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people brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them;" and when from (a) "Paul's body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs and aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and evil spirits went out of them."

To sum up what has been said on this subject. Since a real miracle is such an operation as can be done by none but God, or such as are appointed by him, and was therefore, in all ages, acknowledged as an authentic proof of a Divine mission; since the prophets, in their predictions of the Messiah, represent him as working miracles of a kind and merciful nature, and our Saviour, when he entered upon his ministry, and assumed that character, displayed a wonderful power in works of the same kind; since that power could proceed from no other cause but a communication from God, and yet to imagine that God would communicate any part of his power to give sanction to an impostor, is a thing repugnant to his sacred attributes; since, upon examination, it appears that all the marks and characters of true miracles concur in the words of Jesus, but violent suspicions of trick and artifice in those that are named in competition with him; since, besides these characters of their truth, the number of those which he did (besides those that were done by persons acting in his name and by his authority) was greater than what all the true workers of miracles, viz. Moses and the prophets, had done through the whole compass of the Old Testament: Since these things appear to be thus, I say, we are under a necessity to conclude, that our Blessed Saviour must have been the true Messiah promised to the Jews, and characterised in the writings of their prophets; that he was the great "Messenger of the Covenant" sent from God; for (b) "if he had not been of God he could have done nothing;" and consequently, that the message which he delivered to us containing this covenant, or (what is all one) that the religion which he hath settled in the world, and confirmed by so many incontestible proofs (so far as the testimony of miracles is available) cannot but be true.

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## SUPPLEMENTARY DISSERTATION

### ON THE MIRACLES OF OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR AND HIS APOSTLES.

[SINCE the period at which the preceding Dissertation was written, objections have been urged against the reality of miracles in general, and of the Gospel miracles in particular, which seem not to have occurred to the philosophers, who were contemporary with our author. As these objections have been lately stated in perspicuous and very forcible language, and disseminated among all classes of reading people, with the art which distinguishes one of our most popular literary journals, (c) I am unwilling to dismiss from my hands a work of this kind, without *attempting* at least to expose the sophistry which has been thus employed to undermine the foundations of our holy religion.

A miracle has been defined—"An effect or event contrary to the established constitution or course of things," or "a sensible deviation from the known laws of nature." To this definition I am not aware that any objection has ever been made, or indeed can be

(a) Acts xix. 11, 12.

(b) John. ix. 33.

(c) See the Edinburgh Review, No. 46.

made. That the visible world is governed by stated general rules or laws; or that there is an order of physical causes and effects established in every part of the system of nature, which falls under our observation, is a fact, which is not, and cannot be, controverted. Effects which are produced by the regular operation of these laws or physical causes, or which are conformable to the established course of events, are said to be *natural*; and every palpable deviation from this constitution of the natural system, and the correspondent course of events in it, is called a *miracle*.

From Matth. xii. 1. Mark ii. 23. Luke vi. 1. John v. 1. to Matth. xvii. 14. Mark ix. 14. Luke ix. 37. John vii. 1.

If this definition of a miracle be accurate, no event can be justly deemed miraculous merely because it is strange, or even to us unaccountable; for it may be nothing more than the regular effect of some physical cause operating according to an established though unknown law of nature. In this country earthquakes happen but rarely, and at no stated periods of time; and for monstrous births perhaps no *particular* and satisfactory account can be given; yet an earthquake is as regular an effect of the established laws of nature as the bursting of a bomb-shell, or the movements of a steam engine; and no man doubts, but that, under particular circumstances unknown to him, the monster is nature's genuine issue. It is therefore necessary, before we can pronounce an event to be a true miracle, that the circumstances under which it was produced be known, and that the common course of nature be in some degree understood; for in all those cases in which we are totally ignorant of nature, it is impossible to determine what is, or what is not, a deviation from her course. Miracles, therefore, are not, as some have represented them, appeals to our ignorance. They suppose some antecedent knowledge of the course of nature, without which no proper judgment can be formed concerning them; though with it their reality may be so apparent as to leave no room for doubt or disputation.

