

A N  
E N Q U I R Y

Into the FORCE of the  
O B J E C T I O N

Made against the  
*RESURRECTION* of *CHRIST*,

From the Circumstance of His not appearing  
openly to the Rulers and People of the *Jews*  
after He rose from the Dead,

W H E R E I N

What Mr. *Woolston* offers on that Head in his  
K Sixth Discourse is particularly consider'd.

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*Tu ratione pugnas. Patere igitur rationem meam cum  
tuâ ratione contendere.*

Cicero de Nat. Deor. lib. 3.

*D<sup>r</sup> Zach<sup>y</sup> Pearce*

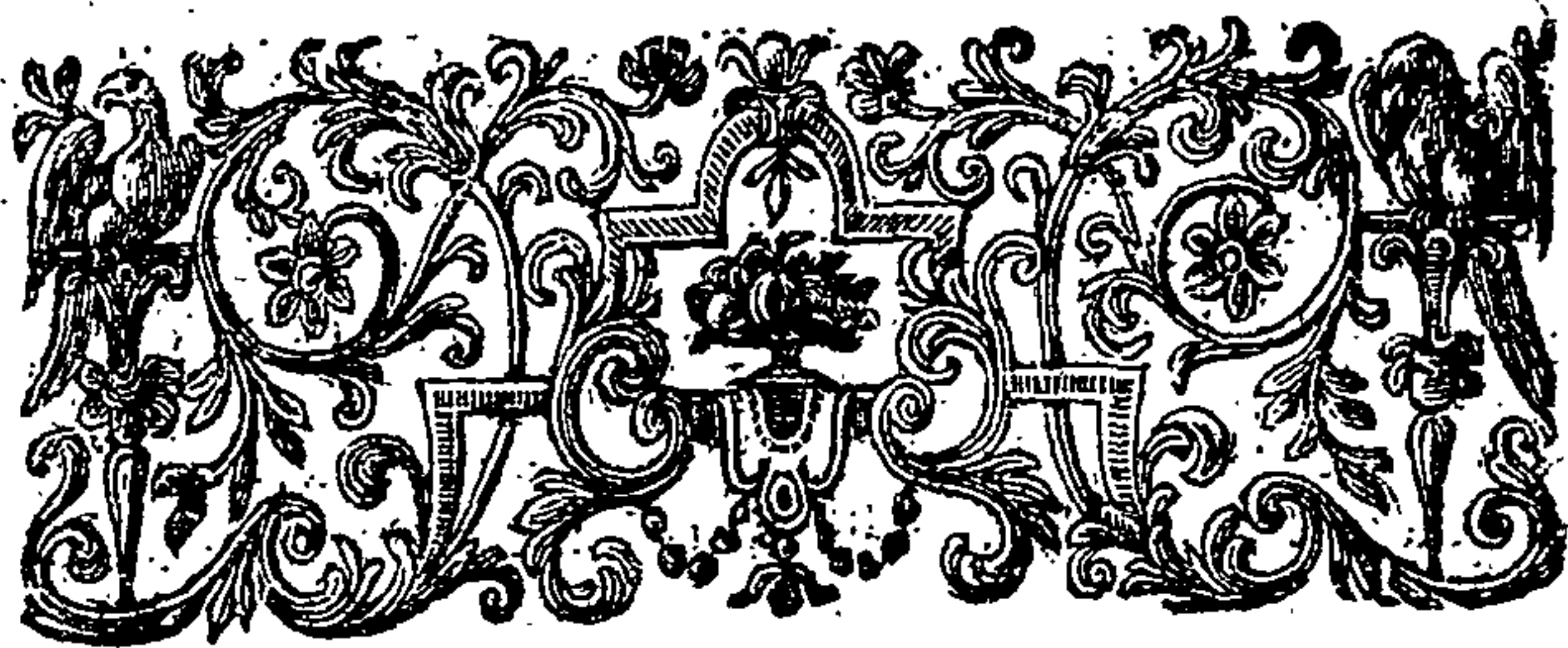
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[Price Six Pence.]



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# ENQUIRY

Into the FORCE of the

## OBJECTION

Made against the

### *RESURRECTION of CHRIST, &c.*

**T**H E Enemies of Christ and Christianity seem to have been always sensible, that there could be no such thing as justifying their Infidelity; without destroying the Credibility of the Sacred Writings in the Article of our Lord's Resurrection; their main Strength therefore has been pointed this way, and all Endeavours have been us'd to invalidate the Evidence on which our Faith is built: One while we are called upon to clear the Apostles from the Charge of being Deceivers and Impostors; at another; we are required to shew that they were not Enthusiasts; first imposing upon themselves, and then deceiving others; and when the Arguments in defence of their Character seem too strong to be confuted, they artfully shift the Question, and leaving the Witnesses, for the present, in possession of their Character, set themselves to quibble and cavil upon the Subject-matter of their Testimony; I say quibble and cavil, because, I think, that nothing has been offer'd against the literal Story, as we have it, that, either for the matter, or manner in which it has

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been

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been urged, deserves a better Name. If indeed that Enlightened Genius, who of late has undertaken to shew that the Gospel Narrative of the Resurrection contains the most downright *Absurdities, Improbabilities and Incredibilities*, could make good his Charge, this would effectually destroy the whole Credit of the History: For it is certain, that if the Testimony of the Apostles, as reported to us, is big with those many Absurdities, which this Author says it is, the Character of the Witnesses, be it what it will, can be no good reason for our believing their Report, since their Testimony confutes it self. How he has succeeded in his Design must be left to the Reader's Judgment; when he has considered what is advanc'd on the other side.

The Substance of his reasoning lies in a narrow compass, and rests entirely upon one single Circumstance, confessed by the Apostles and Evangelists, and universally acknowledged by Christians in all Ages, and which he thinks, and undertakes to prove, sufficient to destroy the Credit of the Resurrection: The Circumstance insisted on is this, It is said that *God raised up Christ from the dead the third day*, and, when he had so done, *shewed him not to all the People*, but to certain Persons *before chosen* and fixed on for *Witnesses*, as St. Peter declares in the tenth of the *Acts*.

Here then the Question is ask'd, "Why to Chosen Witnesses?" "Why did not he appear publicly in *Jerusalem*, and make himself known to the Chief-Priests and Rulers, and to all the People of that City at least? The more stiff and obstinate they were, the more reason there was to remove all Suspicions. He had it in his Power, and why was not it done? If things had been thus conducted, all Men would have believed in him, the *Jews* would have been convinced, and have received him accordingly; and all the Nations upon Earth, as far as the Story went, would, without dispute, have assented to the truth of so notorious a Fact: The Fears of Mankind would, in this case, have operated strongly in conjunction with their Convictions, and his Authority would have been every where submitted to, out of fear that an obstinate refusal might draw down the Judgments of Heaven on the Heads of his Opposers: Thus the Reformation of the World would have been speedily accomplished, and all the Purposes of His Mission effectually answered, without any Possibility of a Failure: Certainly if God had sent him, as he pretended, if he was really dead and raised again, as we are told he was, we should have had stronger Evidence of it; for God could never send a Prophet, His own Son, into the World, to instruct and reform Mankind, without intending they should regard him,

" and



“and be reformed by him, and therefore since the proper measures, to render such a design effectual, were not taken, this is a direct proof that God never sent him.”

This is the Objection (a) in its full force; and because it is founded on a circumstance in the literal Account, as publish'd by the Evangelists and Apostles, we must enquire whether there are not such other circumstances related by them, as, if duly weigh'd and compared together, may help us to a Solution of the difficulty; and by letting us, in part at least, into the reason of the Divine Conduct, give full satisfaction upon this Question, Why things were order'd in the way here objected to, and not in that other way propos'd in the Objection.

In prosecution of this Enquiry, I have carefully review'd the whole Gospel History, and, after the strictest Scrutiny, am so far from altering my mind, or seeing reason to quit my Faith, that I am more fully convinc'd than ever of the Truth of Christianity, and that no more is requisite to convince any man of it, than to set himself soberly and honestly to examine the Evidence. The Deference which we all pay to our own Judgment and Understanding, makes it natural for every one to imagine, that what convinceth him, may have the same effect upon others; and I frankly own, it was the prospect of This which first tempted me to publish these my Observations: If, thro' the weakness of my reasoning, I am disappointed in my expectation, I hope it will be some excuse for my troubling the Public with my thoughts, that I meant well: As for my Arguments, I crave no quarter for them, let them be sifted to the bottom; if they will not stand the test, I shall think my self oblig'd to any one that will shew me my mistake, and I promise coolly and candidly to examine any counter-proof, that can be produc'd to shew the invalidity of mine. In the mean time I assert and maintain these four things, which I think I can prove beyond all exception.

*First*, That the Evidence of Christ's Resurrection was fully sufficient, with respect to the Number of the Witnesses, to convince any sober unprejudiced person.

*Secondly*, That this being so, neither the *Jews* then had, nor we now have, any right or reason to desire more.

*Thirdly*, That supposing more could and had been given, the *Jews* would, notwithstanding, have either acted just the same part they did, or else, if they had received *Jesus* as the Messiah, it must have been agreeably to their own notions and expectations about that Person.

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(a) See pag. 23, 24, and 25. compar'd with pag. 35. in Mr. W.'s Sixth Discourse.

*Fourthly*,

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*Fourthly*, Let the *Jews* have behaved themselves how they would, if our Saviour had shewn himself so publicly, at it's said he ought, the rest of the World would and must have had full as many, if not more and greater Difficulties and Objections against Christianity, than they had or have, as things were managed.

Now if this can be made out, the Objection is fully answer'd; because we hereby shew that, *according to the Law of reason, Our Saviour ought not to have appear'd to the Chief Priests and Rulers and the People of Jerusalem*. And therefore by Mr. *Woolston's* own confession, there is no Force or Truth in the Argument he makes use of to prove a Fraud in the Resurrection.—This Subject I am now upon, has been admirably well handled in a small Pamphlet lately publish'd, \* which is such an excellent Performance, and so full a Confutation of Mr. *W.*, that I should readily confess it to be quite needless, for any one else to write upon the Argument, but that I think it of great Advantage, in a Matter of such Consequence, for the same Argument to be handled by different Persons, if it be only for the sake of setting it in a different Light; this Consideration makes me venture to the Press, even after having perus'd the abovemention'd Pamphlet: And tho' I never saw or heard of it 'till this Piece of mine was near finished, yet I pretend to nothing more than to be a Second to that Ingenious Gentleman in the present Controversy, and in this Character I proceed upon the Plan propos'd.

