

THE

Ed. Ed. 7/11

EVIDENCES

OF

CHRISTIANITY:

STATED IN

A POPULAR AND PRACTICAL MANNER, IN A COURSE OF
LECTURES, DELIVERED IN THE PARISH CHURCH
OF ST. MARY, ISLINGTON.

BY DANIEL WILSON, A. M. VICAR.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

CONTAINING THE LECTURES ON THE
AUTHENTICITY, CREDIBILITY, DIVINE AUTHORITY, AND
INSPIRATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

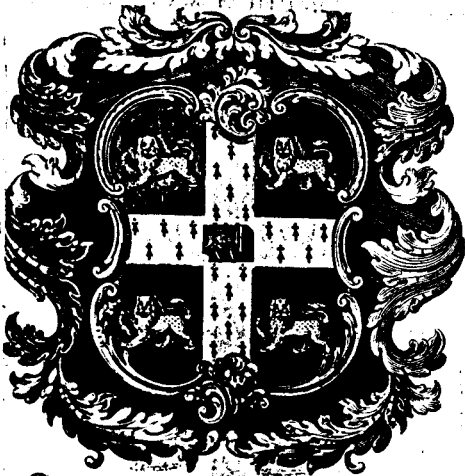


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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

WILLIAM,

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

THE FOLLOWING LECTURES

ARE,

WITH HIS LORDSHIP'S PERMISSION,

MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

LECTURE VII.

DIVINE AUTHORITY OF CHRISTIANITY.

MIRACLES.

 MARK ii. 10—12.

But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, we never saw it on this fashion.

THE arguments in our former Lectures have been directed to prove the authenticity and credibility of the books of the New Testament. In order to ascertain these points, we have examined them by the strictest rules of historical testimony and we have found them to be established by far stronger proofs than men uniformly consider as satisfactory on similar subjects.

During this enquiry we have deferred the consideration of the divine authority of the religion of which they treat.

It is now, however, the time to enter upon this topic. We open the sacred books with the fullest confidence and repose of mind, as having been really written by the persons whose names they bear, and as entitled beyond all other writings, to credit, upon the ground of veracity and trust-worthiness.

On reading them with attention, we learn that their chief design is to communicate a revelation from Almighty God to man. This is their main scope, to which all other matters are subordinate. Such being the case, we proceed to examine, with seriousness and humility of mind, the marks and evidences by which we are assured that they really contain a revelation of the divine will.

These credentials we soon discover, were, in the first instance, the miracles which our Lord performed, the prophecies which were accomplished in him, the nature of his doctrine, the holiness of his character, and the beneficial effects produced in the hearts and lives of those who received his message.

These credentials remain in substance the same in every age. They have, however, been

enlarged by the lapse of time. To the miracles of our Lord are now added those of the Apostles. And to the prophecies accomplished in himself, all the series of predictions which have been since fulfilled, and are now fulfilling, in the world. We also adjoin the proofs arising from the propagation of the gospel, and the obvious benefits it has conferred on mankind. These topics will form the subject of the present and the four succeeding Lectures.¹

Our Lord's doctrine and character, as well as the divine effects of his religion, will form branches of the internal evidences to be considered in a further division of our Course.²

Thus we are coming to the grounds of a divine faith, fixed on a divine testimony. The authenticity and credibility of our books place them on the footing of other undoubted histories; the supernatural credentials will give to the subject matter of them a divine authority.

We begin with the MIRACLES of our Lord and his Apostles.

And here three questions may be proposed: Did the wonderful actions ascribed to Christ and the Apostles really take place? Were these actions undoubtedly miraculous? Was there

¹ Lect. viii.—xi.

² Lect. xiv.—xviii.

such a connexion between them and the religion they attest, as to prove that that religion was from God?

If these questions are satisfactorily answered, we shall have demonstrated all that the case requires; for we shall have shown that THE FACTS WERE DONE—that THE FACTS WERE MIRACULOUS—that THE FACTS PROVE THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

Let me beg the attention of every candid and sincere hearer, (for I address no other,) whilst I detail the proofs of these points, though they will necessarily throw us back on the last lecture. Some repetition on so great a topic, if unavoidable, is a small evil.

I. To ask whether the wonderful actions ascribed to our Saviour and his apostles REALLY TOOK PLACE, is to move again the question which we have already settled. For it is in a good measure the same thing as to ask, Whether the credibility of the gospel history includes the credibility of the works which are the most prominent part of it, and on which the whole rests. If the history be not true as to these, it is not true at all. The wonderful deeds are not subordinate and insulated parts of the account, mere appendages; but the main features. The trust-worthiness of

the historians is pledged to the particular events which we call miracles, as the foundation of the entire narrative. The question then with regard to them is of the last moment. To proceed in the clearest manner, let us first separate the wonderful actions from their causes, and view them simply as *matters of history*.