Thus, were a physician to give instantly sight to a blind man, by anointing his eyes with a chemical preparation, which we had never before seen, and to the nature and qualities of which we were absolute strangers, the cure would to us undoubtedly be *wonderful*; but we could not pronounce it *miraculous*, because it might be the physical effect of the operation of the unguent on the eye. But were he to give sight to his patient merely by commanding him to receive it, or by anointing his eyes with spittle, we should with the utmost confidence pronounce the cure to be a miracle; because we know perfectly that neither the human voice, nor human spittle has, by the established constitution of things, any such power over the diseases of the eye. No one is now ignorant, that persons apparently dead are often restored to their families and friends, by being treated, during suspended animation, in the manner recommended by the *Humane Society*. To the vulgar, and sometimes even to men of science, these resuscitations appear very *wonderful*; but as they are known to be effected by physical agency, they can never be considered as *miraculous* deviations from the laws of nature, though they may suggest to different minds very different notions of the state of death. On the other hand, no one could doubt of his having witnessed a real miracle, who had seen a person that had been four days dead, come alive out of the grave at the *call* of another, or who had even beheld a person exhibiting all the common *evidences* of death, instantly resuscitated merely by being *desired* to live.

Thus easy is it to distinguish between such miracles as those of our Blessed Saviour, and the most wonderful phenomena produced by physical causes, operating according to the established laws of nature. Yet it seems difficult to admit, on any occasion, a *suspension* of these laws; and we may safely pronounce, that they have never been suspended but for some important purpose, which could not otherwise have been accomplished. "Events, says an able writer, (a) may be so extraordinary, that they can hardly be established by any testimony;" and the instance which he gives is of an event, in

(a) In the Edinburgh Review already referred to.

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which I am not aware that any law of nature would be suspended. "We would not give credit to a man who should affirm that he saw a hundred dice thrown in the air and that they all fell on the same faces." To such an affirmation I certainly would give no credit; for though I think that a hundred dice *might* all fall on the same faces without the suspension of any known law of nature, such an event is so extremely improbable, and of so very little importance in itself, that it would require the evidence of more than one witness to establish its credibility. The author however considers it as the violation of some unknown law of nature, and immediately infers from its not being admitted on the report of one man, "that the probability of the *continuance* of the laws of nature is superior to every other evidence, and to that of historical facts the best established." In this inference I cannot acquiesce; but before entering into any discussion of the subject, it will be necessary to ascertain with some precision what is meant by *the laws of nature*, and whence those laws had their origin.

If this profound mathematician (*a*) be, as his countrymen in general were some years ago, convinced, either that there is no God; or that if there be a God, he is not the moral Governor of the world; or that the present laws of nature, or the established course of things, have existed from all eternity independent of him and of every intellectual being, he is perfectly consistent when he says, that no weight of testimony could prove the miraculous suspension of these laws. It would indeed be ridiculous to *talk of miracles* to the atheist or fatalist; for if there were no God, or if God were not the moral as well as physical *Governor* of the world, the very notion of miracles, as it is entertained by Christians, would involve in it a contradiction and absurdity. It is only with **THEISTS**, therefore, and such theists as, admitting the moral attributes of God, believe that the established course of things, or the laws of nature, were established by HIM for the accomplishment of some great and good purpose, that any discussion can be carried on respecting the evidence necessary to prove the temporary suspension of any one of these laws; for if they be all necessary, and have been from eternity, it is as impossible to suspend them by any power or for any purpose, as it is to render a geometrical axiom false.

That the world, in its present state, has not existed from eternity, has been a thousand times demonstrated (*b*); but at present I take this fact for granted, because it is only to those by whom it is admitted, that what I have to urge in evidence of the Gospel miracles is addressed. Every theist who acknowledges the moral attributes of God, admits, on the testimony of universal history, sacred and profane, supported as that testimony is by the phenomena of nature, that the present magnificent system was once in a state of chaos, and that it must have been brought, from that state, into its present beautiful order so plainly indicative of design and benevolence, by that God in whom he believes. The laws therefore by which all its movements are directed; by which all the planets primary and secondary revolve round the sun; by which animals and vegetables grow and perish and succeed each other; by which passions and appetites are generated in the human mind; by which mankind are enabled to express their thoughts by articulate sounds; by which the atoms of matter tend towards each other, and when brought into contact cohere together; and in one word, by which every phenomenon corporeal and intellectual is produced, must have been established by him. But of being governed by *laws* in the proper sense of the word, as men in society are governed by the acts or decrees of the legislature, brute matter is not capable. What then is meant by the laws of nature? Let the theist, to whom I am addressing myself, revolve the question seriously in his own mind, and he will find that the laws of nature can be nothing else than the volition or volitions of that God, who brought the world from the

(*a*) *Laplace*.  
 there referred to.

