of regeneration are rather marks of spiritual pride than of union with Christ.⁷² He has little sympathy with ostentatious religion or with the enthusiasm of the early Methodists, who "look with Disdain upon all the prudent Methods by which Goodness may be advanced, and censure them as the Effects of wordly Wisdom and Cunning."⁷³ He is equally scornful of "tedious and expensive Pilgrimages and processions; unnatural Mortifications and sullen Retirements from the World practised and recommended in some Parts of the Christian Church."⁷⁴ Moderation is his watchword. In a sermon preached on the text, "Let not your good be evil spoken of," he protests against those whose "Zeal for Good arises even from Envy and Strife." "This Spirit," he says, "is still in being; and 'tis no uncommon Thing for Men to be spitefully good and to delight in the Opportunities of exasperating Others who differ from them. Men often fall upon Subjects for no other Reason but because they know how disagreeable they are to some of the Company."⁷⁵ Sherlock would not have been so typical of the eighteenth century if he had not regarded enthusiasm with such profound distrust. His emphasis is always on practice, and the same spirit may be seen in his brushing aside of deep philosophical problems such as the freedom of the will, and the identity of good as we

⁷⁰ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. III., p. 299. "We ascribe it not to Grace that we know our Duty, but this we ascribe to it, that we are able to do it."

⁷¹ *Ibid.* Vol. I., p. 247.

⁷² *Ibid.* Vol. III., p. 304.

⁷³ *Ibid.* Vol. IV., p. 199.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Vol. II., p. 306.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Vol. IV., p. 199.

know it and as known by God. Sherlock stood for a settled and orderly Church, and he thus defends the ceremonies of the Church as by law established. He makes no claim whatever for a divinely inspired and infallible episcopacy. True, the Church has a mission, but this mission is clearly one of preaching the faith once delivered to the saints.⁷⁶ Whenever the Church speaks conformably to this commission it is the voice of God calling men to repentance, for in this sense the Church is ordained of God. But the commission has been given once and for all: it is not an expanding one and gives no power to create new articles of faith. Indeed, on historical grounds, he attempts to prove that not even the Apostles themselves—so most certainly not the Church of Rome or any assembly whatever—had “any Authority to make Articles of Faith and that Jesus Christ was the Author and Finisher of our Faith, to which nothing can be added and nothing can be taken.”⁷⁷ Yet every Church has an absolute right to appoint its own “Rules of Orders and Discipline for its Members,” which are not essential but can be adopted to meet particular requirements. Hence the particular rules of the Anglican Church have been “settled upon prudential Considerations of the Circumstances of England.” The breach with Rome was justified in that Rome had departed from the faith once delivered to the saints, and had over-elaborated its ceremonies, which thereby became alien to the English spirit. It is not surprising that Church ceremonies as a whole were the subject of rationalists’ attacks, but Sherlock is content to justify them as means to an end. Of themselves they have no value except as they are a channel of grace. There is a difference, he points out, between religion and the means to religion:⁷⁸ but such subtle differentiations were hardly likely to satisfy the rationalists of his age. Also, he argues, whatever

⁷⁶ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. IV., p. 330.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* Vol. IV., p. 336. This statement of Sherlock’s occasioned an attack on him by Caleb Fleming, in *Natural and Revealed Religion at Variance*, 1758. He asked how Sherlock, believing this, could subscribe to the twentieth article of the Church which says “that the Church hath power to decree rites and ceremonies and articles of faith.”

⁷⁸ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. I., p. 357. One cannot help recalling his differentiation between a qualification for office, and a proof of a qualification in his Vindication of the Test and Corporation Act.

ceremonies were performed in obedience to the command of God “would have such Virtue as he thought fit to annex to them.”⁷⁹

If the Church is free to alter the non-essentials but cannot touch the faith once delivered to the saints, it is imperative that the question, where can this faith be found, shall be answered. This faith, he maintains, cannot be found in the “Traditions of Men” any more than could the Jewish religion in the vain traditions of the Pharisees: but it consists in “the Doctrines of the Apostles and Prophets of the Gospel.”⁸⁰ This is, of course, the true Protestant position: but it means that everything depends on the manner in which the Bible is interpreted. Sherlock, in his handling of the New Testament (if not of the Old), is very balanced. His essay on the “Authority of the Second Epistle of Saint Peter,” for example, is a scholarly effort, showing a desire to bring the best scholarship of the day to bear on the Scriptural Canon.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Sherlock: *Discourses*. Vol. IV., p. 76.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁸¹ It is included in Hughes: *The Works of Bishop Sherlock*. Vol. III., p. 137. This dissertation of Sherlock’s deserves a little more detailed notice. Although some of his views are no longer held by modern scholars, yet his method of tackling the problem shows his adoption of critical methods in the interest of modern orthodoxy. The problem with which he is primarily concerned, it must be borne in mind, is not the question of the Petrine authorship of the second Epistle but its authority. He begins with a short historical survey of the objections against its authority by the earliest writers, Eusebius and Jerome to Helvetius and Grotius. By this examination he proves that Grotius’ statement, that the Epistle was rejected by many Churches, is far too strong. He then traces all objections to the authority of the Epistle to a primitive doubt as to its authorship, due to the difference between the style of the Epistle and the first Epistle of Peter. This difference might suggest that it was not written by the same writer as the first Epistle, but in itself could not create a doubt as to its genuineness. This difference, he continues, does not run throughout the whole of the Epistle, but is only apparent in Chapter II., which abounds with pompous expressions. There is, however, no reason why S. Peter should not have written the first Epistle and Chapters I. and III. of the second Epistle. Then he proceeds—and modern scholarship has further developed this part of his argument—to point out the parallels between the second chapter and the Book of Jude, and he comes to the conclusion that the similarities and differences can only be accounted for by supposing that they have both drawn from the same Jewish original. (Modern criticism now regards 2 Peter as taken from Jude.) He concludes by dealing with the objection that under his argument 2 Peter will fall under the reflection of using the spurious Enoch: this may be summarily dismissed, however, he says, because “Enoch was a romance of Hellenistic invention and there is no evidence whatever that it existed in apostolic days.”

In his sermons also, Sherlock always endeavours to place the text in its historical setting, and seldom attempts to prove his argument from isolated references taken out of their context. He realizes that a strict adherence to the literal sense of the English translation must lead to difficulties, and that many passages of the New Testament appear obscure because "the Writers being necessarily drawn into Controversy . . . there are many Things in Scripture which appear dark to us for Want of a distinct Knowledge of the Errors and Miscontents which the Writers oppose"; also, "the Passions and Weaknesses, and Prepossessions of Mind which the best Men are not free from" should be remembered.

Sherlock's position in theology is essentially that of a rationalizing orthodox divine, defending the faith against attacks from rationalist enquirers on the one hand, and Unitarians and Socinians on the other, and preaching a creed essentially practical. It may be said (and this is frequently said against the eighteenth century divines) that Sherlock's conception of religion is not a high one, and that it is deficient on the spiritual side: but this argument is based on insufficient evidence. Rather, he should be admired in that he had the courage to meet the Deists on their own ground, and did not entrench himself behind the authority of dogma.

The Church of the eighteenth century was called upon to meet what was essentially a rationalist attack, and in our opinion, the best reply was not to fall back on its own spiritual experience, but to endeavour to reinterpret the Christian truths in the thought forms of the day. If it were to do this successfully, it must inevitably stress the ethical side of Christian teaching and the reasonable demand which it made on the worshipper. The eighteenth century was not easily given to self-expression, but it would be presumptuous indeed to deny that it had vital religious experiences merely because it did not see fit to declare them from the housetops.

Dr. Johnson, who is often regarded as the great representative of the eighteenth century, compares, we suggest, not unfavourably with the Christian of any generation. In this connection we may perhaps quote from a letter of Sherlock's

to Dr. Dodderidge, a leading Dissenter, which shows the simplicity but sincerity of his faith.

"Whatever points of difference there are between us, yet I trust that we are united in a hearty zeal for spreading the knowledge of the Gospel, and for reforming the lives and the manners of the people according to it. I have lived long enough to know by experience the truth of what we are taught: That there is none other name by which we may be saved, but the name of Christ only. I have seen the true spirit and the comfortable hopes of religion lost in the abundance of speculation, and the vain pretences of setting up natural religion in opposition to revelation: and there will be little hope of a reformation till we are humble enough to be willing to know Christ and him crucified. In this necessary and fundamental point I am fully persuaded we do not disagree: and I earnestly beg of God to bless our united endeavours to make his ways known. Recommending you and your Christian labours to his gracious protection."⁸²

It remains only to estimate what is the permanent contribution which Sherlock made to the theological thought of his age.

First, we may place his "historical emphasis." Christianity is above all a historical religion, and Sherlock realized this clearly and always appealed away from speculation to fact. It was from this point of view that he endeavoured to elaborate a consistent scheme of prophecy throughout the Old Testament, because he realized that Christianity was rooted in Judaism. Secondly, Sherlock, although living in a rationalist age, realized that Christianity is bound up with the miraculous, and his approach to the Christian miracles was almost the same as that which Christian apologists adopted at the end of the nineteenth century against rationalist attacks. In his firm grasp of the objectivity of real knowledge as opposed to the subjectivity of natural laws which are mere generalizations from human experience, his work is of abiding worth.

Lastly must be mentioned the place which he assigned to the reason. He realized that a religion which in the last resort was irrational had no right to demand the allegiance of men,

⁸² Dodderidge: *Diary and Correspondence*. Vol. V., p. 153.

for intellect and revelation were the gifts of the same true God. If revelation and the intellect were opposed the one to the other, then we should be forced, either to resort to a blind, unquestioning faith (with Henry Dodwell) or abandon the revelation (with the Deists).

The fact that all truth is ultimately "reasonable," however, does not mean that it can be discovered by the reason. Revelation has revealed truths which the unassisted reason could never have achieved, but to deny them merely on this ground would be to make the finite human reason the measure of truth. Here again Sherlock's position is very sound. The reason must give way before the facts of history, but it is its task to examine these facts, to understand them, and incorporate them in the body of "rational" knowledge. To suppose that this cannot be done is to place a radical dualism at the very foundation of knowledge, to place reason against faith, rational effort against revelation. This is the vital contribution which "Christian rationalism" of the eighteenth century has given to theological thought.

The further we go in the pursuit of truth, the further we explore the Christian mysteries, the more we shall find that facts "above reason" are not contrary to it. As man is made in the image of God, so he is assured that new truths will ever find their place in a wider synthesis.

The balanced rationalism of Sherlock, which is based on a clear knowledge of the limitations of the reason (that the finite can never fully know the infinite), is the stronghold which the eighteenth century erected against a paralysing scepticism. In this way it secured a permanent place for revelation in a world awestruck by the majesty of scientific achievement.

THE FITNESS AND CREDIBILITY OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST: TWO ESSAYS

by

William Webster
M.A., D.D.

Editor's Introduction

William Webster (1689-1758) was a bit of an eccentric — but (1) eccentricity is not unkindly regarded as one of the hallmarks of the true Englishman, and (2) it hardly disqualifies his work for inclusion in the *Simon Greenleaf Law Review* in light of the delightful eccentricities of our own faculty! Hoefer's *Nouvelle Biographie Générale* (Paris, 1866) informs us (Vol. 46, col. 614), relying on Webster's own autobiographical remarks, that when the extensive sale of his pamphlet on wool production began to die down, he published anonymously a refutation of his own arguments, which went through several editions; and of the first work he modestly declared that "the author should have a statue erected to him in all the manufacturing towns of Great Britain"!

But Webster's importance lies in theology, not in economics. He graduated from Cambridge University, was ordained to the Anglican ministry, served as curate of the historic parish of St. Dunstan-in-the-West, London, and earned his theological doctorate from Cambridge. Besides his important apologetic essays in support of the Resurrection of Christ — here brought back into print after centuries of neglect — the voluminous list of his theological writings includes a translation of French biblical scholar Richard Simon's New Testament commentary; *A Complete History of Arianism from 306 to 1666* in two volumes; and a counter to one of the most influential works of Bishop Warburton (the founder of the Warburton Lectureship; its 1985 Lecture constitutes the leading essay in the present number of the *Simon Greenleaf Law Review*).

