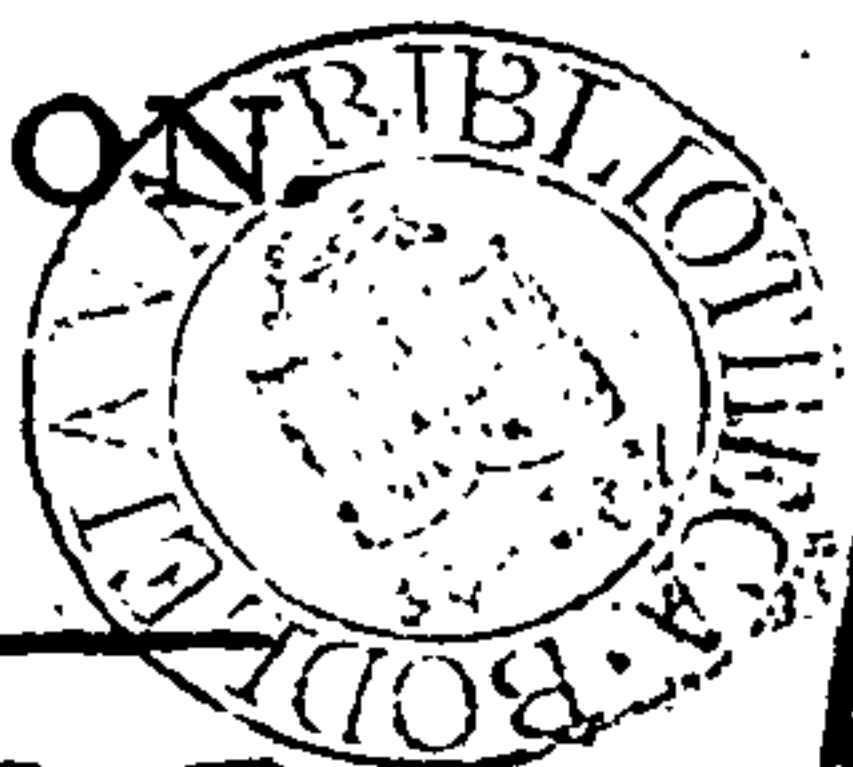


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T R E A T I S E

Concerning the TRUTH of the

CHRISTIAN RELIGION



By GILBERT BURNET D. D.

Sometime Professor of Divinity in the University
of *Glasgow*, afterwards Bishop of *Sarum*.

To which is added, A DISCOURSE on
MIRACLES, by JOHN LOCKE Esq;

G L A S G O W,

Printed by ROBERT FOULIS, and sold by him
there, and at *Edinburgh* by Mess. G. HAM-
MILTON and J. BALFOUR, MDCCXLIII.

Tho. Hitchcock
M. John's Son

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T R E A T I S E

CONCERNING THE

Truth of the Christian Religion.

THERE is not any one thing that we ought to enquire into with so peculiar an exactness, as the truth of that religion which we believe; nor is there any thing in which we ought to be so conversant, and to which we should be so well prepared, as to defend this great argument, the foundation of our faith and hope. It is a very preposterous way of study to be able to argue about the retail of our religion; I mean the particular doctrines of it, and the subdivisions into which it is broken, and not to know how to maintain it in gross; when the truth of it is called in question, either in the pe-
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tulant

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tulant way of profane liberty, or with the subtilties of philosophy and criticism. We may have to do with both in the age in which we live.

The divisions among Christians have made the world conclude, that they had a right to prove all things, that so they may know how to hold fast that which is good. The enthusiasms and hypocrisies of some, and the looseness and disorders among others; the superstitious magnifying of small matters, and the contending eagerly for them, while the greater, as well as the more useful and more uncontroverted rules have been too visibly and generally neglected; have furnished them with prejudices, that must be confessed to be but too specious and plausible: And I wish some of us may not have contributed, to make many think we are scarce in earnest in arguing for the truth of our religion, while our lives do but too openly testify that we do not firmly believe our own arguments.

The great Author of our religion
has

has left this woe upon the world, that *offences must come*; and the heaviest part of that woe will certainly fall upon those by *whom they come*. But when we are enquiring into so important a matter, it certainly becomes us to free our minds from prejudices as much as we can; and neither to suffer ourselves to be possessed by the first impressions that education made upon us, nor by our present stations and engagements on the one hand; nor to be led away by the fury of our appetites and passions, and the bad examples that the world abounds in on the other hand: That so we may more freely search after truth, and both find it out, and follow it.

As a preamble to what is to come afterwards, let us look into our natures, and see if we do not feel a principle within us that both thinks and acts freely, which is totally different from matter, which neither thinks nor chuses. This principle then feels that its thoughts do direct its freedom in all

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that it does, and therefore is capable of good or evil, of reward and punishment. The more distinctly that it thinks, and the more exactly that it follows those truths which by thinking it discovers, it feels itself become the more perfect; the more that it can resist all impressions which arise either from the constitution of the body, or from outward objects and accidents, it grows to enjoy a perfecter calm within, and is enabled to go through the fatigues and chances of life with much more ease and patience. The more it resists the furious cravings of the body, it enjoys a longer life and perfecter health. There is also a chain of rules which arise out of these two qualities, that in the opinion of all mankind are the best our nature is capable of, which are *veracity* and *goodness*, which render all the societies of men both safe and happy: They establish a confidence, and maintain an intercourse in the world; they give credit, and draw esteem

esteem ; they endear men to one another, and make all the ties and the whole neighbourhood and commerce of life firm and useful : And there is also a train of thoughts which run through a man's mind and life, which makes him live with great advantage, and die with much firmness ; which give him much courage, and attract much esteem : These are all things that a man may safely affirm, since none question them ; and as no man who sees the constant mirth in which some in Bedlam do pass their days, will be from thence tempted to think that they are truly happy ; so the mad frolick in which some Libertines waste both their bodies and minds, their lives and fortunes, has never imposed so far on the world, as to make men so much as to doubt, whether it were better to be as they are, or to be good and wise, calm and sober.

This then being laid down, it is a great step made in favour of any religion, if it does exactly quadrate with

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it all: if the principles that it contains, and the rules that it prescribes, are so much of a piece with this, that they do both improve and fortify it. This does not prove it to be true indeed, but it renders it probable; it makes us inclined to believe, or at least to wish it to be true. The thoughts of a Supream Being, who made and preserves all things, who is everywhere, and can do whatsoever he pleases, raise vast ideas in us, and give a sort of opening and enlargement to our powers: The sense of his knowing all things, begets a composure, and creates an awe; the persuasion of his governing the world, gives a quiet, when we know, that as infinite power cannot be withstood, so sovereign wisdom cannot be mistaken: nothing can have such influence, both on our lives, and in our death, as the belief of another world, and of the account that is to be made after death: nothing strikes the hatred of sin, or the obligations to virtue deeper, than the whole theory of
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the death and sufferings of Christ. The rules given in the Gospel to all the orders of men, and in all the relations of life, would make all families and societies both easy and happy; the obligation to strict justice to all others, and to an abatement of what in justice we might demand from others, by doing as we would be done by: The rules of not only passing by, and forgiving injuries, but of loving enemies, and doing good for evil; the tenderness as well as the extent of our charity, the measures and manner of our bounty to the poor, the modesty of deportment, the condescending gentleness, as well as the unaffected humility that are enjoined, have all such characters in them, so suited to our faculties, and to human society; to the calm of a man's mind, as well as to the comforts of his life, to fortify him against misfortunes, and to support him against the feebleness and frailties of his nature; that he who will suffer himself to weigh all this carefully,

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carefully, must feel a strong disposition to believe a religion to be true, that agrees with the highest thoughts that we can have of God, and the best feeds or principles that we feel within ourselves.

All this receives a vast accession from the Simplicity of the worship prescribed by it, which consists chiefly in the exercise of the sublimest thoughts that we can entertain of God, and the justest that we ought to have of ourselves ; all which are to be expressed in the most genuine and simple manner possible, with the fewest, but the plainest and most significant rites. Thus a great advance is made, when a man can be induced to lay all these things together. The whole moral and practical part of Christianity, together with the modesty and reasonableness of its worship, are great inducements, if not arguments, to believe all the rest of it : and this will appear the more sensibly, if one sets by it the idolatry and magick, the cruelties
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and brutalities that have defiled the whole Gentile world, either as we find them antiently, even among the politest nations of *Greece* and *Rome* ; or as they continue to this day in so great a part of the world, which lies still under the darkness of Paganism, according to the descriptions that navigators and travellers have given us.

Here is the first foundation to be laid : to this is to be added, That a nation which hates our religion, does yet retain many books that give a vast strength to it ; and so much the greater as they (the Jews I mean) have preserved those books with great care. It was a remarkable step, when those books were put in a language of greater extent, and more certainly understood, than that in which they were first writ ; and that long before our religion appeared, which was done by the men of that nation. That translation was received, and long used by them, which prevented endless disputes that must have otherwise arisen
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in the beginnings of Christianity, concerning the true rendring of many passages in them, which relate to an extraordinary person, that was to be sent to them, and was looked for by them, under the name of the *Messias*: For the *Hebrew* language, as it was little known, so it was capable of such different readings and interpretations, that if the matter had not been settled before by an authentical and authorized translation, it does not well appear how it could have been done. A Christian would not have had credit enough, nor a *Jew* honesty enough to have given a work of this kind, in which the world would have acquiesced. Now in these books, as there are some predictions that seem looser and more general, such as those concerning the *seed of the woman*, the *seed of Abraham*, and the issue of *David*; so some, chiefly of the later Prophets, fixed upon a period of time, as that he should come during the second temple, and within a limited course

course of years ; and that he should be cut off, but that afterwards *the city and sanctuary should be destroyed: that desolations were determined till the war should be at an end.* * Now without entring into the exact adjusting of the time limited of 70 weeks, we do certainly know that their temple and city were destroyed many ages ago; and but a few years after, that he, whom we believe to be that *Messias*, had appeared among them, and was cut off by them: So that either it must be owned that this was not a true prophecy, or the *Messias* came before the destruction of *Jerusalem*: this argument receives a vast strength by those who have made out the point of chronology of the 70 weeks of years, that is 490 years, which does exactly agree to the interval of time.