(*b*) See the Introduction to the History of the Old Testament, and the Works



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many of the irregularities to which that luminary is subject. Let the same thing be told to an astronomer, in whose mind the rising and setting of the moon were necessarily connected with a vast number of other appearances; who knew, for example, that the supposed fact could not have happened, unless the moon had exceedingly deviated from that orbit in which it has always moved; or the position of the earth's axis had been suddenly changed; or that *the atmospherical refraction had been increased to an extent that was never known*. Any of all these events must have affected such a vast number of others, that, *as no such thing was ever before perceived*, an incredible body of evidence is brought to ascertain the continuance of the moon in her regular course. *The barrier that generalization and the explanation of causes thus raises against credulity and superstition*,—the way in which it multiplies the evidence of experience, is highly deserving of attention, and is likely to have a great influence on the future fortunes of the human race. *Against the uniformity, therefore, of such laws, it is impossible for testimony to prevail.*"

Certainly, it is impossible for such testimony as that supposed, to prevail against the uniformity of any law of nature; for, as I have already observed, if those laws be necessary and eternal, their uniformity can never be interrupted for any purpose or by any power, and if they have been established by a God of perfect wisdom and goodness, we may be assured that they will never be suspended for so unworthy a purpose as only to make the citizens of London stare, and enable one of them to try the credulity of some clown, who believes the moon to consist, according to the Scotch expression, of *green cheese!* What such a ridiculous tale as this, supposing it ever to have been seriously told, would have to do with *superstition*, it is not easy to conceive; but the ingenious critic might as well have told us in plain terms, that it is impossible for testimony to render credible what is said of the sun and moon standing still (a) at the call of Joshua; for even his friend, who believes the moon to be a mere luminous circle of *cheese*, if at all conversant with his Bible, must perceive that this is what he intended to say under the cover of a clumsy apologue.

If the laws of nature be the work of FATE, I readily agree with him that the story of the sun and moon standing still cannot be rendered credible by any testimony. If those laws be, as I believe them to be, the constitution of an Almighty and infinitely wise and good God, I likewise readily agree with him, that no testimony could render credible the phenomena of the sun and moon's standing still, but for some important purpose that could not have been otherwise so well accomplished. What the purpose was for which the children of Israel were separated from the idolatrous nations around them, and established in the land of Canaan, has been fully stated elsewhere; and the theist, with whom I am now arguing, will admit that, whether it was real or not, that purpose was of great importance. Great however as that purpose was, for the reasons elsewhere assigned, no testimony could prevail with me to believe, that, for the sake of it, the rotation of the earth on its axis, and the course of the moon in her orbit, were literally arrested, unless the same Almighty power wrought another miracle at the same instant to prevent the natural consequences of the sudden cessation of motions so rapid. Without this second miracle, I am as fully aware as our critic, that those events produced by the first, must have not only affected a vast number of others, but been also productive of mischief—such as the reducing of the earth to a state of chaos—more than sufficient to balance the good expected from the miracle;—nay, that they would have rendered the miracle itself useless by destroying those for whose instruction it was meant to be wrought. I confess, however, that I do not perceive what injury could have been done to any sentient or intelligent being in the solar system, or how the different planets, of which that system is composed, could have been disturbed in their

(a) Joshua x. 12, 13.







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to the Almighty, by observing "that the raising of a feather, when the wind wants ever so little force requisite for that purpose, is as real a miracle as the raising of a house or a ship into the air." By *greater* and *less* miracles therefore, and by always rejecting the *greater*, it is evident that he meant nothing more than that of two or more deviations from the known laws of nature, one might in itself, when contemplated with all its circumstances, appear less probable than the others; and that if he could not reject them all, his principles would compel him to reject that which should appear least probable when viewed in all its bearings.