Take any miracles you please. For instance, at the marriage feast in Cana, our Lord is represented as having turned water into wine. At the same place he healed the son of a nobleman who was sick at Capernaum. On another occasion, when watched by the Pharisees, he ordered the man who had a withered hand, to stretch it forth and it became whole as the other. Again, he restored sight to blind Bartimeus; and he raised Lazarus, and the only son of a widowed mother at Nain, to life.

Now in each of these and the like examples of our Lord's wonderful works, there are two distinct and palpable facts, which were submitted to the observation of all the people, and of which they were competent judges. The water-pots of stone were filled with water—when the servants presented the same to the governor of the feast, it was wine. The nobleman left his son at Capernaum dying—he received on his return from our Lord, the certain tidings of his recovery. The man had indis-

putably a withered hand—it was afterwards whole as the other. Bartimeus was blind—his sight was restored. Lazarus and the youth at Nain were dead; the one had been interred, the other was carried out on the bier as our Lord met him—both lived again.

So of all the other works which were performed by our Lord and his apostles, and which we consider to be miracles. At the least, certain plain, intelligible facts took place, which no one can dispute. All who were present witnessed and knew the previous state of the sufferers—the same persons witnessed and knew their subsequent altered condition. Whether a miracle was performed in each case, is another question. We are now concerned with the previous enquiry. Did certain facts occur? Does the testimony to the facts of the state previous to the interference of our Lord and his apostles, and to the facts of the state subsequent to it—does this testimony deserve belief? Were the events themselves such as are recorded?

These remarks may be applied to the greatest of all miracles—the resurrection of our Lord. It resolves itself likewise into two facts. Did the apostles see and know the death and burial of their Master? This is one fact. Did they see and know the same Jesus

their Master alive again—did they converse with him for forty days—and behold him ascending into heaven? Thus the whole question of the truth of the gospel miracles falls back on the credibility. A few remarks will show that that credibility embraces them, and that they are indissolubly connected with the general credit due to the evangelical history.

1. For all that we stated, in our last lecture, as to the number and character of the witnesses to our Lord's history, as to their simplicity, uprightness, disinterestedness and purity of life, not only applies, but applies chiefly, and in the first place, to these very actions. It was not to doctrines, but to these specific facts occurring under their own eyes, and submitted to their own examination, that they bear their testimony. It was for asserting especially the resurrection of their Master, the most astonishing of all the events in the evangelical history, that they endured suffering, reproach, persecution, death. By only not bearing testimony to this and the preceding miracles of their Lord, they might have avoided all suffering and reproach, and have lived in quiet, as we observed in the last lecture; nay, by detecting an imposture, if there had been any, they might have risen to reputation, honour, reward. And yet these twelve plain, honest

men, the purity of whose lives no one can impeach, persisted to the last in a firm, consistent, unshaken testimony to this miraculous history. Not only so, they go about and preach these specific facts, and the doctrines springing out of them, and live a self-denying, beneficent, holy life; and thus living and bearing witness, they bring upon themselves gratuitously, and with a full knowledge of the consequences, enmity, hatred, peril, and death. Such a testimony never can be disputed or disbelieved, except on principles which would destroy the validity of all testimony, and end in annihilating human intercourse. That such men should invent things entirely false, should then give them out as true, at the peril of life; and should suffer themselves to be put to death, all of them, for attesting that they had seen with their eyes what they did not see, is contradictory to all the known principles of human nature. This is the first point, the number and character of our witnesses prove that, as they are credible in their narrative generally, so they are most of all credible in what is the main part of it, the extraordinary actions performed.

2. Again: what did the converts of the first century believe, and what did they attest to those of the second, but the facts of the gospel

miracles, of the resurrection of their Lord especially, and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, on which Christianity rested its claims?

Their giving credit to a narrative founded on these wonderful operations, included, in the very first place, a belief in the account of those operations. If the works had not been performed, what would have availed all the fragments of the story? If Christ had not really wrought his miraculous works, really risen, really ascended into heaven, and by many infallible proofs assured his disciples of his divine mission; if he had not really poured out the gifts of the Holy Ghost according to his promise, Christians would have had nothing to believe in; the whole of Christianity would have been a lie. But these facts were universally admitted as true by the contemporaries of the apostles. They rest not only on their testimony, as immediate witnesses, but on the suffrage of the whole Jewish nation, to whom they appealed. This is a most important circumstance in considering the truth of the extraordinary works recorded in the gospel narrative. For the credibility of contemporary history, be it remarked, when uncontradicted, springs not only from the personal qualities of those who write, but also from the suffrage of all their countrymen, friends and enemies, to whom the writings

are submitted. In reading the evangelical history, it is the nation, it is the whole age whom we hear. If the works said to be miraculous had not taken place, the cry of indignation raised in all the places where the false accounts came, would have resounded with a tremendous echo to posterity, and have left us in the present age no Christian religion to discuss.