E. Irving Carlyle, in his article on Webster in *The Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1899), Vol. 60, p. 128, describes the genesis and influence of Webster's *Remarks on the Divine Legation*, which in diverse ways associated him with Christian jurisprudence (Richard Hooker and the Inns of Court), English literary history (Alexander Pope), and the 18th-century Evangelical Awakening (George Whitefield): "On 16 Dec. 1732, under the pseudonym of 'Richard Hooker of the Inner Temple,' he began to edit a periodical entitled 'The Weekly Miscellany.' Not being very successful, it was discontinued on 27 June 1741. From the number of religious essays it contained it became known as 'Old Mother Hooker's Journal.' It is chiefly memorable for the attacks made in its columns on William Warburton's 'Divine Legation of Moses.' Webster's contributions to the controversy were republished probably in 1739, under the title of 'Remarks on the Divine Legation' (London, 8vo). They earned him a place in the 'Dunciad,' Pope, in 1742, inserting a passage (bk. ii. l. 258) in which Webster was coupled with George Whitefield, who had also criticised Warburton (Pope, *Works*, ed. Elwin and Courthope, iv. 17, 333, ix. 205, 207)."

* * *

The Fitness of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ is photoreproduced from the copy in the rare book collection of the Simon Greenleaf School of Law; *The Credibility of the Resurrection of Christ* has been photographically reproduced by permission of the British Library (formerly the British Museum Library), London, England, from their copy (shelf mark: 115.c.30).

J.W.M.

THE
FITNESSES
OF THE
WITNESSES
OF THE
RESURRECTION
OF
CHRIST,
CONSIDER'D;

In Answer to the principal Objections
against them.

By WILLIAM WEBSTER, M. A.

LONDON:

Printed for JAMES LACY at the Ship in
Fleetstreet. MDCCXXXI.

BOOKS published by the same
AUTHOR.

I. **T**HE Clergy's Right of Maintenance
vindicated.

II. A Discourse upon Speculative Doc-
trines.

III. The Duty of keeping the whole Law.

IV. The New Testament of our Saviour
Jesus Christ, according to the antient Latin
Edition; with Critical Remarks upon the
Literal Meaning in difficult Places. From
the *French* of Father Simon. Printed for
J. Pemberton in *Fleetstreet*, and *C. Rivington*
in *St. Paul's Church-yard*.

T H E
P R E F A C E.

WHAT I here offer to the Reader,
is only part, of a discourse which I
intended to publish, 'till I had read
the Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrec-
tion of Christ. Tho' other pamphlets appear'd
at that time wherein the objections of the ad-
versaries were very well answer'd, yet I thought
that some parts of the subject were still capa-
ble of improvement; at least, that the same
arguments might be placed in a new light ac-
cording to the particular apprehension, or ability,
of the Writer, by which means different rea-
ders might be convinced, or affected. But the
above-mention'd Author writes with such a supe-
riority of genius, that he has left no room for any
new matter, and with such a peculiar felicity as
to method and manner, that it seem'd as impos-
sible to say the same things after him without
injuring the argument, as to find out any thing
which did not occur to his uncommon sagacity.
But I shall say no more of this excellent per-
formance, since I might as well attempt to imi-
tate it, as to do justice to its character.

What

P R E F A C E.

What then could induce me to trouble the publick with any thing upon a subject so well handled, and only upon a particular part of it?

The season of the year obliging me to revise my papers upon the Resurrection of Christ, I found I had consider'd some of the objections against it with a different view from other writers, which gave me occasion to make some seasonable remarks, and to obviate some fundamental errors that run thro' all the modern writers on the infidel side. I can't tell whether this apology will be admitted as a reasonable one, neither am I much concern'd about it. I have very little regard to my reputation as a writer, if I can but shew the sincerity of my intentions as a Christian. I had much rather be accused of impertinence, than be suspected to want a becoming zeal for Religion. I have one thing farther to add, that if the reader should think his time lost in perusing this discourse, I have taken care, by making it very short, that he shall lose but little.

May 1. 1731.

Temple-Bar.

The

The Fitness of the

W I T N E S S E S

O F

Christ's Resurrection.

THE resurrection of Christ being a matter of fact so essential to the truth of *his* religion, and the foundation of *our* faith and hope, unbelievers have been particularly industrious to raise objections against it. Among other difficulties that have been started upon this important subject, it has been urged, that his appearance after his resurrection was not *publick* enough; and the witnesses, both for *number* and *quality*, not answerable to the weight which was to be laid upon their testimony. The history of Christ's resurrection informs us that, tho' he appear'd *openly*, yet he did not appear to *all the people*, to the *multitude* of the *Jews*, but only to a *select* number of persons appointed to be witnesses of it to the rest of the world. These *chosen* witnesses were the *twelve Apo-*

B

stles

(2)

files only ; for, though Christ appeared to others, as well as unto them, even to five hundred of his Disciples at one time, yet only the Apostles were appointed to bear *publick* testimony to the truth of his resurrection. It is farther urged, with regard to the *manner* of his appearance, that the witnesses were improperly chosen, in respect to their *station* and *circumstances*. The several exceptions against them may all be reduced under the three following heads, which shall be the subject of my present discourse.

The *first* objection is, That Christ did not appear in a more *publick* manner to the *multitude* of the unbelieving *Jews*, when his appearance was of such *publick* and *universal* concern to them.

2^{dly}. Because he did not appear to the *Priests* and *Rulers*, who, it is pretended, were the persons more immediately concern'd in matters relating to their *religion*, and *government*.

3^{dly}. That he appeared only to his particular *friends* and *followers*, whose testimony cannot be so satisfactory to us as that of his *enemies* would have been.

I am not forward to dive into the secret counsels of the all-wise God, thinking it
more

(3)

more becoming our limited capacities to rest satisfied with the methods of providence, than to undertake the solution of them upon precarious conjectures ; but, as far as we are concerned in these questions, we are able, upon *rational* grounds, to vindicate the *Wisdom* and *Goodness* of God ; which, by his assistance, I shall now endeavour to do.

First it is objected, that Christ did not appear, after his resurrection, in a more *publick* manner, to the *multitude* of the unbelieving *Jews*, when his appearance was of such *publick* and *universal* concern to them.

This objection must be consider'd under two different respects.

- I. As it concerns the conviction of *mankind* in *general*.
- II. As it relates to the *Jews* in particular.

1st. Then I am to consider this objection in respect to the conviction of *mankind* in *general*. The objection above mentioned is founded upon this supposition, that a more *publick* appearance, to the *multitude* of the *Jews*, would have given a more convincing

B 2 evidence

(4)

evidence of the truth of his resurrection, than the testimony of a *select* number of persons, however qualified, is able to give us. But I cannot help thinking it *morally impossible* that the world in general could have had so good evidence, if Christ *had* appeared in so *publick* a manner, as we have now upon the testimony of the twelve Apostles only ; unless we suppose, what *cannot* be supposed, that *all* the people would have been converted by his appearance, and have continued stedfast in the faith. For, besides that *all* the people were not *qualified* to be witnesses of his Resurrection, *all* of them not being sufficiently acquainted with his person, which must have occasioned variety of opinions concerning the reality of it ; besides this, I say, the *Jews*, (especially the *priests* and *rulers*, who had a mighty influence upon the people) had obstinately resisted the evidence of many and extraordinary miracles, and conspired to put Christ to death only for raising *Lazarus* to life ; so that they were not likely to be converted by the Resurrection of *Christ himself*. They who had ascribed one of the greatest of his miraculous works to the operation of the *Devil*, might with equal reason have resolved

2

this

(5)

this appearance of Christ into a delusion and imposition upon their senses, by the operation of a diabolical power: At least, they had impudence enough to have denied the fact, and to have used all possible means, as well to prevent the belief of it in others, as to force them to a denial of it. Their suborning the soldiers to swear that the Disciples of Christ came *by night and stole his body out of the sepulchre while they were asleep*, shews, beyond contradiction, that they would have left no methods of corruption unattempted, and that the *people*, either for the lucre of a little money, or from the dread of persecution, would have asserted, or deny'd any thing. This then being the case, (and I think it a very clear and obvious one) what would have been the consequence? Why, that there would have been *contradictory* evidence upon record, some *affirming*, others *denying* the truth of Christ's Resurrection ; nay, the very same witnesses, at different times, both *affirming* and *denying* it. Now, if Christ had appeared to such a large and mixed multitude of people, some of whom would have contradicted, not only *one another*, but *themselves*, how could we, at this distance of time, come at the true knowledge

(6)

knowledge of such a variety of characters, and other intricate circumstances, in order to judge whose testimony is the most credible, or whether the fact be, upon the whole, worthy of our belief, or not. Much less could such a contradictory testimony be equally satisfactory to us with that of a select number of witnesses, all of them competent judges of the fact, all of them agreeing in their report, all of them confirming their testimony by miracles, and at last sealing it with their blood.

But, if the testimony of others may be to us the ground of a reasonable assent to the truth of any fact (which, I presume, will not be disputed) the question will be, not whether a more *publick* manifestation of Christ to *all* the people, to the whole *multitude* of the *Jews*, would have been more satisfactory to *them*; or whether their testimony would not have been to *us* a stronger evidence of his resurrection, than the testimony of the Apostles; I say, this will *not* be the question; but whether the testimony of the Apostles, who were chosen by God to be witnesses of it to the world, be not a *sufficient* evidence of it. For, whenever God is pleased to require our
assent

(7)

assent to any matter of fact, he is not obliged to give us *all* the evidence, whereof the fact is capable, but only such a degree of evidence upon which we may build a *rational* conviction. Suppose, for instance, that any matter of fact done at any distant part of this kingdom were attested by a certain number of credible persons, would any of us think it a reasonable objection against the truth of it, that it might have been attested by a greater number, if it be already sufficiently attested? We are very ready to allow, that, in proportion to the weight and consequence of any doctrine, or fact, it seems reasonable that we should have clearer and stronger proof. In some cases, of lesser moment, *human* laws are satisfied with *one* witness, in others of a more important nature, they proceed with more caution, and require the positive evidence of *two* persons. So likewise in the business of religion, the making of a new revelation to mankind, upon which depend our *eternal life*, or *death*, we may *here* expect to meet with stronger evidence than any *temporal* concern requires. Yet this kind of reasoning must be managed with a great deal of caution, or it will lead us into infidelity. As to the point now
under

(8)

under consideration, the truth of Christ's Resurrection, it being a matter of such infinite moment, it seems reasonable that the evidence should bear *some degree of proportion* to the *importance* of the truth. But if we argue too closely from the *infinite* distance between the importance of things *temporal* and *eternal*, requiring a degree of evidence *proportionably* greater in one case, than in the other, we may require such an *irresistible* evidence as will leave no room for the exercise of humility, and a due regard to the wisdom of God in his dispensations; or, indeed, for the exercise of our faith, considered under any proper notion of it. Wherefore in all our religious enquiries let us attend principally to *this* consideration, whether the thing be highly credible *in itself*, and such as would satisfy us in affairs relating to the *present* life, without attempting to determine *exactly* what *degree* of evidence any particular truth requires. If infinite Wisdom had thought it fitting, the Resurrection of Christ might have been manifested in a *more publick* manner, and attested by a *greater* number; but if it be already sufficiently attested, it is highly unreasonable to reject a credible testimony, only because the

goodness

(9)

goodness of God might have granted us a testimony *still more* convincing, tho' his *justice* did not *oblige* him to do it, and his *wisdom* did not think it *expedient*. Thus far I have consider'd the objection, as it affects the conviction of *mankind in general*; which is a consideration more worthy the wisdom and goodness of God, than the unreasonable demands of *hardened infidels*.

2^{dly}. As to the *Jews*, in particular, if a more extraordinary method of conviction seems requisite for the conversion of such inveterate enemies, than for others who were better disposed to believe the truth of Christ's Resurrection, This gave them no right at all to *demand* it; neither was it consistent with the settled purposes of God that they should have been convinced in such an extraordinary manner. Their obdurate temper, which arose from their own lusts and passions, was in itself highly *criminal*, deserving rather the *Divine vengeance*, than any particular marks of *favour* and *goodness*. Their slowness of heart to believe the miracles of our Saviour, and to embrace his doctrine, proceeded from their inveterate malice, and their malice was the effect only of their pride and ambition, which disdain'd

C

a cruci-

(10)

a crucified Redeemer; and of their impure and carnal affections, which were impatient of the restraint of his holy precepts. But was God obliged to have any regard to their wicked indisposition, so as to proportion the degree of evidence to the exigency of their wants, which they had *voluntarily* brought upon themselves? Or how could he do it consistently with his predictions concerning their destruction for not believing in him sooner? God had afforded them sufficient means of conviction by the many miracles which Christ had wrought among them in his life-time, for rejecting which they justly merited that judicial visitation which God determined and denounced against them. If therefore, after this, God had used any extraordinary means for their conviction, he had not only done more for them than they had any reason to expect, but he must have destroy'd his own immutable purposes, and falsified his own unerring predictions.

