

THE
Theological Magazine,

OR

S Y N O P S I S

OF

MODERN RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT.

ON A NEW PLAN.

PROVE ALL THINGS, HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD.

Paul.

“ I observe that old men seldom have any advantage of new discoveries; because they are beside a way of thinking they have been long used to. Resolved, if ever I live to years, that I will be impartial to hear the reasons of all pretended discoveries, and receive them, if rational, how long soever I have been used to another way of thinking.”

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all in all; and of speculative opinions (which is the fashionable name now for doctrinal sentiments) as things of very little consequence. Thus, by placing the doctrine of the gospel at a distance from practical godliness, the unwary are led to conclude, that it has no sort of dependence on them. The effect of this has been, that others, from an attachment to doctrinal principles, have run to the contrary extreme. They write and preach in favour of doctrines, and what are called the privileges of the gospel, and utterly neglect those subjects which immediately relate to practice. In some places you may hear experimental religion extolled above all things, even at the expence of christian practice and of sound doctrine. But surely, the gospel ought not to be mangled and torn to pieces. Take away its doctrines, and you take away the food of God's people. Insist on them alone, and you transform us into religious epicures. And you may as well talk of the pleasure you experience in eating, when you are actually deprived of sustenance, or of the exquisite enjoyments of a state of total inactivity, as boast of experimental religion, unconnected with doctrinal and practical godliness. The conduct of a man who walks with God appears to me to resemble, in some measure, that of the industrious husbandman, who eats that he may be strengthened to labour; and labours, that he may find pleasure in sitting down to a meal.—But, my time is gone. Business calls me away. I must therefore take my leave.

Crisp. Farewell, my dear friend. But I hope we shall soon have an opportunity of some further conversation on this subject.

F.

Remarks upon Hume's Essay on Miracles; more especially upon the Arguments advanced in the first part of this Essay.

IN this essay Mr. Hume seems greatly to please himself with the idea, that he has discovered an argument which, in the view of reason and philosophy, must forever render all miracles wholly incredible.

He therefore labours, with great subtilty and plausibility, to demonstrate, that no human testimony can ever afford any probable, much less satisfactory, proof of their truth; and, with much satisfaction and self-complacency, he appears to exult in his fancied victory: for, as miracles are inseparably connected with the christian religion, he well knew they must stand and fall together. Imagining, therefore, that he had given a fatal blow to the credibility of

of miracles, he flattered himself that he had overthrown the whole system of revelation. And since Mr. Hume, in this laboured essay, strikes at the foundation of our religion, and aims to deprive us of the glorious hopes of life and immortality through the gospel; and since he glosses his specious reasoning with the plausible appearance of demonstration, it becomes a matter worthy of the attention of the friends of christianity, and especially at the present time, when infidelity is struggling to rear its head, and its votaries are boasting of the strength of their arguments, as unanswerable.

It is therefore designed to offer some remarks upon the arguments advanced in this essay, especially in the first part of it. Our author observes, that experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact. Thus it is from past experience that we expect heat in summer, cold in winter, and better weather in June than in December. All the credibility of human testimony is also derived from experience—from past experience of the conformity between testimony, and the thing testified.

Had we not found by experience, that mankind, through a sense of shame for being detected in falsehood, and on various other accounts, were commonly inclined to speak the truth, and that there was generally some agreement between facts, and the reports of witnesses; we could not give any rational credit to human testimony. The evidence of testimony is therefore founded wholly on experience. A miracle is a violation of the common laws of nature, established by a constant uniform experience. As, therefore, a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, established by a constant, unalterable experience, so, of course, there is a full and entire proof, from experience, against every miracle; yea, as great a proof as can be derived from experience.

Now, the evidence of testimony, as before observed, depends wholly upon experience, and, therefore, at best, cannot amount to more than a full and entire proof of this kind. But as there is a full, entire proof, from experience, against the miracle, that being contrary to our constant uniform experience,

experience, it appears, that no possible human testimony can afford any rational proof, or even probability of a miracle. For were there the highest possible proof, from human testimony, in support of a miracle, and had we found from experience, that human testimony was always true, even in this case there would be no more than a full and entire proof, from experience, in support of it. On the contrary, there would be a full, entire proof, from our constant experience, against the miracle. Here, then, there would be two full, entire proofs, both drawn from experience, and directly contradictory: of course, they would mutually annihilate and destroy each other, and leave the matter perfectly doubtful, without any probability on the one side or the other. This would be the case, had it been found, by experience, that human testimony was always certain. But, since it appears, from experience, that this is often false and uncertain, and that mankind are frequently guilty of falsehood or mistake, it is manifest, that no human testimony can ever be sufficient to render a miracle in the least degree probable, since, in the nature of the case, there must be a full proof, from our own constant experience, against it.

