

**LETTERS**

ON THE

**EVIDENCES, DOCTRINES, AND DUTIES,**

OF THE

**CHRISTIAN RELIGION.**

**ADDRESSED TO A FRIEND.**

---

“ Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good.”

“ Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.—For we have not followed cunningly devised fables.”

---

“ Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh from the Father of Lights.”

“ These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”

LETTERS  
ON THE  
EVIDENCES, DOCTRINES, AND DUTIES,  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

ADDRESSED TO A FRIEND.

BY

OLINTHUS GREGORY, LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS IN THE ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY AT WOOLWICH, ETC.

---

SIXTH EDITION.

WITH MANY ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS.

---

Complete in One Volume.

---

LONDON: BALDWIN AND CRADOCK,  
PATERNOSTER ROW.

---

1836.

1236

Stack  
Annex

BT

1101

68

1236

PREFACE.

THE history of the work now presented to the public may be given in very few words. It originated in a series of conversations which I had about five years ago with a friend much younger than myself, who had a considerable acquaintance with almost all except religious subjects. *He* expressed much surprise that a person of my habits and pursuits in other respects should adopt the religious notions I had long entertained, or indeed be solicitous about any religious opinions whatever; and I endeavoured to assign the reasons which led me to embrace them, and to consider such topics as of the first importance. After a short time we were so far separated as to have much fewer opportunities of personal intercourse: and I in consequence became induced to carry on the momentous inquiry we had previously commenced, by letter. Pursuant to this intention, all the letters in the first volume<sup>1</sup> were actually written: they were read in manuscript by my friend; and, as I have reason to believe, were not unproductive of benefit. Having proceeded thus far, a growing particularity of inquiry was produced

<sup>1</sup> This work was originally published in two volumes, the first volume closing with the 11th letter.

CHISWICK:  
PRINTED BY C. WHITTINGHAM.

3050079

on the one side, and a gradual extension of plan on the other: and thus, after many interruptions, and in the midst of numerous avocations of a very different kind, the work has become what it now is.

I had not however proceeded half way in the execution of my plan before it occurred to me, that what I first intended for private use might be beneficial to others in circumstances analogous to those of my friend; and I recollected that whatever I might publish on the subject of religion would at least have the advantage of appearing disinterested, as it proceeded from the pen of a *layman*. It is, I am aware, extremely ridiculous for those who adopt the prescriptions of their physicians, and act upon the advice of their lawyers, *although* they are professional, to object to defences of Christianity from the pens of Clergymen *because* they are professional; yet, absurd and uncandid as the objection is, it is often advanced: it is therefore proper to meet it; and at times to show that there are those who cannot on such occasions be actuated by any love of worldly applause, or any thirst after emolument, but who feel sufficiently interested about Religion, and are sufficiently convinced of its powerful tendency to improve the conduct of individuals and to augment the general stock of happiness, to step for a little while out of their more appropriate province to plead its cause. Such defenders of revealed religion there have been in all ages; yet they have not been so numerous

as to render it improper or indecorous to increase their number: especially as the old prejudice still continues to operate with unabated energy; and there are many persons from whom the claims of Christianity receive a more respectful attention, when they are urged by one who is neither "a clergyman" nor "a methodist."

There have long existed several valuable essays on the *Evidences* of Christianity; and we now possess in the English language especially, the treatise of Dr. Paley, which all Christians consider as an honour to our age and nation. Had a luminous statement of the Historical Evidences been all that was aimed at or required, I should at once have referred my friend to Dr. Paley's as a standard, and, I believe, unanswerable work; and never have troubled either him or the public with any remarks of mine on the subject of religion. But it is very possible, and indeed very common, for men to be Christians in name and theory, and infidels in practice; to profess a belief in Christ, and in heart to deny him; to acknowledge him as Messiah, and to refuse to obey him as king; to avow the warmest admiration of the New Testament, and to despise and ridicule every thing in it which is characteristic and peculiar, and which constitutes it a summary of that "truth" which alone "can make us free" from the dominion of sin and from the punishment due to it. This I consider as the most striking and lamentable error of the present times; and it is,

therefore, the more remarkable that such an error should not have been frequently and pointedly exposed. To adopt the language of an admirable living writer—"While the outworks of the sanctuary have been defended with the utmost ability, its interior has been too much neglected, and the fire upon the altar suffered to languish and decay. The truths and mysteries which distinguish the Christian from all other religions, have been little attended to by some, totally denied by others; and while infinite efforts have been made, by the utmost subtlety of argumentation, to establish the truth and authenticity of revelation, few have been exerted in comparison to show what it really contains."

Now the deficiency here adverted to is that which I have endeavoured to supply. I have attempted to exhibit in small compass a view, not merely of the Evidences, but of the distinguishing Doctrines, and principal binding Duties of the Christian Religion. I have endeavoured to show that Christianity is not so contemptible and bungling a fraud as some infidels have represented it to be; and to point out at the same time many palpable and enormous absurdities into which Infidelity precipitates its votaries. But this I reckon the least important part of my undertaking, though I humbly hope it may have its uses. The facts of Christianity are only so far momentous as the doctrines are momentous which are suspended upon them.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ would be no more to us (I mention it with reverence) than the death of Socrates, were it not that he suffered as a *sacrifice for sin*; and his resurrection of no more importance to us than the emancipation of a butterfly from its crysalis, were it not for the assurance that "*even as he has risen*" so shall all his faithful followers. I have, therefore, entered pretty much at large into the establishment and defence of the leading doctrines which distinguish Christianity from all other religious systems. In the choice of these I have kept almost entirely out of sight the higher points which separate the Arminians and Calvinists; while I have attempted to illustrate and confirm, as essential, those grand doctrines in which both Arminians and Calvinists, and indeed the great majority of Christians, differ from the Socinians. The truth is, that upon most of the questions which have long divided, and still continue to agitate, the Christian world, my mind is nearly in a state of perfect neutrality: so that I cannot bring myself to attach much importance to any question which is not obviously favourable or unfavourable in its moral tendency, or which does not appear to me *fundamental*, that is, which does not in some way affect the grand doctrine of man's redemption through the crucifixion of "the Son of God." With all Christians who in this respect "hold the head," and live conformably to the doctrines they profess, however they may be separated

upon minor topics, I am anxious to maintain, and long to see universally prevail, the "unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

I am willing to hope, indeed, that this spirit is gaining ground among us; and that *many* men are beginning to act upon the persuasion that every controversy agitated in the Christian Church upon points of inferior moment, causes a deduction, and in numerous instances a very serious one, from the regard paid to the really important objects of faith.

In attaining the objects proposed, I have not aimed at elaborate composition, or the elegancies of style: believing that if my professional employments did not tend greatly to render success in such an attempt improbable, my real inability to dazzle by splendid imagery and profuse embellishment would. I have endeavoured to reason clearly and *fairly*; have availed myself of every argument I have met with in other authors that has met my purpose; and have endeavoured to compress them into small space; and have, farther, had occasional recourse to some arguments which it is probable would not readily present themselves to any one who was not moderately conversant with scientific topics; these, it may be added, were frequently suggested by the consideration, that the gentleman for whose use they were originally written had successfully engaged in scientific pursuits.

I know not whether it may be necessary to apologize for the frequency and extent of my

quotations from Scripture, especially in the second volume. Let it be recollected that the main object of that volume is to teach the *doctrines* of Scripture; that is, to show what they are, to exhibit them faithfully: and to effect this without being allowed to cite the language of Scripture, would be, as Mr. Boyle long ago remarked, "to challenge a man to a duel, and oblige him not to make use of his best weapons; or to compel him to prove the torrid zone habitable, and not make use of the testimony of navigators." Besides, the maxim of Chillingworth, though old, has not yet been proved absurd; namely, "that we cannot speak of the *things* of God better than in the *words* of God."

I would fain hope that my numerous references to other authors, or quotations from them, will not be ascribed to a desire to make a parade of extensive reading. My acquaintance with the works of other writers, and especially on the subject of religion, is, in truth, far less than it ought to be; and my object in such frequent references and extracts has been either to direct the attention of young men of reading to standard works on topics which my plan would not allow me to treat so fully as I wished, or to confirm and fortify my own sentiments by the authority of many whom the world in general consider as learned, wise, and, therefore, highly worthy of regard.

Lastly, I beg to remark, that I hope and trust

the freedom of my occasional animadversions upon theologians from whom I differ on several topics discussed in these letters, has in no instance arisen from contempt of them, or their opinions, from uncandid interpretations of their language, or from unworthy personal feeling. My business has been to *attempt* to refute sentiments which I deem erroneous and dangerous, as well as to establish those which appear to me true and beneficial. It is possible, I am persuaded, to feel the strongest conviction of the errors certain men may hold, without cherishing a particle of ill will against those who hold them. And surely it is perfectly fair and perfectly candid, when theologians of a certain class endeavour to divest Christianity of almost every thing which (as I conceive) is peculiar to it, pride themselves upon the skill and dexterity with which they effect this, and triumph over what they denominate the irrational and contracted tenets of others; to turn the tables upon them, and to show that *their* system is clogged with its full load of absurdities and contradictions; that their mode of translation, if adopted universally, would rob the New Testament of its whole spirit, energy, and perspicuity; and that by stripping the Christian system of its peculiarities, they deprive it nearly of all which renders it of consequence whether a man be a believer or an unbeliever. Under the influence of these sentiments, I shall conclude by adopting the language of Dr. Jortin on another occasion:

the following disquisitions “are designed, slight and imperfect as they are, for the service of TRUTH, by one who would be glad to attend, and grace her triumphs: *as her soldier*, if he has had the honour to serve successfully under her banner: or, *as her captive*, tied to her chariot wheels, if he has though undesignedly, committed any offence against her.”

OLINTHUS GREGORY.

Oct. 11, 1811.

---

P. S. That successive editions of this Work should be required is a circumstance which calls for my most grateful acknowledgements, at the same time that it has stimulated me to give the whole a very careful revisal, that it may be rendered more worthy public favour. I cannot but be highly gratified that my labours on the most interesting of all subjects should continue to be so favourably received: and still more to learn, that in various instances they have been the means of convincing persons, especially young men devoted to two of the learned professions (medicine and law), that “with the talent of an angel a man may be a fool,” in the worst sense of the word, unless he be “*wise unto salvation.*” Several have been reclaimed from the regions of *Infidelity*, and still

more from *Socinianism*, not merely in England, but on the continent of Europe, in India, and America, by the blessing of God upon an attentive perusal of these "Letters." I had no other object in their publication; and can most sincerely declare that I wish them no longer to meet with encouragement than while they shall be useful in instilling into the minds and *hearts* of others, the essential, immutable principles which have always been found to work most efficaciously towards the renovation and salvation of mankind.

*Royal Military Academy, Woolwich,*  
Oct. 11, 1829.