*First* then I assert, That the Evidence of Christ's Resurrection, with respect to the Number of the Witnesses, was fully sufficient to convince any sober unprejudiced Person. I say the Number of the Witnesses, because this is the only point now to be considered; it's therefore needless to enlarge upon the other particulars of the Evidence, which have been so often and fully discuss'd; the Number of the Witnesses is the Subject of the present Debate, and the Evidence being charg'd as faulty and defective in this Article, which alone is thought sufficient to overturn the Credit of the Whole, let us enquire how just the charge is against the Evidence as it was, and how reasonable the demand in the Objection. The Gentlemen on that side of the Question are of Opinion, that Christ ought to have shewn himself to all the People; this is maintain'd both by *Celsus* and *Olibio*, in the passages referr'd to by Mr. *W.* p. 24. But why to all the People? The reason to be sure is, because it is fancy'd that by this means the Evidence would have been taken off from the tottering foundation of Testimony, and fixed upon a surer Bottom; "if the whole Nation, or "at least the whole City of *Jerusalem*, had been eye-witnesses of

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\* Entitled, *An Impartial Examination, and full Confutation of the Argument brought by Mr. Woolston's Rabbi &c.*



the Resurrection, the Nature of the Proof would have been alter'd much to its advantage, because in this case the whole People would have believ'd upon their own knowledge, and have had the evidence of their Senses for the truth of the Fact." Thus then they say it should have been, and refuse to believe it because it was not thus; whereas in truth, tho' they had been of Council with the Almighty, and things had been order'd as they propose, the greater part of the People must have believ'd upon Testimony, if they had believ'd at all, for it was impossible for the Majority to have had sensitive evidence.

To clear this matter a little, let us suppose a Criminal executed here in *London*, and the Circumstances of the Execution similar to our Lord's at *Jerusalem*. In the first place, all the Town runs out to see it, and the greater the throng and crowd, the more it makes for me; let us consider the noise and uproar, the tumult and confusion there is among the People, upon such an occasion, how all are striving, and pressing, and jostling, to get a sight of the Man that is to suffer, how many of them never see him at all, how few of them have more than a slight transient glance of him, and that none of them can see and observe him so exactly as they might, if they would be all quiet and peaceable, (which a Mob never was, or will be;) add to this, that the Criminal, instead of being rais'd up above the People, walks on foot to the place of Execution, and, part of the way, carries upon his Back the Cross he is to suffer on, with the weight of which he is overloaded, and almost bent double, 'till at last being quite spent, and unable to carry it any farther, a man coming by is laid hold on, and forc'd to carry it for him; here now is a Circumstance that would certainly lead great numbers into a Mistake about the person; for it being customary, that all such as are condemn'd to be crucify'd should carry their Cross themselves, and this very Man having done it part of the way, it is natural for all those who did not see the burthen shifted, to fancy him the Malefactor whom they see carrying the Cross, and consequently to fix all their Attention on the imaginary, instead of the real, Criminal. When they come to the place of Execution, then begins a new bustle, every one striving and struggling to get the most commodious place he can, and this again, of course, takes off their regard from the Prisoner: At length the poor Creature is fasten'd to the Cross, with Nails driven thro' the Palms of his Hands, and both his Feet; and now indeed he hangs expos'd in the full view of such as are within a proper distance, and, supposing his Face not cover'd, many, who saw him not as they came along, have a sight of him now; but such is his Anguish and Agony, and every feature and muscle of his Face is so distorted with

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with it, that if any of his most intimate Acquaintance were to pass by accidentally, without knowing any thing of the matter, they could not tell by his Countenance who it was: How then should the bulk of the ordinary Spectators, in the circumstances I have describ'd, be able to carry away with them a distinct Idea of his Person? It's easy to apply this Account to our Saviour, whose case was exactly the same, bating that he was no Criminal, tho' treated like one of the greatest.

Now suppose he had appear'd publickly in *Jerusalem* after his Resurrection, and shewn himself to all sorts of Persons, without distinction, yet still the matter must have rested upon Testimony, with respect to the far greater part, and I am sure that I speak within compass, when I say that nineteen in twenty, of those to whom he appear'd, must have taken it upon the word of others, that this Person who shew'd himself to them, and call'd himself *Jesus*, and said he was risen from the dead, was the true *Jesus*, who was condemn'd to die for such and such reasons, and, in consequence of this Sentence, was at such a time led out to execution, and put to death.

Nay, suppose, if you will, that before his death, he had summon'd or invited his Judge, his Prosecutors, and all the People in general, to come and see him in his Grave, and then and there be witnesses to his Resurrection, at a certain Time appointed; that hereupon, they had all appear'd at the Sepulchre, and been admitted, man by man, to go in and view the Body before its Resurrection, and be assured it was really there; and really dead; this would have been carrying things as far as possible, but yet let the former circumstances be remember'd, and what would all this have prov'd? They would indeed have been eye-witnesses of a Resurrection, but as to the Resurrection of *Jesus*, that was a Fact which the far greater part must have taken upon Testimony, because they could not be sure upon their own knowledge, that it was He, that this Person whom they saw dead, and rais'd to life again, was the self same who hung and expir'd upon the Cross.

I shall not stay to enquire, in this place, whether the Evidence propos'd to the Gentile World, would in the main have been lessen'd or improv'd by such proceeding, but I can't help observing, that if this method, which I dare say the Objectors will fasten upon as most unexceptionable, had been really follow'd it would have taken more time, by a great deal, to give every Man satisfaction in this manner, than was allow'd, according to prophecy, for our Saviour to be in the Grave; And Mr. *W.* himself owns, it would have been improper for him to have stay'd there longer than was so allow'd; He confesses



p. 15. that if the *Jews had not attended at the Sepulchre at the time appointed, but had been for confining him to the Grave longer than was meet, according to prophecy, that then his Resurrection, without their presence, had been excusable and justifiable; and if so, I am sure he must acknowledge it to be every whit as excusable and justifiable, to refuse to gratify their curiosity in such a way and manner, as must necessarily have so confin'd him: but this only by the bye.*

It's plain, I think, from what has been offer'd, that let the affair have been managed how it would, there was no other way to prove the Truth of the fact, to the greater part even of the *Jews* themselves, but by Testimony; it was impossible to alter the Nature of the Evidence; it rests upon Testimony now, and must have done so then; and if so, how unreasonable is it to demand such a degree of evidence as could not possibly be had, and then deny the Fact for want of it? But this is a glaring Instance how far a spirit of opposition and contradiction may carry Men.

It remains now, since I have prov'd that the *Jews* themselves, as well as the rest of the World, must have recurr'd to Testimony, and there was no helping it, that we enquire what Testimony there was, what Number of Witnesses, and whether there was any occasion for an Increase of their Numbers to make their Testimony unexceptionable. As to the first, we learn from the Scripture Account, that their numbers rose to some hundreds: *St. Paul* tells us, in his first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, that *Our Lord was seen of above five hundred Brethren at once*; to the greater part of whom he appeals as then alive, at the time of his writing that Epistle. And as to the other, five hundred Credible Witnesses are certainly as good as five hundred times the number. I say Credible Witnesses, because their Character is not the thing now excepted to, and if we suppose them good men and true, it's a flat contradiction to suppose them standing out obstinately in a known falshood; but if we suppose them bad, it will be every whit as difficult to discredit their Testimony, considering the circumstances with which it was attended; for suppose them as bad as we please (the worse they were the stronger the Argument) it's absolutely inconceivable, that five hundred abandon'd profligate Wretches should persist in asserting a downright lye, in spite of the severest tortures even to death, and be so closely cemented, as that not any one of them should fall off from the rest and retract his evidence, and that too, at a time, when the People in power would have given any thing to detect the fraud, and they themselves could hope for nothing in the world by maintaining it. In these circumstances, such num-  
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bers are an effectual Bar against any Plot to impose a Falshood upon the World, and as effectually wipe off all Suspicion of the Witnesses being impos'd on themselves, in a Matter of Fact that was the Object of their Senses: For, to use the Words of the ingenious Author above-mentioned, (a) *Let any Man attempt to shew any possible Method by which five hundred, or one hundred Persons may either be impos'd on themselves, or combine to impose on others, (in such a Case as this) and it will be easy to shew the same to be possible in any given Number.* Now when the Evidence of a Fact is thus glaring, when the degree of Certainty rises to so high a pitch, there can be no occasion for any Addition to it; such Proof is sufficient to convince any reasonable Man.

I know there is a good deal of Stress laid upon that Expression of St. Peter's, that Christ was shewn to *chosen Witnesses*; this is thought a suspicious Circumstance; "the picking and culling of Witnesses is said to have a fraudulent Aspect, and the choosing the Apostles preferably to all others, looks as if they had contriv'd the Cheat, and huddled up Matters among themselves." -- It's certain if there had been any Cheat, and St. Peter had been concern'd in it, as he must have been, he would never have told this suspicious Circumstance himself: Impostors are us'd to be more upon their Guard, but Honesty has no Suspicions, and this is a plain Instance of it; he was under no Apprehension that his Hearers would mistake him, or turn what he said to his Disadvantage, he therefore told the whole Truth, without any colouring or curtailing, with all that Openness and Freedom, which Innocence and a just Cause are wont to inspire. And in truth, it was easy to discover in what Sense he call'd himself and his Brethren in the Apostleship, the *chosen Witnesses* of the Resurrection: he does not say Our Lord was shewn to none but them, this would not have been Fact; they indeed were favour'd with more frequent Visits from him than any others, during the time he was upon Earth, betwixt his Resurrection and Ascension; Many saw him, but They convers'd with him, heard him talk, handled him with their Hands, ate and drank with him, and had the fullest and strongest Convictions that he was really risen; and it was but fit they should, considering they were the *chosen Witnesses*, i. e. the Persons pitch'd upon and singled out to go thro' the World, and perswade Men every where to embrace the Religion of Jesus, upon the Credit of his Resurrection; it lay especially upon them to report and testify this Fact, it was made their

Business in particular, and accordingly we find them insisting on it where-ever they come. Nor is it at all surprising that they were *chosen* rather than any others; they had been longest conversant with our Saviour, his most intimate and familiar Acquaintance, constantly attending upon him, and therefore the most proper Witnesses; for no-body could imagine that they were deceiv'd or impos'd on by a false Appearance, because they knew him thoroughly, and could not be mistaken in the Person: Now, is it at all surprising that such Men should be chosen and destined to this public Office, and in consequence of such an Appointment, have the clearest Demonstration afforded them of the Truth they were to testify? To complain that such Witnesses were chosen to the Fact, is to complain that the properest Persons were chosen; and if we complain because the same strong personal Evidence was not afforded to all equally and alike, we complain because that was not done which was really impracticable.