3. I observe further, that monuments were set up in memory of the wonderful facts recorded in the scriptures at the time when they took place, and have continued ever since. This is one of the marks laid down with such acuteness by Leslie.³ We have already noticed that the institutions appointed by our Christian books, and still subsisting, prove their credibility generally; but we now apply the observation to the miraculous part of the history. For the mighty works of our Lord, his resurrection, his ascension, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the miraculous powers of the apostles, were accompanied with the propagation of a new religion, with the promulgation of divine laws; with all the institutions of a peculiar religious society, called the Christian church; with the celebration therein of the sacrament of bap-

³ Frayssinous' *Defense du Christianisme*, i. 506.

⁴ *Short and Easy Method with the Deists*.

tism, as a direct dedication of all its members to their Lord and Saviour; and of the sacred eucharist in commemoration of his death and passion; together with the solemn observance of the first day in every week to record and signalise his resurrection from the dead—in a word, with all the associations and usages which mark Christian nations. These monuments were set up at the time when the wonderful works were done, and as memorials of them. They owed their origin to them, and to them alone. Every individual in every age of the Christian church has known, and knows, that he was baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, as having established his divine mission by a series of wonderful operations; and that he celebrates the Lord's Supper in remembrance of his death, and observes as sacred the first day of the week, in express commemoration of his resurrection.

Now it was utterly impossible for an impostor to have invented the extraordinary facts of the New Testament, and then have written an account of them and imposed it on the descendants of the first Christians: because such impostor must not only have invented the wonderful facts, and forged the books recording them, but must have contrived also the public actions and monuments connected with these

facts; and must further have persuaded the people that they and their fathers had always believed them, and observed the usages from the time of Christ to their own; when every man, woman, and child would have risen up to contradict him.

A man might as well pretend, any day now, to produce an account of wonderful adventures achieved by some ancient saint or hero a thousand years ago, by Bede for example, or Alfred, and in confirmation of this, endeavour to persuade the Christian world that they had all along, from that time to this, been baptized in his name, and in belief of such wonderful works.—Is it possible that such a fraud could succeed?

Or he might with as much prospect of success, attempt at this day to invent a book of statutes or acts of parliament for England, and make them pass upon the nation as the old established laws of the country founded on Magna Charta, which they and their fathers had always received and been governed by, when not a creature had ever heard of them. The case refutes itself. In fact, there never was a book of forged laws palmed upon any people since the world began. So certainly do the public actions, usages, and habits of the Christian church, from the time of Christ and

his apostles, prove the credibility of the wonderful facts from which they took their rise. The pretence to these facts, if they had not been true, would have extinguished Christianity in its birth.

4. But let the account itself of each of the supernatural actions, as recorded in our books, be examined, with all the attendant circumstances, and the credibility of them will appear. Take the New Testament into your hands and read it. Observe the inimitable simplicity and truth of the respective narratives. Notice how indissolubly they are connected and interwoven with the whole history. See how naturally they arise out of the preceding circumstances, and join on upon those which follow. Observe the impression which the extraordinary events made, the surprise and astonishment of the attendant multitudes, and their direct ascription of them to divine power.⁵ Mark how essential they are to the consistency of the whole story. You discover no art, no patch-work, no second thoughts. The time, the persons, the events before and after, the consequences, the objections raised, all the most minute details, are so exquisitely given, that the veracity of the whole shines out con-

⁵ See some striking thoughts in Mr. Penrose's late work on the IMPRESSION made by our Lord's miracles.

spicuously at every turn. They cannot be forgeries. Things which might tend to lessen the greatness of the facts, especially the ascription of them by our Lord's enemies to evil spirits, are faithfully narrated. The inability of the disciples to cast out an unclean spirit is noted. The peculiar dignity and reserve, and what I may call the propriety of our Saviour's conduct, his authoritative and yet simple and unaffected manner of doing his mighty works, are beyond imitation. There is no colouring, no amplification, no study of effect, no eagerness to strike wonder, no anxiety to be believed. The evangelists write as those who give a faithful narrative of a wonderful, but real course of action. Nor is it a slight corroboration of all these arguments, that the undesigned coincidences so admirably adduced by critics in proof of the general credibility of the gospel narrative, fall as frequently upon the miracles as on any other events.⁶

The wonderful deeds then of the New Testament really occurred. To resist such accumulated evidence, borne by such witnesses, attested by all their contemporaries, admitted by their bitterest foes, corroborated by existing monuments and public usages, and strength-

⁶ See Mr. Blunt's *Veracity*: where the remark is first made, and illustrated with admirable judgment.

ened by all the marks of truth in the accounts themselves—I say, to resist such evidence, not to speculative opinions, but to distinct matters of fact, is to overthrow the very foundations of truth, and to involve men in one bewildering maze of scepticism and absurdity.