## CONTENTS.

---

LETTER	Page
1. ON the Folly and Absurdity of Deism . . . . .	1
2. On the Necessity of a Revelation of the Will of God . . . . .	15
3. On the Opinions of the Heathens, their Legislators, Poets, and Philosophers, relative to God, to moral Duty, and a future State . . . . .	20
4. On the Probability that there should be Mysteries in a Revealed Religion . . . . .	42
5. On the Genuineness and Authenticity of the Scriptures . . . . .	65
6. On the Evidence deducible from the Prophecies . . . . .	108
7. On the Evidence deducible from Miracles; and on the Credibility of Human Testimony . . . . .	129
8. On the Resurrection of Jesus Christ . . . . .	157
9. Evidence drawn from the rapid Diffusion of Christianity, and its Triumph over Persecution; also from the Purity and Excellency of the Scripture Morality and Theology . . . . .	178
10. On the Inspiration of Scripture . . . . .	199
11. On some of the most plausible Objections urged against the Truth and Divine Authority of the Scriptures . . . . .	216



LETTER	Page
12. Introductory Letter on the leading Doctrines of the Christian Religion . . . . .	243
13. On the Fall of Man, and the Depravity of Human Nature . . . . .	262
14. On the Atonement for Sin, by the Death of Jesus Christ . . . . .	280
15. On the Divinity of Jesus Christ . . . . .	308
16. On the Nature of Conversion, and its Necessity . . . . .	347
17. On the Influences of the Spirit . . . . .	368
18. On Justification by Faith . . . . .	390
19. On Providence . . . . .	410
20. On the Resurrection of the Body . . . . .	430
21. On Eternal Existence after Death . . . . .	444
22. Summary of Christian Duties . . . . .	467

## LETTER VII.

*On the Evidence deducible from Miracles ; and on the Credibility of Human Testimony.*

THE advocates of Revealed Religion affirm, without any fear of refutation, that the argument resulting from the completion of Prophecy is one that is continually increasing in force ; while they are often as ready to admit, that the argument from Miracles diminishes in proportion as we recede farther from the Apostolic times. I hope, my friend, to be able to convince you, in the course of the present letter, that this is a concession which need not be made : but that *we* have as good reason to believe the miraculous facts of Scripture, as any except eyewitnesses, or those who received their information immediately from the lips of eyewitnesses.

The evidence flowing from the performance of miracles is indeed so summary and convincing, that it may be stated satisfactorily in very few words : for this reason, however, as it should seem, it has been selected by ingenious unbelievers to exercise their dexterity and acumen upon ; and thus it becomes requisite to discuss this branch of our subject with a minuteness and comparative prolixity which might, otherwise, have been altogether avoided.

By *miracles*, I do not mean “juggling tricks,” but supernatural events. This genuine notion of miracles has been sometimes obscured by definition ; yet a candid inquirer after truth cannot well mistake. Most of the opinions entertained by men of good sense, apart from any controversial views as to this topic are correct. *No* man would think that curing lameness, by a regular surgical or medical process, was miraculous : *every* man would say that the instantaneous production of a limb, and “making the maimed whole,” was miraculous. And this exactly reaches the logical scientific notion of miracles : for, when such effects are

produced as (*cæteris paribus*) are usually produced, God is said to operate *according to the common course of nature*: but when such effects are produced as are (*cæt. par.*) *contrary to, or different from, that common course, they are said to be MIRACULOUS.*"

Now no man will presume to affirm that it is *impossible* a teacher should be sent from God. It may be *necessary* that one should be sent; and I think the train of observation and deduction of facts in my second and third letter, establish that necessity. If one or more be sent, they must bring *credentials* to evince that their mission is divine; and what can those credentials be but *miracles*? In fact, the very idea of a revelation includes that of miracles. A revelation *cannot* be made but by a miraculous interposition of Deity: so that the probability of a revelation implies a correspondent probability of the occurrence of miracles; and the necessity of a revelation a like necessity of miracles. Nay, I may venture to affirm farther, that there is a mutual and necessary correlation between the two: for, as, on the one hand, miracles (or prophecies, which are in fact miraculous, being contrary to the course of nature) are necessary to prove the divine authority of an agent; so, on the other hand, the performance of uncontrolled miracles, or the delivery of true predictions, immediately suggests to the mind the conviction that they have been permitted solely for the purpose of proving that the person, by whom they are performed, is employed by God to do something, or reveal something, which mankind would not have known in any other way.

It is, one would suppose, almost an intuitive truth, that, when a person performs evident and *uncontrolled* miracles in proof of any doctrine, those who have sufficient evidence of the reality of such miracles ought to admit the doctrine to be true, or from God. At all events, the proposition is easily deduced from a few steps of obvious reasoning; limiting it, as I have done, with Baxter, Barrow, and Chandler, to *uncontrolled* miracles, or those the apparent design of which is not

contradicted either by the *absurdity* of the thing they are intended to prove, or by some equal or greater miracles opposed to them. We thus exclude every thing like juggling from the idea of miracles; and at the same time free ourselves from all consideration of pretended miracles, such as those performed by the Egyptian magicians, with the permission or the performance of which, as they were *controlled*, we have nothing to do. The reasoning from which our proposition flows is simply this: a genuine miracle cannot be performed without an extraordinary divine interposition, either mediate or immediate. If the Supreme Being would confirm the truth of a proposition to one man, by the testimony of another to whom it was immediately revealed, we can conceive no method by which it would be so effectually accomplished, as by conferring on him power to work a miracle in confirmation of it. When a miracle is *uncontrolled*, we can conjecture no particular by which it can be distinguished from a miracle wrought to confirm a truth. If God were to suffer an uncontrolled miracle to be wrought in confirmation of a falsehood, there would seem to be no criterion by which his testimony could be distinguished. It is inconsistent with the *wisdom and goodness* of God, to suffer an *uncontrolled* miracle to be wrought to establish a falsehood; since it would leave his creatures in a perpetual uncertainty, and an uncertainty that would be most painful to the most *virtuous*, who have always most wished for a revelation. Since, therefore, God is both wise and good, it follows that a proposition attested by uncontrolled miracles is attested by him, and is of necessity true.

From this reasoning it is natural to expect, that in the Scripture History there should be recorded many miracles; and thus, on examining the sacred volume, are our expectations realized. The faith of Moses was confirmed by the miracle of the burning, yet unconsumed, bush. Moses convinced the children of Israel that God employed him to lead them out of Egypt, by

performing miracles by means of his rod: he appealed to similar miracles before Pharaoh for the same purpose: the passage through the Red Sea, which opened to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptians, who were afterwards swallowed up in the collapsing waters, was miraculous: the gushing of waters from a solid rock on its being struck by Moses, was miraculous: the passage of the river Jordan under Joshua, the standing still of the sun and moon at his command, and the falling of the walls of Jericho, were miraculous: the sacrifice kindled by fire from heaven; the raising of the Shunamite's and of the widow of Sarepta's sons; the destruction of the captains and their fifties by fire from heaven; the dividing of the waters of Jordan by means of the mantle of Elijah, and the translation of that prophet, are events of the same class; and so are those recorded in Daniel, respecting the fiery furnace and the den of lions. From the numerous New Testament miracles, beginning with that wrought at the marriage at Cana, I cannot attempt to make an adequate selection. Though it may be proper to remark, that those performed by Jesus Christ differed essentially from others: Moses could not work miracles without his rod; the Apostles performed theirs, for the most part expressly, and always *virtually*, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth:" the Messiah exerted miraculous power from *himself*, without any reference to another. And, farther, the miracles of Jesus Christ were uniformly benevolent:—he cured the sick,—he healed the lame, he made the maimed whole,—he made the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the dumb to speak, he raised the dead, and finally he raised *himself*; thus evincing at once the greatest miracle, and the sublimest act of benevolence; for, as he "died for our sins," so he "rose again for our justification." So numerous, indeed, and so beneficial were his miracles, that "the multitude were astonished, saying, It was *never* seen so in Israel;" and well might their astonishment be excited, as our Lord wrought more benevolent miracles in *one* after-

noon<sup>1</sup>, than had been performed by any of the prophets in all their lives.

That one great object, kept in view by Christ and his apostles in performing miracles, was to furnish awakening and convincing proofs of their divine mission, is evident from the uniform tenor of the New Testament Histories. The language of the Jewish Ruler was the pure unadulterated language of common sense, the force of which all the sophistry in the world cannot weaken: "Rabbi, we *know* that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, *except God be with him*<sup>2</sup>." The Chief Priests and the Pharisees had the same conviction; for, said they, after Lazarus was raised from the dead, "This man doeth *many* miracles: if we let him alone, *all* will believe on him<sup>3</sup>." Jesus Christ himself appeals to his miracles: "I have greater witness (says he) than that of John, for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the *works that I do*, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me<sup>4</sup>." And again, when the Jews asked him, If thou be the Christ tell us plainly. How long dost thou make us to doubt? Jesus answered them, *The works that I do*, they bear witness of me. If I do not the works of *my Father*, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in him." "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin<sup>5</sup>." And on another occasion, when John sent his disciples to Christ to ask, "Art thou HE that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them<sup>6</sup>." In like manner, with

<sup>1</sup> See Matt. ix. 18—34.

<sup>2</sup> John, xi. 47, 48.

<sup>3</sup> John, x. 24, 25, 37, 38; xv. 24.

<sup>4</sup> John, iii. 2.

<sup>5</sup> John, v. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. xi. 3, 4, 5.

regard to the Apostles, "God also bare them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"

Consistently with this, the early Christian writers and apologists, in all those cases where they do not assume the *history* as true, and thence argue that Jesus ought to be received as the Messiah, appeal in very express terms to his miracles. Thus QUADRATUS appeals very strongly to those miracles. JUSTIN MARTYR asserts the performance of miracles by Jesus in as forcible words as language will admit, and assigns the reason why he rather had recourse to the argument from *prophecy*, than that from *miracles*; viz. that his opponents would ascribe the latter to magic. IRENÆUS, LACTANTIUS, TERTULLIAN, ORIGEN, AUGUSTIN, and JEROME, speak of Christ's miracles (and often, indeed, of those wrought subsequently to the Apostolic times), and notice the same evasion on the part of the adversaries to Christianity.

It is highly worthy of remark, too, that none of the *early* opposers of the religion of Jesus, pretend to dispute that he performed miracles. LUCIAN, JULIAN, PORPHYRY, HIEROCLES, CELSUS, &c. admit that miracles were wrought. Julian, it is true, endeavours to make light of them, and wonders that so much stir should be made about a person, who merely "opened the eyes of the blind, restored limbs to the lame, and delivered persons possessed." Celsus, again, ridicules the miracles, but never disputes that they occurred. "Well (said he), suppose that you really did those things that ye talk of; pray must we deem the persons who perform such wonderful operations to be sons of God; or must we not rather deem them vile wretches, well versed in a diabolical art?" Now, who can imagine, for a moment, that so violent an opposer of Christianity would have admitted the miracles of Christ as real facts, had he not been compelled to it by the uni-

<sup>7</sup> Heb. ii. 4. See also Acts, xiv. 9; x. 38, 39, &c.

versal consent of all inquiring men of the age in which he lived? Hence it may be asked (with Mr. F. Cunningham), "whether modern infidels who have ventured to contradict the miracles of Christ, a weapon Celsus was afraid to take up, have estimated the rashness of their enterprise? Are they competent to deny what a spectator no less malevolent than themselves was compelled to admit? Has the lapse of eighteen hundred years enabled them to ascertain a fact of daily occurrence with more accuracy than a by-stander? Are objects best seen at the greatest distance?"