But 2^{dly}, it may be objected that, tho' God was not obliged to satisfy the unreasonable demands of harden'd infidels by manifesting the Resurrection of Christ to *all* the people of the *Jews*, yet why did he not appear to the

(11)

the *priests* and *rulers*, who may be thought the most proper persons to be concerned in a transaction that related to their *religion* and *government*?

But this objection has no foundation but in the impotent wishes of unbelievers, no force besides what it may chance to acquire from the positive air with which they endeavour to hide its weakness. If there be any real strength in the argument, it must arise either from the nature of the thing, that is, from the consideration of their *publick station* and *authority*, which gave them a right to demand such a *personal* appearance to them; or from some express *promise of God*, that Christ should appear *personally*, after his Resurrection, to the *priests* and *rulers*.

1. But there is no reason in the *nature of things* that obliged Providence to grant them that particular evidence; they could not claim it in right of their *publick station* and *authority*. Even in a transaction between two *independent nations*, kings do not appear in *person*, but send others in their name, with proper credentials, to act for them. But this affair, of the Resurrection of Christ, was a transaction between the *Sovereign* of

C 2

the

(12.)

the world, and his *creatures*, who were all equally obliged to submit to his will, and not entitled to make any demands for *singular* privileges. In this case, therefore, which was a transaction between God and them, and not between them and their *inferiors*, there was no distinction of *governors* and *people*; they were *all*, both *rulers* and *people*, as *creatures*, upon a *level*; and God was not obliged to afford them, as being *governors*, any other evidence than what he thought proper for the rest of the nation, and of *mankind* in *general*. No body can pretend that the *priests* and *rulers* could not have sufficient reason to believe the Resurrection of Christ, without being *eye-witnesses* of it, because then there would be no rational ground for our assent to any fact unless we had seen it. This assertion, sure, is too gross to be offer'd, or admitted, by any one. But if *any* part of the *Jewish* nation, or *mankind* in *general*, might be required to believe the Resurrection of Christ upon the testimony of those who were *eye-witnesses* of it, why not the *priests* and *rulers*, as well as *private* persons, as well as *distant* ages and nations? They might have *sufficient* evidence, without the evidence of *sense*, and it is absurd to say,

(13)

say, that they might *rationally* demand *more* evidence than what was sufficient for a *rational conviction*.

2. And as to any express *promise of God*, that Christ should appear *personally* to the *priests* and *rulers* after his Resurrection, nothing of that kind is to be found in his *word*. God did, indeed, promise that the gospel should *first* be preached to the *Jews*. And in order to *fulfil* his promise, and predictions relating to the life and actions of Christ, *Christ* did appear *publickly* among them, in their *streets* and *market-places*; in the *synagogues*, and in the *temple*; he conversed with them, and explained the scriptures to them; he wrought various and mighty works among them, the truth of which they acknowledged, tho' they denied the Divine power by which they were wrought; but where is there any promise that the *priests* and *rulers* should be *eye-witnesses* of this particular fact? Or how was providence obliged to grant them any such favour? It has been very justly observed, by the author of the *Trial of the Witnesses*, that *Christ's* particular commission to the *Jews* ceased at his death; that they having finally rejected *him*, he took his final leave of *them*,

and

(14)

and declared that they should see him no more, and consequently that he could not appear to them without falsifying his own declarations. But *had* the claim of the *Jews* to *singular* advantages, as being the *peculiar people* of God, still subsisted in the strongest manner, this *national* prerogative did not give the *rulers* in *particular* a right to be *eye-witnesses* of any particular fact, or miracle, relating to their *religion* and *government*: Neither could any *general* promise made to the *Jewish nation* be the foundation of any such claim, because it might be fulfill'd, if the *rulers*, by any means whatsoever, had sufficient evidence of the truth of such facts, whether from the report of their *own senses*, or the credible *testimony* of *private* persons. Their *publick* capacity gave them no *distinction* in this case. Their *authority* over the *people* gave them no claim upon *God*, the absolute Governor of the world. This is a fact that some people were to believe upon the testimony of others, and whether the *rulers* or *private* persons were to be the *witnesses*, was matter of favour, and God was the best judge upon whom to bestow it. So that if we could *not* see any reasons why the *rulers* were disqualified to be

(15)

be witnesses, 'twould be a sufficient answer to say, that they were *not chosen* by God, who is infinitely wise in the choice of his instruments. But we can see the plainest and the strongest reason why they were utterly *unfit* to be witnesses of *Christ's* Resurrection, because they would not have believed the truth of it, if they *had* seen him after he was risen, and then the rest of the world would have wanted a proper evidence of this important truth. And we can add farther, that if they *had* been in a disposition to receive conviction from his *personal* appearance to them, such extraordinary means of conviction could not be granted them, because by the determinate counsel, and declared purpose, of God, they were devoted to destruction for their former infidelity.

But see the unreasonableness and perverseness of these gainfayers! They are continually calling out *priestcraft*, *priestcraft*, and yet are objecting against the methods of establishing Christianity, because they were not enforced by the weight of *authority*, which would have given a much juster occasion for the suspicion of *fraud*. The witnesses were *private*, and *mean*, and *obscure* persons, too *inconsiderable* to be employ'd in an affair

of

(16)

of such moment: Men of *education*, it seems, and *learning*, and *dignity*, and *power*, were much fitter for the purpose. But who sees not that the Apostles were the less likely to *intend* a fraud, and the less able to *execute* it, by reason of the meanness of their education, and the obscurity of their characters; their ignorance of the world, and the arts of address; their poverty and want of power?

3. But 'tis farther objected against the witnesses of *Christ's* Resurrection, that they were his particular *friends*, strongly attached to his cause, and affectionate to his person, for which reason they should have been excepted as *partial* and *prejudiced* persons; but that if the witnesses had been taken out of the number of his *enemies*, whose prejudices and passions ran strong against him, *their* testimony would have had the more weight, because *they* could not be suspected to believe the truth of his Resurrection but upon the clearest evidence, or to testify it but upon the strongest conviction.

I have already observed, that the only proper question in respect to *this* and *all other* religious truths, is, whether we have *sufficient* evidence, and therefore in answer to

I

this

(17)

this objection we need not enquire whether *Christ's enemies*, or *friends*, were the fittest persons to be witnesses of his Resurrection, or whose testimony would be *most satisfactory* to the rest of mankind, but whether the testimony of the *chosen* witnesses be *credible in itself*; yet it may not be improper to observe, that unless the persons appointed to be witnesses had frequently seen *Christ*, and intimately conversed with him in his *lifetime*, as well as *after his Resurrection*, they would have been, in *that respect*, less qualified than his *particular friends*, to testify the truth of the fact, because they would have been less competent judges of the reality of it; and if we suppose *Christ* to have appear'd, after he was risen, to such of his *enemies* as had been thus conversant with him, they must have been witnesses of his *other* miracles. Now, if they were proof against the force of so many, and such great miracles, what reason is there (as I remark'd under a former head of this discourse) to imagine that they would have been converted upon his appearance to them after his Resurrection, without such an *over-ruling* influence as would have destroy'd their *free will*: so that if these *objectors* had been in the direction of this important affair, they

D

in

(18)

in their *abundant* wisdom, would have chosen such witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ as were either incompetent judges of its reality, or not at all likely to believe it themselves: Very fit persons these to set in council with *Omniscience*, and prescribe to their *Maker* in the government of the world! The more we examine into the dispensations of God, the more reason we shall have, not only to acknowledge his *Justice*, but to adore his *Wisdom*, and to be thankful for his *Goodness*. But to quarrel with the evidence for the truth of Christ's Resurrection because it is not exactly such as we could wish it to be, or wantonly imagine that it ought to be: To object against the witnesses because there were not *more* of them, because they were *private* persons, not the *rulers*, because they were chosen from among Christ's *followers* and *friends*, not such as were before *unbelievers* and *enemies*; all this is not *argument*, but *presumption*; not *reasoning*, but *rebellious* against God. No matter what their *number* was, provided it was *sufficient*; no matter *who*, or *what* they were, provided they were *competent judges* of the fact, and *faithful relators* of it. If we indulge our fancy in imagining what *sort* of evidence we should have liked best, and object against

it.

(19)

it only because we think it might have been stronger, and more satisfactory; this objection will hold equally *against any degree* of evidence that is not absolutely *irrefragable*, and subverts *all* religion, *natural*, as well as *revealed*, because it destroys the very notion of a state of *trial* and *probation*, and takes away the foundation of *rewards* and *punishments*; because, upon this principle, we never can be obliged to *believe* any religious truth 'till it is impossible for us to *disbelieve* it. This is the unavoidable consequence of such objections, and it is the avow'd opinion of some of our celebrated *modern reasoners*. I shall instance in one who seems to be so much admired and extolled, that we may well suppose him to speak their sentiments. Mr. *Chubb*, in his *previous question*, speaking about *speculative doctrines*, says, " that God will either so
 " clearly deliver such points, as that there
 " shall be no place for error, or else he will
 " excuse all errors which may arise from
 " them, it being most absurd to suppose,
 " that a wise and good Being should give
 " a revelation in a way in which it is *liable*
 " to be *misunderstood*, and then be displeased
 " with his creatures if they *mistake* his
 " meaning of it, seeing such errors are not,
 " in the nature of the thing, a proper founda-

D 2

" dation

(20)

"dation for repentment." This is a proposition that could not drop *hastily* from a writer, but must be the result of *cool* and *deliberate* thought; and he lays it down gravely as a fundamental point. Now if all errors in *speculative doctrines* be innocent because they are not so *clearly* revealed as to leave *no room* for mistake, then all error in respect to the truth of *revelation in general* must be equally innocent, unless the evidence be *so clear* and *strong* as to exclude all *possibility of being mistaken*, which is the very principle into which all the abovemention'd objections against the Resurrection of Christ must finally be resolved.

But if this argument be conclusive, it renders all errors in *Morality*, as well as in *speculative* points, innocent, and subverts the foundation of *rewards* and *punishments*, because it destroys the notion of a state of *trial* and *probation*, which supposes *room* for *error* and *sin*. See the parallel between the two propositions.

It is absurd and ridiculous in God to be DISPLEASED with us for ERRING, if he has made us LIABLE to error.

It is absurd and ridiculous in God to be DISPLEASED with us for SINNING, if he has made us LIABLE to sin.

