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A SHORT

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OF THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

AS CONTAINED IN

TWO SERMONS,

BY THE REV. *JER. SEED,*

TWO SERMONS,

BY THE *BISHOP OF LANDAFF,*

AND THE

LAST CHAPTER OF PALEY'S EVIDENCES.

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1796.

TWO SERMONS

ON THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY JEREMIAH SEED, A. M.

SERMON I.

ON THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

JOHN iii. 2.

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.

THE proposition contained in the text is, that some miracles are so circumstanced, as to be direct evidences of a divine power. By a miracle, is meant an effect evident to the senses, contrary to the fixed and established course of nature. Strange! that man should disbelieve an operation different from the present course of nature; when man himself, the first man, from whom all the rest descended, could not have been brought into being, but by an act of power different from the course of nature, as it is now established. For some first man there must be: and, whoever he was, he must be brought upon the theatre of nature without parents, without any second causes, by the immediate power and will of the first,

or, in other words, by an operation, which, if it were not, strictly speaking, a miracle, was, at least, equivalent to one.

Nor is it at all improbable, that he who called man into being, by a particular display of power, distinct from those general laws which obtain at present, would exert some unusual and uncommon acts of power for (what was of greater importance than his mere being) his well-being, his eternal well-being.

In the prosecution of this subject,

I. I shall attempt to shew, that several miracles are decisive proofs of a divine power.

II. That we have sufficient evidence, that such miracles were wrought for the confirmation of religion.

I. I shall attempt to shew, that several miracles are decisive proofs of a divine power.

What powers evil spirits may have, and what is the utmost extent of their abilities, it is beyond the extent of ours, in all cases, to determine: but that God would suffer them to exert those powers in working superior and uncontrolled miracles, this I cannot admit: because God is too good to permit such a snare to be laid for the bulk of mankind, who will be always governed more by what affects their senses, than by those arguments which address themselves coldly to their understandings. Striking and pompous miracles, tho' they enforced a doctrine seemingly absurd, would dazzle and overpower

overpower the soul, and force an admittance for it into the mind: whereas dry and abstracted reasonings operate but slowly and languidly in comparison. He who could raise the dead, and suspend the laws of nature, would convince the generality of men much sooner, than if he brought several demonstrations to support what he advanced.

I cannot then believe, that God would permit evil beings to work considerable miracles, without asserting the superiority of his power; because this would unavoidably mislead the gross of the species into error. I cannot likewise believe it, for another reason, because it would invalidate and weaken the strongest proofs of his providence.

For either we must say, that no finite effects whatever bear the impress of the Deity, and prove an infinite being at the helm, (which is to discard all the arguments *a posteriori*), or such astonishing notices of power, as our Saviour and Moses, and others gave, bid as fair for the proof of it, as any phænomena.

For why may we not as well believe, that finite beings are empowered to make the sun, or other planets, revolve in their orbit, and go their everlasting round; as that they are empowered to arrest the course of the sun (or the earth), make it go backwards, or eclipse it, when the moon is at the full? Let us consider the case of Joshua stopping the sun. If the laws by which the material world is governed, be nothing, as is generally

agreed, but God's standing and uniform operation upon matter; I ask, did God suspend his action upon the sun, when it was stopped; or did he not? If he did, then he wrought the miracle; for the miracle was nothing but the suspension of the laws of nature: but if he did not, if he still continued his regular action; then it seems, there was another being concerned, who over-ruled his power, or at least kept it at bay; and thus polytheism will be unavoidable.

The same kind of reasoning may be applied to other miraculous facts. I could as soon believe, that evil spirits might call me into being, and set the springs of nature a going at first; as that they can raise me when dead, reanimate a lump of senseless matter, and re-ward my soul, when it is in the hand of God, to its former lodging refitted up. No creature can come into, or be restored to being, but by him who is the fountain of all beings.

He that had power to create bread two several times, to satisfy some thousands, might have power to create the whole world; there being no more impossibility in the one, than in the other. Either then creative and providential powers are no divine powers; or else these effects likewise bear the stamp of the Deity.

If the sick may be healed, and the deaf made to hear by an inferior being; can *the maimed be made whole*, (Matth. xv. 31.), or a lost limb restored? He, who produced and preserves

preserves that infinitely complicated engine, the human body, can alone form or restore any member of it. For in each member of it there is a curious interweaving of endless fibres, there are continual streams running to and from each part of it, through an infinity of canals, to convey nutrition throughout: each member maintains a constant correspondence with the head and the heart; it is the instrument or occasion of exciting certain sensations in the soul, and is enabled, by an incredible activity, to execute her orders, as soon as she issues them out, and wills the motion of the hand or foot, or any other part: a power to be derived only from him, who commands, and it is immediately done.

It may be of some importance to inquire, whether it be consistent with God's wisdom to intrust any beings, much less evil ones, with such ample powers, as to reserve to himself no distinctive characters of his own power; whether this be not to give up the most valuable branches of his prerogative, and in effect to unking himself: whether this would not be the case, if evil spirits might perform all the miracles recorded from Genesis to the Apocalypse. For if no such supernatural notices, no such undeniable change of nature, carry evident marks and impressions of the Deity; then the consistent uniform workings of God, according to established laws, cannot prove the Deity; and if they cannot prove it, then we are left, to all appearance, in a fatherless

and forlorn world. We may then be as sure that such miracles could be wrought by none but God, as we are, that the world is governed by God.

But farther, the argument for the unity of God is this, that one being is sufficient to produce all the phænomena in nature, and therefore we have no occasion to suppose any more than one: which argument is enforced by the *similis ratio*, analogy, and harmony, which runs throughout nature, as far as the sphere of our observation extends. But, if another being can give as glaring indications of power, in a supernatural manner, as are shewn in the ordinary course of nature, if he can break through that *similis ratio* and harmony; then this argument must be dismissed as inconclusive. For the manifestation of two distinct equal powers must lead us to the acknowledgement of two distinct equal beings.

The standing miracle of the sabbatical or seventh year, well deserves our consideration; when the land lying uncultivated, the produce of the earth in one year (the sixth), according to Moses's promise, Lev. xxv. 21. was to be thrice as much as usual, or provision for three years. Now, either this miracle was performed, or not. If not, then the whole body of the Jews must have a flagrant proof, that their lawgiver was an impostor, and consequently, must have been so far from believing him, that they would have been a nation of infidels. Nay, they could not actually have observed the

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the sabbatical year, according to his directions, upon a failure of his promise. But if this miracle was performed, then it must be the Lord's doing: for God would never suffer any evil spirit, for such a long tract of time, for several centuries, by an oft-repeated exemplification of his power to do thrice as much in a supernatural manner, as he himself did in one year, in the ordinary course of his providence. It is as certain then, that no such miracles could be wrought by any evil spirit; as that there are not two distinct independent beings at the helm. Where there is an infinite disproportion of power between two beings, there must be some sufficient marks of distinction, to ascertain, which of them acts. It cannot therefore be impossible to hit the dividing point, between the little puny feats of evil spirits, and the august display of divine power. But if such an uninterrupted series of unparal- leled miracles as our Saviour did, do not point out to us the appropriate ensigns of the Deity; what others can we single out as sufficiently and peculiarly expressive of his Majesty? The most astonishing idea we can conceive of the most astonishing being that is, is, that he brings about things, by the mere act and *fiat* of his will, without any tedious, slow, gradual process; that it is as easy for him to effect whatever he wills, as it is to will any effect. But behold another, if he were another, usurps his sovereign style: *I will, be thou clean. Lazarus, come*

come forth : It is spoke, it is done : nature hears his voice, and, confessing her author, instantly obeys the dread command.

Those settled and established rules, by which God governs the material world, being for the general good of the whole, God will never act by particular wills, and miracles in numerous, open, uncontroverted instances ; nor will he suffer others to act by them, but for some superior and prepollent good, which cannot be attained but by a deviation from the settled course of nature. Either then the miracles were wrought for some superior good, or they were not. If they were, then there is no absolute necessity to suppose other beings concerned : it was not beneath the Deity to interpose ; it was no prostitution of his power and dignity, but an act of condescension and goodness worthy of himself. If they were not for some prepollent good ; then he would not suffer them to be wrought at all : since if evil beings might, for no prepollent good, interrupt the course of nature, and turn things into another channel, all human affairs must stand still, all our industry must stagnate, and all our prudence be superseded. For where every thing in the course of nature was precarious, where there was no regular conduct or providence ; no regular and well-concerted means could be of any service, to procure any desirable end, or avert any evil. Wisdom and folly, carefulness and idleness, would be upon a level, if beings of a superior nature
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were left at large, to disconcert, unsettle, and embroil every thing. I can easily see, that God may sacrifice the uniformity and harmony of his providence, upon some uncommon exigency; the love of the happiness of his creatures being superior to his love of order: but that he should suffer a set of evil spirits to break through that magnificent simplicity, and regular variety, which constitute beauty; that he should suffer an impostor to go on in a continued series of unrivalled miracles, to raise the dead, and himself, to confer the same powers on his followers, and to enable them to speak all languages; and all this with a design to deceive a set of creatures, who may be, and are every day deceived, without the expence of one miracle, is a supposition highly injurious to the wisdom of the Deity, which has given things a law, which shall not be broken upon every slight occasion. It is in nature, as in a poem: the great author of it may break through set formal rules, when a greater beauty may be compassed by swerving from them, then by scrupulously adhering to them. But then he will never permit others to break through his regular adjustment of things, and blend their own performances promiscuously with his. I grant that evil invisible beings may be the ministers of God's vengeance, as well as visible beings are; nay, they are much properer instruments, as their intellects are clearer, their reason more extensive, and their powers more enlarged. But
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all this may be done consistently with the laws of nature; at least without any notorious uncontrolled breach of them.

To these miracles of power we may add prophecies, which are miracles of knowledge. Now, how God himself should certainly foresee uncertain events, is unconceivable by us; but it is absolutely impossible, that any such degree of knowledge should be lodged in finite beings. Yet there are several such prophecies as suppose infallible knowledge of contingent events; and consequently, must be ascribed to God alone. Such is the prophecy about Cyrus by name, and what he would do, above an hundred years before he was born; Isaiah's prophecy concerning our Saviour's sufferings, a prophecy so very punctual, that if we were not certain of the contrary, one would suspect that the author had lived after our Saviour, and had nothing to do but to adjust the pretended prophecy to the event. Such is our Saviour's prediction concerning the unexampled destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews, *'till the fulness of the Gentiles should come in.*

There then is no question, but, if the miracles were wrought, they were wrought by God himself: which brings me to the

II. Point, which was to prove, we have sufficient evidence the miracles were actually wrought.

And

And in order to this, I need not prove, that the apostles could not be deceived themselves, since they were eye-witnesses of our Saviour's miracles; much less could they be deceived, as to the miracles they themselves performed, particularly as to that of the gift of tongues. For they must have had as much an internal consciousness, that they could on a sudden understand and speak a variety of languages, which they never learned, as they had an internal consciousness of their own existence. They must have an intimate feeling of what passed within them.

My business shall be to shew,

1st, That the apostles had no interest to deceive others: and,

2^{dly}, That they could not have deceived mankind if they would.

1st, Then, I am to prove, that the apostles had no interest to deceive others.

If Christianity was an imposture, it was a strange imposture indeed; an imposture beneficial to the world, but destructive to the authors, in the nature and tendency of the thing itself: beneficial, I say, to the world, since it forbade every vice, and enjoined every virtue, that could make a man more happy in himself, more serviceable to the world, and more acceptable to God: but as visibly, in its genuine consequences, destructive to the authors; since they could not expect to impeach the justice of the Jewish government, by charging the crime of murder, the murder of
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the *Prince of life*, upon the rulers, to disturb public settlements, and unhinge national religions with impunity; since they knew from the indignities their master met with, that they were to promote it at the expence of whatever was dear and valuable to them in this life; since the Pagan priests would every where work up the dregs of the populace into a ferment, against the propagators of a religion, which could not take place but at the expence of their interest.