Thus it appears, that we have the most marked and direct testimony of the friends of Revealed Religion (those, too, who had been converted from heathenism by the weight of its evidence), and the concessions of its enemies, in favour of those miracles, which were performed in order to prove that the religion came from God; and this testimony, and these concessions, were delivered so near the period in which the miracles were supposed to have been wrought, that they cannot be accounted for in any other way than by admitting that both Christians and unbelievers, in the early ages, were convinced that something which required more than human energy had occurred. Why, then, should this be disputed in these remote ages?

Voltaire and Mr. Hume will answer this question, by telling us in effect, though not in express words, "that since miracles are not wrought now, they never were wrought at all."

The substance of Mr. Hume's argument (which I describe, because almost all later Deists have echoed his sentiments) is this: "Experience, which in some things is variable, in others is uniform, is our *only* guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact. Variable experience gives rise to probability only; a uniform experience amounts to proof. Our belief of any fact, from the testimony of eyewitnesses, is derived from no other principle than our experience of the veracity of human testimony. If the fact attested be miraculous,

there arises a contest of two opposite experiences, or proof against proof. Now, a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as complete as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined; and if so, it is an undeniable consequence, that it cannot be surmounted by any proof whatever derived from human testimony<sup>8</sup>.”

Now, to this reasoning, or the most prominent and essential parts of it, several decisive answers have been, or may be, given. A few of these may properly find a place here.

I. Dr. Campbell, in his celebrated “Dissertation on Miracles,” shows the fallacy of Mr. Hume’s argument thus: “The evidence arising from human testimony is *not solely* derived from experience: on the contrary, testimony has a natural influence on belief, antecedent to experience. The early and unlimited assent given to testimony by children, gradually contracts as they advance in life: it is, therefore, more consonant to truth to say, that our *diffidence* in testimony is the result of experience, than that our *faith* in it has this foundation. Besides, the uniformity of experience in favour of any fact is not a proof against its being reversed in a particular instance. The evidence arising from the single testimony of a man of known veracity will go farther to establish a belief of its being actually reversed. If his testimony be confirmed by a few others of the same character, we *cannot* withhold our assent to the truth of it. Now, though the operations of nature are governed by uniform laws, and though we have not the testimony of our senses in favour of any *violation* of them; still if, in particular instances, we have the testimony of thousands of our fellow-creatures, and those, too, men of strict integrity, swayed by no motives of ambition or interest, and governed by the principles of common sense, that they were actually

<sup>8</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, art. *Abridgment*.

witnesses of these violations, the constitution of our nature obliges us to believe them<sup>9</sup>.”

—II. Mr. Hume’s reasoning is founded upon too limited a view of the laws and course of nature. If we consider things duly, we shall find that lifeless matter is utterly incapable of obeying any laws, or of being endued with any powers: and, therefore, what is usually called *the course of nature* can be nothing else than the arbitrary will and pleasure of God, acting continually upon matter according to certain rules of uniformity, still bearing a relation to contingencies. So that it is as easy for the Supreme Being to alter what men think the course of nature, as to preserve it. Those effects, which are produced in the world regularly and *indesinently*, and which are usually termed the works of nature, prove the constant Providence of Deity; those, on the contrary, which, upon any extraordinary occasion, are produced in such a manner as it is manifest could not have been either by human power, or by what is called chance, prove undeniably the immediate interposition of the Deity on that especial occasion. God, it must be recollected, is the governor of the *moral* as well as of the *physical* world; and since the moral well-being of the universe is of more consequence than its physical order and regularity, it follows, obviously, that the laws, conformably with which the material world seems generally to be regulated, are subservient, and may occasionally yield, to the laws by which the moral world is governed. Although, therefore, a miracle is contrary to the usual *course* of nature (and would indeed lose its beneficial effect, if it were not so), it cannot thence be inferred that it is “a violation of the *laws* of nature,” allowing the term to include a regard to *moral* tendencies. The laws by which a wise and holy God governs the world, cannot, unless he is pleased to reveal them, be learned in any other way than from *testimony*; since, on this supposition, nothing but testimony can bring us acquainted with the whole series of his dis-

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, art. *Abridgment*.

pensations, and this kind of knowledge is absolutely necessary previously to our correctly inferring those laws. Testimony, therefore, must be admitted as constituting the principal means of discovering the real laws by which the universe has been regulated; that testimony assures us, that the *apparent* course of nature has often been interrupted to produce important moral effects: and we must not at random disregard such testimony, because, in estimating its credibility, we ought to look almost infinitely more at the moral, than at the physical, circumstances connected with any particular event<sup>10</sup>.

III. But the defence of miracles against the objections of infidels need not be thrown wholly upon these general and abstract reasonings, satisfactory and cogent as they are. The miracles recorded in Scripture, and especially those performed by Moses, by Jesus Christ, and his Apostles, are accompanied by evidence such as you will find it difficult to adduce in support of any other historic fact, and such as cannot possibly be brought in support of any pretended fact whatever; evidence, such as the pretended miracles of Mahometanism, and those of the Romish church, are totally destitute of.

The truth of a matter of fact may be positively inferred and known, if it be attended by certain criteria, such as no pretended fact can possibly have. These criteria are at least *four*. It is required, first, that the fact be a *sensible* fact, such as men's outward senses can judge of: secondly, that it be *notorious*, performed publicly in the presence of witnesses: thirdly, that there be *memorials* of it, or monuments, actions, and customs, kept up in commemoration of it: fourthly, that such monuments and actions commence with the fact<sup>11</sup>. There may be facts in favour of which these

<sup>10</sup> This argument is pursued to a considerable extent by the late Professor Vince, in his "Sermons on the Credibility of Miracles, preached before the University of Cambridge."

<sup>11</sup> These criteria were first proposed as decisive in favour of the

four marks cannot be produced; but the argument of Leslie, and St. Real, is, that whatever has all these four marks *cannot* be false<sup>12</sup>.

For example, could Moses have persuaded six hundred thousand men that he had led them through the Red Sea in the manner related in Exodus, or have instituted the passover in commemoration of the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, if these circumstances had never occurred? Could he make the Israelites *fancy* that they were fed miraculously with manna forty years in the wilderness, or that, during all that period, their "raiment waxed not old, neither did their feet swell<sup>13</sup>," unless those things, however extraordinary, were facts? Here our four criteria apply. The first two secure from any cheat or imposture, at the time the facts occurred, and the last two preserve equally against any imposition in after ages; because the authors of the book in which these facts are related, speak of it as written at that time by the actors or eye-witnesses, and as commanded by God to be carefully kept and preserved to all generations, and read publicly to all the

Scripture Miracles about 1697, by Mr. Charles Leslie, in his admirable and unanswerable book, "A Short and Easy Method with the Deists" (from which I select the instances given in this section), and by the Abbé St Real. It is of no consequence to the argument, to determine whether these authors invented it independently of each other, or borrowed it one from the other; but it is important to remark, on the authority of the late very able Mr. Jones, of Nayland, that *Dr. Conyers Middleton*, feeling how necessary it was to his principles that he should find some way of getting over Mr. Leslie's arguments, looked out assiduously, for twenty years together, to find some pretended fact to which these four criteria could be applied, but *without success*. *Dr. Middleton* died a Deist notwithstanding! Alas! is this the conduct of one who professed to yield to *nothing but* reason? or of one, who, through some strange fatality, "loved darkness rather than light?"

<sup>12</sup> The miracles of Scripture have two additional tests, upon which, however, no stress is laid in this argumentation. They have an important end, worthy of their author: and they are independent of second causes.

<sup>13</sup> Deut. viii. 4; xxix. 5.

people at stated times<sup>14</sup>. And farther, the institutions appointed in this book were to be perpetually observed from the day of each institution for ever among these people, in memory of the miraculous facts. Now, suppose this book to have been forged a hundred or a thousand years after the time of Moses; would not every one say when it first appeared, "We never heard of this book before; we know of no such institutions, as of a passover, or circumcision, or sabbaths, and the many feasts and fasts therein appointed; we know nothing of a tribe of Levi, or of a tabernacle in which they were to serve in such an order of priesthood: this book *must* be an arrant forgery, for it is destitute of all those marks which it gives of itself, as to its own continuance, and of those institutions which it relates." No instance can be shown since the world began of any book so substantiated that was a forgery, and yet passed off, as exhibiting truth, upon any people.

Mr. Leslie, however, does not stop here, but adds a *fifth* mark as peculiar to our Bible, distinguishing it from all other histories, relating facts that formerly occurred: that is, that the book, in which the facts are related, contains likewise the *law* of that people to whom it belongs, and is their statute book by which their causes are determined. This will render it impossible for any one to coin or forge such a book, so as to make it pass as authentic among any people. If, for example, a person should forge a statute-book for England, and publish it next term, could he make all the judges, lawyers, and people believe that this was their genuine and only statute book by which their causes had been determined for centuries past? They must forget their old statute-book, and believe that this new book, which they never saw or heard of before, was the very book which had been referred to in the pleadings in Westminster-hall for so many ages, which had been so often printed, and of which the originals

<sup>14</sup> Deut. xxxi. 10, 11, 12. Josh. viii. 34, 35. Neh. viii.

are now kept in the Tower, to be consulted, as there is occasion. Thus it is that the books of Moses contain, not only the history of the Jews, but also their municipal law, as well civil as ecclesiastical: and thus, also, it is with respect to the New Testament, which is the spiritual and ecclesiastical law to the Christian church in all nations; and which cannot, therefore, be corrupted, unless all persons in all nations whithersoever Christianity is spread, should conspire in the corruption of the Gospel.

Mr. Leslie selects some striking, though familiar, examples in illustration of his general argument; among others, he adverts to the *Stonehenge* on Salisbury Plain, and compares it with the stones set up at *Gilgal*. Every one, as he observes, knows this Stonehenge, or has heard of it; and yet none know the reason why those great stones were set there, or by whom, or in memory of what. Now, suppose a person should publish a book to-morrow, and therein affirm that these stones were set up by Hercules, Polyphemus, or Gargantua, in memory of such and such of their actions: if he merely make the affirmation, some few may *perhaps* give him credit. But if, for farther confirmation of his assertion, he should say in this book, that it was written at the time when such actions were performed, and by the very actors themselves, or by eye-witnesses: and that this book had been received as true, and quoted by authors of the greatest reputation in all ages since; moreover, that this book was well known in England, and enjoined by act of parliament to be taught our children; and that in consequence we *did* teach it our children, and had been taught it ourselves when we were children; it would seem impertinent to ask any Deist whether he thinks such a delusion could be passed upon the people of England.

Let us now compare this with the Stonehenge, as we may call it, or twelve great stones set up at Gilgal; and erected in order that when the children of the Israelites in after ages should inquire their meaning,



it should be told them<sup>15</sup>. The occurrence, in commemoration of which these stones at Gilgal were set up, is as wonderful and miraculous as the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, and free from the puerile carpings which have been raised by unbelievers against that remarkable event. Notice of this miraculous passage over the Jordan at Gilgal was given to the people on the preceding day<sup>16</sup>. It took place at *noon-day* before the *whole nation*. And when the waters of the Jordan were divided, it was not at any low ebb, but at the time when the river overflowed its banks<sup>17</sup>. It was effected, too, not by winds, or in length of time, which winds would require to accomplish it; but all on a sudden, as soon as the "feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, then the waters which came from above stood, and rose up upon an heap: and they that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt-sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lift up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned into their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before. And the people came out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which the twelve men (from every tribe a man) took out of the midst of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord

<sup>15</sup> Josh. iv. 6, 7.    <sup>16</sup> Josh. iii. 5.    <sup>17</sup> Josh. iii. 15.

your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us until we were gone over: that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever<sup>18</sup>."