Of

(21)

Of the same-kind, and equally destructive, is another popular maxim, which is this; that all *necessary* articles of faith should be so *plain* and *obvious* that the most *illiterate* person without any pains and difficulty, without any instruction or assistance, may understand them. As nothing can be believed without such a degree of evidence as *forces* the assent, so That evidence must appear without the trouble of any search or enquiry; from whence it follows, that we cannot be obliged to give our assent to any truth but what is *self-evident*, and offers itself *casually* to the mind, without any *attention*. For, if we may be obliged to use *any* means of information and conviction, we may be obliged to use *all* the means within our power; and if we cannot be obliged to the use of *all possible* means, 'tis impossible that we can be obliged to the use of *any*. The reasoning is conclusive both backward, and forward. What makes us *accountable* beings is, our *free Will*; if then we may be accountable at all, we may be accountable for *every* thing within our power; whatever we have a *capacity* of doing, God may *oblige* us to do, and *punish* us for the neglect of it. There is as much reason why we may be required to apply to *others* for their instruction in order

(22)

der to understand any religious doctrine, as to apply ourselves to the knowledge of it at all; to enquire and search into the evidence for the truth of any *particular* doctrine of revelation, as of *revelation in general*; of *revelation*, and its *particular* doctrines, as of the truths of *natural religion* and *moral* duties. There is no possibility of maintaining their position without destroying the very notion of *probation*, which implies a power of *doing*, or *neglecting* our duty. Therefore all these questions must at last resolve into this *single one*, *Is it consistent with the known attributes of the Divine nature to put us into a state of trial?* They must answer in the *negative*, or else give up their notions about *irrefragible evidence*, and the *plainness* of all *necessary points*. *Reasonable* evidence, and *proper* means of knowledge, is all that can be demanded by accountable creatures. This is what the adversaries know, and mean; as appears more plainly from their way of *proving* their positions. They argue from the *Goodness* of God. The *stronger*, say they, the evidence for truth, and the more easily we discover and apprehend That evidence, the greater is the *Goodness* of God in granting us such evidence, and a *good Being* will shew *all possible* Goodness to his creatures. But this way

(23)

way of arguing is inconsistent with a state of *trial*; for would not any of us think it *better* with regard to our *own particular happiness*, that God should have put it *out of our power* to make ourselves *miserable*? And if it would have been an act of *greater Goodness*; according to them, a *good Being* must have done it. It will prove farther, that the attribute of Goodness obliged God to create us as *perfect*, and *happy*, as a creature can be; in short, to communicate *all possible* perfection and happiness to as *many* beings as *Omnipotence* could create, and to create them all *eternal*; so that there ought not to be any *difference* between them, either in point of *duration* or *perfection*, which is contrary to what every man knows to be fact. Wild and extravagant as these consequences are, they must follow necessarily if we reason from the attribute of *Goodness*, separately taken; we shall have but a *partial* and *imperfect* notion of it without *wisdom* to *direct* and *regulate*. We cannot argue from what would be good to a *particular* being, Good consider'd *abstractly* and *independently* of other beings, to what is *absolutely good upon the whole* of things; which nothing can judge of but *unlimited* knowledge and wisdom, because nothing but Omniscience can see at
one

(24)

one view *all possible relations* of things, and the *fitnesses* arising from them. But this is fully explain'd and proved in a piece lately publish'd by Mr. Law, in answer to *Christianity as Old as the Creation*.

The consideration of these groundless objections against Christianity naturally suggests to us the wisdom of guarding against the *capitious* temper, the prevailing inclination of the age to start *difficulties* upon all questions. If we give way to this *itch of speculating*, and *objecting*, like an humour of the body that infects the whole mass of blood, 'twill gradually infect the mind with a *sceptical* disposition that never fails of leading men into infidelity. However well grounded the truths of religion are, we may, through pride and other evil dispositions, find room to cavil and object. It is impossible in the nature of things but that there will be *difficulties*, unless our understandings were *infinite*; and while we are subject to *passions* and *prejudices*, men will *make* difficulties where there really are none. We are made liable to error, that there may be room for *virtue*, and the *reward* of it; *finite* and *imperfect*, that we may be *humble* and *modest*. An honest heart and a teachable disposition are the best preservatives against error, not only as they

have

(25)

have the assurance of God's Grace to direct us, but as they put us into the fittest disposition for the reception of truth. A strong understanding, if it relies too much on its own strength, soon begets a *self-sufficiency* that is the most fruitful source of error, the common parent of *infidelity*. *Self-love* betrays men into this *pride* of the understanding. From an inclination to make themselves as *considerable* as they can, they flatter themselves into a persuasion that their *natural faculties* are a *sufficient guide*, without any *farther* help from their Maker. *Revelation* consequently is *false*, because it is *needless*. From *Deism* to *Atheism* the progress is natural, and the way short. And if we observe the *manner* and *style* of their writings we shall see the marks of this *pride* and *self-conceit*; the utmost contempt of *other* people's understanding, and confidence in their *own*; as if the *rest* of the world were *wholly* ignorant, and *they* ignorant of *nothing*; at least *capable* of understanding any thing that they apply themselves to. They talk of the awful and tremendous attributes of the Divine Nature, and the methods of God's government with a vast deal more *familiarity* than would be thought decent if they were speaking of a *minister of state*, and the measures of his con-

E

duct

(26)

duſt. They are as forward to make objections againſt the wiſdom of the *creation*, and of *Providence*, as if they themſelves could have made, or govern'd the world better. From one man to another of a *ſuperior* underſtanding and ſtation their language would be thought, by all ſenſible people, the higheſt *ill manners* and *impudence*; how then ſhall we uſe words ſignificant enough to expreſs the inſolence, and madneſs, and folly of thoſe who preſume to uſe ſuch freedom towards the *ſupreme Being*, whoſe nature is incomprehenſible, and whoſe ways are paſt finding out? We ſhall diſcover a better underſtanding, and more judgment by *distrust*, than by *confidence*; by *modesty*, than *presumption*; becauſe moſt ſuitable to the *nature* and *order* of things. It is a thing fit and proper that an *imperfect* and *limited* underſtanding ſhould look upon itſelf as *fallible*, and that a fallible Being ſhould always be in a ready diſpoſition to hearken with great humility to the *unerring* dictates and conduct of *Omniscience*. A juſt ſenſe of God and ourſelves, awful ſentiments of *his* excellency and perfection, and a low and mean opinion of the weakneſs and defects of *human nature*, this would be the moſt convincing answer to all the cavils of *infidelity*.

FINIS.

THE
CREDIBILITY
OF THE
Resurrection of Chriſt,
UPON THE
TESTIMONY
OF THE
APOSTLES;

BEING

A Sequel to Two Letters in the
WEEKLY MISCELLANY, No 121, 122.
—Upon the *Fitness of the Witnesses*.

By WILLIAM WEBSTER, D.D. Rector
of *Depden*, in the County of *SUFFOLK*.



L O N D O N:

Printed, and are to be Sold by J. WILFORD, in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*. 1735. [Price 6d.]



Coel Thornhille, Esq,

Of DEPDEN-HALL, in the County
of SUFFOLK.

IT is now upwards of
two Years since You
gave me a very kind
and *seasonable* Instance
of Your Friendship, and I take
this first publick Opportunity to
make you the only Return in
my Power, to pay you the
Thanks of a sincerely grateful
Heart. I am well aware that I
run the Hazard of committing
an Offence while I mean to per-
form a Duty ; but, I hope, the
A 2 same

DEDICATION.

fame Generosity which inclin'd You to be my Friend, will allow me to have some Regard to my *own Reputation*, as well as to *Your Temper*. Had Your Kindness been a *Secret*, I would content myself with such an Acknowledgment as would be most agreeable to the Modesty of my Benefactor, with my private Thanks and Prayers ; but as the Benefit could not be concealed from the World, give me leave to say, it would be unreasonable in You to expect that I should be able to satisfy myself without letting the World know that I have a true Sense of my Obligations. But if I were willing to lie under the disgraceful Imputation of *Ingratitude*, which every honest Mind is studious to avoid, I should injure the *Publick* by neglecting this Occasion to propose to their Imitation an
Ex:

DEDICATION.

Example so worthy to be imitated, at a Time when such Examples are so rare. For a Gentleman to give a *Living* unsolicited, and without any dishonourable or disagreeable Conditions ; to confer such a Favour without expecting that the Person obliged should ever after commence a *Slave*, and make his Patron a Compliment of his *Freedom* for having accepted a *Preferment* from him ; to take no Advantage of his *Clerk* by getting any Part of his Estate excus'd from legal Demands, or any Part of those Demands abated ; to support all his rightful Claims in the Parish, and to make the Discharge of his Function more easy and effectual by the Weight of his Power, and the greater Influence of his Example : These, Sir, I fear, are Circumstances rather to be wished for by every
Cler-

D E D I C A T I O N.

Clergyman, than always to be expected; yet this is a Felicity which it is my good Fortune to enjoy, and my Duty, as well as Pleasure, to acknowledge. In one Instance I shall consult Your Inclination, by forbearing to mention your social Virtues, which intitle you to the Love and Esteem of such as have the Happiness of being acquainted with You. But then You must excuse me again if I take the liberty to tell the Avaricious Worldling, and the Crafty Politician, that a Gentleman who has a Mind equal to great Desires, and a Taste capable of enjoying a much larger Estate than you possess, may have Probity enough to despise the fordid Means too often made use of for acquiring Honours, and accumulating Wealth; to assure the young Sparks about Town, that a Gentleman of an
in-

D E D I C A T I O N.

independent Fortune and a good Constitution may make a Conscience of denying himself the criminal Pleasures so much in Fashion. May You always continue to make a true Estimate of human Life, and expect Your Happiness, where every wise Man will find it, from *Religion* and *Virtue*! I am,

S I R,

Your Affectionate and Obliged humble Servant,

WILLIAM WEBSTER.

*April the 19th, 1735.
Canon-Street, London.*

[I]



IN the Year 1731, I publish'd a Piece, entitled, *The Fitness of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of CHRIST*; which, being out of Print, I have lately taken the Opportunity to republish in the *Weekly Miscellany*, in N^o. 121 and 122. And having, I hope, sufficiently confuted some Cavils, which I had met with both in *Print* and *Conversation*, and which I knew had made an Impression on the Minds of several; I thought it might be of some Use to consider the *Credibility* of those Witnesses; that, as there lay no reasonable Objection against hearing their Testimony, so the Testimony which they had given was sufficient to confirm the Truth of that important Fact, in the Opinion of any impartial Judges. The Number of excellent Discourses already publish'd, had hitherto determin'd me not to offer any thing to the Publick on so exhausted a Subject; but more mature Consideration has alter'd my Sentiments. I am fully convinc'd, that new Discourses upon old Subjects may do Good; not only because every Writer will take a different Manner of stating Things, and the same Argument shewn

B ia

[2]

in a different Light may affect different Persons, but because they will fall into different Hands. What I have written, may chance to be read by those who would never have read any thing else upon the Subject; and it is possible that personal Acquaintance may influence others to read it with Favour. Without any other Apology, therefore, I shall now proceed to bring the Argument into as clear a Method, and as short a Compass as I can.

The Persons who were selected by Divine Providence to be the chosen Witnesses of this Fact, were the 12 Apostles only. For, tho' Christ did appear to others, even to 500 at one time, and ascended in the Presence and Sight of 120, yet the Apostles only were appointed to bear publick Testimony to the Truth of Christ's Resurrection.

My Business at this time shall be to enquire into the Sufficiency of the Testimony of the 12 Apostles; for which Purpose I shall,

First, Consider the *Testimony*, or *Evidence* itself, which these Witnesses gave concerning the Fact.

Secondly, Consider the *Credibility* of this Testimony, or Evidence; which will sufficiently appear from the two following Arguments; *viz.* that the Apostles were *competent Judges* of the Fact which they testified, and that they were Men of *Verity* and *Probity*, who would not impose upon the World by reporting a Falshood.

First, I am to consider the *Testimony*, or *Evidence* itself, which these Witnesses gave in relation to the Resurrection of Christ; or, in other Words, to enquire what they testified concern-

1

ing

[3]

ing it, because 'twill be to no Purpose to examine into the *Qualifications* and *Characters* of the Witnesses, 'till we have determin'd whether their Evidence, supposing it to be true, be *full* and *home* to the Point. If they express themselves at all *doubtfully* concerning the *Reality* of the Fact, then the *Evidence itself* is defective, and no Considerations drawn from the Circumstances of the *Witnesses* can render it sufficient to induce a *Credibility*. If they *differ* and *contradict* one another in any Part of their Evidence, this is another Circumstance that will destroy the *Sufficiency* and *Credibility* of it. But if they speak *confidently* concerning the Fact, if their Evidence be *strong* and *full*, and if, farther, they agree in giving the *same*, *concurring*, Testimony, we may proceed regularly to enquire into the *Qualifications* and *Characters* of the Witnesses; whether they were *competent Judges* of the Fact which they testified, and were in themselves *credible* Persons.