This whole matter receives a great confirmation from that unvaluable history which *Josephus* a *Jewish* priest, and a man of great learning and judgment,

* Dan. 9. 24, 25, 26, 27

ment, well skill'd both in civil and military affairs, and full of zeal both for his country and religion, has writ in so particular a manner, he having been an eye-witness, and a considerable actor in the whole affair. Whosoever is at the pains to compare that dismal scene with our Saviour's predictions, sees such an agreement between them, that this is no small argument to prove the truth of the whole religion. Nor is it to be past over without a special remark, that we have this piece of history writ by a *Few*, who cannot be suspected; had a Christian writ it, he might, perhaps, have been thought too partial to his religion; or had a *Roman* writ it, he might have been suspected to have aggravated matters for raising the triumphs of his country; but there lies no possible colour of suspicion against *Josephus*: and since he mentions the story both of the forerunner, and of the disciple of our Saviour; this is a great presumption, either that the passage relating to our

Saviour

Saviour himself is genuine, or that if he said nothing of him, it was because he knew he could say nothing that could derogate from his credit, and that he would say nothing to raise it: for it is plain from those relations concerning *St. John Baptist* and *St. James*, that he was acquainted with the beginnings of our religion; besides, that we see a particular curiosity possessed him, of being well informed concerning all the different sects that were among them, and their particular tenets and customs.

There are so many passages in the gospel, of which the Jews must have had such full and authentic information, that if they had been falsely related, it must have been in their power to have confuted them beyond the possibility of a contradiction. So that as to this part of the argument, so much is certain, That the Jews looked for their *Messias* during the second temple, and about the time that our Saviour appeared, which disposed

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them so easily to hearken to every impostor. Their temple has been destroyed, their nation dispersed, their genealogies lost, by which the certainty of their being Abraham's seed, subsists no more, and their sacrifices have ceased now above 1600 years. So that their hatred of us, and yet their books agreeing with ours, when joined together, make no small part of our argument. But now to come to the strength of our cause, I lay it thus.

The gospels were published in the time when many persons were yet alive, who knew, and were appealed to, for the passages contained in them: which is made out thus. First, they mention the temple and nation of the Jews as still in being, which shews they were written before the destruction of Jerusalem: more particularly, St. *Luke* writ the *Acts of the Apostles* two years after St. *Paul's* going to *Rome*, with which he ends that book: and he begins it with the mention of his gospel, as writ some time before that.

that. His gospel also begins with an account of some other gospels that had been then writ. Now *St. Paul's* going to *Rome* happened two or three and twenty years after the time of our Saviour's passion and resurrection, so early were these things put in writing. They were no sooner written, than they were read in the assemblies of the Christians, as the Jews were wont to read the law and the prophets in their synagogues. This we do find from * *St. Justin's* apology, was the practice of his time, which was less than an hundred years after they were written. So that we clearly see, these writings were not kept as secrets to be divulged as the depositaries of them thought fit, according to the way that the *Romans* had used about the *Sybil-line* oracles; but were immediately copied out for the use of all the churches, and of as many private Christians as could compass the copying them. The epistles of the Apostles

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* *Justin. Apol. 2.*

do carry in them characters that lead us very near the time in which they were written: and by comparing those of St. *Paul* with the books writ by St. *Luke*, we see when most of his epistles were writ, many of them being before his going to *Rome*: Now these epistles were addressed to whole bodics and churches, and they do often appeal to the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, as matters which were then well known, and firmly believed by all Christians: from all which I at present infer no more, but that these things were published in the time, and were known in many remote provinces, soon after they were transacted; and were not kept close to be published in some other age, when it might have been easy for bold impostors to make any thing pass with a credulous multitude. Now all this was published near the fountain, and was so soon spread, that in *Nero's* time we know by *Tacitus*, that there were great numbers of them at *Rome*,
who

who had fallen under a *publick odium*, and on whom *Nero*, tho' he had burnt *Rome* himself, threw the hatred of that conflagration, and punished them with the severity that such a crime, if truly proved against them, had well deserved. In the gospels we have the relations of our Saviour's miracles, of many of his transactions with the Jewish nation, so circumstantiated, most particularly the account of his death and resurrection, is given so minutely, that the Jews, who might have been easily masters of the books in which these were contained, had it in their power to have overthrown the credit of them, in many instances, if they had found any falsehoods in them. If they had not sealed the sepulchre, or asked of *Pilate* a grant to watch it; if that guard had not run away in the night, and given out a story of their having fallen asleep, the Jews could have well disproved this, upon which the whole depended. Now as the Jews were engaged, both out of their

hatred of our Saviour and his doctrine, and to justify themselves from the imputations of having shed his blood, and that of his followers ; to have pursued this matter so close, as to have convinced the world of its falshood ; so the progress that it made, did alarm them too much to make any one imagine that they could despise it. They had it also in their power, by the registers which were in their hands ; and at least, during *Agrippa's* reign, they were in so happy and flourishing a condition, that it cannot be said, that the ill state of their affairs took from them either the heart or the leisure to look after this. All which received a great confirmation from *St. Paul's* conversion, who from being one, not only of their zealots and *Pharisees*, but of the most furious persecutors of this religion, was so strangely struck down, and changed, while a company of their own people were about him, that he became afterwards the most successful
of

of all the first planters of Christianity. He did very frequently appeal to that matter of fact, in which it had been easy to have taken away his credit, if they could have denied it. So far then I have gone to shew that this matter was published early, and in the sight of those who were both most concerned, and most able to have detected any deceit that might have been in it; who did not by any act, of which there remains the least print, among either the writings of their own nation, or of the other enemies to Christianity, attempt to discredit it.

Had not the genealogies of Christ been taken exactly out of the temple-registers, the bare shewing of them had served to have confuted the whole; for if in any one thing, the registers of their genealogies were clear and uncontroverted: since these proved that they were *Abraham's* seed, and likewise made out their title to the lands, which from the days of *Joshua* were to pass down, either to
immediate

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immediate descendants, or, as they failed, to collateral degrees. Now this shews plainly, that there was a double office kept of their pedigrees, one was natural, and might be taken when the rolls of circumcision were made up; and the other related to the division of the land; in which when the collateral line came instead of the natural, then the last was dropt, as extinct, and the other remained: it being thus plain from their constitution, that they had these two orders of tables, we are not at all concerned in the diversity of the two Evangelists on this head, since both might have copied them out from those two offices at the temple; and if they had not done it faithfully, the Jews could have authentically demonstrated their error, in intituling our Saviour to that received character of the *Messias*, that he was to be the *Son of David* by a false pedigree; therefore since no exceptions were made in the time, when the sight of the rolls must have ended the enquiry,

enquiry, it is plain that they were faithfully copied out: nor are we now bound to answer such difficulties as seem to arise out of them, since they were not questioned in the time in which only an appeal could be made to the publick registers themselves. If then it is yielded, that those publick actions done in the sight of many witnesses, passed, without being challenged or disproved in that time, here was a series of most wonderful things, done by a man with a word: He calmed seas and winds, he fed great multitudes out of a very small store, which increased vastly as it was distributed; he cured the most desperate diseases, such as palsies and leprosies: He gave sight to the blind, strength to the lame, and hearing to the deaf; he healed many of their infirmities; and which was more than all the rest, he raised some that were dead, to life again: one was indeed but newly dead, but another was led out to be buried, and a third had been four days dead: His

His own resurrection, ascension, and the wonderful effusion of the Holy Ghost, surpassed all, and were the confirming seals and testimonies of his whole doctrine ; and proved that he was sent and authorised by God. And besides the miracles which were wrought by those whom he sent to preach his doctrine, the gift of tongues that they had, as it was absolutely necessary for the discharge of their commission, of going to teach all nations ; so it was of a nature not to be capable of an imposture ; since it was in the power of every single man to have discovered the truth or falshood of it. In other miracles it may be suggested, that witnesses might be so managed, as to carry on the credit of them, true or false : but the Apostles having given this out as a part, and a main part of their history, we cannot suppose but that this was true, otherwise the falshood of it must have been discovered, and with it the whole must have sunk.

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If these extraordinary things were really transacted as they are related, it cannot be pretended that they were the effects of some secrets in nature, which our Saviour might know: for tho' the load-stone may be plaid with so much variety, as to amuse a simple man; and tho' jugglers by a slight of hand seem to do wonders; yet the vast variety, as well as the great usefulness of our Saviour's miracles, shews he was not limited to a few secrets, which work always one way: nor were the wonders he did, shews of pomp, that do only amuse; but they were things of such use to mankind, that it very well became one who was sent of God to prove his mission by them: nor can it be said that imagination wrought powerfully, and made people fancy they saw things that they saw not; or that the persuasion which some took up, might so strike their fancy, as really to cure their diseases; for tho' a hypochondriacal person may be deceived, especially in
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the dark or twi-light, yet numbers of people in full day-light could not agree in the same mistakes : some effects were too signal to be so mistaken; such as, for a man born blind, to be made to see by a word ; or for a storm to be calmed with a rebuke ; and tho in critical diseases, such as fevers, which lie in the fermentations of the blood, a strong conceit may have a real operation; yet chronical distempers, and natural defects go not off by fancy. Nor can it be thought that these wonderful operations could come from the assistance of an evil spirit ; for since our Saviour's doctrine tended wholly to pull down the kingdom of *Satan*, to destroy idolatry and magick, and to root out all immorality, an evil spirit could not co-operate to carry on so good a design ; otherwise it had changed its nature, and from being bad, must have grown good ; so that our Saviour's answer to this objection was full and clear ; that *if Satan was divided against himself, his kingdom*

dom could not stand: For our Saviour's doctrine being so totally opposite to him, if he had joined his force to give it credit, he must thereby have pulled down his own kingdom.

But to give Infidelity its utmost advantage, we shall now consider that which is its last refuge, and chief strength; which is, “That in all ages
“some men have been so bold and
“crafty, while the Herd has been
“so simple and credulous, that many
“impostures have past upon the world
“in such different shapes, that tho’
“we cannot discover the conduct of
“them, yet we are not for that to
“judge in favour of them; and there-
“fore tho’ it is not easy to assign
“the method how Christianity came
“to be received, we may still have
“reason to mistrust the whole mat-
“ter.” This might be tolerably al-
ledged, if there were any one thing
in our religion that gave the least sha-
dow to suspicion: if the teachers of it
had pretended either to authority,
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wealth, or pleasure; if, on the contrary, the rules that were laid down in it, did not shut out all these: for whatsoever corrupt men may have brought in since by an after-game, that has no relation to the beginnings and doctrines of our religion, which does directly contradict them. So far were the first publishers of this from expecting advantages by it, that they knew they were to be exposed to much contempt and hatred, and that by their own countrymen, in which there is a peculiar sting: They looked for severe persecutions, nor were they disappointed; they endured great hardships, by want and poverty, by imprisonments, and cruel whippings, and in conclusion, they lost their lives in the cause: and they did so certainly reckon for all this, that they warned their first converts of a * *fiery trial* that was to come upon them, and of † *much tribulation through which they must enter into the kingdom of heaven*. Im-

postors

* 1 Pet. 4. 12. † Acts 14. 22.

postors must draw on their followers by specious promises, and flattering hopes; and it argues a great certainty of success, as well as an assurance of the truth of a cause, when those who promote it, are so far from drawing on men by allurements, till they are once engaged, that they warn them early of the dangers and difficulties that are before them: With this our Saviour begun, when he said, * *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and become my disciple.* The severe morals which accompany this doctrine, and are indeed a main part of it, are a very lively character of integrity: the true secret of all corrupt religions is, That they propose somewhat to be done for the honour of the Deity, by which their votaries may compensate with God, and may buy off their obligations to solid and true virtue: but a religion that proposes a simple and naked worship, with such easy perfor-

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manances

* Matth. 16. 24, 25.