This seems to be a just maxim; and therefore if it can be shown that the testimony given by the apostles and other first preachers of the Gospel to the miracles of their Lord, would, on the supposition that those miracles were not really performed, have been as great a deviation from the known laws of nature as the miracles themselves, the balance must be considered as evenly poised by opposite miracles; and whilst it shall continue so, the judgment must remain in a state of suspense. But if it shall appear that, in this case, the false testimony would have been a deviation from the laws of nature much less probable in itself than the miracles recorded in the Gospels, the balance will be instantly destroyed; and by Mr Hume's maxim, we must reject the supposition of falsehood in the testimony of the apostles, and admit the miracles of Christ to have been really performed.

In this argument it is needless to waste time in proving that those miracles, as they are represented in the writings of the New Testament, were of such a nature, and performed before so many witnesses, that no imposition could possibly be practised on the senses of those who affirm that they were present. From every page of the Gospels, this is so evident, that the philosophical adversaries of the Christian faith never suppose the apostles to have been themselves deceived \*, but boldly accuse them of bearing false witness. But if this accusation be well founded, their testimony itself is as great a miracle, or, in other words, as real a deviation from the laws of nature, as any which they record of themselves or of their Master.

That testimony does not derive all its force from experience has been already proved; and is indeed little less than self-evident from the unquestionable fact that the earliest assent, which is given to testimony by children who have no experience, is unlimited, whilst the experience of age renders men distrustful. Exactly the reverse would be the case, were our belief in testimony the result of experience. It has therefore been thought that the beneficent Author of nature, who intended man to be a social creature, hath implanted in every human breast an instinctive propensity to speak truth, and likewise a disposition to confide implicitly in the veracity of others; and it cannot be denied that children believe whatever is told them, and that the greatest liar on earth speaks a hundred truths for one falsehood. That truth is indeed always at the door of the lips; that it requires no effort to bring it forth; that in ordinary cases men speak truth uninfluenced by any motive moral or political; and that lying is never practised by the worst of men without some effort to accomplish some end, are positions which daily experience renders it impossible to question. But notwithstanding all this, I do not think that truth is spoken by an *original* and *instinctive* principle; because men

\* The reviewer of Laplace, so often referred to, speaking of the improbability of a hundred dice thrown at once all falling on the same faces, adds—"If we had ourselves been spectators of such an event, we would not believe our own eyes, till we had scrupulously examined all the circumstances, and assured ourselves that there was no trick nor deception. After such an examination, we would not hesitate to admit it, notwithstanding its great improbability; and no one would have recourse to an inversion of the

laws of vision in order to account for it." This acute writer therefore must allow, that no trick or deception could have been practised in the resurrection of the widow's son at Nain, in the resurrection of Lazarus, or in the feeding of five thousand men on five barley loaves and two small fishes. Either these miracles must have been really performed, or the evangelists must have wilfully borne false witness; for there is no other alternative.



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with all their mutual relations, and in their appropriate dress. In the very act of learning to *speak*, we necessarily learn to speak the *truth*; for what I have called *mental truth* is impressed upon our minds by him who cannot err, and were we not to employ words for the expression of that truth exactly as they are employed by those with whom we converse, our language (if language it could be called) would be unintelligible jargon; and we could neither declare our wants, nor ask relief with any hope of success. *Children beginning* to speak may indeed often utter untruths or nonsense without any motive, and merely from mistake; and this indeed they often do, because the ideas and words of children have neither been long nor closely linked together; but it is impossible that a man, however wicked, should habitually, and without motives, lie on ordinary occasions, unless the constituent principles of his nature have been totally altered; unless his brain has been disordered by disease; unless his ideas and notions have been disarranged; and all the associations which have taken place among them from his infancy have been dissolved, and quite contrary associations formed in their stead.