This is the substance and scope of Mr. Hume's reasoning in the first part of his essay, and the conclusion, which he fancied, must destroy all rational belief of miracles.— And this conclusion will necessarily follow from the principles upon which he grounds his reasoning. If these are just and well founded, they will necessarily prove, that no possible human testimony can ever be sufficient to render a miracle in the least degree probable.

But let us attend, for a few moments, to some of the consequences which will necessarily result from these principles and this reasoning. How would it be possible for a person, upon this scheme, ever to have a rational belief of any phenomenon which was contrary to his own experience? For instance, supposing a person, who had no experimental acquaintance with the *loadstone* or *magnetic attraction*, should be informed, that there was a certain stone, to which a large piece of iron would hang suspended without any support: this would contradict his constant uniform experience; consequently

consequently he would, from his own experience, have a full proof against this phenomenon. Of course, the highest possible human testimony, in favour of it, could no more than counterbalance this entire proof against it from the person's own experience. And so, according to Mr. Hume's principles, the united testimony of the whole human race would be utterly insufficient to prove the existence of *magnetic attraction* to one who had never seen it. This also would be the case with earthquakes, volcanoes, and many other *phenomena*. As these things would be directly contrary to the experience of those who were unacquainted with them, so, according to the reasoning in this essay, they would, from their own experience, have a full proof against them. Consequently no possible human testimony could ever render such events in the least degree credible. In short, we could never have any rational belief of any fact different from our own experience and observation.

These consequences, it appears, will inevitably follow from the arguments advanced by Mr. H. but how contrary are they to the plainest dictates of common sense? Would not the person be justly deemed devoid of reason, or out of his senses, who should adopt these principles in his common conduct, and refuse to believe every thing different from his own experience, though supported by the highest possible testimony? Had there been an earthquake just before my birth or remembrance, and were it uniformly testified by all who were living at that period, would it not be deemed very unreasonable to disbelieve it, because I had never experienced one? But, according to Mr. H. I should have a full proof against this earthquake from my own experience, and so could never rationally believe it upon any possible human testimony. It is manifest then, that the principles upon which Mr. H.'s reasoning against the credibility of miracles is founded, will necessarily lead to consequences which are contrary to the plainest dictates of reason and common sense; and it will necessarily follow from them, that we never ought to believe any thing different from our own experience. Thus it would, in a great measure, destroy the evidence of human

man testimony, one of our greatest sources of information; and confine our knowledge and ideas to the narrow circle of our own personal experience, or, at farthest, to things which are similar to this.

Further, supposing that all authors, in all nations and languages, had informed, that, in the year 1760, the sun, for ten days, rose in the west, and went down in the east: suppose also, that all persons who were then living, universally testified to the truth of this miraculous fact; could any in such circumstances reasonably doubt of the truth of this wonderful event? It could not be rationally supposed, that mankind in all countries could be deceived about such a fact; or, that all nations should universally unite in fabricating and supporting such a falsehood; no reasonable, intelligent person could suppose it. Surely then, in the view of reason and common sense, such general testimony would be sufficient to render this miraculous event fully credible; and it would seem, that no rational, well informed mind could doubt it.