But when Men set themselves to cavil, there is no end of it. It will still be pleaded in the present case, That Christ's Resurrection was an extraordinary Fact, of great Importance, much depended on it, no less than the Reception of a new Revelation, a new Scheme of Religion, which concerned the Happiness of Mankind in this World and the next, and therefore all possible Evidence should have been given: If such a degree of Proof as is demanded in the Objection could not be had, yet, when all the most valuable Interests of Mankind were stak'd on the Belief of this Fact, some way or other should have been contriv'd (and to be sure Almighty Power could have contriv'd some way) to make the Evidence so strong, in point of Numbers witnessing to the Fact, as to convince all, whether they would or no; whereas it's undeniable that a great part of Mankind were not convinc'd by it, and therefore, so far at least as these Persons were concern'd, it was really and actually insufficient.

Now in answer to this, I assert, That if the Evidence of our Lord's Resurrection was and is sufficient, with respect to the Circumstance in Debate, I mean the Number of the Witnesses; if it was such as would convince any sober Enquirer, laying all Prejudice aside, and impartially attending to it (which, after what has been said, I shall now take for granted) then, however *insufficient* it might be, or is, in the Sense in which the Word *insufficient* is here apply'd, *i. e.* tho' it should be allow'd that a great part of Mankind then did, and still do declare themselves unsatisfy'd, and really were and are so, because there was not a greater Number of Witnesses to confirm the Fact, yet this is far from being a just Objection against the Truth of it, and I maintain, that, the Sufficiency of the Evidence being supposed,

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neither the *Jews* then had, nor we now have, any Right or Reason to insist upon more; which is the Second Thing to be consider'd.

II. For, upon what must this Right be founded? It certainly must take its Rise, if from any thing, from a real Defect in the Nature of the Evidence. Here's a Fact reported; I refuse to believe it; Why? If I act reasonably, it must be because the Proof is defective; but this is not the Case; it is not argued that there are not Witnesses enough to convince a sober impartial Inquirer, it's only objected that there were not more, and that for want of it, there were and are some Persons not convinc'd, and therefore, with respect to these, the Evidence given is *insufficient*. ---- Be it so; but what makes it thus? Where does the Fault lye? In the Evidence, or in them? If in them, they are to account for it. It's to no purpose to urge their Prejudices, that they are under the Influence of strong Passions and Prepossessions which incline them to the other Side; for the Question is, Whether their Prejudices are reasonable? If not, why don't they use their Reason as they ought, in order to get the better of them, so as to leave themselves at liberty fairly to attend to, and impartially examine the Evidence that's before them? This is what every Man has in his Power, and if they will not use the Power God has given them, to their own Advantage, they must thank themselves only for the Mischief that ensues.

When a Matter of Fact is so reported and prov'd, as to leave no room for any reasonable Doubt or Hesitation about the Truth of it, if I am so unreasonable as to doubt of it for all this; Can it be thought that my acting unreasonably can ever give me a Title to further Satisfaction? Can any thing be more extravagant than such a Claim as this, which is founded on nothing but the most wilful Obstinacy? If a Man's Stiffness and Obstinacy, or in other Words, his neglecting to use those Powers, and employ those Faculties and Means which God has given him for the Discovery of the Truth, is a Reason why he should expect to be extraordinarily favour'd and indulged, then of course the Reasonableness of such Expectation must rise and increase in proportion to his Obstinacy and Negligence, and the more obstinate and negligent he is, the better Right he has to be particularly distinguish'd.

But then the Difficulty is, where to stop: When shall we say there is Evidence enough? If this is allow'd, there can be no end to such Pretensions. For suppose God had humour'd the *Jews* then, and were to humour Mankind now, in all the Demands, however unreasonable, that Freak, and Fancy, and Prejudice

judice could invent and insist on, What would be the Consequence? Is it not probable they would indulge their Curiosity to the utmost, and, if for nothing else but to gratify a Passion so natural to the human Mind, as soon as one Miracle is over insist upon another, and a greater, and, if that should not be granted, declare all past ones insufficient, and not worth regarding? And thus Miracles must become as common as any other Event, and when so, would be as little attended to; and then some other Method of Proof must be invented, to convince such as are not to be affected by any thing but what is unusual and extraordinary, and thus on *in infinitum*.

We are told in the 12th Chapter of St. *Matthew*, of a miraculous Cure that our Lord performed on the Person of a *Man blind and dumb*, publicly, in the Presence of the People, at which they were mightily astonish'd, and immediately express'd their Surprise, and their present Opinion of him, by crying out, *Is not this the Son of David?* But how did the Scribes and Pharisees behave upon it? They could not doubt the Miracle, they had seen it wrought before their Eyes, but they impute it to a Power derived to him from some Evil Spirit: To remove this Suspicion, they demand a *Sign* from him, *i. e.* some other miraculous Instance of his Power; And what if they had been comply'd with? Is it probable they would have believed on him? Was it not as easy to impute the latter Miracle to an Evil Spirit, as the former? Again; When Our Saviour was hanging upon the Cross, they call out to him, *Come down now from the Cross and we will believe on thee*; suppose he had, Would they have made good their Promise? I doubt it much: They might perhaps have been amaz'd, and struck dumb for the present with Wonder and Astonishment, but that would soon have worn off, and then they might have recurr'd to the same Evasion as before, and given *Beelzebub* the Reputation of this, as well as of other Instances, wherein the Divine Power operated to bear Testimony to the Mission of Jesus. In short, if the Evidence of a Fact be plain and distinct, and I refuse to admit it, for no other Reason but because it is not plainer, there is no stopping; and such Conduct is very ridiculous and absurd, something beneath a Man; it's behaving our selves with the Frowardness of Children, who throw away all you give them in a Pet, because you will not humour them in some thing else which they have a mind to. It's little to the purpose, in the present Case, to talk of convincing People whether they will or no; for it's one thing to convince a Man of the Truth of a Fact, or Proposition, and quite another, to engage him to act in conformity to such Conviction; but more of this hereafter.



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III. I come now in the Third Place to shew, That provided Our Saviour had appeared publicly in *Jerusalem* to all sorts of Persons, and that such a Step would have confirm'd and strengthen'd the Evidence of his Resurrection, to the *Jews*, y<sup>e</sup>t still the Leading Men among them, the Scribes and Pharisees, the Chief-Priests and Rulers, and their numerous Dependants, would not, in all Probability, have been at all more inclin'd to embrace true genuine Christianity, upon the real Plan of it, but have either acted just the same Part they did, or else, if they, and the rest of the People had received Jesus as the Messiah, it would have been in such a way as was agreeable to their Notions and Expectations about that Person. And if this can be prov'd, here is a plain Account given, why Our Saviour did not appear thus publicly, because it would either have answer'd no Purpose at all, or a quite contrary one to what was his Design in coming into the World.

If we look into the Gospel History, we shall find reason to think, that the Leading Men among the *Jews* really did believe the Fact of Christ's Resurrection, upon the Evidence as it was. And what could any Evidence have done more, than engage them to believe it? And if they still persisted, after all, in an obstinate Refusal to receive him, if they continued to reject him notwithstanding their Belief of this surprizing Event, is it not probable they would have done the same, let the Evidence have been what it would?

But let us proceed to examine their Conduct, according to the Account we have of it in the Gospel History, and the *Acts* of the Apostles, immediately after the thing happen'd, while it was fresh in every one's Memory, and the Story in every Man's Mouth.

Only first observe what St. *Matthew* tells us; with respect to the Care and Caution that they us'd to prevent all Possibility of Trick and Imposture, and it is much to the Advantage of the Christian Cause that they did so: They remember'd what Jesus said while He was yet alive, that after three Days he would rise again; this they thought fair Warning, and therefore they came to Pilate, and desire that the Sepulchre may be made sure on the third Day, lest his Disciples should come by Night, and steal him away, and say unto the People he was risen, and thus the Trick, or Imposture, should be of worse Consequence than the first; for so they were pleas'd to call Our Saviour's former Claim a Divine Authority, and all the Miracles he wrought in confirmation of it. How does the Governour behave upon this? I have a Watch, says he, go your way, and make it as sure as you can. What follows?

When the appointed time came for our Lord, according to his own Prophecy, to triumph over Death and the Grave, *Behold there was a great Earthquake, and the Angel of the Lord descended from Heaven, and came and rolled back the Stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it; His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow, and for fear of him the Keepers did shake, and became as dead men.* As soon as they had recovered themselves a little, some of them went into the City, and shewed unto the Chief Priests all the things that were done, all that they had seen and felt, the Earthquake, the Angel, and their own fear and surprise. Upon this an Assembly is immediately called, *And when they had taken counsel, they gave large money to the soldiers, saying, say ye, his Disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept, and if this come to the Governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you; so they took the money, and did as they were taught, and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.* Here is the naked Story without Art or Colouring, and one need only read it over, plainly to discover what the chief Priests and Rulers really thought, when this Account was brought them. However for the further clearing matters, I shall make some Observations which naturally arise upon the perusal of it.

If it be asked how *St. Matthew* came by this Story, I answer that I cannot positively tell; but I think it's highly probable that the Soldiers discovered it themselves; no doubt their Comrades and Acquaintance thought them mad, when they heard them openly confessing such a thing as this, the owning of which was as much as their Lives were worth, and therefore immediately asked them what they meant by it, and advised them to hold their Tongues, and not expose themselves to such imminent danger; upon this, not caring to lye under the imputation of being either Fools or Madmen, they whispered their Companions in the ear, that they knew very well what they were doing, that to be sure they would not have told such a thing of themselves if it had been true; but the Chief Priests had set them at work, and not only promised to bear them harmless, but had given them a good sum of money into the bargain: And thus I truly believe the Story got vent, and was told about from one to another, 'till at last it was in too many hands to be a secret.

*St. Matthew* indeed is silent as to one Article, whether the Soldiers saw Our Lord himself or not, and therefore we can pronounce nothing certain about it, though it's very likely they did; but the Earthquake, and the appearance of the Angel, which preceded his coming out of the Sepulchre, had so frightened and as-  
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## 16 *An Enquiry into the Force of the Objection*

astonished them, that they were not capable of taking notice and observing, so as to remember, and give an Account of what passed immediately upon it, while they were in that condition; however as it was, they witnessed to enough to make the *Jews* or any one else believe the fact: When they were a little recovered out of their fright, they certainly looked into the Sepulchre, and saw the Body was gone: Here then is something very extraordinary, the Earth quaked, the Angel descended, rolled away the Stone, and sat upon it, and presently after the Body missing. Now could any man, in his wits, believe that all this happened, that the Divine Power had thus sensibly interposed that God had moved Heaven and Earth, only to scare the Watch, and give the Disciples an opportunity to steal away their Master, and cheat the World! No man could believe this, and certainly the *Jews* did not believe it: It's plain what they thought, they thought the true Story not fit to be told, and therefore they bribe them to tell another of their making, *while we slept His Disciples came by night and stole him away*. Was there ever such a poor evasion, such an ill-contrived Story?

