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

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

SUPPLEMENTARY DISSERTATION

ON THE MIRACLES OF OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR AND HIS APOSTLES.

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

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

(a) Acts xix. 11, 12.

(b) John. ix. 33.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(a) In the Edinburgh Review already referred to.

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

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

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

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

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

state of chaos into that of order. When by his fiat he separated the parts of the heterogeneous mass, and formed them into those beautiful systems which we behold, it was his *will* that certain events in each system should regularly succeed each other, and that the different systems should be so connected among themselves, as to promote some great and wise end which he had in view. It is difficult—I think indeed impossible—to conceive any other end, which a Being all perfect could have in view, than the diffusion of happiness; but the greatest quantity of happiness can be diffused only among the greatest numbers of beings susceptible of it.

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

Inanimate beings are not capable either of happiness or of misery; but every being endowed with sense is capable of both; and every being endowed with reason as well as sense, is capable of both in a still greater degree. We must conclude, therefore, that it was for the accommodation of sentient and rational beings that events were made to succeed each other in a regular order, and that the order made choice of by perfect wisdom was the best that could have been chosen for promoting the happiness of the whole sentient and intelligent creation. This being the case, we may rest assured that no deviation from that order ever has been, or ever will be, permitted, but for some very important purpose foreseen and provided for by that *fiat* which established what are called the laws of nature; and that if there had been among the creatures of God no free agents, there never would have been such a deviation from the ordinary course of events, as that which constitutes a miracle. But among those creatures there are free agents, and man is one of them, whose happiness depends in a very great degree on their own conduct; whilst that conduct cannot, like the movements of inanimate matter, be directed in one determinate course by impulse or pressure. Without entering at all into the question of liberty and necessity, I trust that I may assume, as a truth unquestioned and unquestionable, that the relation between motive and action is something quite different from that between cause and effect in physics, and that it is by motives, and not physical causes, that the actions of men are directed.

Let us now suppose that, when the Creator of the world was about to establish that course of events, which we call the laws of nature, in such order as he knew would produce the greatest quantity of happiness to the whole sentient and intelligent creation, he foresaw that man, for whose accommodation chiefly we must suppose this earth to have been fitted up, would bring himself into such circumstances, that his happiness would become impossible, unless some one of these laws should for a time be suspended; may we not suppose that a Being of infinite power and wisdom might make provision for such an event in the very establishment of those laws? To control by force the freedom of the human will would be to destroy that very nature on which depends the greatest happiness of which man is capable (*a*); but might not some portion of inanimate matter be diverted for a short time from its regular course without the smallest injury to any sentient or intelligent being in the universe? In the journal to which I have already referred, it is confidently affirmed that it could not.

“Suppose a man, says this critic, not at all versed in astronomy, who considers the moon merely as a luminous circle that, with certain irregularities, goes round the earth from east to west nearly in twenty-four hours, rising once and setting once in that interval. Let this man be told, from some authority, that he is accustomed to respect, that on a certain day it had been observed at London, that the moon did not set at all, but was visible above the horizon for twenty-four hours:—there is little doubt that, after making some difficulty about it, he would come at last to be convinced of the truth of the assertion. In this he could not be accused of any *extraordinary* or *irrational* credulity. The experience he had of the uniform setting and rising of the moon was but very limited; and the fact alleged might not appear to him more extraordinary than

(a) See this completely proved in *Law's* edition of *King's* Essay on the Origin of Evil,

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

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

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

(a) Joshua x. 12, 13.

courses, by the extraordinary atmospherical refraction of part of the solar rays, by which I believe the miracle in question to have been affected (a). It is very true that my knowledge of the sciences of astronomy and optics is very limited when compared with that of Laplace and his friend; but I may surely be allowed to know more of them than the man, who, without displaying any *irrational* credulity, believes that on a certain day the moon had at London, *forgotten to set*. I have likewise conversed often, on the subject of miracles in general, and of that of Joshua in particular, with philosophical laymen, some of whom, with respect to their knowledge of optics and astronomy, might, without presumption, have been brought into comparison even with *Laplace*; and they saw as little danger, as I do, to any part of the creation, from a temporary increase of the refractive power of the atmosphere to any extent. Indeed all philosophical theists, with whom I have conversed freely on such subjects, have held the will of God to be the immediate *cause* (I mean *efficient* cause) of every law of inanimate nature, as well as of every deviation from those laws, which deviations were foreseen and provided for from the beginning, when "the world first rose out of chaos." I confess likewise that I see not how the restoration of a dead man to life, or any other miracle recorded of our Lord in the Gospels, could affect such a vast number of others, as to bring what our critic calls an *incredible* body of evidence against the reality of those miracles. The most astonishing of them all has long appeared to me to be the multiplication of *the loaves and fishes*, because it seems to imply the power of creation; and we certainly have the evidence of uniform experience, as far as experience can be had in such a case, that not an atom of matter has been either created or annihilated since the beginning of the world. The quantity however of new matter added, on those two occasions, to the old, supposing such to have been the case, was comparatively so small, that the philosophers, who "weigh not only the mountains of the earth," but even the earth itself and all the planetary system, "in a pair of scales," and who hope, by the aid of "a calculus sufficiently powerful, to make near approaches to OMNISCIENCE," will admit that it could not have *greatly* disturbed the motions of the earth and moon, or any other planet!