It may be said, the apostles were actuated by ambition: they were impatient to set themselves above the undistinguished many, and to shew the superiority of their parts by dissenting from the common herd.

It is granted, that ambition is sometimes as predominant in the vulgar, as it is in men of letters, or heroes: but then it operates in a quite different manner, and flows in another channel.

For instance, an ignorant peasant, who has had a narrow and confined education, may be desirous to be the oracle of the village in which he lives, and to get and maintain an ascendant over it. This would probably be the height of his ambition: it could never enter into his head, if he were in his senses, without the advantages of a refined conversation, or the knowledge of books, to erect himself into a teacher of many nations. The philosopher indeed might be tempted to enlarge the scene of action, and to spread his
fame

fame and knowledge throughout the world: but a desire of distinction in poor unlettered men of common sense, is confined within a narrower sphere, it never prompts them to take the world for their theatre, and mankind for their audience.

If then the apostles were men of common sense, which is plain from that excellent system of morality, which they have left us, explained in the clearest precepts, enforced by the strongest motives, and exemplified by the brightest pattern; they could not, were their passion for glory never so strong, merely upon the strength of that motive, have formed a wild romantic project of propagating a new religion among the polite, as well as barbarous nations, without either riches or power to obtrude their sentiments upon the world, or art and address to insinuate them.

No, if they had not been swayed by a principle of obedience to their Creator, and a well-grounded belief in him, that he would prosper their endeavour; that attempt, *viz.* for a few defenceless ignorant men to change the religions of all the earth, by introducing a rational devotion, and a pure morality, had been a kind of religious knight-errantry, which some frantic enthusiasts might have set on foot; but was inconsistent with their character, who spoke the words of soberness and truth. These then were the true springs of their actions, a settled conviction of the truth of the resurrection, a firm confidence that they
reposed

reposed in their Maker and Saviour, and a certain expectation of heavenly rewards in reversion. Had they not believed the truth of the resurrection, and that God would give a sanction to it by miracles; vain-glory, it is certain, could not prompt them to embark in an attempt which they could not but foresee must terminate in their disgrace and defeat; they being in themselves very incompetent instruments, to occasion so great a revolution in religion.

Besides, it is plain ambition could never have been their motive: had they indeed pretended to preach and write from their own fund of sense, and to strike out an entirely new track of thought, without treading servilely in the steps of another; then there had been some colour for taxing them with vain-glory: but instead of this, they disclaim the vanity of being thought originals: they refer all the glory of being the first author of these beneficial truths to their Lord and Master: he was the master-builder who laid the plan; they desire only to be considered as under-agents and workmen; a character, to which ambitious men are not willing to stoop: they every where make our Saviour the immediate fountain-head of that knowledge which watered and enriched the world; they only pretend to be the channels, through which it was conveyed.

There are few or no other public actions; but what a witty malice may put some sinister interpretation

interpretation upon; and the best deeds in appearance may, and often, no question, do proceed from a principle of vanity: but the actions of the apostles will stand the test of the severest scrutiny. For they could not act upon any indirect and interested views of worldly honour, ambition, or gain; they must have been supported by a determined resolution of mind, to bear the utmost pressures of misery and torment, in the cause of truth, founded upon a prospect of future happiness. So far are they from consulting the dignity of human nature who deny the truth of Christianity, that they do what in them lies, to rob us of the most incontestable examples of human virtue, and consequently to deprectate our nature.

It is objected indeed, whereas the primitive witnesses sealed their testimony with their blood; that consideration does not weigh much, since several criminals have persisted to the last in the denial of known facts.

To this I answer, that these wretches generally do it with the prospect of a pardon or a reprieve. But pray, which of these hardened creatures would persevere to attest what he knew to be false, provided a pardon was offered, if he would confess the truth? Yet this was the case of the apostles: they might at any time have preserved their lives, by laying open the cheat, if it had been one: nay, in the first council, that of the Jews, before which they were convened, all that
was

was desired of them was, that they should preach no more in the name of Jesus.

He that can produce one instance of a man that would rather part with his life, than retract what he knew to be false, when he might save his life by retracting, must find some history as yet unknown to the learned world. Much less can a number of such men be produced, who all with an inflexible stubbornness, with an unconquerable spirit, were consistent from first to last, 'till death closed the scene, without one of them throwing off the mask. I have often heard that terrors and torments have made a man abjure what he knew to be true; but I never heard, that they had something so inviting in them, as to make a man, much less a number of men, maintain what they were conscious was a falsehood, a falsehood unprofitable to them, when they might have been rescued from death by recanting. There is then this material difference: criminals either, in the first place, falsify with an intention to save themselves from the stroke of justice: whereas the apostles brought their lives, knowingly and wilfully, into imminent danger; nay, actually lost them, for nothing but persevering to attest the truth, unawed by any terrors, unallured by hopes of pardon: or secondly, malefactors have died, as they lived, under an insensibility of each good and virtuous impression. Gross and heavy minds, that think of nothing in this world but what strikes their senses, may

may think of nothing beyond this world: but the apostles must have lived an exemplary life, and in an uninterrupted tenour of virtue. For a profligate and immoral life would have blasted their credit as much, as the detection of a notorious falsehood. And it is not to be supposed, that men of exemplary lives, who in their writings inculcate the justest, and therefore the noblest sentiments of the Deity, and a strict regard to truth, would die with a falsehood in their mouths.

I own that enthusiasm will put men upon desperate attempts. But then the apostles could not have been enthusiasts. For they must have had an absolute certainty, whether our Saviour was risen, after such oft-repeated, lasting, sensible evidence of his being alive, after having seen, handled, and felt him: they must be intimately conscious (the highest degree of certainty) whether they could speak all languages, agreeably to his promise after his rising from the dead, *viz.* that they should *be endued with power from on high.* If they then asserted these things without any foundation, they knew what they asserted to be false. Now, he is not an enthusiast, who asserts what he knows to be false; he is something worse.

That charge being dismissed, the only tolerable motive that can be assigned, is that of vain-glory, which I have already disproved. For it is plain to the force of a demonstration, that they were not influenced by other worldly views, when they knew, that renouncing ease

and pleasure, their country and friends, they were to face poverty, bonds, and death, under their most forbidding and frightful appearances. *I think, says St Paul, that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle to the world, and unto angels and men.—Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labour working with our own hands; we are reviled, persecuted, and defamed; we are made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things.* I Cor. iv. 9. &c.

Hear what Clemens Romanus, contemporary with the apostles, says, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, the most valuable monument of Christian antiquity, next to the inspired writings. “It was of unjust envy, that Peter
 “suffered, not one or two, but several pains;
 “and having undergone martyrdom, is gone
 “into the place of glory, which was due to
 “him. It is out of envy” (continues the same author) “that Paul got the prize of
 “patience, having been put seven times in
 “irons, stoned, and scourged; being the herald of the gospel in the east and west, he
 “made his faith famous. Having taught the
 “whole world justice, and being come to the
 “extremity of the west, when he had suffered
 “martyrdom before the chief of the state, he
 “went out of the world*.” These are the words

* Cotelarii patres apostolici, vol. 1. pag. 150. 151.

words of an author, who had no temptations to falsify, and living in the same age with the apostles, could not want an opportunity to inform himself of the truth of what he delivers. Since then the apostles were not swayed by vain-glory, or other worldly considerations; they must have been either acted by a disinterested love of pain and misery, contrary to the known workings of human nature, contrary to the first principle, that of self-preservation, and an invincible desire of happiness; or they must have been swayed by a settled conviction of the truth of the resurrection, and animated by the hopes of an everlasting weight of glory. These are the only assignable springs of action.

Disbelievers would be thought to be great patrons of social morality: but one cannot well conceive how society, and consequently social morality, can subsist upon their principles, which are fruitful of distrust and jealousy. They who can impiously believe the apostles to have been deceivers and knaves, must, if consistent with themselves, believe every one else to be so too, as far as he has capacity and opportunity. They who can entertain a doubt of the apostles honesty, after the strongest proofs of their integrity, that they could possibly give, or mankind require, must entertain a general undistinguishing suspicion of every person about them.

Add to this, that a vein of simplicity runs throughout their whole composure, and nature,

void of art, speaks in every line. And whatever critical skill and accuracy in languages they might want, they every where seem to speak, what is more estimable than all the languages besides, the language of the heart: they never cast in shades, what might appear too bold, glaring, and incredible at the first transient view: they never smooth the way and prepare the reader, for what might seem offensive: they every where leave the actions to speak, and their readers to judge, for themselves. Plain honest truth wants no artificial colourings; and falsehood is apt to betray itself, by laying them on too thick. Truth shines with unborrowed beauties, and has no need of foreign ornaments: but on falsehood, which has no comeliness in itself, men bestow the more abundant comeliness. Here they lavish out all their art, prodigal of decorations, to divert the eye from attending to its genuine deformity.

The evidence still rises higher, if we consider that the truth of the miraculous facts in scripture-history, is proved by events subsequent to them; which events, *viz.* the propagation and establishment of Christianity, could never have taken place, unless the miraculous facts had been true: for it was as impossible, that *the twelve apostles* should propagate Christianity, against the united forces of Jews and Gentiles, magistrates and philosophers, as *that twelve unarmed men should defeat the whole Roman army.* The relation therefore which the scripture gives us of miracles, must be

be true: because, without a supposition of miracles actually performed, we cannot rationally account for *that great turn in religious affairs, which not very long after followed, viz. the subversion of Pagan idolatry in part, and the introduction of the worship of God in spirit and in truth.*

But this argument for the truth of Christianity falls under my next head, and must be reserved for another discourse.

S E R M O N. II.

ON THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

JOHN iii. 2.

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him.

I Have already proved in a former discourse, that miracles may be so circumstanced, as to be direct and decisive evidences of a divine power and commission.—That it was absolutely impossible the apostles should be deceived themselves, as witnesses of our Saviour's miracles and their own.—That it was morally impossible they should attempt to deceive others.—The subject of my present discourse is to prove, that the apostles could not have
deceived

deceived mankind, if they would : nor have imposed a false religion upon the world, by virtue of a pretended commission from heaven.

If the Christian religion, containing doctrines unpalatable to flesh and blood, void of every advantage, besides its own internal excellency, to recommend it, and clogged with a great many incumbrances, could carry conviction with it from east to west, by such incompetent instruments, in so short a time, in spite of the most resolved opposition : if this plant, from a slender appearance at first, grew, and waxed a great tree, when no kindly sunshine of worldly power yet smiled upon it ; nay, when the inclemency of the season beat hard against it ; the growth of it was undoubtedly marvellous.

It is granted, that in matters of pure speculation, the bulk of mankind may be, and often are, deceived ; because they have not leisure or capacity, to unravel studied sophistry, and nicely to distinguish between what is plausible, and what is solid and substantial : but the case is different as to miracles, which are matters of fact, that fall under the cognisance of our senses. Here the vulgar and the learned are equally competent judges, and you can persuade neither of them to believe he sees a glaring fact, which he does not actually behold. Either then the apostles wrought such matters of fact, or they did not. If they did, then they were invested with a power from God : for evil spirits would not, if they could, em-
power

power them to beat down idolatry: if they did not, then it is unaccountable, how a set of fishermen, despised for their poverty, and odious upon the account of their nation, should propagate through many nations, not to say the whole known world, such an unlikely story as this, *viz.* That one who was crucified as a common malefactor in Judæa, was to be adored as a God; and that too, at such a juncture of time, when their numerous converts in several parts of the world, some of whom were men of known distinction and opulency, (such as Dionysius of the Areopagus, Joseph of the Jewish sanhedrim, Sergius Paulus a proconsul, Flavius Clemens a Roman consul, &c.), who had, very probably, enjoyed one continued sunshine of prosperity; must bid adieu to all the blandishments of life, undergo whatever is distasteful to human nature, and either suffer, or be in danger of suffering martyrdom.