We know indeed, by woeful experience, that immoral men occasionally utter falsehoods with a view to deceive. But in these cases they are influenced by some motive either of hope or of terror; the falsehood is always uttered with an effort; and so very strong is the association between words and ideas, that the truth will at times break out in spite of all their endeavours to conceal it; so that the end or middle of a false narrative, if it be of any length, and include a number of particular events or incidents, is commonly inconsistent with the beginning. We entertain a suspicion of falsehood, when those who relate the same tale, either palpably contradict each other, or agree in every minute circumstance, and speak throughout the very same language—when they are but few in number and of a doubtful character—when they have an interest in what they affirm or deny—when they deliver their testimony either with hesitation, or with superfluous and violent asseverations of its truth; because all these are circumstances which have been generally observed to accompany false witness. It is likewise with reluctance that we admit a narrative of events entirely different from every thing that we have hitherto seen or heard; because we may not be certain that the narrator is not under some influence to deceive us in matters concerning which we have nothing but his testimony on which to ground our judgment. But in every case, where the fact recorded is in itself possible, and attributed to a cause which we know to be adequate; where a competent number of witnesses \* had sufficient means of information, and were certainly under no inducement to deceive, testimony is complete evidence, however extraordinary the fact may be; because no fact, which is known to have had an adequate cause, can be so incredible, as that a number of men of sound understanding should act in a manner inconsistent with the fundamental principles of human na-

real universe; and Dr Hartley attempted to account for the great law of intellectual association, by supposing that vibrations and vibratiuncles in the brain are the physical causes of perception and memory. These are mere hypotheses, which, though they were granted, would not solve a single difficulty in the phenomena, for which they were respectively invented to account. It is better therefore to assume at once the two universal facts of *gravitation*, and what has been called the *association of ideas*, as two laws—the one of brute *corporeal* nature, and the other of *animated* nature as it is observed at least on this globe; for though we were to discover some *physical* cause for each of those phenomena, we should be obliged to resolve its operations at last, as we now resolve the

phenomena themselves, into the will of the Almighty.

\* Should it be asked what number of witnesses I call competent, I beg leave to reply, that it will be greater or less according to circumstances. In cases where there is no danger of the senses being deceived, two men of integrity and intelligence deserve equal credit with two thousand; but where there is particular occasion for good organs, whether of sight or hearing, the greater the number, the greater will be our security. To this must be added, that as hardly any individual can pay *equal* attention to *all* the circumstances of any complicated event; we may expect a *fuller* and *more accurate* account of the *whole* from several witnesses than from only one.



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*should be hated of all men for his name's sake; that the brother should deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and that he who took not up his cross and followed him, was not worthy of him."*

The very system of religion, therefore, which they invented and resolved to impose upon mankind, was so contrived, that the *worldly* prosperity of its first preachers, and even their *exemption from persecution*, was incompatible with its *success*. Had these clear predictions of the Author of that religion, under whom the apostles and evangelists acted only as ministers, not been verified, all mankind must have instantly perceived that their claim to inspiration was groundless, and that Christianity was a scandalous and impudent imposture. All this the apostles could not but foresee when they formed their plan for deluding the world. Whence it follows, that when they resolved to support their pretended revelation by an appeal to forged miracles, they *wilfully*, and with *their eyes open*, exposed themselves to *inevitable misery*, whether they should succeed or fail in their enterprise; and that they concerted their measures in such a manner as not to admit a *possibility* of recompence to themselves, either in this life, or in that which is to come.—But if there be a law of nature, for the reality of which we have better evidence than we have for others, it is, "that no man can choose *misery* for its *own sake*," or make the acquisition of it the *ultimate end* of all his pursuits. The existence of other laws of nature we know by testimony and our own observation of the regularity of their effects. The existence of this law is made known to us not only by these means, but also by the still clearer and more conclusive evidence of every man's own consciousness.

Thus then do miracles force themselves upon our assent in every possible view which we can take of this interesting subject. If the testimony of the first preachers of the Gospel was true, the miracles recorded in the New Testament were certainly performed, and the doctrines of our religion were derived from heaven. On the other hand, if that testimony was false, either God must have miraculously effaced from the minds of those by whom it was given, all the associations formed between their ideas of sensation and the words of language, or he must have endowed those men with the gift of prescience, and at the same time have compelled them to fabricate a pretended revelation for the purpose of deceiving the world, and involving themselves and their immediate followers in certain and foreseen destruction.