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

On the principles of pure theism, therefore, though certainly not on those of atheism or fatalism, the *possibility* of miracles—and even of such miracles as those of our Lord,—will surely be admitted: but the great question is, what evidence is sufficient to render them credible? The Christians say that the evidence of testimony is sufficient for this purpose, and indeed that no other evidence can be had. That the truth of the Gospel miracles admits, in the present age, of no other evidence than that of testimony, will be readily admitted; but our critic contends, as Hume had done before him, that the improbability of the violation of the order of those events, of which the course is known from experience to be perfectly uniform, is so strong, that no testimony can prevail against it. "It will always be more wonderful, he says, that the violation of such order should have taken place, than that any number of witnesses should have been deceived themselves, or should be disposed to deceive others."

If this doctrine be true, how many facts have taken place in nature, or have been said by philosophers to take place in nature, which not one man of ten thousand, or even ten millions, can rationally believe to have happened? "That testimony derives all its force from experience," says the critic, "seems very certain;" and Hume, as he acknowledges, had said the same thing before him. But if this be true, upon what evidence can I and hundreds of millions beside me believe, that showers of meteoric stones have, in different ages and distant nations, fallen from the atmosphere on the earth? I never saw one such stone fall, and I have the evidence of uniform experience that the atmosphere does not *regularly* generate metallic stones. Every man who is in the same predicament with me, has the same immense weight of experience to place in the ba-

(a) See the Appendix to Dissertation I. Book v. chap. i. of this Work.

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lance against the testimony of the comparatively very small number who say that they had witnessed such stones fall from the heavens; and if it be very certain that testimony derives all its force from experience, how can it be possible for hundreds of millions of men, possessing common sense, to admit, in opposition to their own uniform experience, the testimony of some dozens of people who may have been deceived themselves or disposed, like the London citizen with his moon of *cheese*, to deceive others? It is vain to say that we have the experience of ages, and of numbers of chemists who have examined the stones, in corroboration of the testimony that they fell from the heavens; for in this argument where experience of the uniformity of the laws of nature is opposed to testimony bearing witness that those laws have been occasionally suspended, no experience can be admitted but *individual, personal* experience. The experience of ages and of distant nations—indeed the experience of every individual but myself is known to me only by *testimony*; and is it possible that any philosopher can seriously contend that *testimony* derives all its force from that experience, of which we never could have known any thing—of which, indeed, we never could have heard, but through the medium of *testimony*?

This is surely not possible, and therefore it must be by every man's individual personal experience, by which, on the principles of Hume and his followers, the truth of testimony is to be tried? If so, I ought not to believe that there has ever been an earthquake, for I never felt the shock of one, though I have heard of many, and of some which were *said* to have been felt by numbers in the very town where I then was! I ought not to believe that a monstrous child was ever born of a woman, for I never saw a human being, who could with any propriety be called a monster, whilst I know, by uniform personal experience, that every monstrous birth, if there have been any such births, has been a deviation from the regular course of nature. In vain shall I be told, that earthquakes may be accounted for in certain circumstances, and shewn to be produced by the operation of the laws of nature; for those circumstances are probably assumed for the purpose, and whether they be or not, they are made known to me only by testimony, which I ought to disregard, because directly contrary to my uniform experience.

But even this mode of converting testimony into experience, cannot be had recourse to in the case of the meteoric stones; for according to one of the most scientific chemists of the age (*a*), "it would be absurd, in the present state of our knowledge, to attempt any explanation of the manner in which they are formed; for not even a *conjectural* cause for them in the smallest degree probable can be assigned." We are told indeed that the testimony produced in support of the origin of those stones, "has been confirmed by a scrupulous examination into the natural history of the facts (the stones) themselves. When the stones which were said to have fallen from the heavens came to be chemically analyzed, they were found to have every where the same characters, and to consist of the same ingredients, nearly in the same proportions;" whilst no other stones have anywhere been found of precisely the same character. "Here therefore, says the reviewer of Laplace, we have a testimony confirmed, and rendered quite independent of our previous knowledge of the veracity of the witnesses."