I would gladly have the Deists try the experiment: let them send the ablest they can single out of their numerous fraternity to broach such a like story: for instance, that one, who suffered in England for a malefactor, is risen from the dead, and is to be worshipped as the saviour of mankind: let them send them to Portugal or Spain, where the inquisition reigns, and where as exquisite tortures will be applied to them as were to the primitive martyrs. It is easy to see the consequence: they themselves would meet with a very warm reception;

reception ; but their doctrine with a very cold one: both would be involved in the same doom, both perish and come to naught. If then the apostles had not a power of working genuine miracles, and displaying the amplest credentials of divine power ; it will be the greatest miracle of all, that without either riches to bribe, authority to awe, or acquired knowledge and dexterity to over-reach men into a compliance with their notions, they should pave the way to so general and *great a turn in religious affairs* ; when these boasted masters of reason, the Deists, these men of large views, who by an uncommon superiority of the soul have disengaged themselves from the prejudices of education, would not be able to bring over a majority of men, nay, perhaps, not one man of common sense in any one nation ; if they should set on foot such another unpromising project.

Let us suppose, that a person in our days should embark in a design of cancelling all the old religions, and building a new one upon their ruins ; that, to compass this design, he pretended to raise the dead, make the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, &c. that not long after his death, his followers publish a punctual circumstantial relation of all these things, mentioning the places where, the persons upon whom, the witnesses before whom these miracles were said to be wrought : let us put the case, that they too pretended to have the same miraculous powers vested in them,
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and that their doctrine gained footing every where, not only in England, but in foreign countries: would the magistracy, and those whose interest was at stake, remain unactive in such a critical juncture, and suffer the people to be seduced by such overbearing pretensions? No, certainly they would send, which might be easily done, to the places where, the persons upon whom, and the witnesses before whom those astonishing notices of divine power were said to be displayed: they would take down the depositions of creditable and substantial witnesses in every place, that the dead were not raised, nor the sick cured there, nor thousands fed in a miraculous manner, &c. they would circulate and disperse these attestations, and send the antidote, where-ever the infection was spread.

Now I ask, did the Jewish and Pagan magistracy and priesthood, upon the first publication of the facts, when the gospel began to spread, take these easy measures, which common sense suggested, to suppress Christianity, and confront its evidence? If they did, then Christianity must have been stifled and overlaid in its infancy, by the weight of several thousands of disinterested witnesses, giving it under their hands, that no such glaring actions were publicly done. This, I say, must have been the consequence, if the facts had been false; especially when all the engines of worldly power were directed against it. If they did not take this easy method, they virtually and implicitly acknowledged the truth
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of the facts : they confessed the world was not deceived ; because, if it had been so, they neither wanted power nor inclination to undeceive it.

But it is objected, that such accounts were published, which the Christians, when they got the power into their hands, wisely took care to suppress. To which I answer : When did the Christians get the power into their hands ? Why, after Christianity had stood the shock, and outlived the rage of ten long persecutions. But this does not at all invalidate what I said, *viz.* that Christianity must have been overlaid in its infancy, by the weight of authentic accounts, well attested against its truth : whereas then it was too late ; it had taken the deeper root, by weathering out the storm. Besides, this is *gratis dictum* ; there are no traces left of any books, that ever denied the facts ; no mention of them occurs any where. We have indeed some remains of Celsus, Hierocles, Porphyry, and Julian, declared enemies to Christianity. But what they allege does not amount to a denial of the facts : so far are they from that, that they ascribe the miracles of our Saviour to magic, and the Jews in the Talmud, just as their forefathers do in the New Testament, to a correspondence or intercourse with the devil.

To account for the rise and propagation of Christianity, our adversaries have recourse to false miracles, which they say are very common among Christians. By Christians here they mean

mean the Papists: but if Popish priests chuse to act their pretended miracles in by-places, in cloysters, or at least only before men of their own persuasion, where they have the power in their hands, to fence off an impartial inquiry into them; and yet their pious frauds have been generally detected: if notwithstanding their confessed depth of art and finesse to execute a well-concerted project, they have never attempted to do a wonder in the eye of a Protestant nation, before a great concourse of heretics, as they call us; then I desire to know how a set of unpolished men, unpractised in studied wiles and mysterious frauds, should audaciously and successfully carry on a flagrant cheat, in the eye of thousands of its most inveterate foes, the priests and rulers of the Jewish nation, and indeed the rulers and priests of every other nation, who wanted neither discernment enough to unmask and expose it, if it had been such, nor power to crush and stifle it. This, I say, was impossible, if their miracles had been impostures, and therefore they were not so. And since the discovery of impostures has staggered the faith of some weak men, and made them look upon Christianity in the same disadvantageous light; I will venture to say, that the more numerous the impostures are, which are discovered; the more Christianity is confirmed thereby: because it proves, that no imposture can stand the test of a severe examination, when men of power and policy vigorously interest themselves

selves in the detection of it, and are resolved to go to the bottom of it. Impostures need only to be held up to the light, to be seen through; but Christianity, the more thoroughly it was canvassed, and the more vigorously it was opposed, the more it gained footing in the world. There is then this difference between an imposture and a genuine miracle. The former loves obscurity, the latter is desirous to be set in the strongest point of view, and challenges the nearest inspection, of the most penetrating judge.

Besides, Tacitus, an Heathen historian, assures us, that in Nero's reign, but thirty years after our Saviour's resurrection, there was (*ingens multitudo*) a prodigious multitude of Christians at Rome, above two thousand miles from Jerusalem; that Nero inflicted upon them the most exquisite punishments; and particularly, that they were burnt to give light in the streets, when day-light failed.

What shall we say as to that prodigious multitude, who, in Nero's reign, were faithful unto death, unwearied by toils, unshaken by misery, and undismayed by terrors, even by death the king of terrors? They could not be mistaken, since they who conversed with the apostles, must know, whether they made good their pretensions to a miraculous power or not; or, in other words, whether they were impostors, or persons commissioned by God. Did they then wilfully conspire to impose upon others? Upon what motives?

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That of vain-glory? No, certainly. The great leaders of parties may sometimes expect to be transmitted down to posterity, with marks of honour, and to leave behind them a bright and lasting track of glory. But their numerous retinue of followers must expect to die unnoticed, as they lived unknown: each of them will be lost in the croud, like so many ciphers, undistinguished, and of no consideration or moment, any farther than they contribute to make the principal figure, which was placed at the head of them, more considerable. Now, that men should give up the most weighty and valuable considerations of this life; nay, life itself, for invaluable rewards in heaven, and for *an exceeding weight of glory*; that they should suspend all desire of applause, 'till they received the inestimable applause of their Creator——this is easily accounted for. But that men *should give up their all here, for nothing in reversion*; that they should resign life itself, without even expecting that imaginary life, a great name after death, merely *to attest and support an unprofitable falsehood*——this is highly incredible, absurd, and impossible.

I grant, that several may die martyrs for an opinion that is false; because, though it be false, they may be persuaded it is true. But miracles, upon which Christianity is founded, are matters of fact, of which the early followers of the apostles must have been eye-witnesses. And nobody ever *died to assert an untruth in matters of fact*, as to which he
could

could not be deceived, supposing *the truth of his senses* : though several have died, rather than renounce opinions, the falsity of which they had not judgment enough to discover. Much less can it be imagined, that, under the early persecutions of Nero and Domitian, many thousands of Christians would go on in an uninterrupted track *of falsifying wilfully, at the expence of their lives* ; without one of them, even in the article of death, deviating into truth.

The numerous converts to Christianity in the first century, could not have believed it to be true, if it had been false. For they must have had an inward consciousness, whether they had received those miraculous gifts or not, for the abuse and misapplication of which St Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians censures and reproveth them. They must have had an absolute certainty, supposing no extraordinary gifts were communicated to them, that he, from whom they received their religion, and whose epistles, as appears from St Peter and others, were universally read as of divine authority, was a shameless impostor. And yet they could not have professed the belief of it, knowing it to be an imposture, at a time, when Christians were *of all men most miserable*, without any prospect of worldly honour and advantage, but with a certain expectation of exquisite torments ; except upon a supposition that they loved misery and hated happiness as such.

Pliny

Pliny, a person of unsuspected veracity, in the reign of Trajan, not seventy years after the resurrection, in a letter to the emperor, informs him that where he was governor in Bithynia, a place above twelve hundred miles from Jerusalem the nearest way ; to arrive at which you must travel through several nations, of different languages, Syrians, Pamphylians, Carians, Lycians, &c. Christianity had so far prevailed, that “ the temples of the gods
“ were almost desolated, their sacred rites a
“ long time intermitted; and there were very
“ few that would buy any sacrifices, notwith-
“ standing great severities were inflicted upon
“ Christians of every rank, sex, and age.”

Justin Martyr, who lived in the same century, informs us, in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, that there was no nation in the known world, where some did not pray to God in the name of Jesus Christ. What shall we say then ? that the apostles travelled from one end of the earth to the other, without understanding the languages of several nations ? Then it would have been impossible to have made any converts, by speaking to them in an unknown tongue. Or shall we say, that men bred up in low employments had a vast variety of languages at command ? That would have been almost impossible, if they had made it the whole business of their lives. In short, there is no other way of accounting for it, but by inspiration : they could not acquire them ; they must be the gift of God. And

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when I consider, that they enlightened as many nations with a rational devotion, and found morality, as Alexander ravaged by the force of arms; that they did more in one century to disabuse the world, and rescue it from human sacrifices, and to propagate beneficial truth, than the philosophers had done for many ages: I think, what was a mere compliment, when applied to a certain great hero, is but strict justice done to them, *viz.* that they were the instruments *in tantis rebus gerendis, quantas audere vix hominis; perficere nullius nisi Dei*, “in bringing those things to bear, which merely to attempt was more than human; but to perform was certainly God-like and divine.” That the apostles, though low, should overcome the great; and though ignorant, should teach the wise; can only be ascribed to him, who has *chosen the weak things of this world to confound the mighty.*

Besides, supposing the apostles had asserted without any foundation, that at the death of our Saviour, when the moon was at the full, and consequently there could be no natural eclipse, yet there was a supernatural one, and a darkness of three hours continuance; that in the metropolis of the nation, the partition of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom; that the graves were opened, and the dead appeared in the heart of the nation; that fifty days after, at the solemnity of Pentecost, to celebrate which people resorted from

from different parts of the world; there was a descent of fiery tongues upon them; by virtue of which, several, who, it could be proved, knew no tongue but their native one, were empowered to converse publicly with men of different nations, in their own language: suppose, I say, they should have asserted these things without any foundation; could they have persuaded one man to have swallowed such crude glaring falsehoods in matters of fact, and make him believe he saw what he never did, a supernatural eclipse, and heard what he did not, the miracle of tongues? If they could, I should not know which most to wonder at, their modesty in asserting such notorious untruths, or his understanding in believing them. Thus their story would have been an empty bubble, which must have sunk and vanished, almost as soon as it rose. That single fact of the miraculous eclipse, if false, must have proved a millstone about the neck of it, and sunk it irretrievably. It put it in the power of man, woman, and child, to disprove their relation: every one would tell them, such a thing must be notorious and visible to the whole world, which yet had escaped their notice, and that of every one else they knew. They could not then have imposed upon the age in which they lived.

The only thing that can be supposed, is, that the story might be put upon after ages, at some distant period of time.

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Place then the date and rise of Christianity at what period of time you please ; could the propagators of it persuade any people to believe such a story of public notorious facts, which they never heard of before, without foundation or evidence ? No certainly, if they should tell us, that, to perpetuate the memory of these actions, the history of them had been written by eye-witnesses, public sacraments appointed, weekly and annual festivals celebrated from that time to this, and a church founded, against which *the gates of hell never could prevail*. For then the story would carry its own confutation along with it, and they might have as well attempted to make people believe they heard ignorant men speak all manner of languages, or saw our Saviour raise the dead ; as that there was then in being a church, against which the gates of hell never had prevailed ; in which these festivals had been always observed, and these sacraments always kept up. The cry would have been, What is become of your church, which was to be impregnable as a rock, and lasting as the sun ?— Is it become an invisible church indeed ? *Out of your own mouths will we condemn you : what need we farther witnesses ?* Now, would any nation, discarding the religion which they had been bred up in, admit a new one in its stead, upon the account of such a groundless self-contradictory story ? What would they say, could such glaring and notorious facts, which must have alarmed the whole world, like the
failing

failing of a ship, leave no traces behind them of their existence in history? In short, such unsupported and overgrown falsehood must have fallen to the ground by its own unwieldy bulk, without any one to overturn it.