Here is a Watch set to guard the Sepulchre, to watch against any fraud or deceit, and in the very nick of time, in the critical minute, they every man of them fall asleep; it is something strange that not one should be awake to observe what passed, and if there had, the Plot must have been discovered, and all broken and disconcerted; and still stranger, that being all asleep, they should be able to give so particular an Account who stole away the Body.

But, to take the most favorable interpretation the words will bear; if we say the meaning is, that the Soldiers fell asleep, that when they awaked they found the Body gone, and therefore supposed His Disciples had stole it, because no body else would have given themselves that trouble; if this be the meaning of it, yet still the story betrays itself, and one cannot help finding out the truth, *viz.* that they were heartily bribed, and promised security as St. *Matthew* says, before they could possibly be prevailed on to tell such a Story. For is it conceivable that a Guard, a number of Centinels, should all, openly and boldly accuse themselves of sleeping on their Post, a Crime that by the Military Law exposed them to Capital (a) Punishment, unless we

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(a) Death was the Punishment of this Crime both among Greeks and Romans; that it was so among the Greeks, see Meursii Them. Attica, lib. 2. cap. 2. the Law there quoted is this, Νόμος, ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἀποκτενεῖται.

well paid for it, and protected by such as had power and interest to procure their pardon? Surely there never was a worse contrived tale than this.

If it had been true, and the *Jews* had believed it to be so, it is not likely they would have promised all of them an Indemnity and a Reward, upon condition they would declare the truth, as Mr. *W.* suggests; it is much more probable, that they would have taken the common method in such Cases, and have tryed, by fair promises and the hopes of pardon, to gain over some of them to be evidence against the rest: For though they had been all asleep when the Body was removed, yet it is not likely, if we suppose there were but five or six of them, that they all awoke at once, in the very same instant of time; but if they had all waked together, yet some of them might have bore witness to thus much at least, “that when they waked, and found the Body gone, they were all equally surprized and frightened; and those very persons who now disown’d the fact, did then, without reserve, confess themselves equally guilty with the rest, and that their pleading not guilty was the result of after-thought, in hopes to get clear for want of evidence; whereas at the time, every one freely blamed himself for his carelessness and neglect of duty, and all entered into joint consultation, how to bring themselves off the best way they could.” Now if such Depositions had been taken, and some of the Soldiers had been thereupon tryed, convicted, and publicly executed, the *Jewish Account* of the matter might then have looked a little plausible, this would have been something like proof, that the Centinels were asleep, and if that had been proved, it would certainly have bred great suspicion about the fact.

*καὶ μὴ καθεύδεν, ἢ θανάτῳ ζυμίζετο.* And that the punishment was the same among the Romans, when, through a neglect of Duty, what was entrusted to the care of a Guard was lost, appears from the Story of the Soldier in Petronius, cap. 72. Some thieves had been crucified, by Order of the President of the Province, and a Centinel set to watch the bodies; one of them being stole; the Author says, Miles veritus supplicium, mulieri, quid accidisset, exponit: nec se expectaturum Judicis sententiam, sed gladio jus dicturum ignaviae suae: But if Death had not been the punishment of his crime, he would never have thought of killing himself. It matters not whether the Story was fact or fable: This we may be sure of, the usual sentence in such cases was death; if it had not, the Story must have been told in another manner; for in alluding to customs, truth must always be kept up, for the sake of probability. And though the Scene is laid at Ephesus in the lesser Asia, yet that Country was then a Roman Province, and subject to Roman Governors, at the time when Petronius wrote.



At first sight perhaps we may wonder, how the Soldiers durst venture to take money of the Chief Priests, upon such perillous terms, for such was their Malice and Inveteracy, that it allowed them to stick at nothing; they had forced *Pilate* to Crucify *Jesus* against his Will, though he declared he found no fault in him; so that it was plain Blood and Murder would not stop them, when it was for their purpose; and therefore the Soldiers might very justly have been afraid of the *Jews* playing them a trick, and when they had once got them to own they were asleep, have then used their Interest with the Governor; to have them condemned for it, upon their own Confession; it is certain the Soldiers might very justly have been afraid of this, or something like it, if they had given themselves leave to think; but such sort of people are not used to trouble themselves much with thinking, especially when there is money to be got; the reward promised them to be sure was great, *they had large money given them*, and this was a tempting bait, which there was no withstanding; if they had been really guilty, they would have been more jealous and wary; but knowing themselves not to be guilty, they were under no apprehension of being accused for doing what, they knew, they had not done; or if they had been apprehensive of it, yet still they might believe it much more dangerous of the two, to exasperate the Chief Priests and Rulers by a stiff refusal of their money, and an obstinate adherence to the truth, than to belie themselves under a promise of protection and reward: Neither way indeed was absolutely safe, but they might think the latter the safest, considering the *Jews* were under a necessity of destroying the Credit of the Resurrection, if they would maintain their own; and therefore, if the Soldiers had refused to accept their offer, they would probably have been so enraged at them, that, to prevent the Resurrection being believed, and to be revenged on Them, both at once, they would have accused them to *Pilate*, and suborned Witnesses to swear to the Accusation. Mr. *W.* indeed is of opinion, that, *if there had been a real Resurrection to the Astonishment and Amazement of the Watch, as it is represented in the Gospel, no money could so soon have corrupted them to a false witness, being under such fears of God and of Jesus (b).* But who does not know, that the Hopes and Fears of this World operate, much more strongly, upon the minds of the generality of Mankind, than the Hopes and Fears of the next? We have Instances every day of Men's acting against their Consciences, out of the hopes of gain, to serve a turn, or gratify a passion, or avoid some evil or other which they are afraid of. If we look into the first and sixth Chapters of 2 *Kings*, there are two In-

stances that hit our present purpose exactly; the Persons concerned had all the reason in the world, in both cases, to be under Fears of God and his Prophet, and yet acted directly contrary to what one might reasonably have expected from Men in their Circumstances (c). But to proceed,

If the Rulers of the *Jews* had really believed their own Story, if they had really believed there was any Trick or Imposture, any Theft or Fraud, why were all the proper Methods to detect it neglected? Why was not immediate search made after the suspected Persons? Why were not public Rewards promised, and an Indemnity published to any of the parties concerned, that would come in and make a Discovery of the rest? Were they sure that all the parties concerned in the Imposture were so closely united, that none of them were to be worked on, by the hopes of gain, and the assurance of pardon, to desert the Cause and divulge the Secret? They could not think so, if they believed it an Imposture. They knew the force of money, and had tried its influence on the Person of *Judas*, against Our Lord himself. They gave money then, and succeeded; and why was not something of this kind tried now? Certainly they would have given any thing to have had the Fraud proved, if it could have been done: But it is plain they believed the Fact was true, and were unwilling to have it sifted into and examined, for fear the truth should come out. When the News was brought them, they were at their wits end, their Consciences smote them, they knew not what to say or do, what face to put upon things, so as to maintain their ground, and escape the shame and scandal of having put to death that *Just One*, who now prov'd himself to be, what he said he was, The Son of the most High God; In this hurry of Spirits, they were not at leisure to set down, and think coolly, to contrive a plausible Story; but in their fright and confusion, at a loss how to colour matters over, and ward off the blow that threatened them, from this unlucky incident, before the truth came out, they greedily catch at any thing to give a turn to the affair, and are in so much haste to say something, to prepossess the People with an opinion of the whole business being a Cheat, that they mind not what they say, but rashly and inconsiderately vent this nonsensical insipid Tale. However, bad as it was, it was the only shift they thought on, and they resolved to make use of it, rather than confess the truth, and take shame to themselves.

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(c) If the Reader desires fuller satisfaction upon this point, let him consult the second Chapter of the Ingenious Mr. Lardner's *Vindication of the Miracles wrought by our Saviour, on Jairus's Daughter, The Widow of Naim's Son, and Lazarus.*



## 20 *An Enquiry into the Force of the Objection*

If, after what has been said, we want further proof that the *Jewish* Rulers really believed the Resurrection, though they pretended the contrary, let us enquire how they behaved towards the Apostles, both before the Day of *Pentecost*, and afterwards upon their preaching and publishing it openly in the Temple, and all public places.

We learn from the Gospel History, that the first time *Jesus* appeared to his Disciples in a Body, was on the *first Day in the Evening*, the Day on which He rose, and the Text says, *the Doors of the place, where they assembled, were shut, for fear of the Jews*: And again, when He made His second Appearance eight days after, and satisfy'd the scrupulous *St. Thomas*, it is said, that *then likewise the Doors were shut*: This, I own, is plain proof of their fear and concern, that they expected search would be made after them, to apprehend them; and indeed this was what any reasonable men, in their circumstances, would have expected, though it appears, by what followed, they were in no danger; however, there is nothing surprizing in their endeavouring to keep out of the way, and conceal themselves for the present; they knew what they were charged with, they knew the Keeness and Inveteracy of the *Jews*, and had no reason to believe their Innocence would protect them from the greatest Severities, if they fell into their hands: And besides, they were not yet confirmed and emboldened, as they were afterwards, by the frequent repeated Appearances of their Master: But when they had seen His triumphant Ascension, they instantly took Courage, and during the ten Days that passed betwixt his Ascension and the Descent of the Holy Ghost, *they were continually in the Temple praising and blessing God*. Now if this was fact as I think we are led to believe it was, from what *St. Luke* says at the end of his Gospel, here were *the very Men* whom the *Jews* charged as *Principals* in the Fraud, appearing openly; far were they from concealing themselves, that they resorted daily to the most public places, and shewed themselves to the World, for so many days together, without any Reserve or Disguise; and all this while no notice taken of them, not one of them, that we hear of, laid hold on, and brought before a Magistrate, so much as to be examined upon the fact of which they were accused: It is probable indeed they had not yet begun to proclaim, so loudly as afterwards, the Resurrection of their Master, and His Divine Authority, because they had not yet received, from on high, those Powers which were to confirm and enforce their Testimony, and for which they were to wait at *Jerusalem*, 'till the Day of *Pentecost*. But still, they were the Persons charged with stealing away the Body of Our

Saviour: And is it possible to imagine, that the *Jews* should really believe the Apostles had played them this Trick, which they were at so much pains to prevent, and were sensible was of so much consequence, and yet be at no pains to detect the Impostors, and bring them to condign punishment; but on the contrary, let these very Men, who were charged with being the Contrivers and Managers of this Fraud, appear publicly under their Noses, and yet they meddle with none of them, so far as even to question them on the head? This is to me plain proof, that They were convinced of the Truth, that they believed they should get nothing by an Examination, that too narrow an enquiry would not mend matters, but make them worse, that the Charge of Forgery would fall at last upon themselves, and not upon the Apostles, and therefore it was best for them to let the Story die, if possible, and ask no Questions about it.