And yet this is coolly attempted by modern infidels, not by going into an examination of our arguments, or by producing counter-evidence; but by general insinuations against the fallibility of human testimony, by asserting that miracles are contradictory to experience, and by alleging that the proof of remote history is weakened and extinguished by the lapse of time.

But what has the general fallibility of human testimony to do with the strong, unshaken evidence of upright men to specific events which fell under their own notice? For we are now only considering miracles as to the facts on which they rest. What the cause of them might be, that is, whether they are properly miraculous or not, we do not now enquire; we adduce testimony to the naked facts. Were the water-pots filled with water? Did it become wine? Here are two facts. Was Lazarus dead? Did Lazarus live again after four days? Was Bartimeus blind? Did he receive

his sight? Was our Lord crucified? Did he live again on the third day? These are the questions.

Now what can general insinuations against human testimony avail in a case like that before us, when every caution has been taken against this very fallibility, and the evidence of twelve unimpeached beholders, with the suffrages of a whole nation, excludes all possibility of mistake? As well might we enter a court of justice, and, when a jury of twelve men upon their oath, under the direction of a learned and impartial judge, have brought in a verdict, upon the testimony of numerous credible witnesses to a specific fact—whisper the fallibility of human testimony.

It is further objected, that these wonderful works are contrary to experience? To what experience? To that of the objector merely? Then he will shut out all facts of which he is not himself the eye-witness; and the Indian who should refuse to believe on any testimony the fact of water being frozen, would be in the right. But does the objector mean the experience of others? Then he must come to testimony. Thus his objection does not apply. Opposite experience is not necessarily contradictory. In order to oppose experience to miraculous facts, the objector should contrast the testimony of those who professed to have

seen miracles, and considered them divine; to the testimony of those who, under similar circumstances, saw the same actions, and considered them not divine, but mere impostures.⁷

Again, it is urged, that the transmission of remote facts is weakened till it becomes extinct. But we are not speaking of a loose, undefined transmission by oral testimony. We are speaking of written testimony, and where a series of separate and credible witnesses, in each age from the present, may be traced up, step by step, till we come to the apostolic. In this view, the Christian church is a society which never passes away, nor leaves a void in the transmission of testimony. The generations of it change only gradually and imperceptibly. The new age of Christians has been baptized into the faith of the great and striking facts of Christianity, and received the distinct testimony of them, long before the old age has passed off. Twenty or thirty individuals joining hands, as it were, across the lines which divide the centuries, form an unbroken chain from the apostles' time to our own. The successive generations of witnesses imperceptibly passing away in the Christian society, are only like the successive changes in the matter of the same human frame, which possesses always

⁷ See a fine remark to this purport in Bishop Van Mildert's Lect: on Infidelity *in loc.*

one unchanged essence and form, though the particles which compose it are partly dissipated every moment, and renewed by those which take their place. A man is the same man, whatever imperceptible changes take place in the substance of his body, because his consciousness, his mind, his identity remains. Thus the Christian society continues still the same depositary of truth. Consciousness is diffused, as it were, throughout the community. The passage from one generation of Christians to another is imperceptible. The society is always the same body, preserving the memory of certain events, and celebrating actions in commemoration of them. The church in her first and in her eighteenth century, only differs as a man at seventy years of age differs from what he was at twenty. His consciousness, his memory of certain prominent facts, and his testimony to them continue as fresh and decisive as ever.⁸

So utterly futile are the objections against the history of the gospel—objections, however, which being sown in the fertile soil of fallen nature, and favouring the pride and sensuality of the heart, require continually to be exposed. Let it be remembered, then, that if men attempt to shake our belief in the testimony to the miraculous facts of the gospel, they resist

⁸ Frayssinous.

the common sentiments and most approved practice of mankind; nay, the very sentiments and practice by which they themselves are governed in similar cases. In short, all historical truth, all philosophy, all jurisprudence, all society, depends on the evidence borne by credible witnesses. A reliance on well-authenticated and well-circumstanced testimony is as much a law of our moral nature, as the belief of the ordinary laws by which the universe is governed, is of our understanding.⁹

But we proceed, in the next place, to consider

II. WHETHER THESE FACTS WERE, PROPERLY SPEAKING, MIRACULOUS.

That the facts took place is proved: it is admitted also that they were extraordinary. A few considerations will show that they were in the strictest sense miracles.

For what is a miracle? Is it not such an operation as suspends some of those laws of nature, on the general constancy of which the order and preservation of the whole universe rest? These laws God alone, as the author of nature, fixed: and these laws God alone, as the governor and preserver of nature, can alter or suspend. A miracle supposes an established and generally unaltered course of things.

⁹ Franks's Hulsean Lectures.