To apply this to Christianity in general: If the marvellous facts were not true, the books which contain them, could never have been received, nor the festivals and observances which commemorate them, have taken place in that age in which they were said to be done;—because it was then in every body's power to disprove them. They could not, in any after ages, have been imposed upon mankind: because though absurdities may be grafted upon an old religion, yet no nation ever did, or will, voluntarily embrace a religion entirely new, without any evidence. And it is certain, they were not thus imposed upon mankind long after; because it appears by uncontradicted written traditions, that these actions, august ceremonies, and festivals, did commence at the period assigned, and have flowed down from the first fountain-head to the present age, in one uninterrupted stream.

To apply this to the truth of the resurrection in particular: The apostolical age could not be deceived by a sham story of a resurrection, because our Saviour's resurrection was as public and notorious, as his death and crucifixion, though not in itself, yet in its immediate consequences, I mean those miracles wrought before thousands, by eye-witnesses, to confirm

the truth of it. Was it then set on foot in some after ages? No, because both the weekly and yearly memorials of it are of as old a date as Christianity itself, and, from the first propagation of it, have been successively handed down to us. That Sunday was the weekly memorial of it, even in the apostolical age, is plain from St. John, who says, that *he was in the spirit on the Lord's day*, or the day then set apart to commemorate the Lord's resurrection. And that there was an annual memorial of it, instituted by the apostles, and continued down to us, is plain from the early disputes about the precise time on which it was to be observed; though the observation of Easter, as an apostolical institution, was never controverted. In short, the history of the gospel has all the testimony, that any antient matter of fact ever had; and it has, besides, several material evidences, which other antient matters of fact have not. For are there any other ancient matters of fact, which were attested, by eye-witnesses, who expected nothing in this life but miseries and hardships for their attestations; who were ready to lay down their lives for the truth of what they said; who could not be deceived themselves, had no interest to deceive others, nor could have deceived them if they would? Are there standing monuments, and sensible observations, appointed to keep up the memory of other ancient matters of fact, commencing from the time in which the actions were done, and from
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thence, as from the first link, descending to posterity in one continual chain? Did any religion besides conquer by suffering, and by having its thousands and ten thousands slain? — Or did any besides, though its instruments were vastly unequal to the task, bear down all opposition, and triumph over the rage of the Jews, the learning of the philosophers, the power of the emperors, and the prejudices and passions of all mankind?

If Christianity was an imposture, it was an imposture *sui generis*, a pure original, imitating no imposture that ever was heard of before, and which no imposture, I dare say, will ever after venture to imitate: an imposture, in which there could be no priestcraft; for the priests, by professing and propagating it, exposed themselves to superior tortures; they stood in the front of the battle, and were sure to fall the first, and the bishop generally ended in the martyr: an imposture in which there could be no state-craft; for all the states of the world for three hundred years were combined against it.

So strong, in short, if we take the arguments from prophecy, the internal excellency of Christianity, and the necessity of a revelation into the account, is the evidence for Christianity, that it is the last thing I should believe, that an inquisitive unprejudiced man, of a sound head, and an upright heart, could be a determined infidel. Nothing ought to be admitted in bar to such pregnant proofs, but
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some absolute impossibility in the nature of the thing: mere difficulties weigh nothing: for at that rate we must disbelieve every thing in nature; every thing in nature being attended with great, nay insuperable difficulties.

Could we suppose a being in some other part of the wide creation, of the same size of understanding with ourselves, but an entire stranger to the natural history of the world; should any one inform him of the amazing properties of the load-stone, the phænomena of light and colours, the circulation of the blood contrary to all the known laws of motion, the revolutions of the planets, the cohesion of matter, the infinite divisibility of finite matter, nay, of the least grain of that finite matter, the surprising effects of chemistry, he would think the history of nature far more unaccountable, than any Deist can the book of grace, and the history of the Bible.

Poor short-sighted creatures! The least grain of sand is able to baffle the finest understanding: and yet we would pretend to sound the depths of the divine nature and counsels; never considering, what has been often observed, that, “if what was revealed concerning God, were always adapted to our comprehension; how could it with any fitness represent that nature, which we allow to be incomprehensible?” We need not ransack the scriptures for difficulties: every thing about us and within us, above us and beneath us, convinces us, that we are ignorant; and,
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if once we come to a resolution to quit what is clear (such are the proofs for Christianity) upon the account of what is obscure; we shall run into universal scepticism. We will not believe, that the Deity does or discovers any thing marvellous and unaccountable in an unusual and supernatural manner, though every thing that he does in the common road of providence, be marvellous and unaccountable to us.

Though men may disagree about matters of pure abstract reasoning; yet every reasonable man is determined by the evidences for matters of fact, when they amount to a moral certainty; unless it be in cases, where the passions interest themselves, and indispose the mind for the reception of truth. Every intelligent person, after examination, must judge alike in these matters; except his judgment be overruled, and his assent obstructed by some wrong affection, by some strong bias, and some insuperable prejudice, perhaps unsuspected by himself: otherwise a man might seriously dispute, whether Julius Cæsar made a descent upon England, conquered Pompey, and was stabbed in the senate-house; which no man in his senses ever did, or ever will do. Either then it must be maintained, contrary to what I have already proved, that the evidences of Christianity do not amount to a moral certainty; or, if they do, it will be difficult to assign a reason, why clear, strong, and indubitable proofs should not have as much force

force and weight in the affair of religion, as they have in all others; unless we may suppose there is something amiss within, some latent disingenuity of temper, which here, though not in other cases, shuts up all the avenues by which light can find an entrance.

Though we have not a scientific infallible certainty of the truth of Christianity; yet we have an infallible certainty, that we ought to be determined by such evidences, as Christianity is surrounded with: because either we must act upon such evidence in the daily course of life, or remain in a state of utter inaction. He that will not admit moral certainty to be a sufficient principle of action; if his practice be conformable to his persuasion, must neither eat nor drink, till he has a mathematical demonstration, that what he eats and drinks will prove wholesome; he will be sure of nothing in this world, but that he must, by acting up to such a notion, depart speedily out of it. If we have a moral certainty of the truth of Christianity; if every unprejudiced mind is determined by moral certainty, we must argue thus.—It is demonstrably certain, that there is a being of infinite goodness, truth, and veracity.—It is demonstrably certain, that a being of infinite goodness, truth, and veracity, will not mislead his creatures into unavoidable errors, nor suffer an imposture to pass upon the world, in his name, in a matter of the least importance, with such manifest tokens of credibility, and moral certainty,

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ty, as must, and do in every other case determine an unprejudiced mind :—therefore it is demonstrably certain, that Christianity is no imposture. Thus the Christian faith, in the last resort, resolves itself into, and terminates in the divine veracity : it is as sure as that God cannot lie, that he who has laid his creatures under an obligation to act upon moral evidence, would not have done so, if such strong evidence could ever inevitably deceive them in an affair of infinite concernment.

ATHEISM

ATHEISM AND INFIDELITY

REFUTED,

IN

TWO SERMONS

BY RICHARD WATSON, LORD BISHOP OF LANDAFF.

SERMON I.

COL. ii. 8.

*Beware lest any man spoil you through
philosophy.*

THIS apostolic admonition is peculiarly applicable to the age in which we live. It has been called—the age of philosophy—the age of reason: if by reason and philosophy, irreligion be understood, it undoubtedly merits the appellation; for there never was an age since the death of Christ, never one since the commencement of the history of the world, in which atheism and infidelity have been more generally professed. Nature and reason have been proclaimed as gods, festivals have been instituted in honour of abstract ideas, and all revealed religion has been scoffingly rejected as a system of statecraft,

craft and priestcraft, as a gross imposition on the understanding of mankind.

This impious fever of the mind, this paralysis of human intellect, originated in a neighbouring nation; its contagion has been industriously introduced, and is rapidly spreading in our own: it becomes us all in our several stations to endeavour to stop its progress; for of this we may all be well assured, that when religion shall have lost its hold on men's consciences, government will lose its authority over their persons, and a state of barbarous anarchy will ensue.

I know it has been made a question both in ancient and modern times—whether a society of atheists could subsist. This is no question with me, I think it could not.—Many speculative opinions, in every system of religion, are of little consequence to the safety of the community, and, in all well regulated states, they are left to the free discussion of those, who think themselves interested, as advocates for truth, in defending or opposing them; but atheism seems to be irreconcilably hostile, not only to the peace, but to the very existence of civil society. If there be no God, there can be no punishment for any crime, except what is denounced against it by the laws of the land, or what is connected with it by the laws of nature; and these are restraints incapable of controuling the selfish and licentious passions of human kind. He who re-
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moves from the mind of man the hopes and fears of futurity, opens the floodgates of immorality, and lets in a deluge of vices and crimes, destructive alike of the dignity of human nature, and of the tranquillity of the world. There never yet hath existed, and there never can exist a nation without religion. If Christianity be abolished, paganism, mahometanism, some religious imposture or other must be introduced in its stead, or civil society must be given up. But in the opinion of *Bacon*, (a philosopher with whom our modern philosophers cannot be compared) "there hath not in any age been discovered any philosophy, opinion, religion, law, or discipline, which so greatly exalts the common, and lessens individual interest, as the christian religion doth ;" so that I know not which most to admire and deplore, their wickedness as men, or their weakness as statesmen, who have attempted to govern mankind without religion, and to establish society on the ruins of christianity.

The time, usually allotted to discourses from this place, will not allow me to refute, at length, the atheistical tenets, or to answer the deistic objections, which have been so recently propagated to the downfall of one nation, and to the danger of all ; I will, however, crave your patience, whilst I state some arguments of importance, in opposition to the principles of those philosophers, who have been the authors of this mischief in a
foreign

foreign country, and of their admirers in our own.

Nature and reason, they tell us, are their gods. Let them not impose upon themselves and others by the use of words, the meaning of which they do not understand. What is nature? what is reason? These terms ought to be defined, for there is cause to suspect, that men who introduce, or who adopt such impiety of expression, are rather ignorant of what atheism is, than that they are, what they affect to be thought, atheists on conviction. By nature then we may understand, the order and constitution of things composing the universe—and by reason, that faculty of the human mind by which we are able to discover truth.—And can it be thought, that this system of things, consisting of an infinity of parts fitted to answer ends which human wisdom can never comprehend in their full extent, but which, as far as it can comprehend them, appear to be beneficial to man and all other percipient beings—can it be thought, that this system had not an intelligent, benevolent, powerful Author?

When a man makes a watch, builds a ship, erects a silk-mill, constructs a telescope, we do not scruple to say, that the man has a design in what he does. And can we say, that this solar system, a thousand times more regular in all its motions than watches, ships, or silk-mills—that the infinity of other systems dispersed through the immensity of space, inconceivably

conceivably surpassing in magnitude and complication of motion, this, of which our earth is but a minute part—or even that the eye which now reads what is here written, a thousand times better fitted for it's function than any telescope—can we say, that there was no design in the formation of these things?

Tell us not, that it is allowed there must be intelligence in an artificer who makes a watch or a telescope, but that, as to the Artificer of the universe, we cannot comprehend his nature. What then, shall we on that account deny his existence? With better reason might a grub, buried in the bowels of the earth, deny the existence of a man, whose nature it cannot comprehend; for a grub is indefinitely nearer to man in all intellectual endowments (if the expression can be permitted), than man is to his Maker.—With better reason may we deny the existence of an intellectual faculty in the man who makes a machine; we know not the nature of the man; we see not the mind which contrives the figure, size, and adaptation of the several parts; we simply see the hand which forms and puts them together.