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mances in it, that no man can suppose, the bare doing of them is any way meritorious; and that proposes these, not as compensations, but as helps to real holiness, and that carries the obligation to it, into the secret recesses of the heart, to our very thoughts, words, and looks, has nothing of the air or genius of imposture in it.

A religion that flatters no part of mankind, no not those who are in possession of the greatest esteem, has a further character of truth in it. The *Jews* valued themselves upon their being *Abraham's* posterity, and their having a law of many precepts given them by God; among them the most popular were the Pharisees, who valued themselves chiefly upon many voluntary observances, as *fences and out-works to the law*, which kept them out of danger of disobeying. Now a great part of the doctrine of our Saviour, and his Apostles, was designed to beat them out of these, to discover the hypocrisy of the Pharisees; to
shew

shew them that all the Gentile nations were now to be set on the same level with them, and that thenceforth the obligation and virtue of all their legal performances was at an end. The Apostles shewed as little inclination to gratify or flatter the most admired part of Heathenism, I mean the Philosophers, who delighted in lofty eloquence, refined subtilty, and sublime metaphysicks : but nothing of all this appearing among them, they were despised by the Philosophers, who esteemed all inspiration, madness; and were prepossessed against both miracles and prophecies, as no better than juggleries. There was nothing left to gain, but the rabble and herd, and yet these were not flattered neither. They are always struck with pomp and magnificence, they love sights and shows, and a splendid exterior in religion, to which both *Jews* and Gentiles had been so much accustomed, that besides the difficulty of making them forsake the religion of

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their

fathers, in which they had been educated, which is always a thing of an ill sound, and of a bad appearance; they were to draw them from pageantry to simplicity; and from outward and costly shews, to a naked, plain way of strictness and purity. In all these things it must be confessed, that there is nothing of the methods of imposture: now to suspect that any artifice lies hid, when all appearances contradict it, is a very unreasonable piece of jealousy; and looks as if men were resolved to suspect, only for suspicion's sake. When therefore there is positive proof brought on the one side, of miracles publickly done, attested by great numbers of witnesses, published in the same age, while great multitudes were yet alive, who were appealed to, and who did so confirm these books, that they were read in all the assemblies of the saints or Christians, as the test and rule of their belief, as well as of their manners; when, I say, all this is proved, and
when

when there appears nothing, neither in the doctrine itself, nor in the management of the Apostles, and their first converts, to furnish us with any colour of apprehending any foul dealing, it is an unreasonable thing, still to stand upon the general argument, of the possibility of an imposture.

But tho' it be not necessary, and indeed in many cases not possible, to prove a negative, yet this argument is so full of evidence, that even that may be undertaken here. There are four things possible that may be alledged as methods to support the possibility of a deceit, put on the world in this matter.

The 1st is, That the Apostles intended a deceit, which they contrived and managed successfully.

The 2^d is, That they themselves were deceived, and were made Tools to abuse others.

The 3^d is, That the whole matter went about in tales and stories, till by every one's magnifying them, they
grew

grew to be believed without strict enquiry, and due proof made.

And the 4th is, That the books which contain this doctrine were at first more sparingly writ, but were afterwards iterpolated, many passages being put in them that had not been in them at first. I have never met with, nor can I imagine any other hypothesis for infidelity to found upon; and I am not afraid to name all these, because I am very certain I can demonstrate the absolute incredibility of every one of them.

As to the first, Of the Apostles having contrived and managed this, on design to abuse the world. We see nothing in them that looks like this; a plain simplicity and unaffected honesty appears in all their discourses and actions: they were not bred to literature, eloquence, or policy; some one or all of which are necessary for men who venture upon such undertakings: And therefore persons utterly unfurnished in them are little to be suspected.

ted. But if men be without all these helps, at least they must be naturally subtile and dextrous, bold and daring: since nature, when well moulded, may be capable of great matters, without the refinings of art. Now the Apostles, as they were all, except St. *Paul*, of *Galilee*, which bred the most contemptible men of all *Judea*; so they were fishermen by their trade, which of all the employments that we know, does naturally flatten the spirits the most: they are in the water much, in the night for most part, and in open boats, which exposes them to such cold and phlegmatick air, that this must needs dull their Spirits exceedingly. But let us suppose them to be as capable, either of the wickedness of contriving, or of the skill in managing such a fraud, as profane men can fancy them to be. I go next to shew that the supposition is absurd. The resurrection of Christ was the main point upon which all the rest turned. I am now to suppose what shall

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shall afterwards be proved, That this matter went abroad at first in the same manner in which we do now read it in the gospel; and so in this place I am only to shew that the relation which we now have, could not be the contrivance of the Apostles. Our Saviour was laid in a *new tomb*, not an ancient sepulchre, to which there might have been secret avenues, that had been so long forgot, that they were known only to some few persons. This was both newly made, and hewn out of a *rock*: so it might have been well examined, and a passage could not be wrought into it in a night or two. This happened likewise in the beginning of the *Paschal* solemnity, when it was *full Moon*, which in so pure an air gives a very bright light. At that time *Jerusalem* was so full of people, all the *Jews* coming up to keep the feast, that it being then their summer, since we see *handfuls of corn* were to be offered up at that time, as the *First-fruits*

fruits of the year's growth; we have reason to believe, that great numbers, who could not be conveniently lodged in *Jerusalem*, were in so pleasant a time, and at so great a rendezvous, walking in the fields in the night-time. These things cannot be denied: the Apostles had also seen that one of their number, of whom they had suspected no such thing before, had betrayed our Saviour; that the fear with which they themselves were struck upon his apprehension, had made them all run away, and forsake him; and in particular, that he who had been on other occasions the forwardest of them all, and who had been warned by our Saviour of his danger, and so was, by consequence, on his guard, and less likely to fall, had yet upon a remote apprehension of danger, with repeated oaths denied that he knew him. Now he who through fear will deny a truth, is much more like upon the same, or a greater danger, to discover a falsehood. This being the state of
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that matter, let us now see how we can possibly imagine the Apostles, who knew what effects fear had so lately upon themselves, and who had also seen to what a degree one of them might be corrupted, could so far trust either themselves or one another in such a matter, in which they had reason to believe, that the *Jews*, who had gone so far with their Master, would spare neither arts nor violence to fetch out the secret: besides, that to venture on an imposture, which goes so much against human nature, and which naturally strikes men with fears and jealousies, men must be long practised to boldness, and must have made such essays upon themselves, and upon one another, as to think they are secure of all that are in the confidence. But let us pass over all this, and then see how the matter, when resolved on, could have been managed: Either they were to steal away the body of Christ, or to leave it in the sepulchre. If they had left it, all must have

have broke out immediately ; the bare exposing the body must have confuted all that they could have said ; so it must be supposed that they carried it away : now how this could be done when a watch was set, when the Moon shone bright, and such numbers of men were wandering about in every corner, is not easy to be imagined. Some persons to a considerable number must be employed, if it had been to be carried to any distance, and they could not think themselves safe, if it had been laid near the place of the sepulchre : some trace or print must have remained, if they had broke ground ; which they must have expected would have been looked for ; and being found out, would have discovered all ; not to mention the natural horror that all men have, at the handling *dead bodies*, even in what is necessary for their *burial*, but most of all *Jews*, who by their law became *defiled* to a high degree by it. But suppose the dead body so disposed of,

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that they apprehended to hear no more news of it, how is it to be imagined, that those frequent apparitions of our Saviour's, particularly that in *Galilee*, to five hundred at once, which is appealed to, while many of them were yet alive, could have been managed? Here then, we have first twelve witnesses, against whom no just exception lies, even to feed suspicion, who affirm a matter of fact, and call in many others as their vouchers to support their testimony: they stand to it to the last, tho' they suffered much for it, and could not possibly gain any thing by it; and yet are supposed by infidels to contrive and stick to a forgery, merely to persuade the world to virtue and purity, and to sincerity and truth; which they begin with a train of falsehood and deceit, without any other visible bait, but their love to their dead *Master*; that they might magnify him, and give him a lasting name, and wipe off the reproach of his infamous death, by
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this bold contrivance of theirs. A man that can suppose all this to be possible, will suppose any thing; and shews that he has no regards, so much as to the colours of truth, but will advance any thing, rather than be beaten out of his infidelity.

But to follow this matter more home; a part, and a great one, of the history of the gospel, is, That ten days after our Saviour ascended up into heaven, in the sight of his Apostles; which with infidels will pass for a part of the contrivance, they received such extraordinary illapses and powers from heaven, in consequence to the promises that our Saviour had made them, that they were enabled to work miracles, and to *speak with divers tongues*: and the first essay of this appeared at the next festival of the *Jews*, in which *Jerusalem* was again filled, not only with all the *Jews* of *Judea*, but also with those of the dispersion, who from all quarters were come up at Pentecost from

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the East, as far as from *Persia* and *Media*, from the West, as far as from *Rome* and *Libia*, from the South, as far as from *Arabia*, and from the North, as far as from *Parthia*, and many provinces of *Asia the lesser*, and from several islands, as well as from the continent. Here was an astonishing thing, to see unlettered men, all of the sudden break out in speaking languages, in which they had no sort of education or practice: Fevers or enthusiastical heats may inflame men so far, as to make them speak those languages which they understand, tho' they are not otherwise ready at them; for the prints being already in their brains, a strong exaltation of their spirits, may fetch those out much better than they themselves in a cooler and more sedate state could have done; but where there are no previous impressions, no heat whatsoever can fetch out that which is not within: now as this was the most necessary of all other things to qualify
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men to execute their commission, of going to *teach all nations*, in which they must have made a very slow progress, if they must have learned the language of every country to which they were to go ; so it was the most signal of all others, and as was formerly hinted at, was that which must have been presently discovered if it had not been notoriously and unquestionably true. With these powers, and those languages, the Apostles went every where ; and promised to confer the like gifts on those that should receive and believe their gospel : and in the epistles * which they writ afterwards to those churches, even when their authority was called in question, they appealed to the gifts of the Holy Ghost conferred by their means ; so that either these things were notoriously true, or they must have been despised as the most assum-

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* Rom. 15. 19. 1 Cor. 14. 2 Cor. 12. 12. Gal. 3. 5. 1 Thess. 2. 5. 1 Tim. 1. 20. Heb. 2. 4.

ing and impudent of all impostors : These were their credentials that procured them a hearing ; and as men were *disposed to eternal life*, so they received and entertained their message. Thus we have seen by a great variety of considerations which this matter presents to us, that not only there is no colour of reason, to incline a man to think that the Apostles designed to impose upon the world, but that there is all possible reason to the contrary, to persuade us, that they were in no respect capable of projecting any such thing, nor of effecting it, if they had intended it.