This inference I cannot admit; nor can I conceive by what rule of logic it is drawn from the premises. Not to insist on the unquestionable fact, that the result of the chemical analysis of the stones, can be known to those myriads, who were not present when it was made, only by *testimony*, all that seems to me to have been proved by that analysis is, that the stones in question are of one and the same species, and that the species itself is very uncommon. These two facts I admit to have been completely proved, for I have no hesitation to receive the *testimony* of the chemist by whom they were ascertain-

(a) See Thomson's System of Chemistry, Ed. 3. vol. 4. p. 163, &c.

ed; but why stones of a singular character, found in different regions of the earth, should therefore be inferred to have fallen from the heavens, I confess that I am yet to learn. That a stone of two or three tons weight, as some of those meteoric stones have been, should be generated in the higher regions of the atmosphere, and float in a horizontal direction over various countries, at the distance of sixty miles from the earth, is directly contrary not only to all *my experience*, but likewise to all that I know of the constitution of the atmosphere, as well as of the law of gravitation—the best ascertained, perhaps, of all the laws of corporeal nature! Am I then to reject with scorn all that I have been told of ignited stones falling from the heavens? Undoubtedly I *ought* to do so, if testimony derives all its force from experience; for though those stones have been chemically analyzed, and their composition ascertained by experiments, not an individual of the human race can believe that they fell from the atmosphere, on any other evidence than the unsupported testimony of those very few persons who have *said* that they *saw* them fall. “But it will always be more wonderful that masses of iron, pyrites, and earth, of the weight of two or three tons, should be formed in the higher regions of the atmosphere, and even float horizontally in that rare medium, as a log of wood floats in water, than that any number of witnesses, who affirm that they saw them fall, should have been deceived themselves, or disposed to deceive others.” They may have had their origin in the heart of the earth, and been forced upwards by subterraneous fire; and this may seem the more probable, that the principal ingredient in them is iron in the metallic state; that they have been generally found hot and buried to a considerable depth in the earth; and that such eruptions from the bowels of the earth, through the craters of volcanoes, have frequently been accompanied by appearances in the air which might easily be mistaken by a few individuals—almost stupified with astonishment, for meteors descending from the heavens.

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

In a word, it appears to me that there is not one objection urged by Hume, Laplace, or any of their pupils, against the sufficiency of testimony to prove the reality of the Gospel miracles, which does not hold with at least equal force against the reality of those showers of meteoric stones which are said to have fallen in all the quarters of the globe. The truth, however, is, that these objections are in both cases founded on a palpable mistake. Testimony is so far from deriving all its force from experience, that as was justly observed long ago, (a) it is the sole foundation of by far the greater part of what the opponents of the Gospel call firm, unalterable, and universal experience; and that if we did not, in certain circumstances, repose implicit confidence in testimony, every man's knowledge of events would be confined to those, which had fallen under the immediate observation of his own senses. Hume seems to have been perfectly aware of this, when he supposed a case, in which, were it ever to occur, testimony would be sufficient to establish the credibility even of a miracle.

“No testimony, says he, (b) is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish.—When any one tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other, and according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.”

There is some inaccuracy of language in talking of *greater* and *less* miracles when Omnipotence is supposed to have performed them all; but it is no more than justice to acknowledge that the author admitted, in a note, that all real miracles are equally easy

(a) By Dr Campbell in his admirable Dissertation on Miracles.

(b) Essay on Miracles.

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

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

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

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

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

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

appear not to be impelled by instinct to speak any articulate language at all; and it is surely inconceivable that instinct should teach the use of arbitrary and artificial signs, such as the words of every language undoubtedly are, or that between such signs and ideas any *natural* relation should ever be formed.

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

Truth is the conformity of those words or other signs by which things are represented, to the things themselves; and things themselves are what they are independent of us, our instincts, and perceptions. When we have precise and adequate ideas or notions of objects, and when those ideas or notions are related to each other, as the objects themselves are related, we are in possession of knowledge, or what may be called *mental truth*. In this case there is a *real* and *natural* connection between the signs and the things signified; for we cannot frame one original and simple idea, which has no archetype in nature, nor can *one* object distinctly perceived, generate in our minds the ideas or notions that are generated by *other* and quite *different* objects. Here external things are the objects, and ideas are the signs, which, when they are in conformity to the things signified by them constitute truth; and this truth depends not in the smallest degree on the *moral* dispositions of him, on whose mind it is impressed. These truths are the truths of God spoken alike, and with equal faithfulness to all who have powers of perception to receive them; and in the case under consideration, they were received as well by the Jewish Pharisees as by the apostles of Christ.