Shall a shipwrecked mathematician, on observing a geometrical figure accurately described on the sand of the sea-shore, encourage his followers with saying, “Let us hope for the best, for I see the traces of men;”—and shall not man, in contemplating the structure of the universe, or of any part of it, say
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to the whole human race—Brethren! be of good comfort, we are not begotten of chance, we are not born of atoms, our progenitors have not come into existence by crawling out of the mud of the Nile, behold the footsteps of a Being powerful, wise, and good—not nature, but the God of nature, the Father of the universe!

I will not entangle the understanding of my audience, or bewilder mine own, in the labyrinths of metaphysical researches; but I must say to these—the great philosophers of the age—you ought to know, that matter cannot have been from eternity—and that if, with *Plato*, you contend for the eternity of matter, you ought to know, that motion cannot have been from eternity—and that if, with *Aristotle*, you contend for the eternity of motion, you ought to know, that with him also you must contend for the eternity of a first mover—you must introduce, what you labour to exclude, a God, causing, regulating, and preserving, by established laws, the motion of every particle of matter in the universe.

You affirm that nature is your God, and you inform us that the energy of nature is the cause of every thing—that nature has power to produce a man—In all this you seem to substitute the term nature for what we understand by the term God. But when you tell us that nature acts (if such exertion can be called action) necessarily and without

out intelligence, we readily acknowledge that your God is essentially different from our God. "All novelty is but oblivion;" this famous *system of nature*, which has excited so much unmerited attention, and done such incredible mischief throughout Europe, is in little or in nothing different from the system of certain atheistic philosophers mentioned by *Cicero*, who maintained, that "nature was a certain energy, destitute of intelligence, exciting in bodies necessary motions."—The answer is obvious and short— an energy destitute of freedom and of intelligence cannot produce a man possessing both; as well may it be said, that an effect may be produced without a cause.

The proof of the existence of a Supreme Being, which is derived from the constitution of the visible world, is of a popular cast; but you must not therefore suppose it to be calculated to convince only persons who cannot reason philosophically. What think you of *Newton*? He certainly could reason philosophically. He certainly, of all the sons of men, best understood the structure of the universe; and he esteemed that structure to be so irrefragable a proof of the existence and providence of an almighty, wise, and good Architect of nature, that he never pronounced the word—God—without a pause.*—What think you of *Cotes*—second in sublimity of philosophic genius to none but *Newton*?—"That man," says he, "must be

* Boyle

be blind, who, from the most wise and excellent disposal of things, cannot immediately perceive the infinite wisdom and goodness of their almighty Creator; and he must be mad, who refuses to acknowledge them.”

The argument, which I have been hitherto insisting upon, may be called a natural argument for the Being of God, as it is taken from the contemplation of nature; I proceed to another of great weight, which may be called an historical argument, as it is grounded on testimony concerning past transactions.

That this world has not been from eternity, but that it was either created from nothing, or fitted up by the Supreme Being for the habitation of man, a few thousand years ago—that it was afterwards destroyed by an universal deluge, brought upon it by the same Being—that it has been repopled by the descendants of three men, who escaped the general destruction—these things are either ancient fact, or ancient fables—if they are facts, both atheism and infidelity must be given up—and that they are facts and not fables, might, if time would permit, be satisfactorily proved from a detailed examination of the history of every nation in the world.

The credible annals of all nations, not excepting Egypt or Chaldea, China or India, fall short of the deluge.—The annals of all nations, ancient and modern, barbarous

and civilized, speak of a deluge as of a dreadful catastrophe which had destroyed human kind, through the interposition of a superior Being offended by the vices of the world. — The annals of all nations bear witness to the existence of a God who had created all things, for even in the time of *Aristotle* there was, as he observes, “an ancient tradition (he does not say a deduction of reason, but a report or tradition) which all men had derived from their ancestors, that all things were from God, and that by God all things did consist.” --- (ἐκ τῆς Θεῆς τὰ πάντα, καὶ διὰ Θεῆς ἡμῶν συνέστηκεν. *Arist. de Mund. Cr.*)—Remarkable words these! and analogous to those of *St. Paul*, speaking of Christ, and, as is generally thought, of the creation of the material world, “All things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” --- (τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσθη, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶ πρὸ πάντων, καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκε. *Col. i. 17.*)

He who has employed most time in examining the history of remote ages, will be most convinced of the truth of the following propositions—that profane authors derived their notions of a Supreme Being from patriarchal tradition—that they corrupted this tradition—that the Bible is the only book in the world in which this tradition is preserved in its original purity—that this invaluable book throws light upon the origin and ancient history of every nation in the world—and that the history of
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the Jews, contained in the bible, and connected with their history to the present time, is the strongest proof which can be brought, not only against atheism, but against that species of deism which contends, that God never visibly interposed in the government of the Jewish nation.

When it is said that the annals of all nations fall short of the deluge, it must be understood, that the nation of the Jews is excepted. I look upon that people with astonishment and reverence; they are living proofs of facts most ancient and most interesting to mankind. Where do we meet with an Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, Roman; corroborating, by his testimony, any one of the events mentioned in the history of their respective empires? But we meet with millions of Jews in every quarter, and in every country of the world, who acknowledge not only the existence of a God, as other nations do---but that he is the very God who enabled Moses to work miracles in Egypt; who delivered to him that law which they now observe; who called Abraham, the father of their nation, from the midst of his idolatrous kinsmen; who preserved Noah and his family in the ark; who formed Adam out of the dust of the earth; who created all things by the word of his power.

Wherever we have a Jew on the surface of the earth, there we have a man, whose testimony and whose conduct connect the

present time with the beginning of all time. He now believes, and he declares that all his progenitors have constantly believed, the history contained in the book of Moses to be a true history—he now obeys the laws which God gave to Moses above three thousand years ago—now practises the circumcision which God enjoined to Abraham—now observes the passover in commemoration of the mercy vouchsafed to his nation when God destroyed the first-born throughout the land of Egypt—now keeps holy the seventh day, on which God rested from the works of the creation. When nations institute rites to preserve the memory of great events, the uniform observance of the rite authorizes us to admit the certainty of the fact. The Jews have for thousands of years (and the patriarchs, before the Jews, probably the same) observed a very significant rite in commemoration of the creation; and another in commemoration of their preservation from one of the plagues of Egypt: why should we hesitate to admit the certainty of these events? Adam lived with Methuselah 240 years, Methuselah lived with Shem the son of Noah 98 years, and Shem lived with Abraham 150 years: what apprehension can we reasonably entertain that the account of the creation could either have been forged or misrepresented, when it had passed through so few hands before it had reached the founder of the Jewish nation?

But

But I have already gone beyond the limit I had prescribed to myself in this argument, I cannot pursue it farther; sceptical men, however, will do well to consider the nature and weight of historic evidence, not only for the existence of God, but for his having made a revelation of himself to the Jewish nation. Let them examine the matter freely and fully, and I cannot but believe that they will come to the following conclusions—that the creation is a fact—that the deluge is a fact—that the re-peopling the world by the descendants of Noah is a fact—that the Jewish theocracy is a fact—and that these facts may be established, as all past transactions of great antiquity must be, by the authority of history, and especially by the history of the Jews, whom God appears to have constituted witnesses of his existence and providence to all nations in all ages. Of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Tyrians, and of other nations, God hath made, or will make, a *full end*; but the seed of Israel shall not cease from being a nation before him for ever.

If the refutation of atheism and deism be so easy and certain as I have here stated it to be, whence comes it that there are now so many, or that there ever were any either atheists, or unbelievers in the truth of the Jewish and Christian dispensations? I put these dispensations together, because those amongst us (I speak not of the Jews), who deny or admit the divine mission of Moses, will

will deny also or admit the divine mission of Jesus Christ.

There are many causes of infidelity, such as profligacy of manners, which induces men to hope that religion may not be true—want of serious attention to the proofs on which it is established—hasty conclusions that, because some religions have been proved to be impostures, all are so—superstitious ceremonies and revolting doctrines, which are, in many parts of christendom, pertinaciously maintained as parts of christianity—intolerance, secularity, hypocrisy, conspicuous in the lives of christians—these and other causes of infidelity might be enlarged upon at great length, but I will only beg your attention to one other, less obvious, and less general, but more dangerous than any of those which I have mentioned—more dangerous, inasmuch as it operates chiefly on the minds of men of the most cultivated and enlarged understandings, I mean—mistaken piety.

That the Creator and Governor of the universe, who endureth through eternity, and filleth immensity; that this Almighty Being, who hath distributed innumerable systems of material worlds through the profundity of space, and hath, probably, replenished them all with percipient beings, capable of enjoying the happiness which his goodness hath wisely allotted to their respective stations; that this self-existent, uncaused cause of all Being, whom no language can describe, no thought
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can comprehend, should at fundry times and in divers instances have suspended the laws of nature which he had established, visited in an extraordinary manner this little globe, this atom of the universe, and by signs and wonders have made a revelation of his will to such a worm as man---this appears to many men, of good lives and strong minds, so strange a fact, that they are persuaded no human testimony can establish it's credibility. They venerate the majesty of the Supreme Being, they are persuaded that all things were made by him, and that all things were sustained by him; but they think that it derogates from the infinity of his wisdom and of his power, to suppose things to have been at first so ill made, as to require his subsequent interposition to regulate or amend them.

Blessed God! what is this but making our ways thy ways, but measuring thy infinity by the standard of our philosophy? We know the difficulty of regulating the minute concerns of a kingdom, a province, or a family, by special interpositions of any one man's wisdom or authority; and thence we simply infer, that the interpositions of the Almighty in governing every part of the universe is a circumstance not to be expected. We know that a machine of our construction approaches to perfection in proportion as it wants not external aid to direct or preserve it's motion, and thence we simply infer that the works of God, which cannot but be perfect in their kind,

kind, want not his interposition. Absolute perfection belongs to God alone; in all the things which he hath made there is a gradation of excellence, each thing is as perfect as it's nature will admit:---now why may it not be the nature of man to admit indefinite improvement from divine institution? It will be granted that man would be a more perfect Being than he is, if, on all occasions, his passions were kept in subjection to his reason, if he was guilty of no impiety towards his Maker, of no uncharitableness towards his neighbour, of no violence towards himself in an intemperate indulgence of his appetites:---where then is the absurdity of supposing, that God may have thought fit to strengthen the reason and to weaken the passions of mankind by bringing *immortality to light*, by giving an actual example of a resurrection from the dead, by promulgating the certainty of rewards and punishments in another state?

Surely it is a mistaken piety, which, from a sublime idea of the Divine Essence, would exclude the Supreme Being from interfering in the works which he hath made, which would hinder him from still working, 'till he hath brought all things to that perfection for which his goodness intended them. What that perfection is we know not; it must ever fall infinitely short of the perfection of God himself, but it is not possible for us to say to what degree it may be advanced, or to point
out

out the best means fitted to advance it to the degree predetermined in the councils of the Almighty. We cannot look into the depths of God's wisdom, nor comprehend the ends he has in view, or the ways by which he effects them.

It is the not properly considering the extent of our capacity, the not clearly distinguishing the things to which our ideas are suited, from those to which they are inadequate, that has made many men fall into an irksome scepticism, some into actual infidelity, and a few into the madness of atheism.

For what purpose was I born?---in what course of actions does the felicity of my nature consist?---am I author of these reputed actions, or am I a machine incessantly and irresistibly impelled to action, by external motives over which I have no controul?---will my existence be terminated by death, or continued beyond it?---will the quality of my future existence (if there should happen to be one) depend on my moral conduct here? These and other questions of similar import every man of reflection must, at one time or other, put to himself; and when he does put them, he will perceive that his reason is unequal to the clear solution of any of them. That Jesus Christ was born in Judea near 1800 years ago--that he wrought miracles in that country--that he was crucified at Jerusalem--that he arose from the dead--that he ascended into heaven--that he enabled his
disciples

disciples to work miracles, and commanded them to teach the world the doctrines which he had taught them---these are some of the main facts on which the truth of the christian religion is founded. Now it appears to me to be a much easier matter to prove the truth of these facts, than to give, from reason, a satisfactory answer to any of the difficulties which I have mentioned.