But how did they behave afterwards, when the Apostles, having received the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, proceeded to execute their Commission, and proclaim the Fact to the World?

We read in the second of the *Acts*, that St. Peter's first Sermon converted three thousand, and in the Fourth, that the number of Believers was then about five thousand; which increase was owing to a miraculous Cure performed, by St. Peter and St. John as they went up to the Temple, on the Person of a certain Man lame from his Mother's Womb: The Man was generally known, having been constantly used to be *carried and laid at the Gate of the Temple, which was called beautiful, to ask Alms of the People as they went in.* The People all filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened, St. Peter improves this Occasion, and tells them, that *through the Name and Power of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had killed, and whom God had raised from the Dead, and of which he and St. John were witnesses, was this man made whole:* The Chief Priests and Rulers, alarmed at the effect of their preaching, and dreading the consequence, *come upon them with the Captain of the Temple, while they were speaking, and lay hands on them, and put them in hold:* The next Day, they bring them before the High Priest and his Assistants, where they stand boldly to their Assertion, and maintain the same truth over again, that *by the Name of that Jesus whom they crucified, and whom God raised from the dead, this cure was wrought.* What say the Rulers to all this? Why seeing the boldness of Peter and John, and knowing that they had been with Jesus, and perceiving they were unlearned and ignorant men, and beholding the man that was healed standing with them, They marvelled, and could say nothing; but commanding them aside, they enter into consultation what to do in  
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the affair; *that a great miracle was wrought*, they own, *it is not to be denied*, they say, they cannot contradict any thing of what the Apostles had advanced, but the Question is, how to prevent their Doctrine from spreading among the People. This puzzles them heartily; but at last they come to a resolution to *threaten them, that they speak no more to any man in this name*. This being agreed on, the Apostles are called in, and commanded accordingly; But are so far from promising Obedience, that they tell them plainly, they cannot but speak *the things which they have seen and heard*, and appeal to themselves, *whether it be right to hearken unto them rather than unto God*. Upon this they *threaten them again*, and then dismiss them, without doing any thing else; not but that they would have punished them, if they durst, but they were afraid of the People, whose eyes began now to be opened, and that restrained them, when the fear of God would not have done it, though, it is plain, His Hand was visible to them in the whole affair. But to proceed:

The Apostles, upon their dismissal, persisting in the Office they had undertaken, and to which they were commissioned, made a mighty progress, their Fame grew and spread; this nettled the High Priest and his Party; who justly frightened for themselves, at what would be the consequence, if they could not stop their mouths, laid hold on them again, and clapt them in prison; from whence God delivers them by his Angel, and orders them expressly, *to go and stand and speak in the Temple, to the People*; thither they go, and here they are again seized, and brought before the Council: The High Priest, he is Speaker, and by his Speech manifestly betrays their Guilt and Fears, *Did not we straightly command you*, says he, *that you should not teach in this Name? and behold ye have filled Jerusalem with your Doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us*. These Words favor of a guilty conscience, and his talking thus looks as if they were now unwilling to be thought the Authors of Our Lord's Death, and were desirous to shift off the guilt from themselves, at any rate. But St. Peter maintains his Doctrine and his Charge; *The God of our Fathers*, says he, *raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree; Him has God exalted, and we are His Witnesses, and so is also the Holy Ghost*: This put them quite mad with rage and fury, and they resolve to dispatch them at all adventures. *When they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them*.

This seemed to be the general Resolution, when up rises Gamaliel, a Pharisee, a noted Doctor of the Law, of great reputation, and having commanded the Apostles to be put out, he  
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makes a speech to the Assembly; wherein, after enumerating some former Instances of Impostures which had all come to nothing, He advises them *to refrain from these men, lest haply they should fight against God, for if this counsel or work were of men, it would come to nought; but if it were of God, they could not overthrow it*: With this mild and prudent Motion they comply, so far as to quit the design of putting them to death, and, instead of it, only *beat them again, and command that they should not speak in the Name of Jesus, and then let them go*, without proceeding to any thing further.

Now upon the whole, is it possible for any one who reads over, and in the least considers, this Account of their behaviour, to conceive it at all probable, that the *Jewish* Rulers should have believed their own Story, *that the Disciples stole away their Master, and that all that was reported of his Resurrection was Cheat and Imposture*, and at the same time, at such a Crisis, when they were so nearly concerned to do it, when such Numbers were giving into the delusion, never take one step to undeceive them, and vindicate their own allegation? Would not any men, in these circumstances, have tried all ways to make out what they believed to be the truth? Would not one expect to hear evidence called, of some sort or other; to have had the Apostles examined and cross-examined; or at least to have had the Soldiers summoned to make their appearance, and publicly give their testimony to what they knew of the fact? But instead of this, there is nothing done towards detecting the Imposture, but only the Disciples are threatened, and scourged, and commanded to say nothing of the matter: Certainly this looks as if they were conscious that their own Story would not bear the telling, and that therefore they had nothing else left for it, but to hush up matters as well as they could, and stifle the truth if possible.

It cannot be denied, with any color of reason, but that the *Jews* might have prosecuted the Disciples as vigorously as they pleased, in order to a discovery of the Fraud, if there had been any, without any hindrance from the *Roman* Governor; it is plain they were at liberty to do as they thought fit; they took up the Apostles, they beat them, they let them go, just as they had a mind, so that there is no appearance of *Pilate's* interposing to screen the Apostles; but quite the contrary. Nay, if he had been so disposed, it is evident the Chief Priests and Rulers knew how to intimidate him; they would certainly have threatened him, for countenancing this Fraud of the Resurrection, and endeavouring to protect the Authors of it, in some such manner as before, when they found him inclined to release Our  
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Saviour; there would have been the same reason, to charge him with a Neglect of *Cæsar's* Interests, in the one Case as in the other; and if they had done so, it's reasonable to believe it would have had the same effect upon him, and have made him deliver up the Apostles to their resentment.

For I persuade my self it will not be pretended, that the Order Mr. *W.* speaks of, as given by *Tiberius*, had yet reach'd *Judea*: The Emperor's Command was this, *Not to molest or call in question the Disciples of Jesus*; and it is supposed to have been issued, upon his receiving a Letter from *Pilate*, giving an Account of Our Saviour's Life and Actions, of the Miracles wrought by him and his Disciples, and acquainting him particularly with their Character, what sort of Persons they were, and how they behaved themselves. In this Letter, to be sure, *Pilate*, or whoever was the Author of it, represented them as honest inoffensive People, all of the lower sort, without any body of consequence on their side; who might talk indeed sometimes of a temporal Kingdom, which they expected their Master was to erect, but had no thoughts of meddling to do any thing towards it themselves, 'till Christ should come down to them again from Heaven, and put himself at their head; and that in the mean time they liv'd peaceably and quietly, in submission to the present Government, without plotting any thing against it. Thus much at least must have been said, or the Emperor would never have been inclin'd to favor them: And it is not likely that *Pilate* would write thus, 'till some time after the Day of *Pentecost*, when the Apostles enter'd Openly upon their Office, and, by the Power of God that was with them, having converted many thousands, instead of growing insolent upon their Success, or abusing their Interest with the new Converts to raise disturbance in the State, they all behaved themselves with so much Sobriety and Moderation, as left no room for the Governor to suspect them of any mutinous design, or be in the least apprehensive that the *Roman* Government would be endanger'd, by the Resurrection of *Jesus* being reported and believed. But there's no occasion to insist upon this point; for if ever there was such a Letter of *Pilate*, or such an Order of *Tiberius*, it's beyond all dispute, there was no regard paid to such Order, for a good while after the Apostles began their Ministry.

If I am not very much mistaken, there never was a grosser misrepresentation of a Fact, than what we meet with in the passage here refer'd to in Mr. *W.* his sixth Discourse; he there tells us, \* "That *Pilate* for the sake of Rule over the *Jews* was a  
 " Countenancer of every faction among them; and particular-  
 " ly *Tiberius*, upon *Pilate's* representation of the matter, soon  
 " com-

\* Page 36.

“ commanded that the Disciples of *Jesus* should not be molested.” These are his very words, and any Man upon reading them would conclude, that *Pilate* had by Letter communicated his politicks to *Tiberius*, and upon his acquainting him that, to maintain his Rule, he countenanc’d every different Faction among the *Jews*, the Emperor had enter’d into his Scheme, and so far approv’d it, as to command, for the same Reason, that the Christians should be countenanc’d, and the Disciples of *Jesus* not molested : This is the plain obvious meaning of this passage ; whereas the truth was quite otherwise, and Mr. *W.* knew it was so, unless he has found out some other Letter of *Pilate* to *Tiberius*, besides that on which he formerly wrote a Dissertation under the Name of *Myſtagogus* ; for he there asserts point blank the contrary to what he maintains here, and all the Evidence he brings to prove that there was such a Letter at all, shews at the same time what must have been the Contents of it, viz. An Account of our Saviour’s Life and Actions, of the Miracles that he wrought, and what extraordinary things befel him and his Disciples ; And that if ever there was such an Order of *Tiberius* in their favour, it was truly the result of a full Conviction that our Lord was a Divine Person, which Conviction was so strong upon him, that he mov’d the Senate to have him Deify’d, and tho’ he could not carry that point, yet he was all his Life after against persecuting the Christians.

Every tittle of this Mr. *W.* maintains in the abovemention’d Dissertation (a), and therefore he had better have let alone saying any thing of it here, because it only serves to prove him guilty of the grossest prevarication ; for if he has alter’d his mind, and now thinks that Dissertation good for nothing, he is arguing against Christianity from Circumstances which, *he knows*, are nothing to the purpose ; and if he is still of the same opinion as when he wrote that piece, *he must be conscious* that he has set matters in a false light now ; and there is this unlucky Circumstance besides, unlucky to him I mean, that he has furnish’d his hated adversaries the *Clergy*, with at least one important Witness against himself, in favor of Christianity, which it may be they would have never thought of, if he had not put them in mind of it. But to proceed in our Evidence.