But in human testimony the ideas in the mind of the speaker are the things signified, and the words of the language spoken are the signs by which they are expressed; and when these things and signs are in conformity to each other, the words uttered express so much truth. Now, though in this case there is no *natural* connection between the signs and the things signified—between ideas or notions in the mind and articulate vocal sounds, yet it is obvious, that, without a violent effort of the speaker to the contrary, they must always be in conformity with each other, because, in every language, there are words appropriated to the purpose of denoting every idea, and every relation of ideas, which can be expressed by that language; and in the mind of every man those ideas, relations of ideas, and their appropriate *words*, have been constantly associated or linked together from the time that he first learned to speak. So intimate is this association, and so impossible to be broken, that whoever will pay sufficient attention to the operations of his own mind, will find that he *thinks* as well as *speaks* in some language; and that in cogitation he runs over silently and habitually, those sounds which in speaking he actually utters. Hence it is, that hardly any man has written in perfect purity a language in which he has not been accustomed to *think*; and hence too, I believe, it is, that so many men of deep thinking have been remarked for the practice of *speaking to themselves*.

If this be so, it is impossible that a man, without some effort, should ever speak any thing but truth; for the *ideas* of what he has seen or heard, &c. are not of his manufacture; they are generated in his mind by external objects according to the established *laws of nature*; and till they be effaced from his memory, they must always, by the law of association, which is one of those laws *, make their appearance there

* That the association of ideas not only with one another, but also with the articulate sounds by which they are denominated in that language which is vernacular to us, is a law of nature, is incontrovertible. It is a law which extends in some degree to the inferior animals: for, if they were not under the influence of it, neither the dog nor the horse could be trained to render those numberless services to man, which are actually rendered by both. It seems to be a fact universal in the animal kingdom as gravitation is

in the material world, and is therefore, equally with gravitation, a law of nature unchangeable but by him whose *fiat* constituted the universe and all the beings—animated and inanimate—which it contains, what we know them by experience to be. Attempts have been made to explain both these laws of nature, or, in other words, to assign for them *physical* causes; but all such attempts have hitherto failed. Newton threw out a query, whether gravitation might not be caused by an ethereal fluid pervading the whole corpe-

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

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

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

phenomena themselves, into the will of the Almighty.

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

ture, or be able, if so disposed, to dissolve every association which had been formed in the mind of each of them from his infancy, and form new ones, all agreeing exactly with one another, and yet all contrary to the truth.

If this reasoning be just, and if the testimony of the apostles to their own and their Master's miracles be false, it follows undeniably, either that they concerted a consistent scheme of falsehood, and agreed to publish it at every hazard; or that God had dissolved all the associations, which had been formed in their minds, of ideas of sense with the words of language, and arbitrarily formed new associations all in exact conformity with each other, but all in direct contradiction to truth. One or other of these events *must* have taken place; because, upon the supposition of falsehood, there is no other alternative. But such a dissolution and formation of associations of ideas with words, as is supposed in the latter event, is as great a deviation from the established laws of nature, or, in other words, as real a miracle as the resurrection of a man from the dead; and all real miracles being acknowledged to be equally great, either of these could have been performed only by a power equal to the performance of the other.

Nor would the supposed voluntary agreement of the apostles, in such a scheme of falsehood as they are said to have published to the world, be an event less miraculous than the Divine interposition for the unworthy purpose implied in the former hypothesis. When they sat down to fabricate their pretended revelation, and to contrive a series of miracles, to which they were all to appeal for its truth, it is plain, since they proved successful in their daring enterprise, that they must have clearly foreseen every possible circumstance in which they could be placed, and have prepared consistent answers to every question that could be put to them by their most inveterate and most enlightened enemies; by the statesman, the lawyer, the philosopher, and the priest. That such foreknowledge as this would have been miraculous, will not surely be denied; since it forms the very attribute which we find it most difficult to allow even to God himself (a). It is not, however, the *only* miracle, which this supposition would compel us to admit. The very *resolution* of the apostles to propagate the belief of false miracles in support of such a religion as that which is taught in the New Testament, would have been as wide a deviation from the laws of nature, and therefore as great a miracle as the mind of man has ever conceived.