Effects that are produced in the regular order of that course we call natural, and those which clearly and palpably depart from that order we call miraculous. Both are equally easy to God; and equally incomprehensible, in the mode of them, to us. That grains of corn sown in the earth should turn into abundant harvests which nourish whole nations, is an astonishing act of that goodness which continually supplies our wants. But it is constantly exerted, and therefore creates little surprise. It is common. That five barley loaves and a few small fishes should be multiplied instantaneously so as to feed five thousand men, and that twelve baskets of fragments should be collected from them, is an astonishing act effected by divine goodness, communicating a revelation to mankind. But it is rare and unexpected. It therefore strikes us with admiration. It excites enquiry into the cause of the extraordinary occurrence. The usual acts of God's power prove his being and providence; the unusual and miraculous prove the divine commission of the person at whose word they are performed. The extraordinary phenomena which we call miracles, are fitted, therefore, from their infrequency, to awaken the attention of mankind; and at the same time they afford, by their evident connexion with supernatural

agency, the best conceivable proof of an immediate indication of the divine will.

1. The facts then of the gospel were plain and palpable miracles—such suspensions of the order of nature as men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, might judge of. They were not facts of the nature of which any doubt could be entertained whether they were in the ordinary course of things or not; but plainly contrary to that course. Such as raising a body that had been dead four days; restoring instant and perfect sight to the blind; healing by a word or at a distance all the diseases incident to our nature; casting out unclean spirits; walking on the sea; calming in a moment the raging of a storm. These works were evidently miracles—suspensions of the laws of nature—bold, sensible, and level to every man's comprehension.

2. They were done by Christ and his apostles professedly as divine acts, and were accompanied with that open and undisguised publicity which would have led to their detection had they been impositions. They were performed in the face of the world, or before a sufficient number of competent and intelligent witnesses. They were not fabricated among a few interested persons in a corner. They were done openly in the midst of the assembled

multitudes, and before the most bitter adversaries. The man born blind, Lazarus, the paralytic, were seen by their families and neighbours and all the Jews. The few loaves and fishes were multiplied publicly, and partaken of by five thousand men. The entire Jewish nation, assembled at the feast of Pentecost, heard the apostles address them in new tongues. These things were done at noon-day, and were subjected to the examination of every beholder. Lest, however, it should be said that a crowd are bad judges of a miraculous work, others were performed before individual, competent witnesses, and then submitted to the public eye. Peter and James and John, and the father and the mother of the damsel (the persons best able to discern the truth of the restoration to life) were present at the raising of Jairus' daughter: whilst all the people weeping and wailing at her death, and the scoffers who derided our Lord's attempt to restore her, were so many witnesses of the truth of the miracle, and, had there been any imposition, would have been so many accusers of the fraud. The circumstances of the damsel's walking, and being capable of receiving her ordinary food, are further proofs of the perfection of the work and its miraculous character.

3. Then the first Christian miracles were

wrought, not before a heathen nation, but before the Jewish, accustomed to judge of miracles and to weigh the evidence arising from them. At that very time they were expecting their Messiah, and therefore prepared to examine with care and jealousy the truth of the wonderful works; and were excited to bitter hostility against our Lord when they heard his doctrine; and scrutinized his miracles with eager desire to detect a fraud. Yet this people admit the miracles of Christ to be notable and decisive; they ascribe them to a divine power; the impression made upon their minds, contrary to their wishes and prejudices, is evidently that which undeniable miracles could alone produce; their very endeavours to oppose and resist them, or to explain away the just inferences from them, proclaim aloud the truth of the supernatural operations.

4. Further, our Lord's mighty deeds include such numerous and various suspensions of the course of nature as, under the circumstances, constitute the most decisive proof of miraculous agency. It was not one or two or three professed miracles, with many failures and a long interval of time between each, which were performed, but a great number, without a single failure, during the whole of our Lord's ministry. His life was a life of miracles. *He*

went about doing good in the exertion of an abiding and unfailing miraculous power. More than fifty express instances are recorded—whilst whole masses of them are registered in such words as these, *And Jesus went about all Galilee healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people; and his fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought unto him all the sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy, and he healed them.* And at the close of his history St. John adds, *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.*

Again, these miracles of our Lord were of every sort; some less grand and stupendous, others more imposing. At one time he feeds an assembled multitude, at another he heals the trembling woman that came behind him and touched the hem of his garment. His power was universal. At Jerusalem, in several parts of Judea and Galilee, in streets and villages, in synagogues, in private houses, in the streets, in highways, in different manners, and on every kind of occasion, did he perform his mighty works. Some with preparation and a solemn prediction of what he was about

to do, as in the case of Lazarus, and the daughter of Jairus; others without preparation and by accident, as we speak, as the widow's son at Nain.¹⁰ Some when attended by the multitudes, others when alone with the patient. Most of these works were performed at the earnest entreaty of a father, a mother, a master of a family on behalf of persons whom they loved; so that our Lord did not choose the subjects of his miracles, but displayed his power in cases where the attention would be most awakened, and the reality of the cures best ascertained. By this variety every attempt at explaining away the accounts is precluded. If some might overwhelm the senses of the beholders, as the transfiguration and the ascension; others were submitted to the most sober, deliberate contemplation—as the calming of the sea, the turning water into wine, the feeding the five thousand. No fortuitous circumstances, no exaggeration, can solve the phenomena of miracles varied in every possible form, and which never in a single instance failed of their end.