Now to frame our argument, let it be supposed that there never was any such occurrence as that passage over Jordan; that these stones at Gilgal were set up on some other occasion, in some after age; and then that some designing man invented this book of Joshua, and pretended that it was written by Joshua at this time; adducing this erection of stones at Gilgal as a testimony of the truth of it. Would not the Israelites say to him, "We know the stonage at Gilgal, but we never before heard this reason assigned for it: nor of this book of Joshua. Where has it been all this while? and where, and how came you, after so many ages, to find it? Besides, we are told in this book, that this same passage over Jordan was ordained to be taught our children, from age to age; and therefore that they were always to be instructed in the meaning of that stonage at Gilgal, as a memorial of it. But we were never taught it when we were children; nor did we ever teach our children any such thing. And it is not at all likely *that* could have been forgotten, while so remarkable a stonage continued, which was set up for that and no other purpose."

If, then, for the reasons before assigned, no such imposition could be practised successfully upon us as to the Stonehenge upon Salisbury Plain, how much less could it be with regard to the erection at Gilgal?

And farther, if, when we know not the reason of an insulated monument, such a delusive reason cannot be imposed; how much more impossible is it to impose on us in actions and observances which we celebrate in memory of particular miraculous events? How impossible to make us forget those passages which we

<sup>18</sup> Josh. iii. 15—17; iv. 18—24.

daily commemorate; and to persuade us that we had always observed such institutions or ceremonies in memory of what we never before heard of; that is, that we knew it before we knew it! And if it be found thus impossible to practise an imposition upon us, even in some things which have not all the four criteria before-mentioned, how much more impossible is it that there should be any deceit with regard to particulars in which all those criteria actually meet.

Similar reasoning is applied with equal success by this acute writer to the principal facts, including the miraculous ones, recorded in the Evangelical history: The works and the miracles of Jesus Christ are said, by the Evangelists, to be done *publicly* in the face of the world; and so, indeed, himself affirmed in reasoning with his accusers: "I spake *openly* to the world, and in secret have I said nothing<sup>19</sup>." We learn also in the Acts of the Apostles, that three thousand at one time, and more than two thousand at another<sup>20</sup>, were converted, upon conviction of what themselves had seen and known, what had been done publicly before their eyes, and in particulars respecting which it was impossible to impose upon them. So that here we find the two first of Mr. Leslie's criteria.

Then for the two second: Baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted as perpetual memorials of these things: they were not instituted in after ages, but at the very time when the circumstances to which they relate took place; and they have been observed without interruption, through the whole Christian world, in all ages down from that time to the present. Besides, Christ himself ordained apostles, and other ministers of his Gospel, to preach and administer the sacraments: and that *always* "even unto the end of the world<sup>21</sup>." Accordingly, they have continued by regular succession to this day. So that the Christian ministry is,

<sup>19</sup> John, xviii. 20. See on this point, Horne on the Study of the Scriptures, vol. i. p. 541, 1st edit.

<sup>20</sup> Acts, ii. 41; iv. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Matt. xxviii. 20.

and always has been, as notorious in point of fact, as the tribe of Levi among the Jews. The Gospel also is as much a law, a rule of conduct to the Christians, as the books of Moses to the Jews: and it being part of the matters of fact or truths related in the Gospel that "pastors and teachers<sup>22</sup>" were appointed by Christ, and to continue till the end of the world; consequently if the Gospel history and doctrines were invented (as they must be, if forged at all) in some ages after Christ; then, at the time of the invention, there could be no such order of clergy or ministers as derived themselves from the institution of Christ; a circumstance which must give the lie to the Gospel, and demonstrate the whole to be false. The miraculous actions of Christ and his Apostles being affirmed to be true no otherwise than as there were at that identical time (when ever the Deist will suppose the Gospel history to be forged), not only sacraments or ordinances of Christ's institution, but an order of Christian pastors, &c. to administer them; and it being impossible there could be any such things before they were invented, it is as impossible they should be received and accredited when invented. Hence it follows that it was as impossible to have imposed these miraculous relations upon mankind in after ages, as it would have been to make persons believe they saw the miracles, or were parties concerned in the beneficial effects resulting from them, if they were not.

IV. Notwithstanding all that has been said, however, by Leslie and others, since there is no making a fence high enough to keep out extravagant conjectures and surmises, we find unbelievers exclaiming after all, that still men's senses might be imposed upon. To reasoning we may always oppose reasoning; and it is often perfectly legitimate to oppose conjecture to conjecture; yet, with regard to the New Testament miracles, we cannot have so ill an opinion of the intellects of infidels as to conjecture that they really believe—

<sup>22</sup> Ephes. iv. 11.

“That persons afflicted with the most excruciating maladies and diseases should be juggled into perfect ease and health, and cured (as Celsus pretended) by legerdemain :

“That blind men should see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, lepers be cleansed, and dead men come to life, merely by the play of fancy, and the force of imagination :

“That the senses of whole multitudes should be imposed upon to such a degree that they should all fancy together, they saw, heard, spake, ate and drank, repeated these actions many times over, and that in different places and circumstances, too, and yet, after all, did nothing of all this; but were either asleep, or in ecstasy, or under the influence of some strange charm all the while :

“That five thousand men, for example, at one time and four thousand at another (besides women and children), should persuade themselves they fed only upon a few loaves and fishes; should publish it to all the country that they did so; refer to time, place, and persons present; and yet, instead of this, have been in fact at a splendid and magnificent feast, where plenty and variety of all provisions, fit to entertain such multitudes, were set before them.”

If these things may be, of what utility are our senses? What dependence can be placed upon them? or what credit can be due to a Deist who attests nothing but upon *experience*, and yet admits that *thousands* together may be deceived in reference to some of the most common and frequent actions and functions in human life?

In truth, there are but four hypotheses that can be assumed with respect to the miracles of Jesus Christ, one or other of which a reasonable being must adopt.

Either, first, the recorded accounts of those miracles were absolute fictions wickedly invented by some persons who had a wish to impose upon mankind :

Or, secondly, Jesus Christ did not work any true

miracles; but the senses of the people were in some way or other deluded, so that they believed he really did perform miracles, when in fact he did not :

Or, thirdly, that the spectators were not in any way deluded, but knew very well he wrought no miracles: yet were all (both enemies and friends, the *Jews* themselves not excepted, though they daily “sought occasion against him”) united in a close confederacy to persuade the world that he performed the most surprising things. So that, while some actively circulated reports of these amazing occurrences, the rest kept their counsel, never offering to unmask the fraud, but managing the matter with so much cunning and dexterity, and such an exact mutual harmony and correspondence, that the story of Jesus Christ’s performing miracles should become current, should obtain almost universal credit, and *not a single person be able to disprove it* :

Or, fourthly, that he did actually perform these astonishing works, and that the accounts given of them by the Christian writers in the New Testament are authentic and correct.

He that does not adopt the last of these conclusions will find it a matter of very small consequence which of the three others he chooses. For that the stories cannot be *fictions* is evident from the reasoning of Leslie already adduced: and it will be seen farther, from a few moments’ consideration, that the denial of the miracles of Jesus Christ, in *any* way, leads necessarily to the admission of a series of real miracles of another kind.

The progress of the human mind, as may be seen by all the inquiries into it, is a thing of a determinate nature: a man’s thoughts, words, and actions, are all generated by something previous; there is an established course for these things (as well as for the physical part of the universe), an analogy, of which every man is a judge from what he feels in himself, and observes in others: and to suppose any number

of men in determinate circumstances to vary from this general tenour of human nature in like circumstances is a miracle, and may, as Dr. Hartley remarks, be made a miracle of any magnitude, *i. e.* incredible to any degree, by augmenting the number and magnitude of the deviations. It is therefore a miracle in the human *mind*, as great as any that can possibly be conceived to take place with regard to the *body*, to suppose that multitudes of Christians, Jews, and Heathens, in the primitive times, should have borne such unquestionable testimony, some expressly, others by indirect circumstances, as we learn from history they did, to the miracles said to be performed by our Lord upon the human body, unless they were really performed. In like manner, the reception which the miracles recorded in the Old Testament met with is a miracle, unless those miracles were true. These are not however the only miracles which unbelievers in the Scripture miracles must admit. The very determination of the apostles to propagare the belief of false miracles (independent of the additional difficulty arising from the silent concurrence of the Jews and Gentiles in the story, according to the *third* hypothesis suggested above), in support of such a religion as that taught in the New Testament, is as great a miracle as human imagination can conceive. For when they formed this design, whether they hoped to succeed, or conjectured that they should fail, in their undertaking, they chose what they *knew* to be *moral evil*, with the contingency of experiencing *natural evil*; nay, so desirous were they to obtain nothing but *misery*, that they made their own persecution a test of the truth of their doctrines;—thus violating the strongest possible of all laws of human nature, namely, that “no man *can* choose evil for its *own sake*.”

Here, then, an unbeliever must either deny all analogy, association, uniformity of action, operation of motives, selection of good in preference to evil, &c. and become an absolute sceptic in the most extensive

acceptation of the term, or acknowledge that very strong physical analogies may sometimes be violated; that is, he must have recourse to something miraculous in order that he may get quit of something miraculous. Let him next inquire which of the two opposite classes of miracles will agree best with his other notions: whether it be more analogous to the nature of God, the course of providence, the history of the world, the known progress of man in this life, &c. to allow that God imparted to certain select persons, of eminent piety, the power of working miracles; or to suppose that he confounded the understandings, affections, and whole train of associations, of thousands of persons, nay, of entire nations, in such a manner that men, who in all other things seemed to have acted like other men, should, in respect of the history of Jesus Christ, the Prophets, or the Apostles, abandon all established rules of thinking and acting, and conduct themselves in a way miraculously repugnant to all our ideas and all our experience. In order to determine this inquiry, let it not be forgotten that the object, of the class of miracles against which the Deists contend, is *unworthy* of a God of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness: while the object of the latter is decidedly and absolutely inconsistent with wisdom and goodness, attributes which all Theists ascribe to that Great Being by whom alone miracles can be performed, allowing that they can be wrought at all.

V. Much of the preceding reasoning is entirely independent of any minute investigation of the nature of concurrent or successive testimony; and the whole discussion might safely be terminated without any reference to these abstruser inquiries, were it not that Hume and his disciples have frequently adverted to them, and that silence might be construed into inability to break through their web of sophistry. The argument of Dr. Campbell has already been briefly sketched; I shall here add a few distinct considerations. And, first, with regard to *concurrent* testimony, it has been

demonstrated upon genuine mathematical principles<sup>23</sup>, that where the credibility of each witness is great, a very few witnesses will be sufficient to overcome any contrary probability, derived from the nature of the fact; that the evidence resulting from testimony can not only approach indefinitely near to certainty, but can at length exceed the evidence of any inference, however cogent, which can possibly be deduced from personal experience, or from personal and derived experience conjointly; that is, that the evidence of testimony can overcome any degree of improbability, however great, which can arise from the nature of the fact. The reason is, that the evidence of testimony admitting of an unlimited increase on two different accounts (namely, that of the *veracity* of the witnesses, and that of the *number* of concurrent witnesses), while the probability of the happening of any specific event admits only one of them, the former is capable of indefinitely surpassing the latter.