When they formed this design, either they must have hoped to *succeed*, or they must have been convinced that they should *fail*, in their undertaking; and in either case *they chose evil*, and what they *knew* to be *unmixed evil, for its own sake!* They could not, if they foresaw that they should *fail*, look for any thing but that contempt, disgrace, and persecution, which were then the inevitable consequences of an unsuccessful endeavour to overthrow the established religion. Nor could their prospects be brighter on the supposition of their *success*. As they knew themselves to be false witnesses and impious deceivers, they could have no hope beyond the grave; and by determining to oppose all the religious systems, superstitions, and prejudices of the age in which they lived, they wilfully exposed themselves to inevitable misery in the present life, to insult and imprisonment, to stripes and death. Nor can it be alleged that they might look forward to power and affluence, when they should through sufferings have converted their countrymen; for so desirous were they of obtaining nothing but *misery* as the end of their mission, that they made their own persecution a test of the truth of their doctrines. They introduced the Master, from whom they professed to have received those doctrines, as telling them, that "they were sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; that they should be delivered up to councils, and scourged in synagogues; *that they*

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

(a) See Dr Beattie's Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, and Dr Pearson's Warburtonian Lectures.

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

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

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

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

infinite wisdom, goodness, and power. The object of the latter is absolutely inconsistent with wisdom and goodness, which are demonstrably attributes of that Being by whom alone miracles can be performed. Hence it follows, that the supposition of the apostles bearing *false* testimony to the miracles of their Master, implies a series of deviations from the laws of nature infinitely less probable in themselves than those miracles; and therefore by the maxim of Hume and his disciples, we must reject the supposition of falsehood in the testimony, and admit the reality of the miracles.

From Matth. xiii. 1. Mark 16. 23. Luke vi. 1. John v. 1. to Matth. xvii. 1. Mark ix. 14. Luke ix. 37. John vii. 1.

It has been supposed however, that complete as the evidence certainly was which was furnished by the testimony of those who were eye-witnesses of our Lord's miracles, it has been greatly diminished to us by passing through so many generations. This theory of the diminution of evidence by transmission from hand to hand, was first framed, I believe, by a Scotchman *; but it appears to have been adopted by Laplace, who thus reasons in its support.

“Suppose a fact to be transmitted through twenty persons—the first communicating it to the second, and the second to the third, &c, and let the probability of each testimony be expressed by $\frac{9}{10}$, (that is, suppose that of ten reports made by each witness, nine only are true), then at every time the story passes from one witness to another, the evidence is reduced to nine-tenths of what it was before; so that after it has passed through the whole twenty, the evidence will be found to be less than one eighth of what it was originally.” To illustrate his meaning, he compares the diminution of evidence by this sort of transmission to “the extinction of light by the interposition of several pieces of glass; a small number of pieces being sufficient to render an object entirely invisible, which a single piece allowed to be seen very distinctly.”

This reasoning is not without force when applied to evidence transmitted from age to age by *mere oral tradition*; but it seems not to be at all applicable to evidence originally recorded in a book, and transmitted by means of that book from generation to generation. In a series of oral traditions the original evidence is lost as soon as the persons die by whom it was given; and we should have known nothing of it at all but from the report of others, who probably did not make use of the very words employed by the original witnesses, nor, however desirous they may really have been to speak the truth, relate the several circumstances of the event in the very same order. In this case, therefore, the original evidence will very soon become like the object gradually obscured by the successive interposition of several pieces of glass; but the case of evidence preserved in a *record* is very different, for it can never be either lost or obscured as long as the record remains, and its language is intelligible. Accordingly the very ingenious critic, who appears to me to suffer his own judgment to be occasionally biassed by the authority of Hume, completely refutes this reasoning of Laplace. “Take any ancient event, says he, that is well attested, such for example as the retreat of the *Ten Thousand*, and we are persuaded it will be generally admitted that the certainty of that event having taken place is as great at this moment as it was on the return of the Greek army, or immediately after Xenophon had published his narrative, The calculation of chances may indeed be brought to declare in favour of it; for Xenophon's narrative remains, and the probability will be found to be very small, that any considerable interpolation or change in that narrative could have taken place without some historical document remaining to inform us of such a change. The combination of chances necessary to produce and to conceal such an interpolation is in the highest degree improbable; and the authority of Xenophon remains on that account the same at this moment that it was originally.”

* One *Craig*, who, in 1699, published in London a work entitled *Theologia Christiana Principia Mathematica*, 4to. I know nothing either of the author, or of

his work, except what I have learned from Warburton, who mentions both in terms sufficiently contemptuous, though probably very just.

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

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

tation on the four Gospels.

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