That the Apostles asserted the Truth of Christ's Resurrection in the plainest and most positive Manner, we read at the 2d Chap. of the *Acts*. Upon the Day of Pentecost, before a Concourse of all Nations, St. Peter, in the *Presence*, and in the *Name* of the rest of the Apostles, explain'd the Prophecies relating to Christ's Resurrection, shewing from thence, the Necessity of his Rising; and then he declar'd that Christ was actually risen. The *Necessity*, and *Truth* of his Resurrection are both expressly asserted at the 24 Ver. *Whom* (i. e. Jesus) *God has rais'd up, having loosed the Pains of Death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.* Again, at the 32 Ver. he says

B 2

that

[4.]

that *this* JESUS hath God RAISED UP, whereof we ALL, i. e. We, his Apostles, are Witnesses, for by all here must be meant only the Apostles, as appears by the Answer of the People; because the Persons in whose Name St. Peter speaks, must be the same with those to whom the Answer is directed; and we read that the People said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and Brethren, what shall we do? In these express Terms do the Witnesses of Christ's Resurrection declare the Reality of it, without any Doubt or Disagreement among themselves. When we say the Apostles had no Doubt concerning the Reality of Christ's Resurrection, we do not mean that they never distrusted it, but that they were fully satisfied and convinc'd when they appear'd publicly to give their Testimony to the World. If some of them doubted at his first Appearance to them (as the History informs us that they did) if St. Thomas would not believe 'till he had put his Fingers into the Print of the Nails, and thrust his Hand into our Saviour's Side, tho' their slowness of Heart to believe his Resurrection, lessen'd the Merit of their own Faith, for which our Saviour reproached them; it was so far from weakning, that it strengthen'd, their Testimony, because it argued great Unwillingness to believe, or great Caution and Wariness in believing a Fact of such Importance without the clearest Evidence to support it. The greater their Prepossessions, the more, and the longer they doubted, their Conviction carries the greater Weight with it.

So likewise, when we affirm that the Witnesses were agreed in their Evidence, we intend
no

[5]

no more than that they all asserted the Truth of Christ's Resurrection, not that all the Apostles, who have given us the History of it, have related it exactly in the same Order, and Manner, but that none of them contradict one another in any Circumstance.

It has indeed been asserted that the Account, as related by the Apostles, is inconsistent with itself; but when they produce an Instance of any such Inconsistency, 'twill then be time enough to consider it. Hitherto they have been contented with strong, but naked, Assertions, to which as naked a Denial is a sufficient Answer.

Having settled this Point, that the Witnesses of Christ's Resurrection do agree unanimously in testifying that he was certainly risen, we shall proceed to consider the Qualifications of these Witnesses, and the Evidence upon which they themselves believ'd it, as they have set it forth in the History.

As to their Qualifications to judge of the Fact, we need only enquire whether the Apostles were in their Senses, and whether our Saviour gave them the proper Evidence of Sense to prove to them that he was risen.

That the Apostles were capable of bearing, and seeing, and feeling, our Enemies, either in the Wantonness of their prophane Wit, or in the Bitterness of their inveterate Malice, have not ventur'd to deny; and therefore if the Apostles had all fitting Opportunities of conversing with our Saviour, both before, and after, his Resurrection, they were as well qualified to judge of the Fact, as the most learned and judicious could be.

First,

[6]

First, in order to *qualify* the Apostles to *judge* of the Truth of Christ's Resurrection, it was necessary that they should have been well acquainted with the *Person* of Christ while he was *living*. For which Reason, when the Apostles were to *ordain* one to be a Witness in the room of *Judas*, they chose one who had accompanied with them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, from the Baptism of *John* 'till the Ascension of *Christ*, as we read *Acts* i. 21. The Apostles had constantly attended our Saviour thro' the whole Course of his Ministry, so that they were as well acquainted with his *Person*, and as capable of *distinguishing* him from any *other* Person, as it is possible for one Man to be known to be *different* from another; which Circumstance, as it is shews how well *fitted* the *Apostles* were, as to *this Particular*, to be *Witnesses*, it shews likewise how *improper* it would have been for our Saviour to have appear'd *promiscuously* to the *Multitude*, many of whom had never seen him in his Life-time, or perhaps only *transiently*, and at a *Distance*; which would have occasion'd *variety* of Opinions amongst themselves, and have weaken'd the Credit of their Testimony. But when Christ made choice of his *intimate Companions* for his *Witnesses*, there could be no room to doubt whether *they* were proper Judges of the *Sameness* of the Person of Christ; and the Consequence was, that they were all *unanimous* in their *Opinion*, and *unanimous* in their *Evidence*; such *competent Judges* that they could not *differ*, and so strongly convince'd, that nothing could ever influence them to *retract*.

We

[7]

We are next to enquire whether the Apostles had sufficient Opportunities of conversing with Christ *after* his Resurrection, and comparing the Person who *then* appear'd to them with the Person with whom they had *before* been so long and so intimately acquainted.

The Scripture says that he shew'd himself by many *infallible Proofs*; such as *eating* and *drinking*, and *other Actions* of Life; by which he gave as certain Evidence of his being risen again from the Dead, as he had ever given of his being alive. If there be no Certainty at all in the Evidence of the Senses, there is an end of the Argument at once; but if we may depend upon their Report, they testify this Fact as strongly as possible. But to be particular,

First, He appear'd to them *openly* and *fairly*; not as *Apparitions* are usually said to appear, in the *Night*, when the Mind is most subject to Fear, and the Imagination is apt to form Objects to itself, but in the *Day time* and in *full Light*, when the Attention is most awake, and the Senses best able to perform their Offices faithfully.

Secondly, His Appearances were not *transient*, but *continued*, during the Space of 40 Days, 'till his Ascension; not seldom, but *frequent*, and *familiar*; not at a *distance*, but *near*; not to *one* of the Senses, but to *several*. They *saw* him, they *heard* him, they *felt* him. He perform'd the common Actions of Life in their Company; he *eat* and *drank* and *convers'd* with them; they *handled* him with their *Hands*, and *Thomas* was so particular in his Examination of the Object, as to put his Finger into the *Print of the Nails*, and to thrust his Hand into his Side.

He

[8]

He talk'd with them concerning the Kingdom which they were to establish, expounding to them the Scriptures relating to himself, instructing them in the Doctrine which they were to publish after his Death, and giving them Directions for their Conduct: from whence they not only might be certain that he was a *real Person* that had *Flesh and Bones*, but from the Sound of his Voice, the Features of his Face, the Form of his Body, the particular *Marks* in it occasion'd by the *Wounds*, and by the Agreement of his Discourses with what he said to them in his Life-time, they might be assur'd that it was the *same Person*, as much as they could at any time be assur'd that *one Man* is not *another Man*.

Thirdly, Another Circumstance in the *Manner* of his appearing to the Witnesses was this, that he appear'd to them *together*; which must have been more convincing to them, and renders their Testimony more satisfactory to *us*, than if he had appear'd to them *only separately*. Company and Conversation naturally give Courage and Presence of Mind under any Surprise, and made the Apostles more capable of judging of the Reality of those strange Appearances with composure and sedateness. Assembled as they *were*, and encouraged by *one another*, we find them startled and affrighted, but they recollected and recover'd themselves; whereas if they had always been *a-part* when our Saviour appear'd to them, they would have been more terrified and less qualified to make a Judgment. I need only suggest this Observation, because it falls within the Compass of every one's Experience, and the Truth of it is undeniable.

From

[9]

From these continued and frequent and familiar Appearances the Apostles had sufficient Evidence of the Truth of *Christ's Resurrection*; but there is a very extraordinary Point still behind; I mean, the *miraculous Manner* in which he several times appear'd to them.

First, As two of them were going to a Village about threescore Furlongs from *Jerusalem* (*Emmaus*) while they were talking together about what had happen'd; Jesus drew near and went with them, but they knew him not, because *their Eyes were holden*. St. Luke xxiv. 13.

Some have endeavour'd to account for this in a *natural Way*, without resolving it into a *Miracle*; but I think, the plain Letter of the Text; and common Sense, are both against them. If we consider how well acquainted the Apostles were with him, how lately they had seen him, that he had ask'd them Questions concerning himself, which would naturally awaken their Attention; I say, if we consider all these Circumstances, there can be no room to suppose that they should not know him. And the Text says expressly, that their Eyes were holden; *ἐκκείμεναι*, which Word, in the common Acceptation and Use of it in the *New Testament*, signifies *Force and Violence*. And here it must signify some *extraordinary Interposition* of the *Divine Power* superseding and hindring their natural Faculties in their proper Operations, that they might not see him so as to know him, *οὐκ ᾔδειν*. Their Eyes were *holden* and *opened again supernaturally*, as their Understandings were open'd *supernaturally* by the Divine Spirit; that they might understand the Scriptures. And as soon

Ε

[10]

soon as they knew him, immediately, after a Manner quite as extraordinary as his Appearances without being known, he *vanish'd out of their Sight*. In the Original it is, 'Αὐτὸς ἄφαντος ἐγένετο; which indeed, in a strictly literal Sense, signify no more than that he *disappear'd, or ceased to be seen of them*. But if we take the whole Relation together, it is strongly implied that his Disappearance was *surprizing and supernatural*, as well as *sudden*; after the Manner which we call *vanishing*, or disappearing in such a Manner, that they were not able to discern how he went out of their Sight. For let us but observe the Expression; it is not said that he *left* them, or *went away* from them, but that after he had eat Bread with them, immediately, on a sudden, without their perceiving what became of him, or how they lost sight of him, he disappear'd. This I apprehend to be the natural Construction of the Place, and the whole Affair to be *miraculous*. Neither do I see any sort of Reason why any Christians should put their Invention to the trouble of explaining away the *Miracle*, where a Miracle might naturally be expected, or at least prove greatly serviceable to the *Conviction* of the Apostles.

But there is a Writer, who, I doubt with a very bad Design, has given a very bad Account of this Passage. I shall transcribe it at length, tho' it be tedious, that it may appear fairly, as it is*.

"Christ's personal Appearance, after his Resurrection, was so different from what it was before his Death, that his Friends and most intimate Acquaintance did not know him; which renders the

* Four Tracts by Thomas Chubb, p. 63.

[11]

"the Evidence for a Resurrection with respect to Christ, less certain, because this Circumstance gives Occasion for *doubting* whether the Person, who was said to be risen from the Dead, was the very same Person who had been crucified. Again, Christ's personal Appearance after his Resurrection, is represented to be different at different times. Thus, Mark xvj. 12. After that he appear'd in another Form to two of them, as they walked and went into the Country. This Circumstance likewise renders the Evidence of Christ's Resurrection less certain, because to Appearance it was not always the same Person who appear'd to them. Again, it looks (according to the Representation given of this Matter in the History) as if the Senses of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ were (at sometimes at least) over-ruled and misled by some Foreign Power. Thus Luke xxiv. 16. But their Eyes were held that they should not know him. Again, at Ver. 31. And their Eyes were open'd, and they knew him, and he vanish'd out of their Sight. Now if such Power was us'd by some Foreign Agent upon this Occasion, as here seems to be intimated, then all Evidence arising from Sense in such a Case must be doubtful and uncertain. For, in a Case, in which the Evidence arises wholly from Sense, the Senses ought, in Reason and Equity, to be left perfectly free; and it will have the Appearance of Unfairness for a Foreign Agent to interpose and mislead the Senses either Way: and if this be known to be the Case in one Instance, it will render all Instances, which relate to the same Fact, the more doubtful and uncertain."

C 2

If

[12]

" If it should be said, that Christ, after his Resurrection, shew'd to *Thomas* and the rest of his Disciples the *Holes* (or *Scars*) which the Nails had made in his Hands, and which the Spear had made in his Side, at the Time of his Crucifixion, and this was an evident Proof, that the Person, who appear'd to them, was that very same Person who had before been crucified."

" To this it may be answer'd, That if those very Scars remain'd upon Christ's Body after his Resurrection, which the Spear and Nails had made at the Time of his Death; then it may fairly be presum'd, that the same Countenance remain'd with him also. And yet there is not any thing more clear from the History than this, *viz.* that Christ's Countenance and personal Appearance after his Resurrection, was so very different from what it was before his Death, that those who were most intimately acquainted with him, did not know him. And if we admit the Supposition, that the Senses of the Disciples were misled by some foreign Agent, with respect to Christ's Countenance and personal Appearance, and that that was the Cause his Disciples did not know him, and then their Senses might likewise be misled with respect to the Scars which appear'd upon his Body; and consequently, those Disciples were not proper Evidences with respect to either. For, if the Senses of those Evidences were so far over-ruled, as that the Person, whose Resurrection they bear Testimony to, appear'd with a Countenance, after his Resurrection, different from what he did before his Death;

[13]

" Death; and if he appear'd with different Forms at different Times; and if he was visible at one Moment of Time, and then disappear'd and became invisible the next; then surely all Evidence arising from *Sense* in such a Case must be very doubtful and uncertain." If the Reader is not tir'd with reading this confus'd Jumble of Things, I am sure I am weary of transcribing; and it is very hard, that any Circumstances should make it necessary to employ one's Time so disagreeably as in answering it.