If we had no other proof, *Gamaliel*, in his Speech before recited, says enough to convince any man, beyond all Contra-

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(a) Entitled, *Dissertatio de Pontii Pilati ad Tiberium Epistolâ circa res Jesu Christi Gestas. Per Myſtagogum.*



dition, that the *Jewish* Council, at least the Majority of them, believed not one single word of the Story they had publish'd with reference to our Lord's Resurrection: He was in the right to have the Apostles put out before he began; it certainly was not fit for them to hear such a plain concession in their favor; For what is his Argument? *Refrain*, says he, *from these men*, lay aside your intended ill purposes against them, *lest haply ye fight against God*, for if *this Counsel or work be of God*, ye cannot overthrow it. Now what is this Counsel or Work of which *Gamaliel* speaks? Is it not the fact of Christ's Resurrection? the truth of which the Apostles were by Divine Commission endeavouring to establish, and for asserting which, the Chief Priests and Rulers were so exasperated at them, that they resolved to put them to death. The meaning then of his Words is this, If God has interposed, and done these great Wonders, which are reported, in the Person of this Man, you cannot overthrow the Cause which God espouses, and therefore take heed what you do, for fear, if it should be thus, ye should fight against God. But how comes it to pass, if he believ'd it a Cheat, that he was in any suspense whether God was concern'd in it or not? He certainly knew, and this was a plain confession, that the tale they vented in the beginning, was of their own contriving, and without any foundation; And his talking in this manner, with what followed upon it, is a direct proof, that the far greater part, then and there present, believed not one Syllable of the fact they had reported. For it is said that *they agreed* to this reasoning of his, and thereupon quitted their former cruel purpose.

It matters not what or who *Gamaliel* was, whether in the Plot with the Apostles, as some have represented him, or out of it; be he what he would, the Argument is the same, for they were not all in a Plot with the Apostles; and what influence could such reasoning as this possibly have on a set of Men, who believed *the Disciples came by Night, and stole away the Body while the Soldiers slept*? If they believ'd the Apostles to be Cheats, it could not admit of a Debate, whether the Work was of Men or of God; and they would certainly have urged against him, if they had thought it worth while to make any reply to such a silly Speech, that there could be no danger of fighting against God in this case, because they knew it to be a trick and imposture of Men; whereas on the contrary, they own the justness of his reasoning, and, in part at least, come over to his side; which could never have happen'd, if they had not been Conscious that all the trick and imposture, all the lying and falshood, was on their side of the Question. There's no ac-  
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counting for the Resolution they came to, in consequence of *Gamaliel's* Argument, upon any other supposition.

Thus then, I think, it is evident, as evident as a thing of this kind can be, that the Chief Priests and Rulers, tho' so obstinately set upon opposing Christ and Christianity, did yet, in truth and reality, believe the fact of the Resurrection, whatever Pretences they made to the contrary; and if this be allowed, it's an undeniable consequence, that they would, in all probability, have acted just as they did, let the Proof of the Fact have been what it would.

After such a glaring Instance of Men's acting in direct Contradiction to the fullest and strongest convictions, it seems needless to attempt a formal reply to that part of the Objection, which insists upon the proposing such Evidence, as would have been sufficient to convince them, whether they would or no. For we see the *Jews* were convinced, whether they would or no, but acted, for all that, in direct opposition to their convictions; so that the meaning of this demand, if it means any thing, must be this, that the Evidence should have been such as would not only have forced their Conviction, but have forc'd them to a suitable conduct in consequence of their Inward persuasion: What sort of evidence this must have been, I know not; I think I have shewn, that the Evidence propos'd in the Objection would not have done it; for if they really and truly believ'd the Fact upon the Evidence as it was, and yet acted the part they did, there's no room to say, that the fears and apprehensions; which would have risen in their Minds in Consequence of their conviction, would have operated so strongly, as effectually to deter them from making any opposition to Christ and his Doctrine: I own indeed that such fears and apprehensions for themselves, if they opposed the Truth, might have been reasonably expected, in such a Case as this, where they really believed it; but then it was as reasonable to expect them, upon supposition of their Conviction in one way, as of their Conviction in another; for their Fears must be the result of their Conviction, and of nothing else; and therefore, supposing them convinc'd, no matter how, if they were not so frightened; if they were under the influence of passions and prejudices strong enough to overbalance their Fears, or draw off their Attention, so as to prevent their making, and weighing those conclusions, which sober minds would have come to upon a Conviction; in these Circumstances, it's reasonable to think, that their passions and prejudices would have had the same effect, in whatever way they had been convinced. But there's little occasion to argue this Point, which is supported by daily expe-



rience: We have frequent examples of Men's Faith and Practice running directly counter to each other, in matters of the last importance; and if we had not this surprising Instance, in the case of the *Jews*, which we have been now considering, yet there are others enough upon record, of this very People, to put the thing beyond all dispute. (a)

In short, it is certainly true, that when the evidence of a Fact or Proposition rises to a certain Pitch, if then our Passions and Prejudices are so strong and predominant, that tho' the Evidence convinces our Judgment, and engages our Assent, yet it does not incline us to act in such manner, as in reason we ought upon such a belief; when this is the case, it's highly probable, not to say absolutely certain, that no Evidence would be sufficient, to master the force of our vicious habits and prepossessions; And this I take to be the true meaning of that Expression of our Saviour, in the Parable of *Dives* and *Lazarus*, *Those who hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

But waving what has been offer'd upon this Head, that our Adversaries may have no room to complain, let us set aside what has been now said, to shew that it is probable an alteration in the Evidence would have made no alteration in the Conduct of the *Jews*; And suppose the clean contrary, and then try what will be the consequence of such a Supposition. Suppose then that our Lord had shewn himself publicly after his Resurrection, as it is said he ought, and that such an Appearance had made so deep an Impression on the minds of all the People, that they had unanimously believ'd in him, and received him as their Messiah; yet still, I assert, they would have been very far from embracing true genuine Christianity, upon the real plan of it. As for the Scribes and Pharisees, the Chief Priests and Rulers, it is my opinion, they would never have received and owned him as the Messiah upon any terms, as long as it was possible for them to avoid it. For considering how matters stood betwixt him and them; That He had inveighed against them and their whole Conduct, and all their darling Principles and Practices, with the greatest warmth and eagerness, thro' the whole Course of his Ministry; and They, in return, had treated him with all the Contempt and Cruelty, that Rage and Malice could invent; in these Circumstances, for their own Interest and Safety, they would certainly, to the utmost of their

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(a) See the second Chapter of Mr. Lardner's *Vindication* before referred to.

power, have opposed the acknowledging his Title to a Character, which, according to the then opinion of the whole Nation, gave him a right to the Sovereignty, and consequently would transfer the Administration into the hands of a Person, under whom the least they could expect, was to be immediately disgraced, and turned out of all employment. However, Mr. *W.* seems to think that they and the whole People would have received him as their Messiah; he tells us, p. 16. *It was the condition of the Sealed Covenant, that if Jesus rose from the dead in the presence of the Chief Priests upon their opening the Seals of the Sepulchre, at the time appointed, then he was to be acknowledg'd to be the Messiah;* this was the test they had fixed on whereby to try his Messiahship. And p. 22. he says, that *A Manifestation of Christ risen afterwards to the Chief Priests, would have been equivalent to their presence at, and sight of the Miracle.* So that it is his opinion, that if Christ had appeared publicly, the Jews would have stood to the condition upon their part, and have own'd him for their Messiah: Be it so, I shall not dispute it with him; But if the People had received him as the Messiah, it must undoubtedly have been according to their own notions and expectations about that Person.

What those were is well known, that they expected the Messiah to erect a temporal Kingdom, and not only deliver them from a state of Slavery and Subjection, but carry on his Conquests over the whole Earth, and reduce all the Nations of it to his Obedience. This was an Expectation calculated to flatter the Pride and Vanity of any People, but particularly of this, who had been long used to consider themselves as the special Favourites of Heaven, and look down with an insolent Contempt upon the rest of Mankind; to a People of this Complexion the Yoke of Servitude must be exquisitely gauling, and it is no wonder they gladly and generally cherished a Perswasion, that the time would come, when they, in their turn, should be even with their Conquerors, and reign over those who at present had the Mastery over them; this was a pleasing thought, all the Passions of human Nature conspir'd to persuade them; that this delightful Dream would shortly be a Reality; this they were firmly convinc'd of, and their Hopes were at the highest just about this time: Now, if at this Crisis our Lord had shewn himself publickly in *Jerusalem*, risen from the dead the third day after his Crucifixion, and the People had been generally persuaded of the Truth of so miraculous an Event, and, in consequence of their Conviction, had concluded him to be the Deliverer they look'd for; there would have been no such thing as keeping them within any bounds, they would no longer have kept



kept any terms with their Masters, but immediately have thrown off all obedience to the *Romans*.

This, I verily think, would have been the Case. And the Chief Priests and Rulers were of the same Opinion; upon occasion of some extraordinary Miracles which Christ wrought in his Life time, they expressly declare their apprehensions, *What do we? For this Man does many Miracles, if we suffer him to go on, all Men will believe on him, and the Romans will take away both our Place and Nation:* And their soliciting *Pilate* with so much eagerness for a Guard, with what they say upon that occasion, is a plain Proof that they thought it of the last Importance to prevent the Disciples from stealing away the Body, and shews clearly, they were afraid, if any such thing should happen, and the People be made to believe he was risen, that all would immediately be in an uproar, and it would be impossible to hold them in from committing the greatest Extravagancies. But perhaps it may be said, “there was a Circumstance in “the Character of the Messiah they expected, which would effectually have prevented all Confusion; He was to be their “General and Commander, they were to fight under his “signs, and he was to put himself voluntarily at their Head to “conduct them to Victory and Triumph; and therefore if “Christ had not done so, there would have been no stir or “bustle, all would have been quiet.