¹⁰ In the one species of miracle, the raising from the dead, mark the gradations—the daughter of Jairus was just dead and lay like one asleep—the widow's son had been dead some little time and was being carried to the tomb—Lazarus had been dead four days, and corruption had taken place.

5. Consider, further, the miracles of which our Lord was the subject, as well as those which he himself performed.¹¹ He was conceived and born by a direct, miraculous power. Three times during his life did a voice from heaven proclaim him to be the Son of God. At his death the rending of the vail, the earthquake, the supernatural darkness, the opened graves, were divine attestations. The greatest of all miracles was his own resurrection from the dead. I say nothing of his divine knowledge of the hearts and thoughts of men; I omit the miraculous fast of forty days; I pass by various other demonstrations of superhuman operations. I confine myself to the remark that the distinct miracles I have mentioned, of which our Saviour was the subject, are calculated to strengthen our expectation of a truly supernatural character in his own mighty works.

6. Then the wonderful works of Christ produced such permanent effects on those who were the subjects of them, as to prove their supernatural character. They were most of them performed, indeed, instantaneously; but the effects remained, and were submitted to every one's observation. When Lazarus was

¹¹ This is one of the fine thoughts with which Franks's Lectures abound.

raised, he did not merely move and speak and die again, or come forth out of the grave and vanish away. He returned to his family, and was visited by the Jews from motives of curiosity or malevolence. A momentary effect may be called in question; the solid and lasting consequences of a cure, in the abiding health of the individual, attest the finger of God.

7. Lastly, the miracles of the New Testament were done for a high and holy end, an end worthy of the Almighty Creator, which renders a suspension of the ordinary course of nature highly credible. They were not wasted on any trivial occasion. They were not superfluous or undefined in their purpose. The wise and benevolent end was to ascertain the truth of a declaration of God's will; to mark out the Saviour of mankind from all pretenders; to give his accountable creatures a due assurance of a divine revelation—such an end is unquestionably neither inconsistent with the divine wisdom, nor unbecoming the divine goodness. So far as we can judge, some such interference was absolutely necessary as an attestation to a religion sent from God. The extraordinary acts were precisely suitable to the extraordinary occasion which called for them. And to those who admit the being and perfections of the Moral Governor of the universe, (and those

only I address,) it must appear in the highest degree probable that miraculous works would attend the declaration of his will. With such positive evidence before us, then, the case is undoubted—the wonderful actions of the gospel history were directly and palpably miraculous.

But this leads us to notice

III. That there was such a CONNEXION BETWEEN THESE MIRACLES AND THE RELIGION THEY ARE SAID TO ATTEST, as to prove satisfactorily that that religion was from God.

1. For our Saviour and the apostles constantly appealed to their mighty works in proof of their mission. When John Baptist sent his disciples to our Lord to enquire whether he were the Messiah, he bid them return and tell John what miracles they had witnessed, and what doctrine they had heard. A previous notice of many of his miracles was given, the character of an ambassador from God assumed, and then a series of mighty works performed in proof of the truth of his mission. To trace out the manner of this proof, to follow our Lord's various arguments, to study the credentials of the gospel in the gospel itself, to read the Christian evidences as Jesus himself stated them, will give the most entire satisfaction to the candid mind. The progress of the

proof—the wise and forcible manner of our Saviour's arrangement of it—the majesty, the compassion, the truth of his appeals, carry their own conviction with them. Every time that we read the gospel, we are more struck with the matchless character of veracity appearing in the proofs which he adduced of his mission. At first he made scarcely any remarks on his miracles; he performed them, and let them speak for themselves. Towards the close of his ministry, again, he wrought but few mighty works; because of the unbelief of the people. But between these periods, the intermixture of arguments and miracles, of appeals to the heart and displays of divine power, form an irresistible evidence to every attentive mind, that his doctrine was divine.¹²

2. Moreover the miracles of our Lord had been predicted as the express evidence of the Messiah. A long previous expectation had been excited, no room was left for conjecture either as to the agent or the design. The wonders of our Lord were not single, unconnected, unexplained prodigies, but miracles performed in consequence of a design avowed long before, and which ceased to be wrought when that design was accomplished. The prophet Isaiah had marked out the very miracles which should desig-

¹² Franks.

nate the Messiah: *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped, then shall the lame man leap as the hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.* We shall see the finger of prophecy pointed to the Messiah still more clearly when we come to the proper place; but the predictions fulfilled in the miracles of our Lord, fix and designate and seal him as divinely commissioned of God, and as not only a prophet, but the Messiah and the Saviour of the world.