But, according to the drift of Mr. H.'s reasoning, all this evidence would be so far from giving any rational credibility to this fact, that it would not be sufficient to render it, in the least degree, probable. For, according to *him*, our constant uniform experience of the sun's passing from east to west, would amount to a full proof against the fact, that the sun rose in the west; and our evidence, from human testimony, be it ever so perfect, could amount to no more than a full proof from experience; consequently, in this instance there would be two complete proofs, from experience, directly opposite; the one in favour, and the other against the miracle; and these two opposite proofs being equal, must just counterbalance and destroy each other. Thus, according to this gentleman's reasoning, all this evidence, from human testimony, would not be sufficient even to render the fact probable; and it would be wholly unreasonable to pay it the least credit, though asserted by all historians, and testified by all who lived at that period. But is not this conclusion, necessarily resulting from the principles advanced in this essay, very contrary
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to the plainest dictates of reason and common sense? It was so manifestly unreasonable, that Hume himself dare not avow it: for, notwithstanding all his reasoning to the contrary, yet he finally allows, that there may be such miraculous events as will admit of proof from human testimony. Had there been an account in all authors, in all languages, and had the same been confirmed by traditions among all nations, that, from the first of January, 1600, there was total darkness over the whole earth for the space of eight days, he allows that fact ought not to be doubted. "It is evident," says he, that "our present philosophers, instead of doubting the fact, ought to receive it as certain, &c." But does not this conclusion contradict the whole scope of his reasoning? For this *eight days darkness* would be directly contrary to the common laws of nature, established by a firm, unalterable experience, and so, as real a miracle, according to Mr. H.'s own description, as raising the dead, stopping the sun in its daily course, or any other miracle recorded in the scriptures; consequently, according to his reasoning upon the subject, we should have a full, entire proof, derived from a constant, unalterable experience against this miraculous event. And, as the highest evidence, from testimony, in favour of it, could not exceed a full, complete proof, so, of course, could not be more than sufficient to counterbalance the opposing evidence. Therefore, upon the principles on which he grounds his arguments against the belief of miracles, and according to the whole drift of his reasoning upon this subject, there could not be the least probability in favour of this *miraculous darkness*; and yet he declares, that instead of doubting the fact, it ought to be received as certain. Is here not a manifest inconsistency and contradiction? Does he not fairly concede, that a miracle may be proved by human testimony, and thus give up every point he was labouring to establish? It certainly has this appearance. And how does he attempt to extricate himself from this difficulty, and to get rid of the apparent inconsistency? "Our present philosophers," he observes, "ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search

search for the causes whence it might be derived. The decay, corruption, and dissolution of nature, is an event rendered probable by so many analogies, that any phenomenon which seems to have a tendency towards that catastrophe, comes within the reach of human testimony, if that testimony be very extensive and uniform. Here, to save the appearance of contradicting his own principles and arguments, he pretends that this *miraculous darkness* would betoken the decay and dissolution of nature, and therefore ought to be received upon human testimony, merely because it would be an event, rendered probable by many analogies. But is not this a mere pretence, a subtle evasion, to cover his inconsistency? For how does it appear, that there *being such a darkness* upwards of 100 years before, could be reasonably considered as a token of the decay and dissolution of nature? Its tendency towards that catastrophe, if it had any, would be so remote and imperceptible, that it could rationally have little or no influence in rendering it credible. It is manifest, then, that the reason why such a supernatural darkness ought to be fully credited is, that it would be supported by such extensive human testimony, and not that it would be probable from analogy, as Mr. H. pretends; for this would be so remote and uncertain, that it could have very little, if any, influence upon our belief. For let the extraordinary event have been of some other kind, which could not be considered as a symptom of a tendency in nature to dissolution, yet, when thus supported by human testimony, it could be no more rationally disbelieved than the fact he mentions. Suppose, for instance, that instead of the eight days darkness, all authors, in all languages, had informed, that in 1600 there appeared two suns for the space of a month; and suppose also, that there was a strong uniform tradition of this remarkable event in all countries, without any variation or contradiction: Would not this fact, thus supported by universal testimony, be as firmly believed as the eight days darkness? And would it not be as unreasonable to disbelieve it, although it could not be considered as an indication of the decay and dissolution of nature?

nature? If so, then it is evident, that this phenomenon of the darkness would not be believed, because an event rendered probable by analogy, but merely because supported by such extensive human testimony; consequently, Mr. H's. special reason why this ought to be credited upon human testimony, rather than any other miraculous event, appears to be a groundless evasion. It is manifest, then, from what Mr. H. says concerning this extraordinary darkness, that he does, in fact, allow, that human testimony may be a sufficient proof of miracles: and by this he has plainly contradicted the whole drift of his reasoning. For his fundamental arguments, if they prove any thing, will necessarily prove, that no human testimony can ever render a miracle in the least degree probable.