Now there is one Instance in the Gospel of *St. John*, which is enough to end all Dispute upon this point: We are there told that upon our Saviour’s feeding five thousand Men, with five Loaves and two small Fishes, they who had seen the Miracle, come instantly to this Conclusion, *This is of a truth that Prophet which should come into the World:* Upon which our Lord perceiving that *they would come and take him by force to make him a King*, had nothing else left for it, but to retire, and get out of the way; for there is no such thing as talking a mad Populace into reason when under the Influence of a frantic Conceit: *St. Matthew* likewise informs us, that *Jesus*, after working a Miracle of the same sort, when he was retired, and got off with his Disciples, began to ask them what was the general Opinion about him, what they could gather, from the course of their Observation, that the People thought of him; upon which they tell him that *some said He was John the Baptist, others that He was Elias, and others that He was one of the old Prophets risen again:* But, says our Saviour, *whom say ye that I am?* *St. Peter* immediately answers, *the Christ of God.* This was right. But what says our Saviour to it? He directly gives them a *strict Commandment not to tell any Man that thing.* But why? The reason

reason follows, *because the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected, &c.* Whereas if the Jews conceived this Notion of him, he would be so far from suffering, or being rejected, as it was expedient he should be, that the People would set him at their Head, and make him a King whether he would or no. Here then we have Christ's own Testimony in favour of my Assertion; and indeed there is no likelihood, that the People would have scrupulously adhered to every single Circumstance in the Character of the Messiah, as they had pre-conceived it, or have made any Distinction, if he had been but among them, betwixt His leading them, and their hurrying Him along with them whither they had a mind.

And from this Account of things we are helped to a reason for the Conduct of Providence, in not permitting the Apostles to enter upon their Commission, and openly proclaim the Resurrection of their Master, till after his Ascension, and for not communicating, till then, those Powers from on high, which were to accompany their Testimony; for if such Numbers had been convinced, as we find there were, directly, upon the Preaching of the Apostles, and they had owned him as the Messiah, and our Lord had been then upon Earth; or they had believed he was, the first Question would have been, Where is He? And their first Business, to find him out if possible; and, in all likelihood, a general uproar among them would have been the consequence of their Conviction: The out-cry would have been presently raised, *The Messiah is among us, and we are in quest of Him*; and Multitudes would have instantly joined themselves to the first Converts; for when a tumult is once raised, be the occasion of it what it will, in a populous City, there is no knowing where it will stop, so catching is the Infection, and especially when the Cry, that is given out, hits the Humour and coincides with the Passions of the People; which would have been the Case here. In these Circumstances, it would have been equally dangerous for Christ to have shewn himself, or absconded; if He had appeared, they would have proclaimed him King; and if He had continued to abscond, they would have fallen foul on the Apostles as a Set of Deceivers, who told them of a Messiah that was not to be found, and wrought Miracles to delude them, by the Power of the Devil.

Considering and judging of things upon the Principles of human Reason, this seems to be a natural Account of what would really have happened, and, according to all the Views we can have, the best way to prevent it, was to let our Lord be first ascended, before his Messiahship was publicly preached; that so having no Prospect, at present, of getting him  
among



among them, they might not think of erecting a temporal Dominion at this Juncture, but defer it to some properer Season: And it is certain they were for a great while fully perswaded, that such a Season would come, some time or other. How long the *Jewish* Converts to Christianity continued in the Belief of a temporal Kingdom to be erected by the Messiah, I know not; but the Opinion was not confined to them only, it spread it self among the *Gentiles* likewise, and such an Expectation of Christ's reigning upon Earth still subsists, among some few of us even at this day, though a little varied from what was then the Opinion of the *Jews*.

It is to no purpose to say, "that our Saviour might have appeared, and all these Extravagancies have been prevented, even though the People had universally received him, if he had but acquainted them that they were mistaken in their Opinion about him, and given them a true Account of himself, and the Errand that he came upon:" For it is evident, as I have already shewn, that, in *His Judgment*, all he could say to them would not do. The Notion of a temporal Kingdom made so essential a Part of their Idea of the Messiah, and was so closely united to the sound of that Word, that it was next to impossible for them to separate the two, or hear the one, without instantly thinking of the other also: If then He had told them plainly, that He had no design of interposing in temporal matters; that His Commission was of quite another nature, and that they must lay aside all expectation of a temporal Deliverance by his means; if he had dealt thus plainly with them, and they had believed him upon this Article, I will not pretend to say positively what Conclusion they would have come to about him; whether they would have thought he was *John the Baptist*, or *Elias*, or one of the old *Prophets risen again*, or the like; or whether they would have rejected him altogether as a Deceiver, who performed Wonders by a Communication with *Beelzebub*: But whatever they had thought of him, this I am sure of, they would never have conceived him to be the Messiah: And yet it was highly expedient, if they received him at all, that they should believe him to be *that Prophet, and not look for another*; that so they might not be continually liable, as they had been, to Imposture and Delusion; but live quietly and peaceably, observing all that our Saviour had taught and commanded them; but of this there could have been no security, if they had expected another Messiah after him; for if any Deceiver had arisen among them, and set up in a way agreeable to their Notions and Expectations, they would probably have followed him, and quite and clean forgot all the Precepts and Instructions of *Jesus*.

It is very remarkable, how warily and gradually Our Lord proceeded with the Disciples and Apostles themselves, who believed him to be the Messiah, and for a long while expected the very same things from him, that the *Jews* did from their Messiah; How he opened himself to them in some things, Step by Step, and wholly concealed others from them, *because they were not able to bear them.* As long as he continued with them, a temporal Kingdom ran constantly in their Heads; one of the last things they say to him is, *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?* What is His Reply? *It is not for you to know the Times and the Seasons.* Instead of taking occasion from hence to explain himself to them upon that Head, he chuses to leave them in suspense. He knew, if he should then make a full Discovery to them, how things were to be conducted, it would be a great Disappointment, and could not but know what Effect such a Disappointment would have upon them: A former one which they met with, *viz.* that of his being crucified contrary to their Expectation, tho' he had warned them of it beforehand over and over, sunk their Spirits to such a degree, and wrought so upon them, that they gave up all for gone, and even concluded him to be an Impostor; as might easily be shewn, if there was occasion for it. All things therefore considered, he thought it best to decline giving them a direct Answer, and instead of it, promises them, that in a few Days they should be endued with Power from on high, and in the mean-time orders them back to *Jerusalem*, there to wait, 'till this should happen. The chief Reason perhaps, why such an Order was given them, was this, That those who were the greatest Enemies of Christ and his Followers, might be Witnesses to the Miracle wrought on the Persons of the Apostles; but I cannot help thinking there was another Reason besides, which moved Our Saviour, jointly with the other, to command them not to stir from *Jerusalem*, 'till they had received the Powers he spoke of: Flush'd, as no doubt they were, upon the sight of Christ's triumphant Ascension, and in all probability concluding nothing less than that he was gone to fetch Succours from above, to establish him on his Throne, they might have been in danger, thro' human Frailty, in this Interval, before the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon them, of undertaking some rash inconsiderate Attempt, much to the prejudice of Christianity, if they had not been separated from the main Body of the Brethren, and sent strait back into the City, into the midst of their Enemies, where the Fear they were in of the *Jews* might keep them a little in Awe, be a ballance to their Hopes and Passions, and incline them to wait quietly for a few Days, 'till they saw what became of their Master's Promises.



### 34 *An Enquiry into the Force of the Objection*

But let us see how Matters were managed afterwards, when the Apostles had received the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, and, under His Direction, began to publish boldly the Resurrection of *Jesus*; and preach his Messiahship to the *Jews*: We do not find that they told them in exprefs terms, That they were to give up all Hopes of the Messiah's ever doing any thing for them in a temporal way, as they had groundlessly imagined; No; if this had been said, I dare say none of them would have owned him as the Messiah, for this was a thing that, according to all their Notions, they could never have conceived; and therefore, if we may be allowed to guess at the Reasons of the Divine Conduct, from the Temper of the *Jews*, and the method of proceeding with them, it seems easy to account for St. *Peter's* addressing them in the manner which he did in the 3d of the *Acts*, and without entering into a particular Detail of Circumstances, acquainting them, in general Terms, of a future Event which would certainly happen, and which, at that Instant, they might apply and interpret, if they pleased, in their own way: *When the time of Refreshing* (says he) *shall come from the Presence of the Lord, He will send Jesus, who before was preach'd unto You*: He tells them indeed, that *the Heaven must receive him, 'till the time of the Restitution of all things, of which God had spoken by the Mouth of his Prophets*; but he does not tell them how long it will be to this Time; he does not say that it will not be 'till the last Judgment, or near it, when *the fulness of the Gentiles shall be brought in, and Israel be converted and saved*\*; but only in the general that it will be, tho' not yet, and, without fixing the Time, leaves them at liberty to apply what he say upon the Return of the Messiah, in a sense agreeable to their own Notions and Expectations about him: *the time of Refreshing, and of the Restitution of all things*, they would probably understand to be a Time when the Messiah should appear again in their favour, to execute what was not yet accomplished, to deliver them from their present Subjection and Dependency, and raise them to a state of Sovereignty and Dominion above what they ever enjoy'd; the Words would admit of this Acceptation, and I am apt to believe they took them so.

Thus far then I think is clear, that it was expedient for the *Jews*, if they received Our Lord at all, to receive him as their Messiah; and consequently it was necessary he should be propos'd to them under that Character; and if there was no likelihood of their receiving him when so propos'd, unless they were allowed to conceive of him in some measure agreeably to their

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\* As St. Paul expresses himself to the Romans, Cap. xi. 25, 26.

old Prejudices and Prepossessions, as to the worldly Advantages they expected from him; and if it was the most rational way of proceeding in this, as in all other cases, to gain the main Point first, and endeavour afterwards, as opportunity offer'd, to correct their Mistakes, and remove their Prejudices, by degrees; if this be allowed, it will appear, that there could not be a better way taken, than what was, to propose Our Saviour to them under that Character, and, as far as possible, prevent all Inconveniencies. For, suppose he had appear'd openly and publicly in *Jerusalem*, after his Resurrection, in the Character of the Messiah, and been owned and confessed as such, and, to prevent Confusion, had interposed his Authority with the People, and enjoined them to commit no Disorders; yet it was impossible for a Person to reside, tho' but for a few Days, among them in that Character, without the *Roman* Governor's taking Umbrage at it; for the Multitude would certainly have followed him wherever he went, Men of all ranks would have been crowding to make their Court to him; and if, to guard against all Events, the President of the Province had given Orders to seize on *Jesus*, the *Jews* would undoubtedly have protected their Messiah, and in the heat of their Resentment, to revenge such an Indignity offer'd to their King and Nation, have run to Arms directly, and renounced all future Subjection to the *Romans*.