The 2d. supposition of infidelity is, That themselves might have been deceived by two or three designing persons, who might have imposed upon them : that in the twilight a troubled fancy might be made imagine, that they saw Christ, which being affirmed by those who were on the secret, the rest might so far comply with those who said they saw him, as either

ther to imagine it, or at least to yield to the rest, so as to say, that they saw him; for so conceits do sometimes spread, and whole crouds fancy they see or hear things, being faced down by the boldness of a few impudent persons; and this being once set about, the same artifices might prevail again and again, upon the same weakneses, This might look tolerable, if there were no more to be said for the resurrection of Christ than one or two transient views; but continued discourses, the reaching his hands and side to be felt to; Christ's appearance to numbers in full day-light, with all the series of what passed between him and his disciples; and finally, his blessing them, and being parted from them, and ascending up to heaven; but above all, the wonderful Pentecost that followed it, the strange effusion of the Holy Ghost, and the extraordinary gifts that were then given, were things in which it was not possible for men to be deceived. So that the Apostles

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postles did either certainly know that all those things which they attested were true, or that they were false; there can be no mean in the matter; and indeed this objection is so slight, that it scarce deserved to be considered.

The 3^d pretence is more specious; That the history of the gospel passed easily upon the world, without due examination, that it appears both by some hints that are in the *New Testament*, and several passages in *Josephus*, that the *Jews* were at that time very credulous, and were apt to follow every pretender: they were broken into several sects, and under great distractions and oppressions, which prepare men to hearken after novelties: so that great numbers might run in upon rumours, and they being once engaged, they might reckon, that in honour they could not go off, and would stick to it even to the hazard of their lives. So we see some enthusiasts and sectaries in all ages, have courted martyrdom,

martyrdom, and endured great misery with a triumphant firmness. But to answer all this, a great difference is to be made between points of speculation, and matters of fact; in the former, men drink in persuasions, and then they grow to be so full of them, especially when a conceit of their own understanding is twisted with them, so that they think it an affront to their own reason, at least a detracting from its reputation, to confess so publickly that they were mistaken; but in matters of fact the thing is quite otherwise, these are to be strictly enquired into, and a man's believing them, imports no more, but that he had a good opinion of those that informed him, nor is it any reproach to be too easy in this; it rather argues a man to be candid and good in himself, which makes him too apt to think well of others, and to believe them: and how firm soever men may be to opinions, when they have once approved them themselves, so that
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self-love works secretly, yet they are still ready to re-examine matters of fact, when their first informations are called in question; especially if they are like to suffer considerably for owning and espousing them. It is very true, that the *Jews* had so general an expectation of a *Messias* about this time, that they were apt to run after every pretender, yet they were as apt to forsake him, when their hopes failed them. But all their expectations run in so different a channel, from what they saw in our Saviour, that how much soever their curiosity might have prompted them once to run to him, their prejudices drew them so strongly from him, that nothing but mighty and unanswerable evidence could make them still adhere to him. They had groaned long under the slavery of a bloody tyrant, they hated *Herod* and his family, they could not bear the *Roman* yoke, that was coming over them. They fancied a *Messias* should come, in whom the
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characters of a *Moses* and a *David* should meet, that he should raise the honour of their nation, and establish the observances of their laws. There were three things in our Saviour and his doctrine, any one of which was sufficient to disgust them. 1st. His mean and humble appearance; whereas they looked for a glorious conquerour and a magnificent prince. When he made nothing of *paying tribute to Cesar*, and despised the offers of a crown, they could not but despise him for it, according to their notions. 2^{ly}. His seeming to set a low value on the observances of the law, and his disciples setting the Gentiles at liberty from them, was of all things that which appeared to them the most odious and impious: they were so accustomed to a reverence for those rites, that no sort of immorality could strike them, so much as a coldness in them, and therefore they could not bear some liberties which our Saviour or his disciples took on the sabbath-day,

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day, even tho' those could have well been reconciled to the letter of the law; and 3^{ly}. besides the common fondness that all men have for their country, they had so particular a value for their own, for *Abraham's circumcised posterity*, and such a contempt for all the Heathen nations, who were no better than dogs in their esteem; that the many broad hints that appeared in our Saviour's parables and discourses in favour of the Gentiles, and the open declaration which the Apostles soon after made, of bringing them into an equality of dignity and privileges with themselves, was such a stone of stumbling to every natural *Jew*, that nothing besides a full and uncontested evidence could have balanced it: therefore tho' it may be confessed that the circumstances the *Jews* were in, made them easy to be practised upon, and to run as often as any said, *see here is the Messiah*, or *there he is*; yet their prejudices and false notions were so rooted in them, that

that as a great many of them left our Saviour, and fell off from his Apostles, when they understood the tendencies of his doctrine; so those that stuck to him, were without doubt so far shaken by those prejudices, that they made them examine all things the more critically, and particularly look into those wonderful matters of fact that were believed among them; so that how easy soever their first credulity might have been, they must have reconsidered the matter more narrowly before they could overcome principles and notions that were so deeply rooted in them. Men are not easily carried to forsake their friends and families, to draw upon them the hatred and curses of their countrymen. These things have a charm and authority in them, which few can withstand; but when it rested not there, but went on to all sorts of outrages, to the spoiling their goods, the imprisoning their persons, to cruel whippings, to the beheading some,

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and the stoning others, when this fury grew so general, that even *devout and honourable women* in contradiction to the gentleness and decencies of their sex, went in to it; then at least it is reasonable to suppose, that they made all possible enquiries into the matters of fact. I do acknowledge that the martyrdoms in the succeeding ages, are no concluding-proof in the behalf of our religion; but in the first age, in which the question was, Whether such things were seen, and heard or not; mens suffering so much for their persuasions, shews this at least, that they were so persuaded. Therefore when this was the point, Whether they had seen or heard such or such things? their adhering firmly to it, shewed that they did so believe.

The case was yet more amazing with relation to the Gentiles, who were generally given up to a sensual as well as to a sensible religion, that was over-run with idolatry and magick; who were not acquainted with
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the prophecies that were among the *Jews*, and despised them as a mean and a factious nation, that had an ill-natured religion ; so that they had not that disposition among them, which awaken'd the curiosity of the *Jews*. They had been so accustomed to gross and lewd fables concerning their gods, that it was the moulding them anew, to talk of one invisible Deity, and of a spiritual worship, or a severe morality, especially in some particulars, such as the restraint of appetite, or the loving an enemy. Add to all this, that the Heathen priests were soon aware, that this doctrine would have very ill effects upon their profits and authority ; therefore they animated the world into a most implacable hatred of them, which broke out soon into most violent persecutions : and as the governors of the provinces and subaltern magistrates were willing enough to gratify the people in their fury, so the Emperors themselves were soon set on against them. The restless tem-

pers of the *Jews* at that time had so provoked them, that it was crime enough for the Christians to be considered as a sect of the *Jews*; and so careless were they in *Rome*, of enquiring exactly into those matters, that we find by * *Suetonius*, that they believed that Christ had set on the *Jews* to all their seditions, by which they must have been enflamed so much the more against the Christians; and if such a monster as *Nero* was rightly informed of the exactness of their morals, that must have sharpened him so much the more against them. There was in his time a vast multitude of them at *Rome*, the matter of fact concerning Christ's being put to death in *Tiberius's* reign by *Pontius Pilate*, procurator at *Judea*, was so well known, that it was put in the † annals of that time; and the Christians appeal'd to the publick registers for many other particulars relating to it. No wonder if the singularity of
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* Suet. in Claudio. † Tacit. annal. 15.

their doctrine, and the strictness of their lives; drew a general hatred upon them; *Nero* laid hold on this, and he having once fastned the burning of *Rome* upon them, was obliged to follow that with a severity proportioned to the heaviness of the imputation. Upon all these accounts we see how little the Gentiles were disposed to hearken to our Saviour's doctrine, or to the testimony of his Apostles; and as for the few philosophers that were among them, as they were more likely to look into the proofs that were offered, or the evidence that was given, with an inquisitive strictness, so they were as strongly prejudiced against it, as either their pride or their principles could make them; they were haughty and scornful men, they despised the vulgar as a contemptible Herd, and undervalued all that were not formed into their notions, and accustomed to their cant. They had such a high opinion of their own understandings and their theories, that

they were possessed against inspiration, miracles and prophecy; they could not digest mysteries, nor hear any thing that seem'd to rise above a man's understanding: nor could they endure a doctrine that took in all sorts of people within it; reckoning, that only men of a peculiar frame of mind, and of a singular education, were capable of true philosophy; and they were men that studied both to be popular and safe: so that howsoever *Socrates* had exposed himself to the fury of the *Athenians*, by contradicting the received opinions concerning the Divinity; yet all the later pretenders had avoided his fate, by complying with received opinions and practices. So that upon all these accounts we see, that all sorts of people were at the beginnings of Christianity so strongly prejudiced against many things in it, that nothing but a very extraordinary evidence could have overcome it; nothing less than the * *demonstration*
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* 1 Cor. 2. 4.

of the Spirit, that is of the inspiration that did actuate them, which was given with power in mighty signs and wonders, could have overcome it. It was to this that they always appealed, and this only could conquer such mighty prejudices. When the love of this world, together with the fears of suffering, made many fall back, chiefly to Judaism, we do not find that they furnished the enemies of this religion with any thing to object to it, or detract from it; tho' apostates, who to justify their own change, and to beat off the reproaches of those whom they forsake, are observed to have a peculiar sharpness against those of whose sect they once were. They may be apt to forge unjust slanders and calumnies, but are not like to suppress any scandalous truth that they can suggest against them: and yet we find no prints of any such things alledged by any of them; if there had been either delusion, imposture or magick in those great performances, those apostates could

could have discovered all such secrets; some having fallen away that had been * *partakers of the Holy Ghost, and of the powers of the world to come*; that is of the dispensation of the Messias. We see by † *Pliny's* epistle how early Christianity had spread itself over the northern parts of *Asia the lesser*, filling not only their towns and cities, but even their villages and hamlets, to such a degree, that the temples of the gods were forsaken; and no more sacrifices were offered at their altars: he adds, that many had of their own accord returned back from that religion, before he had begun to prosecute them; some three years before, others more, and one five and twenty years before that time: which is a good character, to shew us how early Christianity had been spread in those parts; he adds, that an incredible multitude was informed against, and that his severity had brought back a great many; by these

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* Heb. 6. 4, 5. † Plin. lib. 10. ep. 97.

he might have been well informed concerning them. He adds, that since he saw such numbers in danger of falling under the severity of the imperial edicts, he had tortured two of their *Deaconesses*, that he might draw from them all the secrets that were amongst them: but he found nothing, only an inflexible aversion to the worship of the gods, and the genius of the Emperor: and that they met and sung hymns to Christ as a God, and were tied by vows not to commit adultery, nor to steal, or deceive, or commit other crimes; and that their feasts were innocent and harmless. This happening not above seventy years after our Saviour's death, shews us how fast this doctrine did spread, and what vast numbers had then embraced it; and yet these being all born and bred with such prejudices against it, cannot be supposed to have received it too rashly, or to have believed it implicitly.