Since, therefore, our author's reasoning is founded on principles, which lead to consequences so contrary to the plainest dictates of common sense, and he himself has plainly contradicted it, we may be certain, that there must be some falacy in his pretended demonstration; and this, upon examination, we shall find to consist in the idea, *that our uniform experience of the common course of nature affords a proof which is directly contrary to any proof that can be adduced in favour of a miracle, or a deviation from those common laws.* But this supposition, upon which the chief strength of his reasoning depends, is a perfect fallacy; for these two proofs relate to different facts, which are not at all contradictory; but may both be true with entire consistency. For instance, supposing for 10,000 days, my constant unvarying experience teaches me, that the sun rises and sets once in 24 hours. Happening, however, to be confined from the light for the space of a month, I am informed by all around, as far as I can get intelligence, that in this period, the sun once continued 48 hours in the horizon. Here then, according to our author, are two entire proofs directly contradictory; but is this the case? By no means; for these two proofs relate to different and distinct facts. The evidence arising from my own personal experience, concerns the time only which was the subject of my experience. Whereas, the proof from testi-

mony respects a different time, concerning which I had no personal experience, as I was confined from the light. The proofs then for these distinct facts are not at all inconsistent or contradictory; both may be true. It may be true, according to my own experience, that the sun did rise and set once in 24 hours, as long as I had personal knowledge about the time. It may also be true, according to the universal testimony of others, that the sun did continue in view 48 hours. Nor would this evidence from testimony, at all contradict the experience of my senses with respect to this particular fact, as by the supposition I had no personal experience about it, either for or against it. Had I known, from my own senses, that the sun did rise and set as usual at that time, when others testified that it was in the horizon for 48 hours, the two proofs, from experience and testimony, would then be directly contradictory, as they would respect the same fact, and so could not both be true. But since these two proofs (in the instance first stated) relate to different facts, it is manifest that there is no inconsistency or contradiction between them.

And this is just the case with respect to the miracles recorded in the scriptures. The evidence in favour of them does not at all contradict our experience with respect to those particular facts, as by supposition our experience does not extend to them. Thus the miracle of the sun's standing still in the days of Joshua, does not contradict the evidence of our experience and senses. The proof in favour of that miracle relates to one time and fact, but the evidence of our own experience respects different times and facts. Both these proofs, therefore, may be true without any inconsistency. It may be true according to the proof from the scriptures, that the sun did stand still in the days of Joshua. It may also be true, according to the evidence of our senses, that the sun has never stood still in our days. It is plain, therefore, that there is no inconsistency or contradiction between these two proofs, because they relate to different events. Had we lived at that time, and seen with our own eyes, that the sun did not stand still, then the testimony in favour of that miracle, would have been
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contrary to our experience and senses; and in such a case Mr. H's. reasoning would justly apply. But since we did not live at that period, and had no experience about the fact, either for or against it, it is manifest that our experience does not contradict the proof in favour of this miracle; and these same observations will apply to all the other miracles mentioned in the word of God. They are facts, to which our personal experience does not extend; therefore, the evidence in proof of them does by no means contradict the evidence of our own senses or experience. The supposition then, that the evidence from human testimony, in proof of a miracle, must be contradictory to the evidence of our own senses and experience, and inconsistent with it, appears to be very false and unjust; and upon this fallacy depends the chief force and plausibility of Mr. H's. reasoning. This, therefore, being detected and removed, his arguments lose their greatest force, and his whole fabric, reared with such art and labour, falls to the ground.

But since the supposition which has been now mentioned appears to be the foundation of our author's reasoning, by which he endeavours to demonstrate, that no human testimony can render miracles credible, it may be well perhaps to pay some further attention to it, and see whither it will lead. Supposing then, according to our former statement, that being confined from the light for the space of a month, I am informed by all around me, that in this period the sun once continued 48 hours in the horizon.—Here then, according to Mr. H. are two proofs directly contradictory; the one, from testimony, in favour of the miraculous fact; the other, from my own experience, against it, and these mutually counterbalance and destroy each other. Supposing then, instead of being informed of this wonderful event, I had seen it with mine own eyes. Here then, upon these principles, the evidence of my own experiences would be contradictory to themselves: for if my former experience afforded a direct proof against this event, when informed of it by others, it must also afford a direct proof against it, when seen by me with my own eyes:
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for the fact is just the same. According to our author then, I shall have experience against experience, counterbalancing and destroying each other. In this case he directs to deduct the smaller number from the greater, that we know the exact force of the superior evidence, and may proportion our faith accordingly. As, therefore, in this instance my experiences would be 10,000 on one side, and one on the other; so, of course, there would be 10,000 degrees of evidence to one, that the sun did rise and set as usual.— I ought, therefore, to believe it did, without any hesitation, although directly contrary to what I saw with my own eyes; and though I should see the sun continue 48 hours in the horizon hundreds of times, yet it would be unreasonable to believe it, until I had thus seen it more than 10,000 times, and had more experiences for than against it. And when my experiences for the sun's remaining in view 48 hours should be 10,000, and thus just equal my contrary experiences, then they would exactly counterbalance and destroy each other; consequently I must remain in perfect equilibrio, without believing, that the sun did continue in the horizon either 12 or 48 hours. These, and many other most absurd consequences will necessarily result from the supposition, that the evidence of our senses and experience directly contradicts all miraculous facts, and affords a direct proof against them.