In the ardour of youth, in the tumult of sensual passion, in the profligacy of dissipation, in the bustle of business, in the sordidness of avarice, in the loftiness of ambition, thoughts of such a serious cast may either not occur, or be not regarded. But they will obtrude themselves on a bed of sickness at any period of life; they will surround the pillow of the unfortunate; they will penetrate the recesses of retirement, whether occasioned by a satiety of enjoyment, the chagrin of disappointment, or by any of the sad vicissitudes incident to every human station: and if they should arrest our notice on no other occasion, they will certainly steal upon us with the increase of our age, and generate, in those who reject christianity, no small perturbation, when the feebleness of declining life most requires tranquillity and consolation.

Be it our business then, as it is our duty and our interest, to confirm ourselves in the belief of that gospel by which all difficulties of this nature are done away. If that gospel
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be true, (as it certainly is,) we know for what purpose we are born---that we may live for ever. We know that we are not machines, but accountable for our actions, which machines cannot be. We know in what the felicity of our nature doth consist---in living *soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* We know that death is not *eternal sleep*, but the commencement of everlasting life.

I conclude with recommending one observation to the serious attention of all unbelievers, who are sincerely desirous of becoming christians---that they would well consider the quality of the proof which the subject admits. The truth of the christian religion is, as to us, founded on the reality of past transactions. Now past transactions are neither the objects of sense, nor of intuition, nor of demonstration; we cannot, correctly speaking, be said to know that they ever existed; but the probability, which is grounded on testimony, approaches, in many cases, so near to certainty, that our belief of past transactions is little different from knowledge itself. He who requires more than probability before he will embrace christianity, requires what the nature of the subject does not admit, and subverts the foundation of all history, sacred and profane. That Jesus wrought miracles in Judea, and arose from the dead at Jerusalem, are facts as capable of being ascertained, and as worthy of being credited,

as

as that Cæsar lived at Rome, and was murdered in the capitol.

May the merciful Father of the whole human race, who, for reasons best known to his unfearchable wisdom, hath suffered many millions to die, and suffers many millions also now to live, in utter ignorance of that revelation of his will, which he hath given to the christian world, accept our humble thanksgivings for such an inestimable benefit! May he *establish, strengthen, settle* the inhabitants of these kingdoms in the faith of Christ; and be graciously pleased to remove from all others the *ignorance that is in them, lest, in being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, they become to every good work reprobate; lest, in being spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit, they fall into perdition, temporal and eternal.*

S E R M O N II.

2 PET. i. 16.

We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty.

WHETHER the christian religion be a revelation of the will of God, or a cunningly devised fable, is a question which, one might think, every serious man would examine with impartial attention. He would take, it might be expected, the New Testament into his hand, and observing that it consisted of various parts, and had been written by different authors, he would inquire what evidence there was for it's being a *genuine* book. If he found, as I am persuaded he would find, that there were as solid reasons for believing that the gospel of St. Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles, were written by him, and the other parts of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are ascribed, as that the history of the Peloponnesian war was written by Thucydides, or the lives of the Cæsars by Suetonius ; he would then inquire, whether the book was not only a genuine, but an *authentic* one ; that is, whether it contained a narration of events which had really taken place in Judea, near eighteen hundred years ago

ago, or whether there was any reasonable cause to suspect that the authors of the New Testament had not honestly related what had really happened. With respect to the honesty of the writers, he would judge of that from their characters; and with respect to the reality of the facts mentioned by them, he would consider, that most of the writers of the New Testament did not relate what they had heard, but what they had seen; so that, if they were honest men, there could remain no doubt of the truth of what they had delivered. He would admit, for the sake of argument, that as simple historians, they might, notwithstanding their honesty, have fallen into trivial mistakes in their narration of what they had seen; and that, notwithstanding their honesty, they might have been full of credulity, and liable to imposition; but he would think it quite impossible, that facts of such public notoriety and importance as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, could have been the subjects, either of human error, or credulity, in those who professed to have been eye-witnesses of what they related. He would therefore certainly conclude, that the christian religion was true, if the writers of the New Testament were honest men.

If the writers of the New Testament were not honest men, they were impostors: now that they were not impostors, may appear from considering--that they had neither motive to commence, nor ability to carry on an imposture--and from examining the account they

they give of themselves and of their associates, immediately before, and soon after the resurrection of Jesus.

Impostors are moved to the attempt of deceiving mankind by prospects of wealth, fame, power, pleasure; by some real or imaginary advantages to be derived to themselves, or, through them, to those whom they love and regard as themselves. Now no expectation of this kind can, with the least shadow of probability, be ascribed to all, or to any of the writers of the New Testament. There is no need of entering into the proof of this; every one knows that Jews and Romans, Greeks and Barbarians; that the powers of the world, wherever they went, were against the apostles; they durst not any where lift up so much as an arm in their own defence. Instead of temporal advantages of any kind, they had to expect, and they did in fact experience, hunger, and cold, and nakedness, and scorn, and contempt, and hatred, all the miseries incident to a state of poverty, all the calamities attendant on a state of religious persecution:---these are not the motives which induce men to become impostors. Read the history of the impostor *Mahomet*, or that of *Alexander* as described by *Lucian*, or that of *Apollonius of Tyana*; and contrast them with that of Christ, or of any of his apostles, and you will at once perceive the difference between the manner in which imposture and truth are introduced and established

established in the world. Compare the miracles recorded in the New Testament, with respect to their publicity, their beneficial tendency, and their influence on the thousands who saw them, with the tricks of ancient or modern pretenders to magic ; and you will at once perceive the difference between cunningly devised delusions operating on fanatical minds, and the simplicity of gospel wonders extorting conviction from the most incredulous. The apostles were as destitute of ability to deceive, as of inducement to impose a fable on the world. It requires great power, or great talents, to be a successful impostor ; and the difficulty is encreased, when the plot cannot be carried on without the concurrence of many assistants ; and especially when it is to be carried on, in opposition to men able and willing to detect the cheat. What should we think of twelve fishermen, who should now undertake to proclaim, in the hearing of the learned and unlearned, that a few years ago a certain man wrought many miracles, not only in a distant county, but in the streets and churches of the metropolis of the kingdom ; not only before them, the relaters of the fact, but in the presence of thousands of others ; and that this man was publicly tried by order of the government, and put to death in London ; and that he rose from the dead ; and that after his resurrection he was seen not only by themselves, but by hundreds of others, and by some who were still alive ?--What should we

we think of such assertions, of such audacious appeals to living witnesses, when in truth this man had not risen from the dead, nor wrought any miracle whatever? — What should we think of twelve fishermen, who, without understanding any language but their own, should go to Paris, Rome, Madrid, Constantinople, and endeavour to propagate the same thing? Is it credible that any men could be found so mad as to make the attempt, or that, if they did make it, they should have the good fortune to succeed in their imposition?

That a great part of the world is converted to christianity, is a fact; — that the foundation of this conversion was laid by the apostles, is another fact; — that the apostles were men of mean connections, slender talents, slow apprehensions; of powers, faculties, and dispositions, utterly inadequate to the introducing and supporting an imposture, are other facts, of which, when properly considered, we cannot, it is apprehended, suffer ourselves to doubt. If we admit the account, contained in the New Testament, concerning the means by which the christian religion was established, every thing is credible; if we reject it, every thing is incredible; no satisfactory reason can be assigned for the zeal, or for the success of the apostles in propagating an untruth; their zeal will want a motive, and their success will want a cause adequate to the effect.

Consider farther, that there is no book now in the world, nor, as far as we know, ever

was one, contradicting any of the facts recorded in the New Testament; but that there are several books, *written by men who were not christians*, which confirm many of them: *Tacitus*, in particular, confirms a fact of principal importance; for he tells us, that Jesus Christ was put to death by Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea.—There is not therefore any external testimony, that the writers of the New Testament have written a fable; if we refuse to believe their narration, our refusal, if it has any foundation beside that of prejudice and ignorance of the subject, must be built on something contained in the New Testament itself; now every thing related in the New Testament, and especially what is related concerning the conduct of the apostles, before and after the resurrection of Jesus, carries with it the strongest proof of the honesty of the writers of it; and if they were honest men, the christian religion is true.

What would have been the conduct of dishonest men, who had combined to cheat the world into a belief of what had never happened, into the adoption of a new religion of which they themselves were to be the principal promoters? Would they have ever told to the world circumstances so disgraceful to their characters, as the evangelists have done? Impostors carefully conceal their ambition, their avarice, their cowardice, their insincerity, their vices and imperfections of every

every

every kind, and make an ostentatious display of virtues and excellencies which they do not really possess. But the evangelists, having no design to deceive, relate, without disguise, facts tending to lower their characters in the general estimation of mankind. They tell us that there was a strife among the apostles, which of them should be the greatest; and that, as interested and ambitious men are wont to do, they had all been very forward in professing to Jesus their strong attachment to him---“that if they should die with him, they would not deny him:”---they then proceed to inform us, disgraceful as the account is, that in a very few hours after they had made these solemn professions, when the moment of peril came, and their selfish views were blasted,---“they all forsook him and fled.”---This humiliating narrative is a proof of their veracity as historians, and their conduct on the occasion is highly credible.

Notwithstanding the long intimacy which the apostles of Jesus had enjoyed with him; notwithstanding the distinction with which they had been honoured by him; notwithstanding the knowledge they had of the probity of his manners, of the purity of his doctrines, and of the greatness of his power in working miracles; notwithstanding the promise he had made them of his going to prepare a place for them in his Father's kingdom, of his rising from the dead, of his returning to them again, and of his not leaving

them comfortless ; notwithstanding these and many other circumstances sufficient, one might at first view have imagined, to have generated courage, and secured attachment in all his followers, yet they all abandoned him in his distress---“ forsook him and fled---the shepherd was smitten, and the sheep were scattered.”

This conduct was extremely natural. The disciples of Jesus, and his apostles especially, expected that their master would become a great temporal prince, and that they were to participate in the power, wealth, and honour, which he would at length attain. But when they saw him seized by his enemies, and dragged as a malefactor before the great council of the nation, they not only gave up their hopes of advancement, but were alarmed for their own personal safety ; they yielded to fears inseparable from humanity ; and which are seldom overcome, except by persons impressed with high notions of honourable reputation. This conduct of the apostles is so intirely conformable to what we every day observe, that it forces, at it were, our assent to the truth of the narration. When the founder of a sect in religion, or the leader of a faction in the state, happens to fall into disgrace, his adherents presently begin to be shy of his acquaintance ; and if he happens not merely to fall into disgrace, but to be arrested as a pestilent disturber of the public peace, then do they begin to avoid him ; and if they cannot escape the suspicion of being known to
him,

him, they begin, especially if they be men of low education, to lie and to swear, as Peter did, that they know not the man, never had communication or connection with him.

Compare this selfishness and cowardice of the apostles, with the courage and disinterestedness which soon after adorned their character, and try if you can discover any sufficient reason for so remarkable a change of conduct and principle.

Did Pilate, repenting of his wickedness, extend the protection of the civil power to the followers of Jesus, whom, contrary to all the rules of civil justice, he had condemned to death, though he confessed that he found no cause of death in him? No, we hear nothing of the repentance of Pilate.-- Did the chief priests and elders of the Jewish people, repenting of the premeditated malice by which they had sought the life of Jesus, by which they had bribed Judas to betray innocent blood, by which they had intimidated Pilate to crucify a just person; did these men, struck with remorse, encourage the apostles to adhere to their crucified master? No, these men retained their malice after the object of it was removed, they persecuted the apostles for preaching in the name of Jesus.-- Did the multitude, who a few days before his trial had ushered Jesus into Jerusalem with triumphant acclamations of applause; who, at the time of his trial, as if drunk with fury, had cried out, "crucify him, crucify him, his blood be on us and
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and our children ;” did this multitude (as is not unusual for multitudes to do) once more change their mind, and undertake the defence of the followers of that man, whom in their phrenzy they had murdered? No, we read nothing of the multitude becoming supporters of the apostles, till the wonders and signs which were done by them, brought fear on every soul; the support of the multitude was subsequent to the preaching of Peter and the apostles, it could not therefore have been the cause of their courage---Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Christ, and a rich man; Nicodemus was a disciple of Christ, and a powerful man, for he was a ruler of the Jews; did these or any other men by their wealth or authority inspire the apostles with fortitude to face their enemies, and the enemies of their crucified Lord? No, nothing of this kind, but the contrary of it appears in the history; for it appears that the disciples on the day of the resurrection, and for some days afterwards were so full of apprehension, that they assembled privately with the door of their apartment shut, for fear of the Jews. What was it then that caused the apostles to change their cowardice into courage, their desertion into attachment, their aim at worldly advancement into a voluntary surrender of every worldly comfort, into a patient submission to every evil which could afflict human nature? What, but the conviction that
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that their Lord was risen from the dead? This is a cause adequate to the effect; it is a misuse of time, and a perversion of talents, to seek for any other. This conduct of the apostles before, and after the resurrection of their Lord, is a strong argument in support of the truth of our holy religion.