This Writer is singularly unfortunate in stating his Notion, as well as in making wrong Deductions. This very Fact he states differently, without seeming to know the Difference. At one Time he supposes the same Appearance of Christ to be owing to an Alteration in the Object; at another, to an Alteration in the Organs. Now, the Disciples did not know him because their Eyes were held, that is, over-ruled by a foreign Agent. By and by, it is because the Countenance and Person of Christ were not the same at his Death, and after his Resurrection. One would think the Writer's Faculties were over-ruled by some foreign Agent, or he might see such gross Contradictions. But if he will be contented with any one Account of this Appearance, he is welcome to take which he likes best, but both cannot be true. The Objection will be the same; and therefore let us see how far it destroys, as he asserts that it does, the Evidence of *Sense*.

But as this Writer has divided his Objection into different Parts, we must be contented to follow him in his own Way, and the Whole will

[14]

will be contain'd in these two, tho' he has branch'd it out into *fourthly*. The Objection then may be consider'd in these two Respects:

First, That our Saviour, according to the Gospel History of it, appear'd *differently* to the Disciples *before his Death*, and *after his Resurrection*:

Secondly, That he appear'd to *them after his Resurrection* in different Forms at different Times.

First, That our Saviour appear'd, according to the Gospel History of it, *differently* to the Disciples *before his Death*, and *after his Resurrection*; which he grounds upon this miraculous Appearance to two of the Disciples, in their Way to *Emmaus*, in so *different a Form* that they did not know him. This was his first Appearance after his Resurrection to these two Disciples; and it being in a *different Form* from what he had appear'd to them in before his Death, it made them *incompetent Judges* whether he were the *same Person*.

In answer to this Objection I must observe, that it affects only these two Disciples, leaving, as to this particular Fact, the rest of the Disciples sufficiently qualified to judge of the *Sameness* of Person. But the principal Thing to be observed is this; that he has not (as indeed he seldom does) stated the Case fairly. Let the *Form*, in which he appear'd at *this Time*, be ever so *different* from what he appear'd in before his Death, it does not follow from this Appearance but that he might have appear'd at other Times, to these two Disciples in the very *same Form* in which he had appear'd in his *Life-time*: Neither does this Writer him-

self

[15]

self deny it. But what then becomes of this Argument? For, tho' the Form in which he now appear'd might be *different*, yet if he afterwards appear'd in the *same*, they might have Reason to believe the Resurrection, notwithstanding this Objection, as it is here laid. Therefore we must come to the other Part of the Objection, where the whole Strength of it lies; *viz.*

That he appear'd *after his Resurrection*, at *different Times* in *different Forms*; from whence he argues that the Evidence for the Truth of *Christ's* Resurrection, as arising in this Case from the *Evidence of Sense*, must be render'd *uncertain*.

The Fact we allow in the very Instance before us. For, whether the different Appearance were owing to the Difference of *Person*, or to their different *Manner of seeing*, the Effect certainly was, a *different Appearance*; so different, that they did *not know him*. But then we deny his Consequence, *viz.* that this destroy'd the *Evidence of Sense*. The Inference which the Apostles drew from it had a great deal more Sense in it, for they resolv'd their not knowing him at first, into the miraculous Interposition of a Divine Power; or, as Mr. *Chubb* affects to express himself, into the Influence of a *foreign Agent*: And how will it follow that the *Senses* are not to be credited, when left to their *natural Operations*, because God *can over-rule* them; or that we never can tell when they do perform their natural Operations, because he *does sometimes over-rule* them? Apply this Argument to *natural Causes*, and see what a ridiculous Figure it makes. We find often, by Experience, that

without

[16]

without a *Miracle*, without the Influence of a *foreign Power*, the Senses represent Things otherwise than they are in *Nature*, and yet never bring a Discredit upon their Testimony, because we can account for it. Under a *Distemper* Objects appear in a false Form to the Eye, and give a false Taste to the Palate; but did ever any Man in his Wits argue from hence that the *Eyes* and the *Palate* can never be safely credited? It is sufficient to their Reputation and Credit, if in their *natural State* they have always been found to make a true Report, and we have any Way of judging when they are in their natural State, and when they are out of Order. So with regard to the *Divine Power* over-ruling them, if we can any way tell when they operate naturally, and when Effects are produced regularly according to the stated Course, particular Interpositions introduce no *Uncertainty*. Thus in the Case before us. At first the two Disciples did not know Christ, because their *Eyes were holden* supernaturally; afterwards he appear'd *plainly* to them in *the very same Form* in which he had appear'd to them in his Life-time. They had as much Reason to believe their Senses *after* his Resurrection as they had *before*, because they had as much Reason to believe that they were not *out of their Senses* for ~~20~~ Days together (for so long Time he abode with them, and conversed intimately with them) as during the three Years of his Ministry before his Crucifixion. The *Certainty* of their *Senses* had been sufficiently establish'd by the constant and universal Experience of Mankind; and in the Course of so long, so frequent, and so intimate a Converse as they had with him during his 40 Days abode with them on Earth, he gave them sufficient Opportunity of being assured that they

[17]

they had as due an Use of their Senses for that Course of Time, as in any other Part of their Life; consequently, as no Man calls in question the *general Truth* of their Testimony, notwithstanding their Misrepresentation of Objects in *particular Cases*, by means of some Disorder that interrupts their *natural Operations*; so the Disciples had no Reason to disbelieve their Senses constantly attesting the Truth of *Christ's Resurrection*, during so long an Intimacy with the Object, though God, in this Appearance to two of them; interpos'd to prevent their usual Operations. Let the Reader, for his better Satisfaction, imagine himself in the Circumstances of these two Disciples; that they were in Company with our Saviour for some Time, and conversing with him, without knowing either his Voice or his Person; that at the same Meeting, before he parted from them, he appear'd to them *plainly* in the *same Form* in which he appear'd to them *before his Death*; that he *continued* frequently, in the plainest and most familiar Way, to appear in the *same Form* upon other Occasions, not only to *them*, but to the *rest* of the Disciples in Company with them, giving them all the Proof of *Reality* which our Senses are capable of. What now would be the natural Judgment of his Understanding in this Case? Surely not, that there is no *Certainty* in the *Senses*, but that the *Author* of them had in this Instance over-ruled their *natural Operations*: And this Judgment he would the more readily make, if he were as well acquainted, as they had been in our Saviour's Life-time, with the Divine Power interposing and interrupting the Course
D of

[18]

of Nature. Could it be any great Surprize to them that *he* should here *over-rule* the Faculty of seeing, who had *restored* Sight to so many Persons by the Word of his Power? They had been *accustom'd* to such miraculous Effects, and could not be at a Loss how to interpret this delusive Appearance. And therefore the Disciples were not, properly, *mised*, as Mr. Chubb expresses it; because, tho' there was a *Deception* in the *first* Appearance, yet as they had afterwards such satisfactory Evidence of the *Sameness* of Person as might in Reason convince them that their not knowing him at first was *miraculous*, it would have been their own Fault if they had not seen the *Divine Influence* over-ruling their Senses in *that particular Case*, and believed their Testimony in all the other Instances where they agreed to make the same Report. In short, this Instance proves nothing but a *Miracle*, and I am not able to see how a Miracle makes the Truth of the Fact less credible. What then can this Author mean by accusing his Maker of *Unfairness* in *over-ruling* the Senses of the Disciples, when such an Interposition was a strong Argument of the Truth of *Christ's* Resurrection? It seems, the *Senses*, in a Case depending upon their Evidence, ought in Equity to be left *free*. They were so; they were left so much to their *natural Operations*, as sufficiently to establish their *Certainty*; which being once established, the *supernatural Restraint* in *particular* Instances only shews that the *Author of Nature* interpos'd to manifest his own Power, and give a Sanction to our Saviour.

The

[19]

The next Instance of *Christ's* *miraculous* Appearance to the Disciples after his Resurrection we find at the 20th Chapter of St. *John*, and the 19th Verse. "Then the same Day at Even, being the first Day of the Week, *when the Doors were shut* where the Disciples were assembled for fear of the *Jews*, came Jesus and stood in the *midst*, and saith unto them, *Peace be unto you*; and when he had so said, he shewed unto them his Hands and his Side, &c." St. *Thomas* not being with the rest at this Meeting, and not believing their Report of *Christ's* Appearance to them. "After eight Days, again his Disciples were within, and *Thomas* within; then came Jesus, *the Doors being shut*, and stood in the *midst*, and said, *Peace be unto you*. Then said he to *Thomas* (who had declared that he would not believe without such *particular Evidence*) reach hither thy Finger and behold my Hands; and reach hither thy Hand and thrust it into my Side, &c." This Appearance, in the *Manner* of it, was *miraculous*, and the *Manner* is plainly expressed. The Text says, that when the *Doors were shut* (made fast with Locks or Bars, because it was to secure themselves against the *Jews* breaking in upon them) Jesus stood in the *midst* of them. Now, it could not be the Intention of the Historian to be so particular in the relation of both Meetings, for the sake of mentioning the Circumstance of the *Doors being shut*, because it could signify nothing to the World. But it becomes a very significant Circumstance when we consider it as expressing the *extraordinary Manner* of *Christ's* coming among them. When they were assembled together

D 2

ther

[20]

ther, and the Doors of the Room made fast, Jesus conveyed himself into the Room, and stood in the midst of them, without their perceiving how, or when he came in. The first that they saw or heard of him was, his standing in the midst of them; which could not have been in a natural Way. How this miraculous Effect was produc'd the History does not mention, but most likely it was, as in the other Instance, by over-ruling the Senses of the Disciples. But yet, tho' their Senses were over-rul'd in this Instance, our Saviour immediately appeals to their Senses as an Evidence of the reality of his Appearance, and the Sameness of his Person. For, the Certainty of the Senses is built upon a Foundation no less sure than the moral Attributes of God; and God in every Miracle appeals to the Evidence of Sense. Even in this Case, when the Senses were over-ruled, the Certainty of their Evidence, when acting naturally, is suppos'd and appeal'd to. This Miracle supposes it naturally impossible that our Saviour could have convey'd himself as he did amongst them, without their perceiving it; and from thence, from his being able to over-rule NATURE, and the establish'd Course of Things, it followed, that it was our Saviour; That Divine Person whom they had so often in his Life-time seen performing such miraculous, such supernatural Works. But unless there be such an established Order of Things, sufficiently known to the World; and unless we can argue from the moral Attributes of the Divine Nature, that God will not suffer us to be deceiv'd in the regular Operation of natural Causes; it is impossible for Men to know when God

[21]

God works a Miracle, i. e. when he over-rules Nature. But such an establish'd Order, sufficiently known to Mankind; and the moral Attributes of God, being once suppos'd, it is an easy Matter to distinguish NATURAL from SUPERNATURAL Effects. Miracles therefore do not destroy, but suppose the Certainty of the Evidence of our Senses. But the Intention of all this idle Cavilling is, to destroy the very Notion of Miracles, because Miracles destroy their deistical Scheme.