For, if this were the case, there would be some difficulty in proving a miracle from our own senses, as from human testimony; and as already shewn, it would be wholly unreasonable to believe any extraordinary event, although seen with my eyes, until our experiences for it exceed those against it. These considerations plainly manifest the falshood of the supposition on which the force and plausibility of Mr. H's. reasoning chiefly depends; and they fully evince, that the evidence of our senses and experience does, by no means, contradict the proof of miracles, concerning which we have had no personal experience, either for or against them.

From the observations made in the course of these remarks, it appears, that the scope of Mr. H's. reasoning in
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the first part of his essay, if it proves any thing, will necessarily prove, that no possible human testimony can ever afford any rational proof of any extraordinary fact or event, different from our own experience; and thus it will lead to consequences directly contrary to the plainest dictates of reason and common sense.

It also appears, that by allowing there may be miracles which will admit of proof from human testimony, he has fairly contradicted the principles and general drift of his own reasoning. And it likewise appears, that the chief force and plausibility of his reasoning, in this first part of his essay, by which he endeavours to prove the incredibility of miracles from human testimony, depend upon the fallacious supposition, that evidence of our own experience afford a full and direct proof against any evidence, which can be derived from testimony in favour of a miracle. But this supposition being groundless, the whole chain of reasoning depending upon it falls to the ground.

It appears, then, notwithstanding all Mr. Hume has laboured to demonstrate to the contrary, that miracles may be rationally proved, and rendered fully credible by human testimony. This being established, the only question is, whether the miracles recorded in the scriptures are thus supported by rational, credible evidence.—And that this is in fact the case, has been often clearly shewn by writers upon this subject.—And were it necessary to our present purpose, it might be fully evinced, that these miracles are supported by all those proofs which could be rationally expected, and are necessary to give full satisfaction to a candid, judicious mind.

But before we conclude, we shall make a brief remark upon a passage in the second part of this essay. “But should this miracle be ascribed to any new system of religion, men, in all ages, have been so imposed upon by ridiculous stories of that kind, that this very circumstance would be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient with all men of sense, not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without farther examination.” Our author, in this and some following passages, insinuates, that religious miracles,

acles, or those ascribed to some new system of religion, are much more suspicious and incredible than any other, and therefore ought to be rejected without any further examination; but certainly this is a most unreasonable insinuation: for a miracle is a supernatural interposition or violation of the laws of nature, by the immediate agency, direction or permission of the *Supreme Being*. Reason would therefore teach, that miracles would not be wrought, and the course of nature, thus violated, except to answer some important purposes. But what end can be more important or worthy the supernatural interposition of God, than the establishment of religion and a divine revelation? This is a matter which concerns not one nation only, but all mankind; not one generation only, but thousands; not only their present, but also their everlasting happiness. Thus, religion involves in it, by far, the most important concerns on earth.

If, therefore, miracles were ever wrought on any account, it would be most reasonable to suppose that they would be in favour of this most important concern: for nothing seems so worthy of a divine and special interposition as this, consequently, miracles, in favour of religion, other things being equal, are, by far more credible than any others; and these, if any, may be rationally believed upon human testimony. How unreasonable and unjust then the insinuation, that of all miracles those connected with religion are worthy of the least credit! What bitterness and prejudice does this insinuation manifest against the religion of the Bible?

To conclude then, in the strain of Mr. Hume, is it not very wonderful and miraculous, that any man of sense should adopt principles of reasoning, so fraught with absurdity, and necessarily involving consequences, so contrary to the plainest dictates of common sense? And should a person act according to these principles in his common conduct, he would be a standing miracle of folly and absurdity; and would be as great a deviation from reason and common sense, as a miracle is from the common laws of nature.

H.

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