The power necessary to perform the one series of these miracles is just as great as that which would be requisite to the performance of the other, because they are equally deviations from the laws of nature; and considered merely as exertions of preternatural power, they may seem to balance each other, and to hold the mind in a state of suspense. But when we take into consideration the very different *purposes* for which those opposite and contending miracles were wrought, and call to mind that the *regular course of events* which we say proceeds according to *the laws of nature*, and every *deviation* from that course which we denominate *miraculous*, are alike produced by that all-perfect Being, who, when he established the laws of nature, provided for every circumstance which we call contingent, the balance is instantly destroyed, and the mind relieved from the painful state of suspense. The miracles recorded in the Gospels, if real, were wrought in support of a revelation, which, in the opinion of all by whom it is received, has brought to light many important truths, which could not otherwise have been made known to men; and which, by the confession of those by whom it is rejected, contains the purest moral precepts, by which the conduct of mankind has ever been regulated. The opposite series of miracles, if real, was performed to enable and even to compel a company of Jews of the lowest rank and of the narrowest education, to fabricate, with the view of certain destruction to themselves, a consistent scheme of falsehood, and by an appeal to pretended miracles to impose it upon the world as a revelation from heaven. The object of the former series of miracles is worthy of a God of



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This is sound reasoning, but it applies with ten-fold force to the evidence, afforded by the Gospels, of our Lord's doctrines and miracles. These were witnessed equally by friends and enemies; they were recorded by four different authors—all eye-witnesses\*, in the very age in which the doctrines were taught, and the miracles performed; these records were at an early period translated into all the languages of the Roman empire; they were deemed sacred by every man who adopted the Christian religion, and appealed to as containing all the principles of that religion; the Christians soon began to explain some parts of them very differently from each other, but all admitted the public facts, whether natural or miraculous, mentioned in these narratives; almost every important passage in them has been quoted by successive writers ever since the commencement of the Christian era (a); even Jews and heathens, who abhorred the Christian name, have occasionally quoted them; and all the versions and quotations have been in perfect harmony with the original records, which are still extant in some very ancient manuscripts. The ignorance or carelessness of transcribers has indeed introduced many various readings of single words and phrases, which have been all collated with wonderful accuracy by *Mill, Wetstein, Griesbach, De Rossi, Matthei*, and others, and all found to be of no vital importance. Some of the ancient heretics rejected Gospels, and parts of Gospels; but what they rejected was not the facts recorded in those Gospels, but doctrines which could not be reconciled to notions which they had brought into the church from the schools of Greek philosophy, or from the more wild and fantastic philosophy of the East; and their attempts at mutilation of the four Gospels were loudly condemned, as well by all the other heretical sects, as by the unanimous voice of the catholic church. In this state of things it is impossible that any considerable interpolation or change could have taken place in any of the four Gospels, without many documents remaining to inform us of such a change; and I am sure that the ingenious reviewer of Laplace—adverse as he seems to be to the admission of the smallest deviation, on any account from the known laws of nature—will agree with me, that “the combination of the chances necessary to produce and to conceal such an interpolation in the Gospels, is ten thousand times more improbable, than in the case of the narrative of Xenophon.” That narrative was long known to the Greeks alone, and could never be very interesting to any other people. The Gospels were soon spread over the whole civilized world, and must have been in the highest degree interesting, not only to all who named with reverence the name of Christ, but even to all who blasphemed that name, and who must therefore have been on the watch to detect the slightest change made by each other in these important writings. On this account, I am not without hopes that the same ingenious critic will admit, that for the reality of the Gospel miracles, we have at this day evidence as convincing to the reflecting mind, as those had who were contemporary with Christ and his apostles.]

\* It is not certain that St Mark was a personal attendant on our Saviour, but it is very certain that he received the substance of his Gospel from St Peter, who was. See the Appendix to the preceding Disser-

tation on the four Gospels.

(a) See Lardner's Credibility of the Gospel History, and Paley's Evidences of the Christian Religion.