Let us consider more particularly the account which is given of their conduct. After the crucifixion of Jesus, the apostles were obliged to stay at Jerusalem at least a week, that they might keep the passover according to the law; during this period Jesus appeared twice to them when they were assembled together. After the feast was ended, they returned to their native country, Galilee; and Jesus appeared to them, at the place he had before appointed: it is probable that he showed himself frequently to them in that country, for he was seen of them forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. On the approach of the feast of pentecost, or the feast of weeks, which, according to the law, was to be kept at Jerusalem by all the Jews, fifty days after the celebration of the passover, the apostles went from Galilee to Jerusalem; and there they were again met by their master; who commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they were endued with power from on high, till they were baptized by the Holy Ghost, which he assured them they

they would be in a little time. He gave them also their commission—"Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.—And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight."—A few days after this, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and enabled to speak a variety of languages which they had never learned, and to work miracles surpassing all human power.

Now supposing the scripture account of the resurrection of Jesus; of his frequently appearing to his disciples after his resurrection; of his instructing them in the nature of his kingdom; of his giving them a commission to bear witness concerning him to all the world; of his ascending into heaven while they looked on him; of his sending the Holy Ghost, by which they were enabled to speak with tongues, and to work miracles; supposing these things to have really happened, what conduct would you have expected from the apostles? Precisely that which they adopted. They no longer denied their master, no longer shut themselves up in secret, no longer feared the Jewish rulers, no longer disputed amongst themselves which of them should have the first place in the kingdom of Christ; but relinquishing

quishing all earthly comfort, setting at defiance all opposition, braving all persecution, they went through the world executing the commission they had received, every where maintaining—that Jesus of Nazareth, whilst he was alive, was a man proved to be from God, by miracles which God did by him; that God raised him from the dead; that after his resurrection they frequently conversed with him; that they saw him ascend into heaven; and that they received from him the power of speaking with tongues, and of working miracles.

Had Jesus Christ never risen from the dead, christianity would, probably, never have been extended beyond the limits of Judea. His disciples might have acquired a peculiar denomination, and would certainly have esteemed him a great prophet; but not *the* prophet, not the Messiah, whom they expected to come into the world. In the interval between his death and his resurrection, the minds of his apostles were perplexed with doubts concerning his being the person who was to restore Israel. They were so backward in crediting the reports which were brought to them of his resurrection, that, it is evident, they either did not believe, or, in the tumult of their grief, did not advert to what he had told them of his rising again the third day: and it is very probable that, if he had not risen from the dead, his disciples would have contented themselves with reverencing, in
secret

secret, the memory of their master; they could not have doubted concerning the reality of the miracles which they had seen him perform; but they would neither have had the courage to attempt the conversion of the world to a dead man, nor the means to effect it.

History affords many instances of men, who have sustained with fortitude the greatest persecutions in support of opinions perfectly erroneous, as well as in support of those which are founded in truth. A Jew will sooner be tortured by the inquisition, and burned at the stake, than he will acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah. A christian will suffer martyrdom, sooner than he will deny that Jesus is the Messiah. A Mahometan will sooner be put to death, than he will own Mahomet to have been an impostor; and both Jews and Christians will suffer any persecution sooner than they will acknowledge him to have been a prophet sent from God. It is not only in these great points that human fortitude triumphs over pain and death; but there is no christian sect which cannot boast of numbers who would seal, I do not say, the truth, but their opinion of the truth, with their blood. Servetus was burned to death, because he would not profess, that he believed Christ to be the eternal Son of God, though, in the midst of the flames, he professed that Christ was the Son of the eternal God;---and Calvin would have suffered

suffered the death which he made Servetus suffer, sooner than he would have acknowledged, that Christ was not the eternal Son of the eternal God.---We learn from the history of fanaticism and superstition, that men have died martyrs to opinions unintelligible, absurd, immoral, impious. All this may be allowed, but the inference, which is generally drawn by sceptical men from such observations, cannot be allowed; the inference is this---that the fortitude of the apostles, in sustaining persecution, is no proof of the truth of the Christian religion, inasmuch as an equal degree of fortitude has often been displayed by other men in support of opinions evidently not true.---This inference cannot be allowed for this reason---that an essential difference is to be made between him who dies in attestation of a matter of fact, and him who dies in attestation of an opinion. The apostles died in attestation of their having seen Jesus work miracles, whilst he was alive; and of their having conversed with him after his resurrection from the dead. These are not abstruse opinions, but things which either did, or did not happen; any man is competent to say, whether he saw them happen or not; and the apostles died in maintaining that they did see them happen: they "were eye-witnesses of his majesty." The christian martyrs who had never seen Jesus, nor been eye-witnesses of any miracles wrought by him,

him, or by others in his name, but who died, rather than they would abandon the belief which they had adopted, contributed, by their constancy, to the propagation of the christian religion ; but they did not establish it's truth in the same way that the apostles did.

The christians of the present age are strong in opinion, that Jesus was raised from the dead---the Jews and unbelievers of the present age are strong in opinion, that Jesus was not raised from the dead. Christians and Jews, of all preceding ages, till we come to the very time when this great event---the resurrection of Jesus---either did or did not happen, have been uniform in their respective opinions, and both are now ready to shed their blood in support of them ; there is no hypocrisy in the profession of either ; what reason then has an impartial inquirer after truth to credit the christian rather than the Jew ?---He has this reason ; the groundwork of the belief of the christian is a matter of fact attested by eye-witnesses ; but the groundwork of the belief of the Jew is an assertion destitute of proof. The Jews, who lived at the time when Jesus either did or did not rise from the dead, found the sepulchre, in which his body had been laid, empty. The sepulchre might have become empty two ways, either by the body having been raised from the dead, or by it's having been taken away. The Jews asserted that it was
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taken away by his disciples, but they gave no proof of their assertion; they neither pretended to have seen it taken away, nor to have seen it after it had been taken away. The apostles also found the sepulchre empty, but they did not, from that circumstance, assert, that Jesus was risen from the dead; no, they asserted that they had seen him, handled him, eaten with him, conversed with him, not only once, but often, and in different places, after his resurrection from the dead. Now, no one, who understands the nature of evidence, can hesitate in pronouncing, that the belief of the christians of the present age, when traced back to it's origin, is founded on a rock, on the testimony of eye-witnesses to a matter of fact; whilst that of the Jews is founded on an assertion of their ancestors not only destitute of proof, but utterly incredible, as might easily be shewn from an examination of the circumstances attending the crucifixion and interment of Jesus.

Had the chief priests reported, that, in consequence of the precautions they had taken, the body of Jesus was on the third day after the crucifixion found in the sepulchre; and had the apostles reported, that on the third day the body was not found in the sepulchre, and said no more upon the subject; the christians and Jews, of succeeding ages, might, with some appearance of reason, have disputed concerning the degree of credit due to the testimony of their respective progenitors

progenitors. Yet, even on this supposition, the christian would have had a better foundation for his belief, than the Jew could lay claim to; for the predecessors of the christian sacrificed their lives in support of their testimony, but the predecessors of the Jew gave no such proof of their sincerity and truth.

The sum of what has been said amounts to this—we have as great, if not greater reason to believe, that the history of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as related in the New Testament, is a genuine and authentic history, as we have to believe in the genuineness and authenticity of any other ancient book—we have no evidence external or internal to induce us to conclude, that the apostles had either ability or motive to introduce and propagate an imposture. The selfishness, ambition, and cowardice of the apostles, shewn during the life, and at the death of Jesus, are perfectly natural and credible; and when contrasted with their subsequent disinterestedness, humility, and fortitude, afford an exceeding strong proof, both of the general veracity of the evangelists as historians, and of the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, as a cause adequate to the production of so great, and otherwise unaccountable change in their character and conduct.

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THE CONCLUSION.

THE truth of Christianity depends upon its leading facts, and upon them alone. Now of these we have evidence which ought to satisfy us, at least until it appear that mankind have ever been deceived by the same. We have some uncontroverted and incontestible points, to which the history of the human species hath nothing similar to offer. A Jewish peasant changed the religion of the world, and that, without force, without power, without support; without one natural source or circumstance of attraction, influence, or success. *Such a thing hath not happened in any other instance.* The companions of this person, after he himself had been put to death for his attempt, asserted his supernatural character, founded upon his supernatural operations; and, in testimony of the truth of their assertions, *i. e.* in consequence of their own belief of that truth, and, in order to communicate the knowledge of it to others, voluntarily entered upon lives of toil and hardship, and, with a full experience of their danger, committed themselves to the last extremities of persecution. *This hath not a parallel.* More particularly, a
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very few days after this person had been publicly executed, and in the very city in which he was buried, these his companions declared with one voice that his body was restored to life; that they had seen him, handled him, eat with him, conversed with him; and, in pursuance of their persuasion of the truth of what they told, preached his religion, with this strange fact as the foundation of it, in the face of those who had killed him, who were armed with the power of the country, and necessarily and naturally disposed to treat his followers as they had treated himself; and having done this upon the spot where the event took place, carried the intelligence of it abroad, in despite of difficulties and opposition, and where the nature of their errand gave them nothing to expect but derision, insult, and outrage. *This is without example.* These three facts, I think, are certain, and would have been nearly so, if the gospels had never been written. The Christian story, as to these points, hath never varied. No other hath been set up against it. Every letter, every discourse, every controversy, amongst the followers of the religion; every book written by them, from the age of its commencement to the present time, in every part of the world in which it hath been professed, and with every sect into which it hath been divided, (and we have letters and discourses written by contemporaries, by witnesses of
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the transaction, by persons themselves bearing a share in it, and other writings following that age in regular succession) *concur* in representing these facts in this manner. A religion, which now possesses the greatest part of the civilised world, unquestionably sprang up at Jerusalem at this time. Some account must be given of its origin, some cause assigned for its rise. All the accounts of this origin, all the explications of this cause, whether taken from the writings of the early followers of the religion, in which, and in which perhaps alone, it could be expected that they should be distinctly unfolded, or from occasional notices in other writings of that or the adjoining age, either expressly alledge the facts above stated as the means by which the religion was set up, or advert to its commencement in a manner which agrees with the supposition of these facts being true, which renders them probable according to the then state of the world, and which testifies their operation and effects.

These propositions alone lay a foundation for our faith, for they prove the existence of a transaction, which cannot even in its most *general* parts be accounted for upon any reasonable supposition, except that of the truth of the mission. But the particulars, the *detail* of the miracles or miraculous pretences (for such there necessarily must have been) upon which this unexampled transaction rested,

ed, and *for* which these men acted and suffered as they did act and suffer, it is undoubtedly of great importance to us to know. *We have* this detail from the fountain head; from the persons themselves; in accounts written by eye-witnesses of the scene, by contemporaries and companions of those who were so; not in one book, but four, each containing enough for the verification of the religion, all agreeing in the fundamental parts of the history. We have the authenticity of these books established by more and stronger proofs than belong to almost any other ancient book whatever, and by proofs which widely distinguish them from any others claiming a similar authority to theirs. If there were any good reason for doubt concerning the names to which these books are ascribed, (which there is not, for they were never ascribed to any other, and we have evidence not long after their publication of their bearing the names which they now bear) their antiquity, of which there is no question, their reputation and authority amongst the early disciples of the religion, of which there is as little, form a valid proof that they must, in the main at least, have agreed with what the first teachers of the religion delivered.