But, indeed, the force of the evidence resulting from concurrent testimony is avowedly so great upon the minds of all who have not been biassed by the perusal of deistical speculations, or an indulgence in them, that the matter scarcely needs the support of mathematical investigation. Let it be supposed that twelve men of probity and good sense were circumstantially and seriously to tell, each independently of the others, on his own personal conviction, "a round unvarnished tale" of a miracle performed before their eyes, and respecting which it was impossible (as they affirm) for them to be deceived; I believe few persons would wait to receive a thirteenth concurrent testimony, before they yielded their assent to the truth of the relation, however extraordinary. Let it be supposed, farther, that the twelve evidences, on being suspected of "bearing false witness," subjected themselves to be scourged, tortured, nay strangled, rather than deny the truth of their attestation; could any reasonable or reasoning man refuse

<sup>23</sup> See the article *Credibility* in the PANTALOGIA.

to believe their testimony? According to Mr. Hume's argumentation, we are not to believe them, were we to witness such a story and such sufferings; but I am so persuaded that no person in his senses would *disbelieve* them, that I will venture to say even Mr. Hume, under such circumstances, could not have withheld his assent to the truth of their story.

"But," say his disciples, "whatever might be done or conceded in such a case, those who live a thousand years after the event, can have no reason to believe it: if we admit that *concurrent* testimony may augment; still *successive* testimony diminishes, and that so rapidly as to command no assent, after a few centuries at most." This is specious; but, as I remarked at the commencement of this letter, far from correct. I do not deny that there may be cases in which credibility diminishes with time; but no testimony is really, in the nature of things, rendered less credible by any other cause, than the loss or want of some of those conditions which first made it rationally credible. A testimony continues *equally* credible, so long as it is transmitted with all those circumstances and conditions which first procured it a certain degree of credit amongst men, proportionate to the intrinsic value of those conditions. Let it be supposed that the persons who transmit the testimony are able, honest, and diligent, in all the requisite inquiries as to what they transmit, and how should the credibility due to their testimony be weakened, but by the omission of circumstances? which omission is contrary to the hypothesis. No calculation of the decrease of the credibility of testimony, in which a man bears witness respecting realities, and not the fictions of his own brain, can ever proceed upon any other principle than that of the characters and qualifications of the witnesses: and therefore, so far as the credibility of any matter of fact depends upon pure testimony, they who live at the remotest distances of time may have the same evidence of the truth of it as those persons who lived nearest to the time in which the thing was

said to be done; that identical time being, of course, excluded.

In what possible manner, for example, can the evidence on which *we* believe the facts related in the Gospels be less than that on which those facts were accredited by Christians in the second or third centuries? They possessed the standard writings of the Evangelists; so do we: what those books then contained, they now contain; and the invention of printing seems likely, under the care of Providence, to preserve them genuine to the end of time. This admirable invention has so far secured all considerable monuments of antiquity, that no ordinary calamities of wars, dissolutions of governments, &c. can destroy any material evidence now in existence, or render it less probable to those who shall live in a thousand years' time than it is to us. With regard to the facts of the Christian religion, indeed, it is notorious that our evidence in favour of them has *increased* instead of diminished since the era of printing, the reformation of religion, and the restoration of letters: and, as even the *recent* inquiries of learned men<sup>24</sup> have produced fresh evidence, there is every reason to hope it will continue to increase.

Indeed, it is only with regard to the facts related in the Bible that men ever talk of the daily diminution of credibility. Who complains of a decay of evidence in relation to the actions of Alexander, Hannibal, Pompey, or Cæsar? How many fewer of the events recorded by Plutarch, or Polybius, or Livy, are believed now (on account of a diminution of evidence) than were believed by Mr. Addison, or Lord Clarendon, or Geoffrey Chaucer? It might be contended with some semblance of probability, that we know *more* of those ancients than the persons now mentioned: but that it is widely different from accrediting *less*. We never hear persons wishing that they had lived ages earlier, that they might have had better proofs that Cyrus was the conqueror of Babylon, that Darius was beaten in

<sup>24</sup> See the close of Letter V.

several battles by Alexander, that Titus destroyed Jerusalem, that Hannibal was entirely routed by Scipio, or Pompey by Julius Cæsar: though we sometimes find men of ardent and enterprising minds exclaiming, "O that I had lived and been present when such and such splendid events occurred: how lively an interest should I have taken in such scenes, how much concern in their termination!" And, indeed, it is the frequent hearing of like exclamations that causes men to confound weight of testimony with warmth or depth of feeling; and to lose sight of the essential difference between real evidence, or the true basis for belief of history, and the sensible impression or influence which such history may make upon the mind. We believe as firmly that Lucretius stabbed himself in the delirium of a fever, as that Lucretia stabbed herself in consequence of the wrongs she had received from Tarquin's son; yet we feel a much more lively interest in the latter event than in the former. The fate of Carthage, or the result of the contest between Antony and Octavius respecting the empire of the world, would doubtless be much more deeply felt, and much more warmly conversed about, within two centuries of the circumstances, than they ever are now: yet those who then conversed about them had just as much reason to doubt their occurrence as we have; that is, just none at all. Similar reasoning will apply to all the circumstances recorded in authentic history. So that, having established the genuineness and authenticity of the books of Scripture, on evidence far superior to that on which other historic books are received, it is the most idle and ridiculous thing imaginable to affect to disbelieve any of the facts therein recorded, on account of the remoteness of the times in which they occurred.

Let me now attempt to collect the scattered arguments in this letter, with a few additional suggestions, to one point, and conclude. If, then, we have found, upon careful examination, that the miraculous facts proposed for our belief, and on the credit of which the

divine authority of a particular system of doctrines and precepts depends, are such,—1. As do not imply a self-contradiction in them. 2. If they appear to have been performed publicly, in the view of several people, and with a professed intention to establish the divine authority of the person or persons who wrought them. 3. If they were many in number, frequently repeated and continued for a series of years together. 4. If they were of an interesting nature in themselves, likely to have made strong impressions upon the minds of all who saw and heard of them; and for that reason, probably, much attended to, talked of, and examined, at the time of their performance. 5. If the effects produced by them were not transient, but lasting, such as, however instantaneous the change might be, must have existed for many years, and were capable all the while of being disproved if they were not real. 6. If the relations were committed to writing at or very near the time when the facts are said to have occurred, and by persons of unimpeachable integrity, who tell us, that “that which they have seen and heard, the same declare they unto us;” by persons who, having sufficient opportunity of knowing the whole truth of what they testify, could not possibly be deceived themselves; and who, having no conceivable motive or temptation to falsify their evidence, cannot, with the least shadow of probability, be suspected of an intention to deceive other people. 7. If there be no proof, or even well-founded suspicion of proof, that the testimony of those who bear witness to these extraordinary facts was ever contradicted even by such as professed themselves open enemies to their persons, character, and views, though the accounts of the facts were first published upon the spot where they were affirmed to have been originally performed, and amongst persons who were engaged by private interest, and furnished with full authority, inclination, and opportunity, to have manifested the falsity of them, and to have detected the imposture, had they been able. 8. If, on the contrary, the existence

of these facts be expressly allowed, by the persons who thought themselves most concerned to prevent the genuine consequences which might be deduced from them; and there were, originally, no other disputes about them, than to what sufficient cause they were to be imputed. 9. If, again, the witnesses from whom we have these facts were many in number, all of them unanimous in the substance of their evidence, and all, as may be collected from their whole conduct, men of such unquestionable good sense as secured them against all delusion in themselves; if they were men who evinced the sincerity of their own conviction, by acting under the uniform influence of the extraordinary works to which they bore witness, in direct contradiction to all their former prejudices and most favoured notions; in direct contradiction, also, to every flattering prospect of worldly honour, profit, or advantage (as was remarkably exemplified in the case of St. Paul); and when they could not but be previously assured that “bonds and afflictions awaited them<sup>25</sup>,” that ignominy, persecution, misery, and even death itself, most probably would attend the constant and invariable perseverance in their testimony. 10. If these witnesses, in order that their evidence might have the greater weight with a doubting world (each nation being already in possession of an established religion), were themselves enabled to perform such extraordinary works as testified the clear and indisputable interposition of a divine power in favour of their veracity; and, after having experienced the severest afflictions, vexations, and torments, at length laid down their lives in confirmation of the truth of the facts asserted by them. 11. If great multitudes of the contemporaries of these witnesses, men of almost all nations, tempers, professions, and scales of intellect, were persuaded by them that these facts were really performed in the manner related, and gave the strongest testimony which it was in their power to give of the firmness and active

<sup>25</sup> Aots, xx. 23.

tendency of their belief, by immediately breaking through all their previous attachments and connections of interest or friendship, and acting in express contradiction to them. 12. If concurring testimony, carried to a sufficient extent, and especially of this kind, be in its nature really irresistible; and if successive testimony, under the circumstances of the case before us, rather increase than diminish in credibility. 13. If ceremonies and institutions were grounded upon the miraculous facts, and have been uninterruptedly observed in all the successive periods of time, from the date of the facts in commemoration of which they were established. 14. If we have all the proof which the severest rules of criticism can require, that no alterations have been made in the original writings and records left us by these witnesses in any material article of their evidence since their first publication, either through accident or design; but that they have been transmitted to us in all their genuine purity, as they were left by their authors. In such a situation of things, where so great a variety of circumstances, where, indeed, all imaginable circumstances, mutually concur to confirm, strengthen, and support each other's evidence; without a single argument on the other side, but what arises merely from the extraordinary nature of the facts, and the admission of which inevitably leads to consequences at least as extraordinary as those our opponents are inclined to reject; may not *they* be justly accused of an unreasonable incredulity who refuse their assent to them? And will not such incredulity be as dangerous as it is ridiculous? If facts, attested in so clear, decisive, and unexceptionable a manner, and delivered down to posterity with so many conspiring signs and monuments of truth, are, nevertheless, not to be believed: it is, I think, impossible for the united wisdom of mankind to point out any evidence of historical events which will justify a wise and cautious man in accrediting them. Where there is the strongest assurance of the occurrence of any particular series of

miraculous facts, which we are capable of acquiring, according to the present frame of our nature, and the state of things in the world; to reject these miracles after all, and the religion in attestation of which they were wrought, and to pretend to exculpate ourselves for not believing them, upon the bare suspicion of a possibility that they *may* be false, is, instead of being an indication of freedom from shackles, and erectness and greatness of mind, a monstrous contradiction to the principles of common sense, and the universal practice of mankind. That you and I, my friend, may be preserved from such a preposterous and dangerous absurdity, is the fervent wish of,

Yours, sincerely.