The last supposition of infidelity,
yet

yet remains to be considered, which is, “ That something must be yielded for
 “ ed to have been published and received concerning this religion, which
 “ soon after its first appearance; but the
 “ that in process of time the books might
 “ might have been interpolated, after which
 “ all the eye-witnesses were dead, after
 “ and many additions of great importance
 “ tance might have been clapt in afterwards.” And this indeed is the
 plausiblest part of their whole plea; *Cl*
 for if they yield that the books which we now have, were given out in the
 same manner as we have them, and that they were received in the age in
 which many eye-witnesses were alive to vouch them, then all that can be
 cavilled at, after this is once yielded, is so poor and slight, that it only
 shews the incurable obstinacy of those who maintain it. This last has more
 colour: there were many gospels given out at first, as *St. Luke* informs
 us, some false gospels there were; and there was a considerable diversity
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among some copies ; parcels were in some, that were left out in others : and it could scarce be otherwise, while many were writing what they themselves knew and saw, and others might copy these too hastily, and uncorrectly : yet within a hundred years after our Saviour's death, we find this matter was so settled, that we see these books were cited by *Justin*, and *Irenæus*, not to mention the epistles of *Clemens*, *Ignatius*, and *Polycarp* ; and from them downward, in a continued succession of writers, and they were such as we now have them. I except only such small variations, as might be the mistakes and errors of copiers ; all which when put together, amount to nothing that is of any importance to the matters of our belief, or the rule of our life. Now, when we consider how near *St. John* lived to that time, and that *Irenæus* was instructed by *Polycarp*, who was ordained by *St. John*, and lived not far from him, when we see what weight *Irenæus* lays

lays on the *Scriptures*, in opposition to all *Oral Tradition*, and how positively he makes his appeals to them; when we see how soon after that time, both the *Greek* and *Latin*, the *Roman* and *African* churches, those of *Syria* and *Egypt*, do all agree to cite the same books, in the same words, or with inconsiderable variations, we have all reason to conclude, that this great point of the books was settled much sooner: since by the end of a hundred years they were in all peoples hands, and were read in all the assemblies of Christians; they were also read by their enemies, *Trypho* in particular, as *Justin* informs us: we see also soon after this, that *Celsus* had read them; and indeed, it is plain from all the Christian writers in those ages, that the books of the N. Testament were in all mens hands; they quote them so often in their apologies, and other books, as writings that were generally read and known: such a spreading of books, and multiplying

plying of copies, was a work of time when all was to be writ out; and this was so near the fountain, that we have all reason to believe that the originals at least of St. *Paul's* epistles to the churches, were still preserved: and tho' an oral tradition of a doctrine, even for so short a period, is so doubtful a conveyance, that it were not easy to think, that it might not have enlarged a little beyond the truth; yet a tradition of some books could hardly in so very short a time have been varied, or altered, chiefly in so important a point, as the resurrection of Christ: which was the main article of their belief, and that which runs as a thread through all the sermons and epistles of the Apostles: and indeed, this being once yielded, settles all the rest with it. Therefore since we have such a copious concurrence of authors that cite those books all-a-long, from that time downwards, besides the epistles of those apostolical men, *S. Clement*, *S. Ignatius*, and *S. Polycarp*, the first
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having writ in that very time, probably before the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the other two soon after it; in which several of the books of the N. Testament are cited, as writings then well known, and in all mens hands: we must from all this firmly conclude, that the books, as we now have them, are not altered from the form in which they were at first writ.

They were quickly copied out for the use of the churches: they were read at the assemblies of the Christians; they were translated into the vulgar tongues, particularly the *Latin* and *Syriack*, very early; so that they becoming so soon publick, and getting into so many hands, it was not possible for any one, who might have had the wickedness to have attempted the corrupting them, to have compassed it afterwards. And what noise soever the enemies of our faith may make of the various readings, and how much soever the bulk of them, as they are added to the *Polyglot Bible*, may at first

first view strike the eye; yet when all these are examined, they amount not to any one variation in any article of our faith, and they appear so plainly to be the slips of the writers, that this can never shake any man who will be at the pains to search it to the bottom. So that I have now gone round all the suppositions of infidelity; and have, I hope, clearly evinced, that there is not any one of them which is in any sort credible, or even possible.

I will in conclusion consider some few of their objections, indeed all that I have ever met with, which seem to have any force; “ Some cannot imagine why our Saviour, after his resurrection, shewed himself only to a few, and did not come in next day to the temple, and shew himself to that vast assembly, which was then to be there; since that must for ever have put an end to all doubting, and have silenced all his enemies.” This were a very reasonable

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sonable objection, if *God's ways were as our ways* : our warm tempers that boil with resentment, and that pursue eagerly our own vindication, would have no doubt wrought this way ; but if we go to ask an account of all God's works or ways, we shall find them very different from our own notions. A great part of his creation seems useless to us : much of it seems defective, as well as another part seems superfluously redundant to us : there are many very unaccountable things, both in the structure of our bodies and the temper of our minds ; and if we will quarrel with every thing that does not suit our own notions, we will be very uneasy in our thoughts. There are some sins, for which God gives over all further dealing with persons and nations, and upon which he delivers them up to their own reprobate minds : and when he has used such sufficient means, as might well serve to convince and reform them, he lets them alone, and *leaves them to their own hearts*

hearts lusts : Those who had seen so many of our Saviour's miracles, which instead of having a good effect on them, did only serve to harden them the more in their opposition to him, did well deserve that God should suffer them to harden themselves still more and more : and it was enough that Christ shewed himself so often to such a competent number of unexceptionable witnesses, and gave them full powers to prove their testimony concerning him, by working such miracles as he himself had wrought. Why he did it in this way, and in no other, is among the secrets of his councils, which are to us unsearchable. When our souls become more perfect, our capacities and faculties more enlarged, and our thoughts more exalted, then we may come to understand the reason of these things more perfectly than it is possible for us to do in this depressed and darkned state. One thing after all we may gather from our Saviour's words, who has pronounced them

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blessed who have not seen, and yet have believed ; and from the value that in many places of the N. Testament is set on *faith* and on *believing*, that God did not intend to give the world such an undeniable evidence, as that it should be out of their power to disbelieve : for to believe either such things as our senses do plainly perceive, or to believe mathematical truths, is that to which our nature constrains us, and for which we can deserve no sort of commendation. Therefore to make our faith to be both well-grounded, and also highly acceptable to God, it is enough that there are sufficient reasons offered to us, to persuade our belief, and that there is no good reason to the contrary, tho' we may start possibilities of imaginary reasons against it ; and a man who is so far convinced by those, that he is from thence determined to believe all the other parts of that revelation, both the promises and the precepts of it ; so that he gives himself up to its conduct

duct in the whole course of his life, in the assured expectation of the promises it sets before him; has such a faith, that must certainly be of great value in the sight of God; because it has a great effect on the believer himself. There is beauty enough in the rules of our religion, to oblige every man to examine well the authority upon which it rests, and to him that will set his thoughts a-working upon it, this authority will soon appear strong enough to determine his assent: and when that has its due operation upon him, then his faith has had its full effect. So that it is no dull, nor lazy or implicate faith on which the *New Testament* sets so high a value; it is a faith that *purifies the heart*, that *worketh by love*, that makes us *new creatures*, and engages us to *keep the commandments of God*: so that this objection has no other force in it but this, that God's ways are a great depth, and to us are past finding out.

A second objection is, "That if
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“ our Saviour and his Apostles gave
 “ such proofs of their mission, how is
 “ it to be imagined, that any man
 “ could be so obstinate, as to stand it
 “ out against so full a conviction?
 “ These things were probably enqui-
 “ red into at that time, by men of
 “ all sides; curiosity might work on
 “ some, and fear on others: and those
 “ who had drawn the guilt of his
 “ blood upon them, were most parti-
 “ cularly concerned to examine the
 “ matter carefully. Since blood is
 “ apt to raise a clamour within, which
 “ is not easily silenced: besides, ac-
 “ cording to the *Acts of the Apostles*,
 “ the *Jews*, and even their *Sanhe-*
 “ *drin*, seem to have been struck
 “ with the reports of his resurrection,
 “ so that they knew not how to gain-
 “ say it, and were concerned only
 “ to stifle and silence it. Now it seems
 “ somewhat unaccountable how it
 “ came that they still stood out, and
 “ were not overcome with all that e-
 “ vidence, if it was so full as we do
 “ now

“ now represent it? ” But in answer to this, it is to be considered, that there is a perverseness and depravedness in human nature that cannot be accounted for. To some of the enemies of our religion, I mean the *Jews*, this can be no objection, since *Pharaoh's* hardning himself against all *Moses's* miracles and messages, and even the murmurings of their forefathers the *Israelites*, in the wilderness, are every whit as extraordinary instances of the depravation of human nature, as these we now consider were : but indeed we need not go so far to seek for amazing characters and instances of the madness of mankind : no laws, no rewards, no punishments, no experience nor observation can make men wise or good. When men are once engaged in ill courses, they quickly contract habits, and are soon hardned in them ; and when pride and interest are got on the side of that, which of itself was strong enough to overcome them, then they become intractable

tractable and fierce against every opposition, and become really the worse, the more they are pursued and dealt with.