3. And surely we cannot fail to observe the admirable fitness of this attestation to a divine religion. It is a manner of acting worthy of God. Let men reason to support their opinions; let them establish their doctrines by a course of arguments—they have no right to command the understanding of others. But for the Almighty God, it is not becoming that he should speak as a philosopher who disputes—no, he speaks as a Master who decides; he supports his religion, not by arguments, but by deeds of omnipotence. His word is truth; to obey it is the duty of man—and what more worthy of God than to command the obedience of man by visible acts attesting the homage which all nature pays him.¹³ Such a proof is level to the capacity of man as man. It is

¹³ Frayssinous' *Défense du Christianisme*.

calculated to awaken the attention, and command the assent, and satisfy the doubts, and silence the objections of persons of all classes and conditions. Such an attestation becomes the simplicity and universality of revelation, and carries on it the genuine impress of the majesty of heaven. Miracles are the broad seal annexed by God himself to the grand charter of salvation in Jesus Christ.

4. For it is further to be noted, that the miracles of Christianity were performed by those who had all other signs of a divine mission; and therefore to whose doctrine implicit obedience was due, as to a communication from God. The mighty works, however palpable and numerous, were not the only credentials of our Lord and his apostles. Every thing else corresponded. Dignity, simplicity, disinterestedness, purity of life, holy instructions, bold rebukes of vice, fortitude, meekness, constancy unto death, were conspicuous in the heavenly ambassadors.

The gift of prophecy distinguished the same and no other persons. The miracles were acts of mercy, deeds of compassion and grace, exertions of goodness and piety. They were not disjointed wonders, but were harmoniously united with all the other signs of a mission from heaven. You need not be told that the

prodigies of heathenism, even if the facts be admitted, and the other means of solving the phenomena waived, (as the cure said to be performed by the emperor Vespasian, on which Hume relies,) were done by persons who did not even pretend to a divine commission, and who exhibited not one single mark of the messengers of the Most High.

5. The inference, therefore, from the miracles to the truth of Christianity is direct, forcible, conclusive: it speaks to every unprejudiced mind. The language of Nicodemus is the language of the unsophisticated conscience, *We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him.* The testimony of our senses is not a more satisfactory evidence of the existence of external objects, than the scripture miracles are of a divine commission. When men born blind suddenly received their sight, when multitudes were cured of the most desperate diseases by a touch or at a distance, when the dumb were made to speak, and the dead were raised, when devils were cast out, and confessed that Jesus was the Son of God, when all nature gave way, and started back at the command of Christ, surely no proof could be more decisive of the immediate presence of the God of nature—surely no language, not

even an angel's voice; could proclaim more intelligibly, that God was revealing his will. Surely these wonderful works challenged implicit obedience to the Sovereign of the universe, thus exercising his dominion over nature, and making the whole creation bow and tremble and obey—and then delivering the record of his stupendous scheme of redemption to an awe-struck world.

6. Accordingly, the miracles of Christianity are so incorporated with the instructions, as to oblige men to receive not only the religion generally, but all the doctrines it communicates, as of divine authority. It is most reasonable to submit with unlimited faith to all that was delivered by messengers thus commissioned and accredited. The wonderful actions which they performed are incorporated and intermingled with the whole substance of their doctrine. The actions without the instructions are unintelligible. If the New Testament history and the New Testament miracles are entitled to credit, then all the New Testament doctrine is entitled to the same. None of the supernatural works were performed for subordinate ends: they did not aim, like the heathen prodigies, to prove the greater sanctity of an altar, or raise the credit of an oracle, or establish the usage of some insignificant rite; but they were

performed as the great ends of the mission required, were involved in the most important doctrines, and were directed to the development of one vast scheme, the redemption of mankind.

That men might *know that the Son of God hath power on earth to forgive sins, he saith to the sick of the palsy, as our text particularly notes, Arise, take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.* That the people might learn that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, he expelled him from the bodies of the possessed. He was eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame, and a father to the poor, in the literal sense, that he might afford a pledge of the correspondent spiritual blessing. Those whom he healed, he suffered not to remain with him for the purpose of swelling his retinue, but bade them go to their friends, and *sin no more.* To assure the apostles of their future success in preaching the gospel, he encouraged them by a miraculous draught of fishes to follow him, and become *fishers of men.* He taught the universality of his religion, and the admission of the Gentiles into his Church, by purifying the outward court of the temple, and driving out in a miraculous manner the Jewish traffickers. He showed the power of faith, by devoting the barren fig-tree to sudden decay and destruction.

He encouraged the timid belief of his disciples by calming the tempest. Those multitudes whom he fed by a miracle, were first wearied and faint by a long attendance on his instructions. Thus were our Lord's miracles inseparably connected with the revelation they were designed to attest.¹⁴ The same may be said of those performed by the apostles; every thing had a regard to the high object of the mission: the facts involve the doctrines, and oblige us to receive them.