When we open these ancient volumes, we discover in them marks of truth, whether we consider each in itself, or collate them with one another. The writers certainly knew something

something of what they were writing about, for they manifest an acquaintance with local circumstances, with the history and usages of the times, which could only belong to an inhabitant of that country, living in that age. In every narrative we perceive simplicity and undefignedness; the air and the language of reality. When we compare the different narratives together, we find them so varying as to repel all suspicion of confederacy; so agreeing under this variety, as to show that the accounts had one real transaction for their common foundation: often attributing different actions and discourses, to the person whose history, they profess to relate, yet actions and discourses so similar, as very much to bespeak the same character; which is a coincidence, that, in such writers as they were, could only be the consequence of their writing from fact, and not from imagination.

These four narratives are confined to the history of the founder of the religion, and end with *his* ministry. Since however it is certain that the affair went on, we cannot help being anxious to know *how* it proceeded. This intelligence hath come down to us in a work purporting to be written by a person, himself connected with the business during the first stages of its progress, taking up the story where the former histories had left it, carrying on the narrative, oftentimes with great particularity, and throughout with the

appearance of good sense*, information and candour; stating all along the origin, and the only probable origin, of effects which unquestionably were produced, together with the natural consequences of situations which unquestionably did exist; and *confirmed* in the substance at least of the account, by the strongest possible accession of testimony which a history can receive, *original letters*, written by the person who is the principal subject of the history, written upon the business to which the history relates, and during the period, or soon after the period, which the history comprises. No man can say that this altogether is not a body of strong historical evidence.

When we reflect that some of those, from whom the books proceeded, are related to have themselves wrought miracles, to have been the subject of miracles, or of supernatural assistance in propagating the religion, we may perhaps be led to think, that more credit, or a different kind of credit, is due to these accounts, than what can be claimed by merely human testimony. But this is an argument which cannot be addressed to sceptics or unbelievers. A man must be a Christian before he can receive it. The inspiration of the historical scriptures, and

* See Peter's speech upon curing the cripple, (Acts iii. 18.) the council of the apostles, (xv.), Paul's discourse at Athens, (xvii. 22.), before Agrippa, (xxvi.). I notice these passages, both as fraught with good sense, and as free from the smallest tincture of enthusiasm.

and the nature, degree, and extent of that inspiration, are questions undoubtedly of serious discussion, but they are questions amongst Christians themselves, and not between them and others. The doctrine itself is by no means necessary to the belief of Christianity, which must, in the first instance at least, depend upon the ordinary maxims of historical credibility †.

In viewing the detail of miracles recorded in these books, we find every supposition negatived, by which they can be resolved into fraud or delusion. They were not secret, nor momentary, nor tentative, nor ambiguous; nor performed under the sanction of authority, with the spectators on their side, or in affirmance of tenets and practices already established. We find also the evidence alledged for them, and which evidence was by great numbers received, different from that upon which other miraculous accounts rest. It was contemporary, it was published upon the spot, it continued; it involved interests and questions of the greatest magnitude; it contradicted the most fixed persuasions and prejudices of the persons to whom it was addressed; it required from those who accepted it, not a simple indolent assent, but a change, from thenceforward, of principles and conduct, a submission to consequences the most serious and the most deterring, to loss and danger, to insult, outrage, and persecution

† See Powell's Discourses. Discourse xv. p. 245.

secution. How such a story should be false, or, if false, how under such circumstances it should make its way, I think impossible to be explained: yet such the Christian story was, such were the circumstances under which it came forth, and in opposition to such difficulties did it prevail.

An event so connected with the religion, and with the fortunes, of the Jewish people, as one of their race, one born amongst them, establishing his authority and his law throughout a great portion of the civilized world, it was perhaps to be expected, should be noticed in the prophetic writings of that nation; especially when this person, together with his own mission, caused also to be acknowledged, the divine original of their institution, and by those who before had altogether rejected it. Accordingly we perceive in these writings, various intimations *concurring* in the person and history of Jesus, in a manner, and in a degree, in which passages taken from these books, could not be made to concur, in any person arbitrarily assumed, or in any person, except him, who has been the author of great changes in the affairs and opinions of mankind. Of some of these predictions the weight depends a good deal upon the concurrence. Others possess great separate strength: one in particular does this in an eminent degree. It is an entire description, manifestly directed to one character and to one scene of things: it is extant in a writing,

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ing, or collection of writings, declaredly prophetic; and to the circumstances of his life and death, with considerable precision, and in a way which no diversity of interpretation hath, in my opinion, been able to confound. That the advent of Christ, and the consequences of it, should not have been more distinctly revealed in the Jewish sacred books, is, I think, in some measure accounted for by the consideration, that for the Jews to have foreseen the fall of their institution, and that it was to merge at length into a more perfect and comprehensive dispensation, would have cooled too much, and relaxed, their zeal for it, and their adherence to it, upon which zeal and adherence, the preservation in the world of any remains, for many ages, of religious truth, might in a great measure depend.

Of what a revelation discloses to mankind, one, and only one, question can properly be asked, "was it of importance to mankind to know, or to be better assured of?" In this question, when we turn our thoughts to the great Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and of a future judgment, no doubt can be entertained. He who gives me riches or honours does nothing; he who even gives me health does little, in comparison with that, which lays before me just grounds for expecting a restoration to life, and a day of account and retribution: which thing Christianity hath done for millions.

Other

Other articles of the Christian faith are only the adjuncts and circumstances of this. They are however such, as appear worthy of the original to which we ascribe them. The morality of the religion, whether taken from the precepts or the example of its founder, or from the lessons of its primitive teachers, derived, as it should seem, from what had been inculcated by their master, is, in all its parts, wise and pure; neither adapted to vulgar prejudices, nor flattering popular notions, nor excusing established practices, but calculated, in the matter of its instruction, truly to promote human happiness, and, in the form in which it was conveyed, to produce impression and effect; a morality, which let it have proceeded from any person whatever, would have been satisfactory evidence of his good sense and integrity, of the soundness of his understanding and the probity of his designs; a morality, in every view of it, much more perfect, than could have been expected from the natural circumstances and character of the person who delivered it; a morality, in a word, which is, and hath been, most beneficial to mankind.

Upon the greatest therefore of all possible occasions, and for a purpose of inestimable value, it pleased the Deity to vouchsafe a miraculous attestation. Having done this for the institution, when this alone could fix its authority, or give to it a beginning,
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he committed its future progress, to the natural means of human communication, and to the influence of those causes by which human conduct and human affairs are governed. The seed being sown, was left to vegetate; the leaven being inserted, was left to ferment; and both according to the laws of nature: laws, nevertheless, disposed and controuled by that Providence which conducts the affairs of the universe, though by an influence inscrutable, and generally undistinguishable by us. And in this Christianity is analogous to most other provisions for happiness. The provision is made; and being made, is left to act according to laws, which forming a part of a more general system, regulate this particular subject, in common with many others.

Let the constant recurrence to our observation, of contrivance, design, and wisdom in the works of nature, once fix upon our minds the belief of a God, and after that all is easy. In the councils of a Being, possessed of the power and disposition, which the Creator of the universe must possess, it is not improbable that there should be a future state; it is not improbable that we should be acquainted with it. A future state rectifies every thing; because if moral agents be made, in the last event, happy or miserable, according to their conduct in the station, and under the circumstances in which they are placed, it seems not very material

material by the operation of what causes, according to what rules, or even, if you please to call it so, by what chance or caprice, these stations are assigned, or these circumstances determined. This hypothesis, therefore, solves all that objection to the divine care and goodness, which the promiscuous distribution of good and evil (I do not mean in the doubtful advantages of riches and grandeur, but in the unquestionably important distinctions of health and sickness, strength and infirmity, bodily ease and pain, mental alacrity and depression) is apt on so many occasions to create. This one truth changes the nature of things: gives order to confusion: makes the moral world of a piece with the natural.

Nevertheless, a higher degree of assurance, than that to which it is possible to advance this, or any argument drawn from the light of nature, was necessary, especially to overcome the shock, which the imagination and the senses receive, from the effects and the appearances of death; and the obstruction which from thence arises to the expectation of either a continued or a future existence. This difficulty, although of a nature, no doubt, to act very forcibly, will be found, I think, upon reflection, to reside more in our habits of apprehension, than in the subject; and that the giving way to it, when we have any reasonable grounds for the contrary, is rather an indulging of the imagination, than
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any thing else. Abstractedly considered, that is, considered without relation to the difference which habit, and merely habit, produces in our faculties and modes of apprehension, I do not see any thing more in the resurrection of a dead man, than in the conception of a child; except it be this, that the one comes into the world with a system of prior consciousnesses about him, which the other does not: and no person will say, that he knows enough of either subject to perceive, that this circumstance makes such a difference in the two cases, that the one should be easy, and the other impossible; the one natural, the other not so. To the first man the succession of the species would be as incomprehensible, as the resurrection of the dead is to us.

Thought is different from motion, perception from impact: the individuality of a mind is hardly consistent with the divisibility of an extended substance; or its volition, that is, its power of originating motion, with the inertness which cleaves to every portion of matter, which our observation or our experiments can reach. These distinctions lead us to an immaterial principle: at least, they do this; they so negative the mechanical properties of matter, in the constitution of a sentient, still more of a rational being, that no argument, drawn from these properties, can be of any great weight in opposition to other reasons, when the question respects the changes of which such a nature is capable, or the

the manner in which these changes are effected. Whatever thought be, or whatever it depend upon, the regular experience of *sleep* makes one thing concerning it certain, that it can be completely suspended, and completely restored.

If any one find it too great a strain upon his thoughts, to admit the notion of a substance strictly immaterial, that is, from which extension and solidity are excluded, he can find no difficulty in allowing that a particle as small as a particle of light, minuter than all conceivable dimensions, may just as easily be the depositary, the organ, and the vehicle of consciousness, as the congeries of animal substance, which forms a human body, or the human brain; that, being so, it may transfer a proper identity to whatever shall hereafter be united to it; may be safe amidst the destruction of its integuments; may connect the natural with the spiritual, the corruptible with the glorified body. If it be said, that the mode and means of all this is imperceptible by our senses, it is only what is true of the most important agencies and operations. The great powers of nature are all invisible. Gravitation, electricity, magnetism, though constantly present, and constantly exerting their influence; though within us, near us, and about us; though diffused throughout all space; overspreading the surface, or penetrating the contexture of all bodies with which we are acquainted, depend upon substances
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and actions, which are totally concealed from our senses. The Supreme Intelligence is so himself.

But whether these, or any other attempts to satisfy the imagination, bear any resemblance to the truth, or whether the imagination, which, as I have said before, is the mere slave of habit, *can* be satisfied, or not; when a future state, and the revelation of a future state, is not only perfectly consistent with the attributes of the Being who governs the universe; but when it is more; when it alone removes the appearances of contrariety, which attend the operations of his will towards creatures capable of merit and demerit, of reward and punishment; when a strong body of historical evidence, confirmed by many internal tokens of truth and authenticity, gives us just reason to believe that such a revelation hath actually been made; we ought to set our minds at rest with the assurance, that, in the resources of creative wisdom, expedients cannot be wanted, to carry into effect what the Deity hath purposed; that either a new and mighty influence will descend upon the human world, to resuscitate extinguished consciousness; or that, amidst the other wonderful contrivances with which the universe abounds, and by some of which we see animal life, in many instances, assuming improved forms of existence, acquiring new organs, new perceptions, and new sources of enjoyment, provi-
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sion is also made, though by methods secret to us (as all the great processes of nature are) for conducting the objects of God's moral government, through the necessary changes of their frame, to those final distinctions of happiness and misery, which he hath declared to be reserved for obedience and transgression, for virtue and vice, for the use and the neglect, the right and the wrong employment, of the faculties and opportunities, with which he hath been pleased, severally to entrust and to try us.

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THE END.