Another objection is, “Why do
 “not some of those miracles that
 “seem to have been with a sort of
 “profusion thrown out abundantly at
 “first, now appear to convince the
 “world? for these would certainly
 “have a great effect?” What was
 said to the first objection, belongs in
 a great measure to this. We are not
 to ask of God an account of his ways,
 if he has laid enough before us for
 our conviction; and if that is rejected
 by us, we have no reason to expect
 that he should disturb the order that
 he has settled in the creation, to gra-
 tify our humours. It were not suitable
 to that order that he has so wisely and
 usefully established, that it should be
 too often put out of its channel: It is
 enough that at the first openings of the
 two revealed religions that he delive-
 red to the world, he gave evident
 signs,

signs, both of his dominion over the works of his hands, and of his having authorised those whom he sent to speak in his name. That being then fully done, and the precepts of this religion bearing such an apparent suitability to our natures, and to the interests of all human societies, there is no sort of reason for us to demand more proof, than that which God was pleased to give at first. Besides, that all ages and nations have the same pretended claim to miracles, for they are equally his creatures; and we can fancy no reason why he should be partial to some, more than to others: Now if there were such a constant return of miracles, the whole argument from them would in a little time be lost; men grow accustomed to what they see daily, and it makes no impression, otherwise the wonders of day and night, of summer and winter, the ebbing and flowing of the sea, would work more powerfully on us, than they do. A superfetation of miracles

acles would have no effect, if it were not a bad one, to make the Divine Power in working them be called in question, and to lead men to impute them to some natural cause, or to some secrets known only to a few. In all which we may conclude, that according to what our Saviour said of *Moses* and the *Prophets*; if men believe not Christ and his Apostles, they would not believe, * *tho' a man should rise from the dead*, or that the most uncontested miracle that they would call for, should be wrought for their conviction.

“ Another objection of the *Infidels*
 “ is taken from the differences that
 “ are between the gospels, in which
 “ the same passages seem to be vari-
 “ ously related in different words,
 “ and in another order of time; things
 “ being by some set down as done
 “ after those things before which
 “ they are set by others. Questi-
 “ ons and answers are variously sta-
 “ ted;

* Luke 16. 31.

“ ted; they also find some reasonings
“ that do not seem concluding, even
“ those that are brought to convince
“ gainfayers, where there ought to
“ be more exactness. There is also
“ a lowness and flatness of style, that
“ makes the books seem but mean;
“ nor are they laid in any exactness
“ of method, but seem to run in a
“ loose ramble; besides that there are
“ many passages in them that look
“ staring, as that of Christ’s preach-
“ ing to the *spirits in prison*, that of
“ *Melchisedeck*, and some other things
“ that we scarce know what to make
“ of. These things look not like the
“ products of Divine Inspiration.”

But in answer to all this, we are to consider the different orders of inspiration, according to the different ends for which it was given. * *Moses* had the *law*, as the *Jews* confess, by an immediate communication with God, as one man converses with another; expressed by the phrase of *face to*
G *face*

* Num. 12. 8.

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face, or mouth to mouth ; such a degree seemed necessary for one who was to deliver an entire system of a religion of sacred rites, as well as binding laws to that nation. But those who were only sent to call on the people to the obedience of that law, and to denounce judgments upon their disobedience, and give out predictions, received a lower degree of inspiration; the will of God being represented to them in dreams and visions, in which several representations were dramatically impressed on their imaginations, and explained by a secret intimation made by God to them: others had yet a lower degree, being animated by a divine excitation to compose holy hymns and discourses to the edification of the people: now as the *Jews* divide the books of the *Old Testament* in three different volumes, according to these various degrees of inspiration; according to which division our Saviour himself cites the *Old Testament* ; in all of which, we find

find that those holy Penmen writ in such a diversity, that it is apparent every one was left to his own way and Genius as to style and composition, some being much loftier than others. Now to apply this to the *New Testament*; it was necessary that men sent to publish such a doctrine, should be so divinely filled with the knowledge of it, and should be so actuated by that same influence that assisted them miraculously, as neither to be able to mistake nor mis-represent any part of it; for the miracles that they wrought, bringing the world under an obligation to believe them, it was not possible that they could be left to themselves, and be subject to mistakes: but after all this, every one acted according to his natural temper, and writ in his natural style; so we see a great variety in the whole composition and method of their discourses and epistles. The gospels were writ either by Apostles, or by those who were their companions in labour, and whose books were authorized by them;

them; but it does not clearly appear what method they intended to follow, whether to observe the order of time, or the relation that one passage might have to another: in this they were left to their natural faculties; all that was of consequence, was to have the doctrine and discourses of Christ, his actions and his miracles, faithfully stated to us: but in the method of ordering or expressing these, they might be left to their natural powers; and in this there might be a particular ordering of Providence, that every thing should not be said in the same way by every one as by concert, which might have looked like a contrivance; it being more genuine, when different persons write in different ways, and all agree in the same account of the doctrines and miracles. There may be also many ways of reconciling small diversitie, which at this distance may be lost to us: things may appear to be different, that yet may very well agree; of which we find innumerable

merable instances in critical authors : and those passages whose agreement they have made out, give us very good reason to believe, that if we had a greater number of contemporary books now extant, we might understand many more better than we can do in this want of them. Passages very like one another might have happened in different times of our Saviour's life ; and that which seems to be one story, related two different ways, may be really two different stories, and both may be exactly related. So that all this objection, instead of derogating from the credit of the gospel, does really heighten it. As for many answers and reasonings that do not seem to us to be very concluding; we are to consider, that in a short relation, in which hints are only given, it was impossible to open every thing fully: we are also little acquainted with the methods of the *Jews* arguments at that time. *Philo* and *Josephus* are the only writers that remain. The

one is short upon their customs and notions; and he affecting to write elegantly for the *Romans* and *Greeks*, gives us very little light this way. *Philo* does indeed much more; tho' living long at *Alexandria*, and studying the *Greek* philosophy, he is so mystical and sublime, that it is not easy always to comprehend him: yet in him we plainly see, how much the *Jews* were delighted with very dark allusions and reasonings: and since it is a just and allowable way of arguing with any, to argue from suppositions granted by them, and suitably to their principles and notions, we who plainly see in *Philo*, that the *Jews* used then to explain a great deal of scripture by a dark *cabbala*, are not to wonder if some arguments run in that strain. For instance, we do not see how the last words of the 102 Psalm concerning God's creating all things, and his Eternity and Unchangeableness, belong to the *Messias*, which yet are applied to him in the epistle
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to the *Hebrews* ; but we see clear characters in that Psalm, to shew us that the *Jews* did so expound it ; since those words, * *the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth his glory ; and, when the Lord shall build up Sion, he shall appear in his glory ;* together with several passages that follow, could not according to the *cabbala* of the *Jews* be understood of any thing but of the *Messias*, and of the *Divine Shechinah*, that was to rest upon him, and so according to this all the other parts of the Psalm, were also applicable to him.

If St. *Paul* argues, that the promise was not made to *seeds*, but to the *seed* of † *Abraham*, which seems a bad inference ; since *seed*, tho' in the singular, is yet of a plural signification ; this may perhaps be bad *Greek*, unless some corrupt form of speech had made *seed* stand for *son* ; but tho' the *Greek* is not pure, yet the sense is true, and
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* Heb, 1. 10, 11, 12, 15, 16. † Gal. 3. 16.

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the argument in itself is good ; St. *Paul's* design being to let them see, that their being the *seed* of *Abraham* alone, was not enough to assure them of the favour of God: it was not to all *Abraham's* posterity that the promise was made, since neither *Ishmael* nor *Keturah's* children were comprehended within it : but it belonged only to *Isaac* ; and in that contracting the promise to one, an emblem was given of the *Messias*, in whom singly the blessing of that covenant was to center, and was not to be spread into the whole nation that descended from him. So that what fault soever we may find with the *Greek*, the sense is true, and the application is useful ; and we do not know, but such a form of speech might have been then used in common discourse. It is certain, that the Apostles had no rhetorick, and often their Grammar is not exact: but this, instead of making against their writings, does really make for them ; since it shews, that they used no
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enticing words, nor laboured periods: no lively figures, nor studied sentences; all was natural, without art or study; which shewed that they knew they needed no borrowed help to support a cause in which they were sure Heaven would interpose, and promote its own concerns; and the veneration with which their writings were received, and in which they were held, shews that there was somewhat else than the skill or eloquence, the persuasives or arguings of the authors, that begat and maintained their reputation.

If we find here and there a passage that we know not well what to make of, this is the fate of all books that were writ at a great distance from us; the customs and manners of men change strangely in a course of many ages; and all speech, especially that which is figurative and dark, has such relation to these, that if in a book full of many plain, useful and excellent theories and rules, some passages come
in

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in amongst them which we plainly see relate to some practice or opinion of which we are not sufficiently informed, such as the *being baptized for the dead*; *having power on the head because of the Angels*, or the like: This is nothing but what occurs to us in all ancient books, and what we easily bear with in all other writings, even of a much later antiquity: We are therefore to make the best use we can of that which we do not understand; and to let those other places lie till we can find out their true meaning.

That of * *Christ's going in the Spirit to preach to the Spirits now in prison*, is perhaps one of these, unless we believe that by *prison* is to be meant, according to the use of that word, and others like it in the Septuagint, † the darkened state of the Gentile world, who were shut up in idolatry, as in a *prison* or in *chains*, under

* 1 Pet. 3. 19. † Isa. 61. 42. Isa. 7. 49. Isa. 9. 1, 2.

der the power of the god of this world. In this sense there is nothing easier to be apprehended than that period; which imports only, that Christ by virtue of the Holy Ghost that he had poured out upon his Apostles, was calling the Gentile world out of their ignorance and idolatry: and as in the days of *Noah*, those who were disobedient perished in the flood, while there was an ark prepared for those who would go into it; so says he, our rising out of the waters, that being the last piece of the baptismal ceremony, as it was then practised, and being the representation of our rising again with Christ, was that which now *saves us*. In all this, the sense is clear and good, tho' the manner of the expression be a little dark.