## LETTER VIII.

### *On the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

SEVERAL of the facts recorded in the Christian Scriptures have this to distinguish them from others, that they are intimately connected with doctrines; so intimately, indeed, that the doctrine grows out of the fact, and that, consequently, the denial of the fact causes the annihilation of the doctrine, and prevents the springing forth of those happy effects which the doctrine is calculated to produce. Thus the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact; *our* resurrection is a doctrine founded upon that fact. The denial of one requires the renunciation of the other. "If," says Paul, "there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain<sup>1</sup>." And again, "If we believe that Jesus Christ died, and rose again, even so, them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him<sup>2</sup>." Thus also, the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven is a fact; his return from thence to judge the world is a dependent doctrine. Thus spake the angels

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 13, 14.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thes. iv. 14.



to the disciples at the ascension of our Lord: "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven<sup>3</sup>." "Shall come to be admired in his saints, and to be glorified in all them that believe<sup>4</sup>."

Hence, since the most exalted hopes of a Christian, the most animating doctrines of his religion, have for the basis, the fact of the RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ; it is requisite that his faith in that fact be firmly "rooted and grounded." And, happily, the general evidences in confirmation of so important an event flow from various and satisfactory sources. As from the predictions of Jesus Christ, that at a certain time he should raise himself from the dead. From the fact that, at this precise time, his body was not to be found in the sepulchre, although the most effectual precautions had been taken to prevent its removal. From the positive testimony of *many*, that after this time they saw him, conversed with him, the most incredulous touched and felt him, to remove their doubts, and all received from him those instructions on which they acted in promulgating his Gospel. From the clumsy and self-destructive story invented by the Jews in contradiction of this fact<sup>5</sup>. And from the success which attended the preaching and declaring that he was "crucified and *raised from the dead*."

It is not my intention to enlarge upon these various

<sup>3</sup> Acts, i. 11.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Thes. i. 10. It may also be observed that so indissoluble is the connection between one fact and another revealed to us in the New Testament, that the admission of one, by necessity involves the admission of the rest. Thus, by proving the resurrection of our Lord, you establish,—1. His death and burial. 2. The occasion and benefits of his death. 3. His promise of the Spirit. 4. His ascension (for, if he did not ascend, what became of him?) 5. His ever living in heaven. 6. The objects which he there incessantly carries on.

This suggests an important train of argument, at which I now merely glance, and leave it to be pursued by others.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xxviii. 13, 14.

sources of evidence; but merely, assuming (as I may now, I trust, fairly do) the genuineness of the first four books of the New Testament, to describe, briefly, the leading circumstances of Christ's resurrection, and several appearances previous to his ascension; and then to adduce a few general, though, I hope, unanswerable arguments, in favour of this extraordinary event.

The circumstances of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the subsequent appearances, as they may be collected from the accounts of the several Evangelists, have been related, with slight variations, by different authors. The order I shall adopt appears to me as free from objection, and as little exposed to the cavils of unbelievers, as any I have met with. To render this history the more perspicuous, it may be proper to begin with reminding you, that, when Jesus Christ was led to be crucified, a great company of his friends and acquaintance followed, bewailing and lamenting him<sup>6</sup>. Among the rest was his own mother, who, with two more of her name, and the apostle John, stood so near him, that he could speak to them. While he was nailed to the cross, he consigned his mother to John's care, it appearing that she was then a widow. This beloved disciple, probably, took her immediately to his own home, before the three hours' supernatural darkness<sup>7</sup>, that she might not be there to see him expiring. But the other two women continued there still, as well as many more who stood farther off. When the darkness was over, and our Lord had yielded up his spirit, they were there still; and all of them attended till he was buried<sup>8</sup>. It should seem, also, that the two Marys<sup>9</sup> waited later than the rest, till all was over, and he was laid in the sepulchre<sup>10</sup>. A considerable company of the women seem to have agreed to embalm their Lord's

<sup>6</sup> Luke, xxiii. 27.

<sup>7</sup> John, xix. 25—27.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. xxvii. 55, 56. Mark, xv. 40, 41. Luke, xxiii. 49, 55.

<sup>9</sup> Namely, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the wife of Cleopas, and mother of Matthew, James, Simon, and Jude.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. xxvii. 61. Mark, xv. 47.

body early on the third day; they therefore that evening prepared what time and circumstances would admit, and rested on the sabbath, conformably with the commandment<sup>11</sup>.

Not so the priests and pharisees. With all their pretended zeal for the sabbath, they were very busy on that day, consulting, arranging, preparing an address, waiting with it on Pilate, obtaining a guard, sealing the stone, and setting all safe. This was *their* sabbath employment<sup>12</sup>. By the end of the day all was as safe as they could make it. But very early on the following morning, the first day of the week, *i. e.* about the break of day, or a little earlier, an angel descended from heaven, came and rolled back the stone from the entrance of the grave, and sat upon it, regardless of either seal or guard. The keepers or guards were terrified at his appearance, and became as dead men<sup>13</sup>. Recovering themselves a little, however, some of them went to the chief priests, and related what had happened: the chief priests and elders "gave large money to the soldiers," saying, "Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him while we slept<sup>14</sup>."

About the time of the earthquake which occurred on the descent of the angel, the two Marys were preparing to go, very early, to see whether all about the sepulchre was safe, before the rest of the company could go<sup>15</sup>. Either they called on Salome, or met her in their way<sup>16</sup>; and as all three passed on towards the sepulchre, being desirous, probably, to begin to embalm the body before their friends arrive, "they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" All this time they knew nothing of the guard, or of the opening of the grave: but as they came near the sepulchre "at the rising of the sun," they looked forward, "and saw that the stone was rolled away; for it was very great<sup>17</sup>." This, as

<sup>11</sup> Luke xxiii. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. xxvii. 62—66.

<sup>13</sup> Matt. xxviii. 2—4.

<sup>14</sup> Matt. xxviii. 11—13.

<sup>15</sup> Matt. xxviii. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Mark, xvi. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Mark, xvi. 2—4.

was natural, caused a multiplicity of varying emotions in their minds. Mary Magdalene, being at once warm in her affection, and anxious in her disposition, concluded that the body was stolen; and would therefore go no farther, but hastily ran back to tell Peter and John what she had seen, and what she thought: those two zealous disciples, therefore, hastened thither to ascertain the truth of her relation<sup>18</sup>. But while she ran back, the other Mary and Salome approached nearer to the sepulchre. The angel, who formerly sat on the stone to terrify the guard, had by this time moved into the sepulchre; for Christ rose and went out as soon as the stone was rolled away: and though the women were near enough to see the stone, they could see no angel upon it before Mary Magdalene ran back. Mary and Salome thus advancing, they found no obstruction, and resolved to ascertain whether the body was taken away or not. Just entering, therefore, into the sepulchre, they saw the angel, who invited them farther in, to "behold the place where the Lord had lain." But they were affrighted: so the angel told them "the Lord was risen," directed them to go and inform his disciples, and Peter, and to tell them, moreover, that they should see him in Galilee; as he had assured them previous to his crucifixion<sup>19</sup>. The women, under the joint influence of fear, joy, and amazement, ran away, saying nothing to any one, but fled trembling<sup>20</sup>. They were just gone when Mary Magdalene arrived the second time, with Peter and John, though it was yet early. These two disciples, before they reached the sepulchre, ran quicker than Mary: the angel having now disappeared, the two men went *into* the sepulchre, found the body was not there, but saw the grave-clothes lying folded up, indicating that there had been no indecent haste. John *believed* "the Lord was risen:" but they both soon went away home with-

<sup>18</sup> John, xx. 1—4.

<sup>19</sup> Matt. xxviii. 5—7. Mark, xvi. 5—7. Matt. xxvi. 32.

<sup>20</sup> Mark, xvi. 8.

out seeing him. Mary Magdalene now tarried behind, to weep alone, appearing in much doubt as to what had become of the body of Jesus. While in this mournful, anxious state of mind, she stooped down and looked earnestly into the sepulchre, where she saw *two* angels, one at the head, the other at the feet, where the body had lain. They asked why she wept: she replied it was because she had lost her Lord; and as she made the answer, she in haste looked another way and *saw* JESUS; but not knowing him, being half blinded by her apprehensions and her tears, she supposed it was the gardener who cultivated the garden in which the sepulchre was, and therefore said to him, "Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." Then Jesus made himself known unto her. This therefore was his *first* appearance after his resurrection, to any of his followers: and it was early<sup>21</sup>. Mary Magdalene departed immediately, "and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken to her." Thus, as some of our old divines have remarked, woman, who was first in the original transgression, was first in proclaiming the fact of the resurrection, and laying the grand corner stone in the Christian edifice.

The other Mary and Salome, full of fear and amazement, had turned aside into some retired place; and needed time to recover themselves before they could carry any tidings. But while they were in this consternation, their compassionate Lord met them, and said, "All hail: be not afraid," proceed cheerfully on, and deliver to my disciples the message you have received from the angel, "that they go into Galilee<sup>22</sup>." This was the *second* appearance of Christ; and it was to *two* women.

These three women and two of the apostles having been at the sepulchre, and Mary the last of them having departed, it being yet early<sup>23</sup>: just as she was gone

<sup>21</sup> John, xx. 3—18. Mark, xvi. 9, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Matt. xxviii. 9, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Mark, xvi. 9.

Joanna came, and a considerable company with her; bringing the spices, &c. in order to embalm the body of Jesus, as they had agreed before the sabbath. They spent no time in reasoning about the removal of the stone, as the others had done; being a sufficient number to effect it, and expecting to meet the other three women at the place: for they knew nothing of what had passed at the sepulchre in the earlier part of the morning, before they arrived. When they got there, they found the stone rolled away: so they went into the sepulchre, and immediately perceived that the body was not there: but when they went in they saw no angel, as Mary and Salome had seen, sitting at the right side<sup>24</sup>; nor did the two angels, who spake to Mary Magdalene, now appear. Joanna and her companions, like the other women, were full of amazement: and while they were in this perplexity, behold two angels stood by them and said, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen, &c."<sup>25</sup> Then the women returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things to the eleven, and to others, who, it seems, were now gathered together, by reason of the report Peter and John had made on their return from the sepulchre an hour or two before. When Peter and John were at the sepulchre, they had seen no angels; nor had they heard any report that Jesus was actually risen: but on Joanna's relating what she had seen and heard, Peter, evincing the ardour which marked all his actions, ran a second time to the sepulchre<sup>26</sup>; and some others either along with him, or soon after him<sup>26</sup>: they all found that the body was not in the grave; but they saw not Jesus.

Soon after this, two of them went a journey as far as Emmaus, about seven and a half miles from Jerusalem. We have no account of any more persons going to the sepulchre. But Peter, soon after the departure of the two disciples for Emmaus, retired to a place alone to

<sup>24</sup> Mark, xvi. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Luke, xxiv. 1—9.

<sup>26</sup> Luke, xxiv. 12. 24.

meditate upon what had occurred, where his Lord appeared to him. This was the *third* appearance of Christ; but the first<sup>27</sup> to any of his apostles. Jesus, having conversed a little with Peter, left him; and soon coming up with the two disciples who were journeying to Emmaus, conversed with them a good while, and afterwards revealed himself unto them<sup>28</sup>. This was the *fourth* appearance.