At the 21st Chap. of St. John, ver. 1. There is a particular Narration of another miraculous Appearance to the Disciples. "After these Things Jesus shewed himself again to the Disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas, called Didymus, and Nathaniel, of Cana in Galilee, and the Sons of Zebedee, and two other of his Disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a Fishing. They say unto him, we also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a Ship immediately; and that Night they caught nothing. But when the Morning was now come, Jesus stood on the Shore, but the Disciples knew him not. Then Jesus said unto them, Children, have ye any Meat? They answered him, no. And he said unto them, cast the Net on the right Side of the Ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the Multitude of Fishes. Therefore that Disciple whom Jesus lov'd saith unto Peter, it is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that

[22]

“ that it was the Lord, he girt his Fishers
 “ Coat about him, and cast himself into the
 “ Sea. And the other Disciples came in a little
 “ Ship, dragging the Net with Fishes. As soon
 “ then as they were come to Land, they see a
 “ Fire of Coals there, and Fish laid thereon,
 “ and Bread. Jesus saith unto him, bring of
 “ the Fish which ye have now caught. *Simon*
 “ *Peter* went up, and drew the Net to Land
 “ full of great Fishes; and for all they were so
 “ many, yet was not the Net broken. Jesus
 “ saith unto them, come and dine. And none
 “ of the Disciples durst ask him, who art thou,
 “ knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then
 “ cometh and taketh Bread, and giveth them,
 “ and Fish likewise. This is the *third* Time
 “ that Jesus shewed himself to the Disciples after
 “ he was risen from the Dead.” Then he held
 a long Conversation with *Simon Peter*. But the
 two Circumstances, for the Sake of which I
 mention this Appearance, are, 1st, That after
 they had toiled all Night for nothing, he directed
 them to let down the Net into a particular Place
 in the Sea, where they caught a great Number
 of Fishes; upon which *St. John* immediately
 concluded (tho’ they did not know him before)
 from his *Miraculous* Direction, that it was the
 Lord. 2dly, That the Net was not, *of it self*,
 strong enough to bear so great a Weight; for,
 the History particularly takes Notice of that
 Circumstance, that *for all there were so many, yet*
was not the Net broken. But

While the Disciples were attending to his last
 Charge to them, and beheld him, (*Acts* 1st Ch.
 Ver. 9.) “ He was taken up, and a Cloud re-
 “ ceived

[23]

“ ceived him out of their Sight; and while
 “ they looked stedfastly up to Heaven, two
 “ Men stood by them in white Apparel; which
 “ also said, ye Men of *Galilee*, why stand ye
 “ gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus
 “ which is taken from you into Heaven, shall
 “ so come in like manner, as ye have seen go
 “ into Heaven.” This, as it was the last, so was
 it the most astonishing Appearance of all; and
 as the Miracles which God afterwards wrought
 in Confirmation of their *Testimony*, as *Witnesses*,
 proved to *others* the Truth of their Evidence, so
 these *miraculous* Appearances of Christ to them
 were the strongest Argument to convince *them*
 that they *themselves* were not *deceived*, in respect
 to the reality of his Resurrection. For, when
 they saw the same *Divine Power* accompanying
 him *after his Resurrection*, which constantly at-
 tended him *before his Death*, it was an *infallible*
 Proof of his being the *same Divine Person*.

Thus I have laid together, in as short a Com-
 pass, and in as natural an Order as I could, the
 Testimony of the Twelve Apostles, concerning
 the Truth of Christ’s Resurrection; and shewn,
 that they did in the most positive manner assert
 it; that they were Persons the most properly
 qualified to judge of the Matter of Fact, which
 they attested; and that they had the fullest Evi-
 dence, both *natural*, and *supernatural*, for their
 own Conviction.

Having heard the *Evidence* which these Wit-
 nesses gave concerning Christ’s Resurrection,
 we are next to consider their *Credit*. If their
Characters be as unexceptionable as their *Account*
 is fair and full, their *Testimony* is indisputable.
 And

[24]

And what can carry a greater Appearance of Truth than their Manner of relating Things? It is *plain* and *ingenuous*; without any of those Artifices and Disguises which are practised by designing Men; a naked unimbellish'd Narration. They relate Things as they happen'd, without considering whether they were likely to beget, or to hinder the Belief of others. They were guilty of Weaknesses, which they have not concealed. Their Master reproached them, and his Reproaches are recorded. They were terrified and affrighted, and they owned their Fears. They doubted, and their Doubts are made part of the History. Their Temper, their Conversation and Carriage were of a piece with their Story; simple and unaffected; void of Art, of Avarice, and Ambition. Neither their Education nor Abilities were likely to put them upon any Attempt to deceive Mankind for their own Advantage. There is not any one Circumstance in their History which gives the least Occasion to suspect them of any dishonest Intention; neither was there any Thing in the Fact which they testified, that would reasonably be supposed to induce them to contrive such a Cheat. They testified a Truth, in the Opinion of the World, *ridiculous* and *absurd*; for which they were sure to have their *Persons* persecuted while living, and their *Names* loaded with satirical Reproaches when dead. An Intention therefore of *Fraud*, in this Case, is so utterly groundless; whether we consider the Characters of the Witnesses, the Manner of their Evidence, or the Nature of the Truth attested, that any Man who should suppose it in any other Instance but that

[25]

that of *Religion*, would be laugh'd at for his impertinent Folly. But, there is another Circumstance which renders such a Supposition still more ridiculous and absurd.

For, if the Apostles were in a *Confederacy* to impose upon Mankind, the Design must have been form'd *before the Death of Christ*, and then let any one judge what an Absurdity will follow. The *Disciples themselves*, who are here suppos'd to have concerted this fraudulent Scheme, had no Notion of the *Resurrection* of their Master before he suffer'd, nor of his *Sufferings* and *Death* 'till he was apprehended and carried to his Trial; upon which they all in great Confusion *forsook him and fled*. When he gave them warning of his approaching Fate, the Answer was; *THAT be far from thee Lord!* And after his *Crucifixion* they as little thought of his rising again, 'till he was actually risen, and explained to them the *Prophecies* relating to his *Death* and *Resurrection*; insomuch that when the News was brought them of their Master's being risen, they look'd upon it *as an idle Tale, and believ'd it not*. This is expressly asserted at the 16th Chapter of St. Mark, Ver. 9. " Now when Jesus was risen early, the first Day of the Week, he appear'd to Mary Magdalene, and she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believ'd not. After that he appear'd to two of them, as they walked and went into the Country (to Emmaus) and they went and told the Residue, neither believ'd they them. After that he appear'd to the Eleven (to all the Apostles together) and

E

" up-

[26]

“ upbraided them with their Unbelief, and Hardness of Heart, because they believ’d not them “ which had seen him after he was risen.” From which last Words it is plain that the Persons to whom *Mary Magdalene* and the other two carried the News, were the *Apostles*, because our Saviour blames the *Apostles* for not believing the Report. From hence also appears the Groundlessness of the Criticism of a celebrated Commentator on this Passage, viz. That tho’ the plural Number be here us’d, yet only *St. Thomas* may be meant when our Saviour is said to upbraid *them*. He might with equal Reason imagine that our Saviour appear’d only to *St. Thomas*, or that the News was told only to *him*; for all that heard the Report, and saw our Saviour, are said to *disbelieve*.

The last and greatest Proof that the Witnesses gave, or that could be given, of their *Honesty*, was their *dying* for the Truth which they testified. This ought to remove all Suspicion of their testifying a *Falsehood*, because there never was any Instance of a Man’s *dying* for a *false Fact*, especially a Fact that would bring Disgrace upon their *Persons* and *Memory*, tho’ some have died for a *false Opinion* and *false Glory*. Upon the Whole, the Truth of the Resurrection of Christ is as credible upon the Testimony of his *Disciples*, as *human* Testimony can render any Fact. But as this was a Fact of such infinite Importance to Mankind, God was pleas’d to afford the World stronger Evidence than we have for the Truth of any historical Fact relating only to this Life; for, he empower’d those *Witnesses* to work *Miracles* in Confirmation of it; which is the

[27]

the strongest Evidence that we can have for the Truth of any thing. There is no Occasion to enumerate the various Miracles which they wrought, and empower’d others to work, since no one, who owns the Genuineness of the History contain’d in the New Testament, can possibly deny that before his *Ascension* he promis’d the Apostles this Power, and afterwards fulfill’d it; or that the Apostles publicly exercis’d this Power. But I shall cite one Miracle of the most publick Nature, and the least liable to be disputed. The Account of it we have at the 2d Chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles*, Ver. 1. “ When “ the Day of Pentecost was fully come, they “ were all with one Accord in one Place: And “ suddenly there came a Sound from Heaven, as “ of a rushing mighty Wind, and it fill’d all “ the House where they were sitting. And “ there appear’d unto them cloven Tongues, “ like as of Fire, and it sat upon each of them. “ And they were all fill’d with the Holy Ghost, “ and began to speak with other Tongues as “ the Spirit gave them Utterance. And there “ were dwelling at *Jerusalem* Jews, devout Men, “ out of every Nation under Heaven. Now “ when this was nois’d Abroad, the *Multitude* “ came together, and were confounded because “ that every Man heard them speak in his own “ Language. And they were all amazed and “ marvelled, saying one to another, behold, “ are not all these which speak *Galileans*, and “ how hear we every Man in our *own* Tongue “ wherein we were born!” Then follows an Enumeration of 17 different Nations, whose Languages the Apostles spoke, tho’ they were

E 2

illi-

[28]

illiterate Persons, who never had the Opportunity of acquiring Languages in the ordinary Way. Here cou'd be no possible Room for Imposition and Cheat. The *human* Means of acquiring the Knowledge of a foreign Language, is obvious and indisputable. The Education of the Apostles, and their Incapacity to speak so many Languages without a *supernatural* Assistance was as notorious, which occasion'd so much Astonishment in the *Multitude*: And therefore the Consequence is unavoidable, that God confirm'd the Truth of their Evidence by conferring upon them such *supernatural* Powers that their Testimony might gain Credit, and convert Infidels to the Belief of Christianity. But then, how impertinent is it to object against the Testimony of the *Apostles* on account of their *Number*, their *Station*, their *Circumstances*; when this *divine* Attestation so undeniably supplied any Defect, which they, in their *self Conceit*, may be inclin'd to think there was in the *personal Characters* of the Witnesses? *Miracles*, our Adversaries themselves being Judges, are a Proof of a Divine Power and Mission. Says that most inveterate Adversary, *Woolston*; If God did raise up Christ from the Dead, no Doubt Christ was the Messiah, because it is absurd to suppose that a God of Truth wou'd set his Seal to a Falseness. Now, if the Power of speaking so many Languages without learning them be *truly miraculous*, as it must be allowed to be, a *Miracle* is as much a *Miracle*, and as strong a Proof of Truth, when wrought in Confirmation of the Testimony of 12, as of 12,000 Persons; of private Persons, as of Rulers; of Friends,

as

[29]

as of *Enemies*. They must, therefore, retract their Concession in respect to the Force of *Miracles* when wrought in Confirmation of any Truth, or deny the *Credibility* of all History; for otherwise they will be oblig'd to give their Assent to the Truth of *Christ's* Resurrection upon the Evidence of the Apostles; or rather upon the Testimony of God himself.

If it be objected that this is proving *one Miracle* by *another*, the Reader should observe that I am not now arguing from the Resurrection of *Christ*, consider'd as a *Miracle*, but only proving the Truth of the *Fact*. *Christ's raising himself from the Dead* is, no doubt, as great a *Miracle* as ever was wrought, but the *Greatness* of the *Miracle* does not prove the *Truth* of the *Fact*, tho' it be a Proof of the *Truth* of *Christianity* when the *Fact* itself is prov'd: And surely the mighty Works which God enabled the *Witnesses* of *that Fact* to perform in Confirmation of it, gives a Sanction to their Evidence, and makes the Thing testified more *certain* than it could have been, if resting only on *human* Testimony. To assert the Contrary, is to say, that the Testimony of *Men* is equal to the Testimony of *God*, and demands an equal Assent.

As to the Force of *Miracles* no one can deny that they are a *Divine Attestation* given to the Credit of the Person who performs them, without denying the *moral* Attributes of *God*, and the *Possibility* of an *external Revelation* of his Will to Mankind. For, since *Miracles* (under which Character I include *Prophecies*) are the only Proof that one Man can give another of his having a *Divine Commission*, unless we can be certain that

God

[30]

God will not suffer us *necessarily* to be impos'd upon by *Miracles* wrought in Support of an *Impositor*, 'tis impossible for us to give a *rational Assent* to the Truth of any Revelation, because we can have no *certain Criterion* by which we may distinguish *false* Prophets and Apostles from *true* ones. For which Reason I do not remember to have met with any Infidels who deny the Argument drawn from *Miracles*, supposing such to be really wrought; but many of them, as far as I am able to collect their Opinions from their Writings, seem to deny the *Possibility of Miracles*, which answers their Purpose as well. This Objection strikes at the Foundation of our Religion; and therefore, tho' it does not concern our present Subject *particularly*, yet as it effects the *Resurrection of Christ* in common with all other Parts of *Christianity*, it ought to be consider'd. I shall therefore enquire what is the true Notion of a *Miracle*, and how it becomes a Proof of any Truth.