But let us stretch our Fancy, and suppose, that *Jesus* upon his coming out of the Grave, in the presence of the Chief-Priests and Rulers, and all the People, to prevent the ill Consequences of his continuing upon Earth, had ascended streight towards Heaven in their sight; and, when he was got out of their reach, had with an audible Voice addressed them, and himself been the Preacher of his Messiahship; That, to lay their Passions, and prevent their immediately running into Mutiny and Rebellion, he had told them expressly that he was now going to leave them; yet probably he would have subjoined some qualifying Circumstance, much to the same purpose with what *St. Peter* said, *that when the time of Refreshing or Restitution came, he would then appear again*; something of this kind was expedient to be said. Now suppose that Matters had been thus conducted, and the whole Nation, Priests and People, moved with this pompous manner of Proceeding, answerable to their Conceptions of the Messiah, had received Him as such: If a few Days after the Ascension, the Holy Ghost had descended on some of them, as he did on the Apostles, and they had all been confirm'd in a Belief of *Jesus* being their Messiah, had publicly declared him to be so, and with one Voice united in confidently reporting the Facts of his Resurrection and Ascension, and had undauntedly



## 50 *An Enquiry into the Force of the Objection*

stood to the Truth of them, What must the *Romans* have thought when they received an Account of this Affair? Having been informed, from good hands, what the *Jews* expected of their Messiah; how uneasy under a foreign Yoke; and how disposed to revolt, and shake it off; they would have considered the whole as a Contrivance of the Chief-Priests and Rulers, the politic and intriguing Heads of the Nation, to try the Humours, to raise the Passions, and keep up the Spirits of the People, 'till some Plot they had on foot against the *Roman* Government should be ripe for Execution.

No doubt the *Romans* would have suspected a Plot, and have believed that the Men of Power and Interest, of Credit and Dignity in the State, had formed a Design to raise a Rebellion; for considering how the People were prepared, that they were all persuaded they had seen their Messiah, and buoy'd themselves up with the Promise made to them of his returning; it was natural to apprehend that the Contrivers and Managers of this Affair intended, as soon as Measures were duly concerted, to lay hold on some public Occasion, when the People were assembled in great Numbers, to produce some Person or other, whom they would present to them as their Messiah returned, and whom they had properly instructed for that purpose; or else, which perhaps might answer their end as well, assure them that the Messiah had appeared to them, and given them Orders to acquaint his People, That it was his Will and Pleasure they should immediately begin an Attack upon their Enemies; and He Himself would shortly be with them: It was natural, I say, for the *Romans* to have suspected something of this kind; and though some time had passed without any Attempt being made against the Interest of the Empire, yet they would certainly have concluded that it was design'd, and that the only Reason why nothing had been done was, because the Conspirators were not ready. No Protestations, on the part of the *Jews* with respect to their peaceable Intentions, would have been regarded; the *Romans* would have thought their Suspicions too well founded to be removed by fair Speeches, and formal Declarations of Duty and Submission, which they would have conceived as intended only to lull them into a fatal Security, and gain Time 'till their Enemies had strengthen'd themselves, and prepared matters for a Revolt. No account would have been made at *Rome* of the Miracles which the *Jews* talk'd of; their own Interest, and an eager Desire to maintain their Power and Authority over a conquer'd Nation, would have quickly helped them to a Solution, by resolving all into Fraud or Magic, by means of which, the Heathen Nations then, as well as others since, believed that very wonderful things might be perform'd. Under

Under these Apprehensions, Orders would have been presently dispatched into the neighbouring Provinces, for Forces to march into *Judea* to suppress the growing Rebellion, and strict Command given, to secure all the Persons of most weight and influence in the Country; the Consequence of which must have been this, that the *Jews* perceiving what Preparations were making against them, and concluding that their Nation was mark'd out for Destruction, would have thought it high time to stand upon their Defence.

The Men of Power, dreading the Resentment of the *Romans*, would have armed the People to oppose them; and the People, enrag'd at an Attempt (as they would have thought it) to make them Slaves entirely, would have readily followed the Direction of their Rulers; and no doubt but all Sorts would have comforted themselves with a Persuasion, that the Messiah would appear for their Deliverance, when unjustly attacked, and reduced to these Extremities. Thus a War would have been begun, a Struggle must have commenced betwixt the two Nations; for the Mastery; and whatever had been the issue of the Contest, true Christianity must, in all likelihood, have unavoidably bled to Death, through the Wounds it would have received in that Quarrel; for if the *Romans* had succeeded, Christianity must have sunk with the Jewish State and Nation; and if the *Jews* had succeeded, tho' the Messiah had not appeared, they would have argued from their Success that He was virtually, tho' not personally, present among them, and satisfying themselves with this Distinction, have proceeded in their Scheme of erecting a Fifth Monarchy.

IV. After what has been said, there's but little Occasion to enlarge upon the Fourth thing proposed, *viz.* To shew, that supposing Christ had appeared publicly, let the Manner of his Appearing have been what it would, there would, notwithstanding, with respect to the Gentile World, have been full as many, if not more and greater Difficulties and Objections against Christianity, than there are, or were, in the way that things were managed. And besides, this Point has been so well and fully handled in the Pamphlet before mentioned at the beginning of this Discourse, that it is quite needless to dwell long upon this Particular; and therefore I shall be very brief upon this Head, and say no more than is absolutely necessary to bring the Argument to a fair Conclusion.

Waving then all other Considerations, let us see how Matters would have look'd to the rest of the World, upon any of the following Suppositions.

*First,*



*First*, Suppose that our Lord had shewn himself openly to the *Jews*, and the *Jews* had for all that continued obstinately to reject him, What must the rest of the World have thought about the Affair, if they had thought it worth their while to think at all about it? Here are the Apostles, upon one side, asserting positively that their Master shewed himself openly, and the *Jews*, upon the other, as positively denying the fact, or at least affirming, that there was indeed a Person appeared, who called himself by the same Name, and was something like him, but was found upon enquiry not to be the same. What must distant Nations have thought, what Conclusion could they have come to, from this contradictory Evidence, this Opposition of Witnesses? Again,

Suppose the *Jews* had universally received our Saviour as the Messiah, according to their Notions of the Messiah, which I have shewn they must have done, if they had received him at all; what would have been the Consequence? In all probability it would have occasioned a War betwixt them and the *Romans*; this I think is the natural and direct Consequence, and if so, the whole Affair would have been set in a political Light, and look'd upon merely as a Contrivance to spirit up the Nation to a revolt, and under the specious Name of Liberty, forward and support the ambitious designs of some aspiring Men. Thus it would have look'd to the People, in other Countries, then alive, and in this shape it would have appeared in History to all posterity. Nay, tho' an open Rupture had been prevented by the timely precaution of the *Romans*, or the timorousness of the *Jews*, yet still the whole Story of our Saviour would have been considered as a Stratagem, cunningly devised, to raise the Passions and try the Humor of the Nation, by some Persons who underhand were meditating a revolt. And thus Christianity would have been represented as a Plot to undermine the Government; whereas in the way that things were ordered, there could be no suspicion of a Plot, because the cunning intriguing Heads were all upon the other side of the Question:

But lastly, suppose the whole Body of the Nation had embraced Christianity upon the true real plan of it, which, I think, it's certain they never would have done, yet *their* embracing it, would of it self have been a powerful Argument with the rest of the World, for them to reject it as not worth their Notice. For it is well known how the *Jews* stood in the opinion of the rest of Mankind; their general Character was that of a proud, obstinate, particular, unaccountable People, who despised all the rest of the World, and consequently met the

the fate they deserved, were despised by all the rest in their turn : And we may leave any one to judge, whether such a People's receiving a Doctrine would have been any recommendation to others to embrace it.

To remove the Difficulties, which those, who call for stronger evidence in proof of Christianity, are necessarily involved in, they may possibly after all recur to Almighty Power, and argue, That since God has the Hearts of all Men in his Hands, and can turn them which way he pleases, the Objections raised against their Scheme, are no Reasons why it should not have been followed ; because Infinite Wisdom could have contrived a way, which Almighty Power could have executed, to bear down all the Prejudices of mankind, and force their Assent to the truth, in spite of all their passions and prepossessions : But if this is a sufficient solution to the Difficulties urged against their Scheme, it is certainly full as good an one to the Objections brought against us ; For tho' we own and confess, that nothing is too hard for Infinite Wisdom, and Almighty Power to accomplish ; and are far from asserting, that God cannot, if He pleases, act in an irresistible manner upon the Minds, the Wills, and Affections of His Creatures, yet, if the difficulties upon their side be but equal to the difficulties upon Ours, we may safely defy them to shew a reason, why God, or indeed any rational Agent who had determined to act, or interpose in an affair of any kind, should change one method of proceeding for another in no respect preferable.

Upon the whole, the Foundation of our Religion, our Lord's Resurrection I mean, standeth sure and unshaken, in spite of all that's urged to the contrary, in the Objection I have been now considering ; For if the Evidence, on which our Faith is built, was and is sufficient to convince any sober unprejudiced Person ; if, this being so, neither *Jews* then had, nor we now have, any right or reason to desire more ; And tho' more had been given, if the *Jews* would, notwithstanding, have either acted just the same part they did, or else if they had received *Jesus* as the Messiah, have done it in a way agreeable to their own Notions and Expectations about that Person ; And lastly, If the difficulties and objections against Christianity, instead of being diminished, would have been rather multiplied and increased upon the Scheme proposed ; If this be a true Account of things, there can be no difficulty in the Circumstance mentioned by *St. Peter*, that Christ shewed himself after His Resurrection to some and not to others, *to Chosen Witnesses*, and *not to all the People*.



And now perhaps it might not be amiss, to make some Remarks upon the Manner in which the present Controversy has been managed; but as I have already exceeded the Bounds I at first prescribed my self, I shall say nothing of the insipid Drollery, and rude Burlesque that has been made use of, upon this Occasion; nor enter into an Enquiry how far it may be proper to introduce Raillery and Ridicule into Religious Controversies; But this I am sure of, and it deserves our Notice, being supported by the Authority of that great Master of Wit (a), whom so many have mistaken, and therefore awkwardly mimicked, That Buffoonery ought to be excluded from every Argument; and before we take upon us to laugh out aloud at the Practice or Opinions of others, we should try matters by our selves, and see whether they will bear a Laugh. For, as He justly observes, *Ridicule can never lie against Reason; and He who laughs wrong, is himself ridiculous, and bears a double share of Ridicule* (b). So that this Point all Sides are agreed in, however widely they may differ in other matters, That as it is the Mark of a weak Mind, to believe without Enquiry, so it is the distinguishing Badge of a Fool to laugh without Reason.

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(a) Lord Shaftesbury. (b) See Letter concerning Enthusiasm, p. 11. Essay on Wit and Humour, Part 2, Sect. 1. p. 83. and Part 4. Sect. 3. p. 149.

F I N I S.