While these two disciples were from Jerusalem, those who continued at that city were in great concern; for though Joanna had told them, from the angels, that Jesus was risen, yet her "words were as idle tales." Some time after, Mary Magdalene brought them the tidings that she had "seen the Lord;" she found them mourning and incredulous, notwithstanding the cheering tenor of the news she communicated<sup>29</sup>. The other Mary and Salome likewise conveyed their tidings, as they were directed, first by the angels, and then by Christ himself<sup>30</sup>. Late the same evening Peter came and informed them that he had seen Jesus. And as the disciples were discussing the evidences of his resurrection, some believing, others doubting, the two returned from Emmaus; and while they received, on the one hand, the joyful intelligence "the Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon," they in their turn confirmed the account, telling "what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread<sup>31</sup>;" by this significant act reminding them of his last supper with them, and of the important institution he then established. Still, however, "some of them believed not," though Jesus had now appeared *four* times; first to one woman, then to two; after that to one man, and then to two.

Our Lord's *fifth* appearance after his resurrection was much more public than any of the preceding ones; for while they were earnestly conversing upon this most

<sup>27</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Luke, xxiv. 13—31.

<sup>29</sup> Mark, xvi. 10, 11. John, xx. 17, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Matt. xxviii. 7—10. <sup>31</sup> Mark, xvi. 13. Luke, xxiv. 34, 35.

interesting topic, still on the evening of the first day of the week, just after the return of the two from Emmaus, "Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and said unto them, Peace be unto you<sup>32</sup>." Though Thomas was at this time absent, yet there was a considerable number of the disciples gathered together, besides ten of the apostles<sup>33</sup>, in order to inquire and learn more about Jesus Christ. Besides this, the guard having said that they had seen an angel at the sepulchre, the Jews were enraged that their precautions to detain the body were defeated, circulated the ridiculous story that it was stolen by the disciples of Jesus while the guards slept, and began to threaten the disciples; they, therefore, being "afraid of the Jews," dare not sleep in their own lodgings, but had assembled together, and shut the door, previously to this appearance of Jesus<sup>34</sup>. His sudden and unexpected appearance and address to them terrified them, so that they thought "it was a spirit," and not their Lord in the same identical body that was crucified and buried. But the Redeemer, to remove their distressing unbelieving thoughts, directed them to behold him steadfastly, to feel and touch him, and observe his lately wounded and pierced hands and feet. Then he ate before them, still farther to confirm their faith; and "opened the Scriptures to them," showing them that "thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day<sup>35</sup>." After that, conversing still farther with them, he gave them another sign of his real existence and life, by *breathing* upon them; of his divine power, by conferring upon them the Holy Spirit; and then departed<sup>36</sup>. Presently after, Thomas came in; but when the disciples told him they had "seen the Lord," consistently with the unbelieving spirit which he seemed usually to manifest, he refused his assent, and replied, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his

<sup>32</sup> Luke, xxiv. 36.

<sup>33</sup> Luke, xxiv. 33.

<sup>34</sup> John, xx. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Luke, xxiv. 37—48. John, xx. 29.

<sup>36</sup> John, xx. 22.

side, *I will not believe*<sup>37</sup>." Such was the incredulity of this apostle, although Jesus had then been seen at *five* distinct times in the course of that one day.

At the close of the feast of unleavened bread, that is on the succeeding first day of the week, Jesus again appeared unto the *eleven*, Thomas being with them: he upbraided him for his unbelief, allowed him the tests he wished for, and extorted from him the confession, "My Lord and my God"<sup>38</sup>! On this occasion, which was the *sixth* time of Jesus Christ's appearing, there does not seem to have been much conversation. The appearance was probably for the especial purpose of convincing Thomas.

After this, the feast being now over, the eleven travelled to Galilee, being encouraged by promises both before and after the resurrection, to expect the sight of their Lord there<sup>39</sup>. The distance was more than eighty miles from Jerusalem to Tiberias, and more still to Bethsaida and Capernaum. Thither, however, they went, inspired by these hopes; and shortly after their arrival there, Jesus appeared again at the sea of Tiberias, or, as it was sometimes called, the sea of Galilee<sup>40</sup>. Here were seven of the disciples, probably of the eleven, following their occupation of fishers; they had been "toiling all night, and caught nothing," when Jesus appeared, whom they knew not at first. In consequence of following his advice, they had a large and miraculous draught of fishes in their net; which was succeeded by a long, familiar, and interesting conversation, related pretty fully by the apostle John<sup>41</sup>, who was one of the disciples present. This was, as John terms it, the *third* time he had appeared to the body of the apostles; but it was his *seventh* appearance since his resurrection.

Probably it was at this familiar interview by the sea of Tiberias, that Jesus told these seven disciples when

<sup>37</sup> John, xx. 25.

<sup>38</sup> John, xx. 26—29. Mark, xvi. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Matt. xxviii. 16.

<sup>40</sup> John, vi. 1; xxi. 1.

<sup>41</sup> John, xxi. 12—23.

and where they might expect to see him in a very public manner, agreeably to the promise made them before his death<sup>42</sup>. And hence probably they gave notice of it privately to as many disciples as might be thought proper; for even then, though he was to appear openly, yet it was not to a great variety, but "to chosen witnesses"<sup>43</sup>, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." Pursuant to this previous notice, as it should seem, there was a most numerous and public meeting upon a mountain in Galilee, where Jesus made his *eighth* appearance. Matthew says expressly<sup>44</sup> Jesus had appointed the mountain. The number assembled there was between five and six hundred, called emphatically *brethren*<sup>45</sup>, denoting that they were all chosen witnesses, as Peter observed in the house of Cornelius. Here, as he found that "some" still "doubted," he gave infallible proofs of his resurrection, and "spake much of the things concerning the kingdom of God"<sup>46</sup>;" being now about to take his final farewell of the greatest part of them on earth. It is worthy of observation, that the majority of the witnesses of this appearance were living, and appealed to as such, twenty years afterwards, when Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians.

The *ninth* appearance of Christ recorded in the Scriptures was to James. This, Paul informs us, was after that to the five hundred<sup>47</sup>. Probably it took place in Galilee, as well as the two last mentioned; but the evangelists give us no particular information about it. Paul, however, refers to it as a fact *well known*; otherwise he would not have adduced it in proof of the resurrection, denied as it was by some, and little understood by many who believed the fact.

The *tenth* and last appearance of the risen Saviour was at Jerusalem, "to all the apostles"<sup>48</sup>," that is, to the eleven remaining ones, Judas being "gone to his own

<sup>42</sup> Matt. xxviii. 7. 10. Mark, xvi. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Acts, x. 40, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Matt. xxviii. 16, 17.

<sup>45</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Acts, i. 3.

<sup>47</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 7.

<sup>48</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 7.

place." It was about six weeks after the passover, and about forty days after the resurrection, when several of the disciples from Galilee repaired again to Jerusalem, in order to keep the approaching feast of weeks, called the *Pentecost* by the Grecian Jews. Being assembled together with the disciples at Jerusalem in one house, probably the same as that where Jesus had kept the passover and instituted his supper; and the same in which they met on the day of the resurrection, and on that day week, and where they worshiped till the day of Pentecost<sup>49</sup>; there they had the conversation with their Lord recorded in the first chapter of the Acts<sup>50</sup>. There he gave them commandments, and spake more "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God<sup>51</sup>." There he delivered to them the commission to go forth into all the world to preach, and *baptize* (for baptism, it should be remembered, was not instituted as a *Christian* ordinance till after the resurrection), and gave them animating promises of his presence with them while their life continued, and with their successors in the ministry "to the end of the world<sup>52</sup>." There he commanded them not to depart into Galilee again, but to tarry at Jerusalem till they should "be baptized with the Holy Ghost," which he assured them would be in the course of a few days<sup>53</sup>. This last interview would, doubtless, be very endearing, affecting, and instructive. And, as if to impress the circumstance with all its important lessons, and all its solemn tendencies, more deeply on their minds, he led them out towards Bethany, or *Mount Olivet*, conversing as they went, according to his wonted manner. Often had he retired with his dear and beloved disciples to that secluded spot; and thither he now for the last time conducted them. There, near the place whence he commenced his triumphant ride into Jerusalem—where he had frequently conversed, expounded parables, and prayed with his dis-

<sup>49</sup> Acts, i. 13; ii. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Acts, i. 6—8.

<sup>51</sup> Acts, i. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Matt. xxviii. 18—20. Mark, xvi. 15—18.

<sup>53</sup> Luke, xxiv. 49. Acts, i. 4, 5. 8.

ciples,—where, in so much agony, he had recently prayed, and sweat as it were "drops of blood,"—where he was betrayed with a kiss, taken by his enemies, and forsaken by his disciples; there he once more assembled them, "lifted up his hands and blessed them:" and "while he blessed them," he was taken up gradually from them into heaven, "a cloud receiving him out of their sight<sup>54</sup>." Thus, then, it appears, from apostolic testimony, that Jesus Christ not only rose from the dead, but rendered himself manifest to *many* after his resurrection, removing the doubts of the incredulous by "the most infallible proofs," and confirming the faith of the weak by the most consoling and cheering promises: promises which speedily after were amply fulfilled<sup>55</sup>.

"Twice twenty days he sojourn'd here on earth,  
And show'd himself alive to chosen witnesses  
By proofs so strong, that the most slow-assenting  
Had not a scruple left. This having done,  
He mounted up to heaven."

BLAIR.

Such, in few words, is the history of our Lord's resurrection from the dead, and of his various appearances after that important event. I have drawn this account not from the writings of any one evangelist, but from a collection and comparison of their separate stories: for the relations of these four historians, though not discordant, do not each comprise *all* the circumstances. This, however, is by no means to be regretted. Such a complete coincidence between four narratives relating to the same events, as should extend to every minute circumstance, would argue collusion, or, at least, dependence; whereas, four narratives, each exhibiting the grand outlines of the story, but varying as to minuter matters, some mentioning one, and some another, according to the particular object or individual feeling of each respective writer, naturally suggest the ideas of honest and independent narration, and exclude those of contrivance and forgery.

<sup>54</sup> Mark, xvi. 19. Luke, xxiv. 50—52. Acts, i. 9—12.

<sup>55</sup> Acts, ii.

Admitting, then, the genuineness and authenticity of the historical books of the New Testament (both satisfactorily established, I trust, in my fifth letter), the resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be denied. Yet, as this extraordinary fact is of the greatest moment in the Christian system, you will naturally expect that I will not quit the subject merely with this summary argument in its favour. I shall, therefore, devote the remainder of the present letter to the consideration of two or three such particular evidences as in themselves force our assent; and to a cursory view of some of the difficulties that spring from a denial of the fact.