The way of all the Easterns, even to this day, in all their discourses, being obscure and involv'd, where a great deal is supposed to be already understood; we are not to wonder, if we should find some parts of the *New Testa-*

Testament writ in that strain. As for that of *Melchisedeck*, as the words lie, they seem to be a riddle indeed ; but with a little observation we will find that passage concerning him in the epistle to the * *Hebrews*, to be as plain as any thing can be. The design of a great part of this epistle is to shew, that the *Messias* was to be a *Priest*, and was to offer up a *Sacrifice* ; but not to be of the family of *Aaron*, since he was to spring out of the tribe of *Judah* ; nor to be a *Priest* after that *Order*, or according to the rules of that institution ; but according to the † Psalm, to be a *Priest* after the *Order Melchisedeck* : now the rules or order of the *Aaronical* priesthood were, || that every *Priest* was to be descended from that line, to be born of a mother that had not been a *widow*, or *divorced* ; and this gave him who was thus received, a right to transmit his priesthood to his descendants in a genealogy

* Heb. 6. 20. Heb. 7. 3. † Psal. 110. 4. || Lev. 21, 7, 13, 14.

genealogy derived from him. These *Priests* were also tied to their turns in attending on the temple, which were called their *days*, in which they were admitted to serve at thirty, which was therefore the age of the beginning of their days; and at fifty they were dismissed and were no more bound to attend, than if they had been naturally dead; so this was the end of their life, as to their priesthood. Now in opposition to this, *Melchisedeck* was *a priest without father and mother*; that is, he was immediately called to it of God; and it did not devolve on him by descent, nor was he to derive this in a genealogy to his posterity: He came not on to an attendance on the service of God at such an age, nor went he out at another, but was *a priest of God for ever*; that is, of a long continuance, according to the common use of that word, which only imports a constancy in any thing. *Melchisedeck* was a priest for term of life, which answers the signification of the word;

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but was a type of him that in the strictest sense was to be *a priest of God for ever*. Thus if we construe that verse by a reverse, which is very ordinary, of bringing the last word to govern the whole period, placing the word *priest* at the head of it; nothing can be plainer and more full to the point that is there driven at. And thus many passages that appear difficult, when they are but slightly looked at, become very intelligible when more attentively examined; and as we can make this out in a great many instances; so if there are others in which we do still stick, we have all possible reason to impute our ignorance to our wanting a sufficient number of helps, and of books writ in that country, and at that time, from which we might better collect the opinions, customs, phrases and allusions of those parts and times: for since the books of our religion were writ for the use of plain and simple people, to whom they were addrest, and in whose hands they

they were to be put; they must have been writ in a popular, and not in a rhetorical or philosophical style; which tho' it is more correct and more lasting, yet it is both drier and more laboured, and shews always more of art than of nature.

I have now gone over all the heads that I thought necessary to make this discourse full in all its parts: I have left nothing behind me that seemed to be material: I have not been afraid to lay open all the secrets of infidelity, with the utmost strength that I could ever find them urged in; because I was fully satisfy'd in my own mind, that I could answer them all. There is only one particular remaining, which I have reserved to the last place, because it affords a proper conclusion to this discourse. One of the main things in which infidels support themselves is, "That tho' they speak out, yet let others deny or disguise their thoughts as much as they please, either out of Inte-
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“ rest or modesty, since their doctrine
 “ has an ill sound in the world; yet
 “ they think with them, because
 “ they live with them, and not ac-
 “ cording to the doctrine which they
 “ espouse: and they seem to con-
 “ clude with some advantage, That
 “ we collect what men think, much
 “ more infallibly from what they do,
 “ than from what they say:” And
 this they urge with much malice; and
 would to God that I could add, with
 as much injustice against too many of
 ourselves; whose arguings upon these
 heads are so much the less to be re-
 garded than other mens, because we
 have espoused the cause, and have
 made it our own, both in point of re-
 putation and interest: I wish and pray
 that we may all resolve on the only
 effectual confutation of which this is
 capable, by setting such a pattern to
 the world, and leading such exemplary
 lives, that in these they may see how
 firmly we believe that to which we
 endeavour to persuade others, who
 wait

wait for our halting, and are critical in observing our failings, and malicious in aggravating them. It gave the chief strength to the first apologies that were made for Christianity, that they durst appeal to the lives of the Christians, to give the world a right idea of their doctrine ; whereas we must now decline that argument, and appeal from the lives of Christians to their doctrines : yet wheresoever numbers embrace any thing, there must especially in a course of many ages, follow upon it a great declining from what was while they were fewer in number, and that the thing was newer and fresher upon their thoughts. Besides, that the best Christians are those who are the least known, their modesty and humility leading them to hide their best actions ; whereas those who make the most noise, and the greatest show, are for the most part hot or designing men. A man may also be really a much better man than one would take him to be, that sees him only on one side,

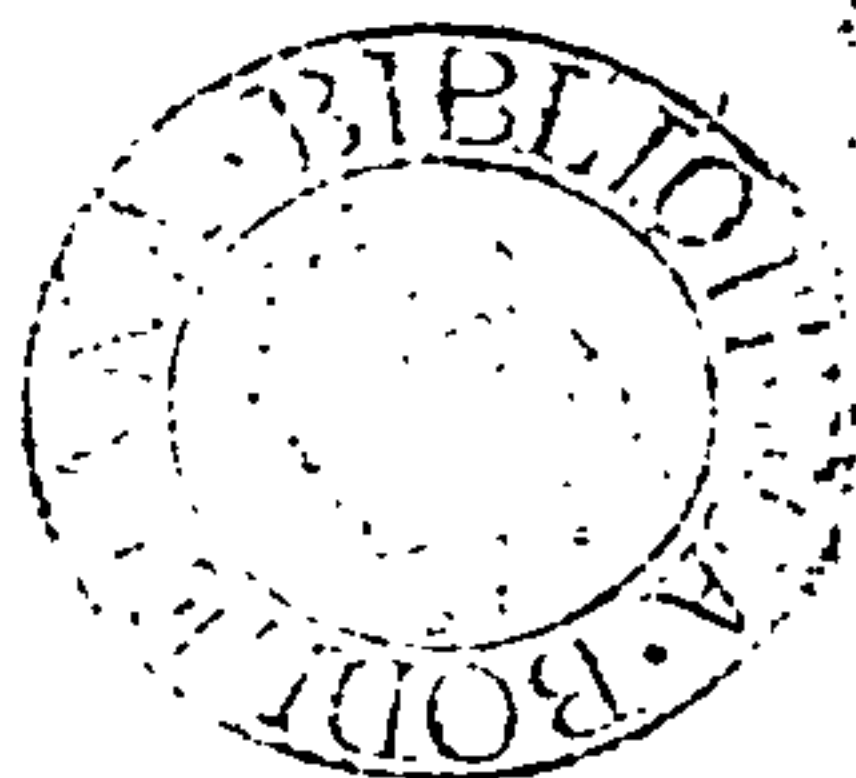
side, and does not know him wholly.

The frailties of some mens natures will hang heavy upon them, and sometimes burst out even in scandalous instances, notwithstanding all their principles and struglings to the contrary : Therefore upon the whole matter, tho' we cannot deny but that there is too much truth in this prejudice, yet it is but a prejudice, and cannot bear much weight: so that it is a most unaccountable piece of folly to venture mens souls and their eternal concerns upon a reflection, that as it is not generally true, so has no solidity in it: yet after all, the use that we ought to make of it is, that we ought to frame our own lives, and the lives of all that are in our power, as much as may be to a conformity to our doctrines, that so the world may observe in us such a true and unaffected course of solid virtue and useful piety, that we may again recover that argument, which we have

too much lost, for the truth and beauty of our religion, from the lives of those who believe and practise it; and that so the *apologies* now writ, which in all other respects are the strongest that ever were, may again have their full perfection, and their entire effect upon the world.

F I N I S.

A SHORT
TREATISE
ON
MIRACLES.



By *JOHN LOCKE* Esq;

JOHN III. 2. THOU art a Teacher come from
God, for no man can do these miracles, that
THOU dost, except God be with him.



Printed, M. DCC. XLIII.

A
T R E A T I S E
O F
M I R A C L E S.

TO discourse of miracles without defining what one means by the word miracle, is to make a shew, but in effect to talk of nothing.

A miracle then I take to be a sensible operation, which being above the comprehension of the spectator, and in his opinion contrary to the established course of nature, is taken by him to be divine.

He that is present at the fact, is a spectator : he that believes the history

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ry of the fact, puts himself in the place of a spectator. m
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This definition, 'tis probable, will not escape these two exceptions. ti

1. That hereby what is a miracle is made very uncertain; for it depending on the opinion of the spectator, that will be a miracle to one which will not be so to another. r
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In answer to which, it is enough to say, that this objection is of no force, but in the mouth of one who can produce a definition of a miracle not liable to the same exception, which I think not easy to do; for it being agreed, that a miracle must be that which surpasses the force of nature in the established, steady laws of causes and effects, nothing can be taken to be a miracle but what is judged to exceed those laws. Now every one being able to judge of those laws only by his own acquaintance with nature, and notions of its force, (which are different in different men) it is unavoidable that that should be a miracle

miracle to one, which is not so to another.

2. Another objection to this definition, will be, that the notion of a miracle thus enlarged, may come sometimes to take in operations that have nothing extraordinary or supernatural in them, and thereby invalidate the use of miracles for the attesting of divine revelation.

To which I answer, not at all, if the testimony which divine revelation receives from miracles be rightly considered.

To know that any revelation is from God, it is necessary to know that the messenger that delivers it is sent from God, and that cannot be known but by some credentials given him by God himself. Let us see then whether miracles, in my sense, be not such credentials, and will not infallibly direct us right in the search of divine revelation.

It is to be considered, that divine revelation receives testimony from no other

4 A TREATISE

other miracles, but such as are wrought to witness his mission from God who delivers the revelation. All other miracles that are done in the world, how many or great soever, revelation is not concerned in. Cases wherein there has been, or can be need of miracles for the confirmation of revelation are fewer than perhaps is imagined. The heathen world amidst an infinite and uncertain jumble of Deities, fables and worships had no room for a divine attestation of any one against the rest. Those owners of many Gods were at liberty in their worship; and no one of their Divinities pretending to be the one only true God, no one of them could be supposed in the Pagan scheme to make use of miracles to establish his worship alone, or to abolish that of the others; much less was there any use of miracles to confirm any articles of faith, since no one of them had any such to propose as necessary to be believ'd by their votaries. And therefore
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fore I do not remember any miracles recorded in the *Greek* or *Roman* writers, as done to confirm any one's mission and doctrine. Conformable hereunto we find *St. Paul*, 1 *Cor.* i. 22. takes notice that the *Jews* ('tis true) required miracles, but as for the *Greeks* they look'd after something else; they knew no need or use there was of miracles to recommend any religion to them. And indeed it is an astonishing mark how far the God of this world hath blinded mens minds, if we consider that the Gentile world receiv'd and stuck to a religion, which, not being derived from reason, had no sure foundation in revelation. They knew not its original nor the authors of it, nor seemed concerned to know from whence it came, or by whose authority delivered; and so had no mention or use of miracles for its confirmation. For tho' there were here and there some pretences to revelation, yet there were not so much as

B pretences

pretences to miracles that attested it.