A *Miracle* has by some Writers been defin'd to be a *Work which none but God can perform*. But this Definition would render the Argument drawn from Miracles, if not uncertain in itself, yet liable to much Cavil, and less effectual towards Conviction. For since we know not the *Extent* of all *created Powers*, there would always be Room for this captious Question, How can we tell whether any particular Work, pretended to be *miraculous*, be out of the Reach of any *created Being* to perform, since there are *created Beings* so vastly Superior in Power to any that we are acquainted with? A *Miracle* then I would rather define thus: *A Work which no Being, that*

WE

[31]

WE ARE ACQUAINTED WITH *can perform*: Or, which is the same thing, a *Work that is out of the STATED Order of Things known to Us*. And such a Work would answer all the Purposes of a *Miracle*, whether it were, or were not, beyond the Extent of all *created Powers* to perform. For, if any Work be perform'd, in Confirmation of any *religious Truth*, which is out of the *stated Order of Things that we are acquainted with*, we may be assur'd that such a Work is perform'd by *God himself*, or by *his Permission*, since otherwise we are liable to be impos'd upon *necessarily*, in an Affair relating to the *Honour of God*, and the *Good of his Creatures*. We have no Way to convince any Man that we have a Commission to reveal the *Will of God* to him, but by some *extraordinary external Action*, that shall be a *Seal* of the Truth of his Pretensions; in consequence of which it follows, that God will not permit any superior invisible Being to supersede that *established Course* of second Causes which we are acquainted with, in Confirmation of a *Falshood*, since such a Permission would *necessarily* mislead us, and put it out of our Power to distinguish a *true Revelation* from a *Counterfeit*. Supposing then such an *extraordinary Work* might be within the Power of a superior invisible *Creature* to perform, we know, from the *natural Attributes* of God, that he *can* restrain the Power of all his *Creatures*, and from his *moral Attributes* that he *will* do it in this Instance, to prevent a Cheat dishonourable to himself, and injurious to us.

The

[32]

The *established* Order of things, *known* to us, being the *Criterion* by which we are to judge of *miraculous* Works, let us inquire whether such Works as these be *possible* in the nature of things.

If it be impossible to suppose that the *known establish'd* Order of Things should be interrupted, the Impossibility must arise from the *natural*, or *moral* Attributes of God; *i.e.* It must be out of his Power to *alter* that Order of Things which he himself appointed, and that when he gave things their Existence and Properties, he made them all *Independent* of himself; or else, though he may have a *physical* Power to do it, that it is inconsistent with the Perfections of his Nature to make use of his Power to interrupt the Course of second Causes. That the Author of Nature should not have Power to controul his own Creatures, is too great an Absurdity for any Man in his Wits to maintain. Therefore let us see, 2dly,

Whether, though God must have a *physical* Power of doing it, it be consistent with his *moral Perfections* to exercise that Power. If it be not, the Inconsistency must respect either *himself*, or *us*. If it respects *himself*, it must be because it would argue *Mutability* in God to *change* that Course of things which he himself appointed. But in order to prove this to be any Instance of *Mutability* in the Divine Nature, they must shew one of these two things; either that God, at the Creation, when he appointed this Order of second Causes, made a *Declaration* to his Creatures, or a *Resolution* within himself, that he would never interpolate to disturb it. If there be any such *Declaration* to
be

[33]

be found, why is it not produced? As to any *Resolution* within the Divine Mind, it is Nonsense to talk of what must be *unknown* to us. If neither any *Declaration* can be produced, nor any secret *Resolution* discover'd, there can be no other Way of proving that our Omniscient Creator, when he first *establish'd* this Order of Things for the *general* Course of his Government of the World, did not intend, on certain *extraordinary* Occasions, to depart from his *general* Method, for the greater Manifestation of his own Glory, and the Good of his Creatures. This Conduct, I say, for any thing that appears, may be necessary for the Accomplishment of those wise and benevolent Dispensations which from all Eternity he had *unalterably* form'd in his infinite Mind. There is, indeed, in this Method of Government, a *Variation* with regard to the *Manifestation* of it to his *Creatures*, but no *Deviation* from his own *immutable* and *external* Purposes. He acts as he always intended to do.

If the Absurdity of God's *varying*, on particular Occasions, from his *general* Method of Government respects *us*; it is, it seems, because such a Variation would leave us in perpetual *Doubts* and *Uncertainties*. As to what? If they mean with Regard to God's *particular Reasons* of acting after such a Manner, it may be true, but nothing to the Purpose. If they mean that this wou'd render the Belief of a *Providence* doubtful, or make it impossible for us to distinguish the *general* Course of his Government from his *extraordinary Interpositions*, the Objection confutes itself. For, if there be a *known, establish'd* Order, it must, in the Nature of Things,
F di

[34]

distinguish *itself* from any *Variations* from it; as such extraordinary *Variations* from the *known, establish'd* Order must (if we can prove his *moral* Perfections) shew the *immediate Interposition* of the Universal Governour.

I should not insist on such Objections as these, if Men who set up themselves, and one another, for profound Reasoners, did not urge them; and if I had not, myself, met with Instances of such *formal Trifles*, I could scarce have believ'd it possible that there should be any such amongst *pretended Philosophers*.

And now that I am upon the Subject of *Miracles*, I shall mention another Position of theirs, which they seem to advance with great Consolation, and an Air of Triumph. Their Intention in advancing it is obvious, but how it can answer their Intention, is to *me*, as yet, a Secret. The Position is this; *That Miracles are a Proof of nothing but mere Power*. What is this to the Truth of *Revelation*, as *prov'd by Miracles*? For, how do we urge the Argument from *Miracles* in Proof of *Revelation*? Not by *proving from them* the *moral*, or even the *natural* Attributes of God. We are suppos'd *antecedently* to have prov'd, from *Reason*, the *Being* and *Attributes* of the Divine Nature; and these Attributes being suppos'd, we infer from *thence*, that such Works, when wrought by one who pretends to work them in the *Name* of God, must be perform'd by his *immediate*, or *mediate* Assistance; that they could not have been wrought without such Assistance; or, at least, if it *were* within the *natural* Powers of any invisible, created Being to perform them, that God wou'd not have
per:

[35]

permitted it on such Occasions; because such *extraordinary Works*, out of the *established* Order of second Causes, *known to us*, must necessarily deceive us in a Matter of the last Consequence. In short, we do not prove from *Miracles* the *Power*, the *Wisdom*, the *Goodness*, &c. of God; but from his *Power*, *Wisdom*, *Goodness*, &c. we prove that *Miracles* are wrought by *him*, or by his *Commission*; from whence we infer the Truth of any Doctrine or Fact, in Confirmation of which they are wrought, it being absurd to suppose that a Being of infinite Perfections should set his Seal to a *Falshood*.

To what has been offer'd in Proof of *Christ's* Resurrection, from the Evidence given us in the *New Testament*, I do not see any other Answer that can be made, but denying the Truth of the *History*. But this is not properly *answering* the *Arguments*, but *destroying* the *Question* under Consideration; which supposes and takes for granted the *Genuineness of the Records* from whence we produce our Evidence, and enquires whether that Evidence be sufficient to induce a rational Assent. Neither can they offer to dispute the Authentickness of the *Scripture*, consider'd only as a *History of Facts*, without throwing off *all Historical Faith* at once. A Piece of *Scepticism* too wild and extravagant to be ever admitted while there are any Remains of common Sense among us; or *publickly* to be owned by any *Infidel Writers*, whatever they may pretend *privately* when they are hard press'd by the Arguments in proof of *Christianity*. I think I may venture to take it for granted, that no *Infidel*, who has the least Regard to the Reputation of his Understanding,
F 2 will

[36]

will seriously deny (if he does, I am sure Confinement and a proper Regimen will be more suitable to his Condition than *reasoning* with him) that any Credit is due to the *Greek*, the *Roman*, or the *English* History; that there ever was (for Instance) such a Person as *Henry the Eighth* of *England*, *Lord Cromwell*, *Cranmer* or *Cardinal Wolsey*; or that any of their Actions, recorded in our Histories, relating to the *Reformation* of *Religion*, are true. On the contrary, Men of all Parties and Opinions receive them in the *Main* as authentick Accounts, whatever Mistakes there may be as to minute Circumstances. Now, if we agree to esteem these Histories as *credible*, the History of Facts, relating to the *Resurrection* of *Christ*, recorded in the *New Testament*, must, in all Reason, be allowed *equally* worthy of Credit. The Account given there of these Matters is as fair and consistent, and carries as strong Lines of Truth in the very Face of it. The *Historians* seem to be Persons of as much Probity and Simplicity. There seems, as far as we can judge from the Nature of the Facts, and the Truth which they support, as little Room to imagine that they could have any reasonable Inducement to falsify. The *sacred* History, therefore, is at least, upon a *Level* with any *profane* one of the most allow'd Credit. But there are many Circumstances which give it greatly the Advantage over any other History. The *sacred* Historians relate nothing concerning *Christ's Resurrection* but what *they themselves* knew perfectly; whereas other Historians relate Things done at a Distance from the Time and Place, when and where they were transacted, and so write

[37]

write from *Traditional* or other written Accounts. The Importance of the Things related, may naturally be suppos'd to make the *Historians* more careful to relate them fully and accurately; as it naturally dispos'd others to Caution and Wariness in receiving their Reports. It is also more likely that Mankind should have had better Opportunities of detecting any Falshoods, whether you suppose the History to be written soon after the Time of those Transactions, or at any Distance from it. If the History were written soon after the Transactions, in the Memory of Persons then alive, the Apostles must be suppos'd to have related them to great Numbers of People, who would have been able and ready to have contradicted the History. If you fix the Date of the History lower, as low as you please, yet still the *sacred* Story preserves its Superiority over any *civil* History; for the Facts being of so much greater Consequence, if they were true, they must at first have made a greater Impression upon Mankind, been more taken Notice of, better remember'd, and more carefully transmitted; and therefore when you suppose this History to have been drawn up, here would have been a more particular and concurrent Tradition, as well as private Accounts preserv'd by particular Persons, and publick Registers, with which, when written, it might, and would have been compar'd, and confuted, if false. For these Reasons, likewise, it is more likely that this History should have been preserv'd freer from Corruption than any other History, on account of its *more publick* and *important* Nature. It concern'd not *one Nation*, but *all Mankind*. Its Consequence

[38]

Consequences reach'd beyond the low Regards of this Life to eternal Ages. The History being of this universal Concern, and of such infinite Moment, it cannot be conceiv'd but that variety of Copies would immediately be taken of it, and dispers'd over all Parts of the World, to which the Converts of different Nations belong'd; by which Means any *material* Interpolations or Omissions might, and would have been discover'd and publickly detected. All this is highly probable *in itself*, as our Experience of human Nature and the usual Conduct of Mankind testifies. But there is a Circumstance of Advantage still superior to all these. Some of these Facts are commemorated from the Time of their Transaction, or immediately after, by external Actions. As for Instance, That *Miracle* of the *Gift of Tongues* was commemorated by a solemn Festival, which we call *Whitsunday*; which the History mentions as a Thing well known to them. And therefore at whatever Distance of Time you suppose the History to have been written, the People to whom he writes must know whether there were then, and had been from the Time that the Facts were done, or near it. any such Memorial observ'd in the Church. To illustrate the Force of this Proof by a parallel Case: Suppose, there had been some external Rite appointed to be observ'd by all the People of *England* in Memory of the *Revolution*, that the Observance of this Rite commenc'd immediately after the Event, or within the Memory of those Persons who were alive when the History of the *Revolution* was first publish'd, and that the History mentions this publick Observance,

[39]

servance, with its Rise and Design, as a Thing well known to them. If there had been no such Custom then in Being, the People must have known it, for the Historian could not have made the whole Nation believe that they observ'd a Rite in Memory of an Event, when they knew of no such Event, or the Commemoration of it. This Circumstance must have detected the Fraud, and have hinder'd the History from being received as Genuine, at what Time soever you suppose it to have been publish'd.

I have no Occasion to enlarge upon this Proof; it being already done to so great Advantage, by Mr. *Lestly*, in his *Short Method with the Deists*, and his Defence of it. In this unanswerable Piece the Author lays down *four Marks* which belong to the *Scriptures*, and which cannot possibly belong to any *Imposture*. To this most excellent Book I refer the Reader for an Antidote (when well consider'd and understood) against the venomous Artifices of the most subtle *Deists*.