Both the Jewish and the Gentile opposers of Christianity, in the primitive ages, admit that Jesus Christ suffered death by crucifixion, was buried, and that his tomb was found empty on the third day. Either, then, the body must have been *taken* away, or he rose from the dead. If the body were stolen, it must have been either by the enemies, or by the friends, of Christ: of these alternatives the former cannot be assumed for a moment; and I shall soon show that the latter, though rather more specious, is utterly untenable. The disciples of the Saviour affirm that he rose from the dead, and often appeared to *them*, as I have already related. They also, immediately after the event, set apart a solemn periodical day, and instituted a ceremony founded upon it, and commemorating it; the returning day, and the significant ceremony, having been observed regularly from that time, through all succeeding ages, to the present. Thus, with regard to the *day*, it appears from various passages, to two or three of which I refer you<sup>56</sup>, that the apostles, very soon after the death of their Lord, set apart the *first* day of the week, being that on which they affirmed he rose from the dead, as a day of religious worship, of Christian rejoicing on account of that important event, calling it *the Lord's Day*: it appears, too, that the Christian converts *in general*, both at Jerusalem and at other places, united

<sup>56</sup> Acts, xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. Rev. i. 10.

with them in solemnizing this day, and for the reason just specified. Farther, the most ancient writers in the Christian church, after the apostles, agree in assuring us that the observation of the first day of the week prevailed early and constantly. BARNABAS tells us, that in his time "the eighth day was observed with gladness, being that *on which Jesus rose from the dead.*" IGNATIUS calls it *the Queen of Days*, and assigns the same reason for its being kept holy. MELITO wrote a book concerning it. JUSTIN MARTYR and TERTULLIAN speak expressly, in their apologies, of stated Christian assemblies held on that day. CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, and many others, furnish similar evidence. NAY, PLINY, a very few years after the death of St. John, speaks of it as the sacred day of the Christians. By the observance of this day, which has ever since continued in the Christian Church, the memory of the event of Christ's resurrection is engraven upon time itself—upon that which, by its perpetual flux, consumes all things, and is itself perishing, yet will last through the successions of finite beings. Let the reasoning of Mr. Leslie adduced in my letter on miracles, be applied, then, to the case before us, and you will find it impossible to account rationally for the observance of the Lord's day without allowing the fact of the resurrection.

Thus again, with respect to *Baptism*: as a *Christian* ordinance, it was instituted (as I have already remarked) *after* the resurrection of Jesus Christ<sup>57</sup>. None were to be baptized except they believed: "If thou believest with all thine heart," said Philip to the Eunuch, "thou mayest" be baptized<sup>58</sup>. This antecedent belief included both the crucifixion and the *resurrection* of Jesus; and the primitive mode of administering baptism aptly represented both, agreeably to the language of Paul: "*Buried* with him in baptism, wherein also you are *risen* with him, through the faith of the operation of God who hath *raised him from*

<sup>57</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19. Mark, xvi. 16.

<sup>58</sup> Acts, viii. 37.

*the dead*<sup>59</sup>." Now, on the day of Pentecost, when Peter addressed the multitude then collected together, he reasoned principally upon the fact of the resurrection; and affirmed that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was thus raised up in proof that he was "both Lord and Christ." So convincing were his arguments within that short distance from the epoch assigned to the resurrection, that on this one day *three thousand* believed, and were baptized, that is, baptized in token of their belief that Jesus died, rose again, and instituted Baptism *after* his resurrection. Here, therefore, in like manner, the reasoning is conclusive. It is impossible to account for the introduction of Baptism "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"<sup>60</sup>, at *any* time, and much less for the circumstance of *thousands* submitting to the ordinance within a few days of that on which the apostles declared Jesus rose, unless it be allowed that they were thoroughly convinced of the truth of the fact: and if thousands who were at Jerusalem at the precise period assigned to the resurrection of Jesus Christ had satisfied themselves of its reality, it is the most puerile of all puerile things (to say nothing of its banefulness) to devise and urge objections at the distance of eighteen hundred years: such, however, is the puerility of men whose minds are too strong to bend to the teachings of Infinite Wisdom.

But, as arguments in favour of this great fact flow from various quarters, let it be farther considered, that, if the account of Christ's resurrection had been false, the imposture must necessarily have been detected. For the advocates for Christianity may argue, and its opponents cannot with any appearance of reason deny,—that the apostles immediately after the resurrection declared it;—that they made this declaration upon the very spot where the thing was pretended to have occurred;—that they did not disseminate their story covertly; but proclaimed it in the most open and public manner possible;—that they did not begin to circu-

<sup>59</sup> Col. ii. 12.

<sup>60</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19.

late their report in some secret and obscure corner; but in one of the most celebrated and public places then existing in the world:—that they made choice of a season in which there was the greatest concourse and resort of all sorts of people thither, that they might gain the greatest number of hearers and of inquirers into the truth of their extraordinary narration:—that the professed adversaries of the Christian doctrine then at Jerusalem had many cogent reasons to stimulate them to exert their utmost efforts to prove it false:—that they had as much time and opportunity as could well be desired to devote to the detection of the imposture, had there been any:—and, that they had likewise power in their hands, by which they were enabled to examine all persons and things that might in any way conduce to throw light upon this remarkable and highly interesting subject.

Under circumstances so favourable to refutation, there can be no doubt that the Jews would have refuted the story of the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ, had it been in their power: and, besides this, the Jews had an additional motive arising from the injury sustained by their moral character, unless they could prove the statements of the Christians to be intentionally and wickedly erroneous. It will be readily granted, I suppose, that, when two parties of men are directly and strongly opposed to each other, if the one asserts and publishes a statement as to matter of fact which is of the highest moment, and absolutely destructive of the interest of the other, and is not so palpably false as to carry with it plain indications of malignity and revenge, or of studied slander and scandal; that then, if the other party, upon whom this charge is made, does not in as solemn and public a manner refute it, or do something in their own vindication, which will, in the opinion of unbiassed and unprejudiced persons, bear some proportion to the attack made upon them—in such case, the accused party tacitly acknowledge the truth of what the accusing



party have alleged against them, and thus, of consequence, relinquish the cause. Now this is exactly the state of the case between the Jews and early Christians. The evangelist, Matthew, publishes to the world in unequivocal terms, that the Jews bribed the soldiers to report that the body of Christ was stolen by his disciples when they (the guards) were asleep<sup>61</sup>; and the early Christians uniformly asserted the same thing. To record thus in the evangelical history that the Jews were guilty of this ridiculous and self-destructive, and yet horrid and abominable, piece of forgery and bribery; to tell the world that they acted so foul and sordid a part as to tamper with the soldiers, and get them to circulate a story which in their hearts they knew to be notoriously false, as well as absurd, since no man can accurately ascertain what is carried on near him when his senses are locked up in sleep; to do this, was to depict the ruling Jews to the world in the very worst colours in which men could be drawn, and to expose the cause of these enemies of Christ, as desperate and forlorn to the last degree. Is it not natural to conclude that the Jews would in some signal manner have vindicated themselves from this charge, if they had not known and felt that vindication was impossible, the thing being *notorious*? and is it not an equally necessary inference, that the Jews at that time were fully persuaded that Jesus Christ was indeed risen? otherwise, why should they offer bribes, and invent an absurd story, to conceal it?

Thus much may suffice to establish the truth of the momentous fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. From this outline of arguments, for it is indeed nothing more than an outline, you will perceive that the evidence in favour of this event is both forcible and satisfactory. To believe it, then, is reasonable; and it is freed from absurdity, because resurrection from the dead is manifestly as much within the power of God as creation; and every consistent theist

<sup>61</sup> Matt. xxviii. 13.

admits the latter. But the adoption of a contrary opinion is pregnant with absurdities and natural impossibilities; with the mention of a few of which I shall close this letter.

He, who denies the resurrection of Jesus Christ, must believe,—That twelve poor fishermen and tent-makers, without power, and (all except Paul) without human learning, were able to deceive the wise, the learned, the prudent; and to lay their plot so deep, that neither their cotemporaries, nor any succeeding generation, should be able to detect and expose the cheat.

—That those very persons who but a few hours before were trembling with timidity and fear, whose want of courage (even according to their own account) overcame their fidelity, and caused them to forsake their master in his greatest extremity, notwithstanding their various professions, nay, protestations, of inviolable attachment and zeal; being so terrified with apprehensions that they dare not acknowledge themselves to be his disciples, but secreted themselves by day for fear of the Jews;—yet that these timid, irresolute creatures should all at once not only form the plan, but execute the bold, hazardous, and useless undertaking of conquering the guards, forcing the sepulchre, and carrying off the body of their crucified Lord.

—That men thus rash and desperate, engaged in an enterprise of so much danger, an enterprise which therefore required all possible expedition and despatch, should waste time in unaccountable niceties, and ceremonies (such as divesting the body of its burial-clothes, disposing them in separate parcels, &c.) which could be of no manner of use; but evidently exposed them to the danger of being surprised by the guards, and taken into custody.

—That these timid, yet desperate men, who constituted a company of the greatest impostors that ever existed in the world, and who, therefore, must necessarily be the worst men that ever were, did, notwithstanding, furnish mankind with the most comprehensive

and exact system of morality extant, teach such rules of living as were infinitely superior to any of the productions of Greek or Roman philosophers, and though their whole business was only to promote and disseminate falsehood and deception, yet denounced the severest eternal punishments upon all who indulged in such wicked practices.

—That these impostors, having themselves no correct notions of God, should notwithstanding impart the most rational and becoming opinions respecting him to the rest of mankind; and, by no other principles than those of delusion and irreligion, kindle a flame of desire in the breasts of thousands to serve and worship God.

—That they took far more pains to expose themselves to all the world, as the most abandoned sinners that ever came into it (for that they should *deceive* themselves so as to believe Jesus was seen *ten* distinct times after his resurrection, when he was not seen at all, cannot be imagined), than they need have done to establish the best reputation among their cotemporaries, and procure an immortal fame in all succeeding ages.

—That these impostors, after spending their lives in promulgating falsehood, died, not to testify their belief in a speculative doctrine respecting which they might be deluded by others, or self-deluded; but in attestation of a pretended fact, while they knew it was no fact; and all this under the strongest declarations of devotedness to God, and of adoration to their risen Saviour, who, they pretended, was now sitting in heaven to receive them<sup>62</sup>.

Hence you will perceive that, as a general denial of revelation leads to numerous gross absurdities, of which a few were detailed in my first letter, so a denial of individual topics of revealed truth brings each its appropriate and dependent string of difficulties. He who denies the truth of Scripture prophecy must admit that things have occurred, although there was an infinitely

<sup>62</sup> Acts, vii. 59.

great probability against their occurrence. He who disbelieves the miracles recorded in Scripture, must believe in other miracles. And he who denies the particular miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in consequence involves himself in the particular class of absurdities to which I have just adverted: besides which he voluntarily excludes himself from the only strong consolation a rational creature can possess at the hour of death, that which flows from a full persuasion of the resurrection to eternal life. "I am the Resurrection and the Life," said Jesus Christ: "who-soever believeth in me shall not die eternally<sup>63</sup>:" and his own resurrection fully establishes the truth of this consolatory declaration. But the proud philosophist who rejects this doctrine, so suited to the wishes and the wants of man, not only places himself below the Christian, but below the *Indian*, in point of prospects of futurity. The poor untutored, despised Indian

"Thinks, admitted to that equal sky,  
His faithful *dog* shall bear him company."

While many of those who pity the stupidity of the Indian, and sneer at the credulity of the Christian, live and die under the embasing conviction that at death themselves and their *dogs* will be alike extinct, alike free from responsibility, alike unconscious of all around them, alike excluded from pleasure, alike liberated from pain<sup>64</sup>!

I am, &c.

<sup>63</sup> John, xi. 25, 26.

<sup>64</sup> It was a common assertion of Diderot, that between him and his dog "*il n'y avoit de différence que habit.*"