If we will direct our thoughts by what has been, we must conclude that miracles as the credentials of a messenger delivering a divine religion, have no place but upon a supposition of one only true God ; and that it is so in the nature of the thing, and cannot be otherwise, I think will be made appear in the sequel of this discourse. Of such who have come in the name of the one only true God, professing to bring a law from him we in history have a clear account but of three, *viz. Moses, Jesus, and Mahomet*. For what the *Persees* say of their *Zoroaster*, or the *Indians* of their *Brama* (not to mention all the wild stories of the religions farther east) is so obscure or so manifestly fabulous, that no account can be made of it. Now of the three before mentioned, *Mahomet* having none to produce, pretends to no miracles for the vouching his mission; so that the only revelations
that

that come attested by miracles, being only those of *Moses* and *Christ*, and they confirming each other, the business of miracles, as it stands really in matter of fact, has no manner of difficulty in it; and I think the most scrupulous or sceptical cannot from miracles raise the least doubt against the divine revelation of the gospel.

But since the speculative and learned will be putting of cases which never were, and it may be presumed never will be; since scholars and disputants will be raising of questions where there are none, and enter upon debates whereof there is no need; I crave leave to say, that he who comes with a message from God to be delivered to the world, cannot be refus'd belief if he vouches his mission by a miracle, because his credentials have a right to it. For every rational thinking man must conclude as *Nicodemus* did, *We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man*
B 2 can

can do these signs which thou dost, except God be with him.

For example, *Jesus of Nazareth* professes himself sent from God: He with a word calms a tempest at sea: this one looks on as a miracle, and consequently cannot but receive his doctrine: another thinks this might be the effect of chance, or skill in the weather, and no miracle, and so stands out; but afterwards seeing him walk on the sea, owns that for a miracle, and believes: which yet upon another has not that force, who suspects it may possibly be done by the assistance of a spirit: but yet the same person seeing afterwards our Saviour cure an inveterate palsie by a word, admits that for a miracle, and becomes a convert: another overlooking it in this instance, afterwards finds a miracle in his giving sight to one born blind, or in raising the dead, or his raising himself from the dead, and so receives his doctrine as a revelation coming from God. By all which it
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is plain, that where the miracle is admitted, the doctrine cannot be rejected; it comes with the assurance of a divine attestation to him that allows the miracle, and he cannot question its truth.

The next thing then is, what shall be a sufficient inducement to take any extraordinary operation to be a miracle, *i. e.* wrought by God himself for the attestation of a revelation from him.

And to this I answer, the carrying with it the marks of a greater power than appears in opposition to it. For,

1. First, This removes the main difficulty where it presses hardest, and clears the matter from doubt, when extraordinary and supernatural operations are brought to support opposite missions, about which methinks more dust has been raised by men of leisure than so plain a matter needed. For since God's power is paramount to all, and no opposition can be made against him with an equal force to

his; and since his honour and goodness can never be supposed to suffer his messenger and his truth to be born down by the appearance of a greater power on the side of an impostor, and in favour of a lie; wherever there is an opposition, and two pretending to be sent from heaven, clash, the signs which carry with them the evident marks of a greater power, will always be a certain and unquestionable evidence that the truth and divine mission is on that side on which they appear. For tho' the discovery how the lying wonders are or can be produced, be beyond the capacity of the ignorant, and often beyond the conception of the most knowing spectator, who is therefore forced to allow them in his apprehension to be above the force of natural causes and effects; yet he cannot but know they are not seals set by God to his truth for the attesting of it, since they are opposed by miracles that carry the evident marks of a greater and superior

rior power, and therefore they cannot at all shake the authority of one so supported. God can never be thought to suffer that a lie, set up in opposition to a truth coming from him, should be back'd with a greater power than he will shew for the confirmation and propagation of a doctrine which he has revealed, to the end it might be believed. The producing of serpents, blood and frogs by the *Egyptian* forcerers and by *Moses*, could not to the spectators but appear equally miraculous; which of the pretenders had then their mission from God? And the truth on either side could not have been determined if the matter had rested there. But when *Moses's* serpent eat up theirs, when he produced lice which they could not, the decision was easie. 'Twas plain *Jannes* and *Jambres* acted by an inferior power, and their operations, how marvellous and extraordinary soever, could not in the least bring in question *Moses's* mission;
on;

on ; that stood the firmer for this opposition, and remained the more unquestionable after this, than if no such signs had been brought against it.

So likewise the number, variety, and greatness of the miracles wrought for the confirmation of the doctrine delivered by *Jesus Christ*, carry with them such strong marks of an extraordinary divine power, that the truth of his mission will stand firm and unquestionable, till any one rising up in opposition to him shall do greater miracles than he and his Apostles did. For any thing less will not be of weight to turn the scales in the opinion of any one, whether of an inferior or more exalted understanding. This is one of those palpable truths and trials of which all-mankind are judges ; and there needs no assistance of learning, no deep thought to come to a certainty in it. Such care has God taken that no pretended revelation should stand in competition with
what

what is truly divine, that we need but open our eyes to see and be sure which came from him. The marks of his over-ruling power accompany it; and therefore to this day we find, that wherever the gospel comes, it prevails to the beating down the strong holds of *Satan*, and the dislodging the prince of the power of darkness, driving him away with all his lying wonders; which is a standing miracle, carrying with it the testimony of superiority.

What is the uttermost power of natural agents or created beings, men of the greatest reach cannot discover; but that it is not equal to God's Omnipotency is obvious to every one's understanding; so that the superior power is an easy, as well as a sure guide to divine revelation, attested by miracles, where they are brought as credentials to an embassy from God.

And thus upon the same grounds
of

of superiority of power, uncontested revelation will stand too.

For the explaining of which, it may be necessary to premise,

1. That no mission can be look'd on to be divine, that delivers any thing derogating from the honour of the one, only, true invisible God, or inconsistent with natural religion and the rules of morality : because God having discovered to men the unity and majesty of his eternal Godhead, and the truths of natural religion and morality by the light of reason, he cannot be supposed to back the contrary by revelation ; for that would be to destroy the evidence and use of reason, without which men cannot be able to distinguish divine revelation from diabolical imposture.

2. That it cannot be expected that God should send any one into the world on purpose to inform men of things indifferent, and of small moment, or that are knowable by the use of their natural faculties. This
would

would be to lessen the dignity of his Majesty in favour of our sloth, and in prejudice to our reason.

3. The only case then wherein a mission of any one from heaven can be reconciled to the high and awful thoughts men ought to have of the Deity, must be the revelation of some supernatural truths relating to the glory of God, and some great concern of men. Supernatural operations attesting such a revelation may with reason be taken to be miracles, as carrying the marks of a superior and over-ruling power, as long as no revelation accompanied with marks of a greater power appears against it. Such supernatural signs may justly stand good, and be received for divine, *i. e.* wrought by a power superior to all, till a mission attested by operations of a greater force shall disprove them: because it cannot be supposed God should suffer his prerogative to be so far usurped by any inferior being as to permit any creature
true

ture, depending on him, to set his seals, the marks of his divine authority, to a mission coming from him. For these supernatural signs being the only means God is conceived to have to satisfy men as rational creatures of the certainty of any thing he would reveal, as coming from himself, can never consent that it should be wrested out of his hands, to serve the ends and establish the authority of an inferior agent that rivals him. His power being known to have no equal, always will, and always may be safely depended on, to shew its superiority in vindicating his authority, and maintaining every truth that he has revealed. So that the marks of a superior power accompanying it, always have been, and always will be a visible and sure guide to divine revelation; by which men may conduct themselves in their examining of revealed religions, and be satisfied which they ought to receive as coming from God; tho' they have by no means

means ability precisely to determine what is, or is not above the force of any created being; or what operations can be performed by none but a divine power, and require the immediate hand of the Almighty. And therefore we see 'tis by that our Saviour measures the great unbelief of the *Jews*, John 15. 24. saying, *If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin, but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father*; declaring that they could not but see the power and presence of God in those many miracles he did, which were greater than ever any other man had done. When God sent *Moses* to the children of *Israel* with a message, that now according to his promise he would redeem them by his hand out of *Egypt*, and furnished him with signs and credentials of his mission; it is very remarkable what God himself says of those signs, *Exod. 4. 8.* *And it shall come to pass, if they will*
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not believe thee, nor hearken to the voice of the first sign, (which was turning his rod into a serpent) that they will believe, and hearken to the voice of the latter sign, (which was the making his hand leprous by putting it in his bosom;) God farther adds, v. 9. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river and pour upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land. Which of those operations was or was not above the force of all created beings, will, I suppose, be hard for any man, too hard for a poor Brick-maker to determine; and therefore the credit and certain reception of the mission, was annexed to neither of them, but the prevailing of their attestation was heightned by the increase of their number; two supernatural operations shewing more power than one, and three more than two.

God

God allowed that it was natural, that the marks of greater power should have a greater impression on the minds and belief of the spectators. Accordingly the *Jews*, by this estimate judged of the miracles of our Saviour, *John 7. 31.* where we have this account, *And many of the people believed on him, and said, when Christ cometh will he do more miracles than of these which this man hath done?* This is perhaps, as it is the plainest, so it is also the surest way to preserve the testimony of miracles in its due force to all sorts and degrees of people. For miracles being the basis on which divine mission is always established, and consequently that foundation on which the believers of any divine revelation must ultimately bottom their faith, this use of them would be lost, if not to all mankind, yet at least to the simple and illiterate, (which is the far greatest part) if miracles be defined to be none but such divine operations as are in themselves beyond

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the power of all created beings, or at least operations contrary to the fix'd and establish'd laws of Nature. For as to the latter of those, what are the fix'd and establish'd laws of nature, philosophers alone, if at least they can pretend to determine. And if they are to be operations performable only by divine power, I doubt whether any man learned or unlearned, can in most cases be able to say of any particular operation that can fall under his senses, that it is certainly a miracle. Before he can come to that certainty, he must know that no created being has a power to perform it. We know good and bad angels have abilities and excellencies exceedingly beyond all our poor performances or narrow comprehensions. But to define what is the utmost extent of power that any of them has, is a bold undertaking of a man in the dark, that pronounces without seeing, and sets bounds in his narrow cell to things at an infinite distance from his model and comprehension. Such

Such definitions therefore of miracles, however specious in discourse and theory, fail us when we come to use, and an application of them in particular cases. 1701-2.

These thoughts concerning miracles, were occasioned by my reading Mr. Fleetwood's Essay on Miracles, and the letter writ to him on that subject. The one of them defining a miracle to be an extraordinary operation performable by God alone : and the other writing of miracles without any definition of a miracle at all.

J. LOCKE.

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never*

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