7. I only mention cursorily, that the success of the gospel, resting on the miracles as its foundation, and on no other, proves that the doctrine was from God. I enter not now on the subject of the propagation of the gospel; but it is necessary for me to repeat, what I observed in the last lecture, that the prodigious success of the simple preaching of the faith of Christ by unlettered men, supported by these miraculous powers, proves that the revelation was divine. For it was no idle assent that the unnumbered converts gave: they exposed themselves to peril, reproach, persecution, death. Nor was it in accordance with preconceived prejudices, that the assent was given. The converts had to give up all their partialities, all their habits, and all their opinions, to re-

¹⁴ Bishop Van Mildert,

nounce the traditions and superstitions in which they had been educated, and in which their fathers lived and died. The miracles did not attest a doctrine which fell in with the sentiments of a party already in favour of the tenets and practice which the religion inculcated. If this had been the case, the miracles might have been examined with less attention. But the fact was totally different; the progress of the Christian religion was attended with an entire change in the sentiments and character of the converts. The religion owed its birth to the doctrine supported by the miraculous works. The miracles attracted the attention of men, and assured them that a divine communication was made; but it was the communication itself, that is, the doctrine, which swayed the heart, changed the life, and purified the whole character. The sacred influences of grace, indeed, accompanied these means of conviction and instruction. This is another most important topic, which will be considered in its proper place. What we now state is, that the success of the Christian doctrine, authorised by the miracles, proves that there was an inseparable connexion between the wonderful works, and the revelation which they attested; in other words, that the Christian religion was from God.

8. We observe, lastly, that though all false

religions have made some pretensions to wonderful works, yet there never was a religion set up and established by miracles, but the religion of the bible. A series of wonderful works like that on which the mission of Christ rests, was never heard of since the world began.¹⁵

¹⁵ I except, of course, that of which Christianity was the complement and consummation, and with which it formed one connected divine revelation, the legation of Moses,

We have already proved the authenticity and credibility of the books of the Old Testament through the medium of those of the New. Of the miracles which introduced the Mosaic economy, I need not say a word: the very same arguments which support the Christian miracles, prove those of Moses. The four marks laid down by Leslie—that they were palpable—publicly performed—commemorated by national monuments and usages—and that these monuments and usages began at the very time when the mighty works were performed, are perfectly conclusive. I will only add, that there is something of greater magnificence in the Mosaic miracles—they were on a larger scale, and of bolder features, in order to be handed down the better by indelible memorials, through those many centuries, during which written testimony by contemporary authors was, from the circumstances of the case, impossible. The miraculous passage of the Red Sea, the pillar of fire, the flaming summit of Sinai, the drying up of Jordan, the descent of the manna, the streams poured out from the smitten rock, the prostrate walls of Jericho, were miracles of that prodigious grandeur, as to stand forth palpable from the scene, and to remain visible, as it were, from that remote age to the present. The milder and less stupendous, but not less divine, miracles of the New Testament, were at once more suitable to the genius of the

Mankind have indeed always expected that God would reveal himself to them by working some things above the course of nature; and therefore there never was any false religion set up, but it professed to be confirmed by some miraculous works or appearances; but these very attempts serve to set forth to greater advantage the undeniable miracles of the scripture.

Mahomet wisely disclaimed the performance of miracles as a test of his divine mission; and though he was not sparing in his account of sensible communications from heaven, his own statements represent him as at once the object of them, and the sole witness.

The prodigies of the heathen were few in number, were attested by no credible witnesses, were insulated and solitary wonders, were never submitted to the senses and examination of mankind, were at best rather subjects of speculative curiosity, than matters with which any serious truth was connected. They totally differ from the miracles of Christ in all their leading features, as well as in their connexion, import, and final cause. Their foundation was

religion, and more adapted, so to speak, to a learned period, when contemporary writings could hand down with ease to future ages the authentic records of the minutest divine operations.

chiefly rumour or fable; the wonders themselves are easily resolved into natural causes; the persons who recorded them lived at a remote age and in a distant country. Besides, there is no proof that any of these religions was set up in the first instance by means of these alleged supernatural works. Not a single miracle can be named that was ever offered as a test of any of these religions before it was established. Their miracles were appendages, not proofs; and the reception of them was the effect, not the cause of a belief in the religion with which they were connected.¹⁶

The Christian doctrine looks down on all these pretences from the glorious height on which it stands. The conviction of the probability of miracles for attesting the divine will, in the minds of all who admit the being and providence of God prepared the way; and the miserable impotency of all false religions in their pretences to them, left the whole field unoccupied for the clear and undoubted miraculous operations which usher in the scripture revelation. They stand as the single series of divine works, to attest the single series of divine communications which was ever made to man.

¹⁶ The above remarks, with a slight variation, apply to the miraculous works ascribed to the Roman Catholic Saints.

And here let us observe, that, as under the head of the authenticity, we found that the Christian books were the only records professing to contain a divine revelation written by the first teachers of that revelation, and submitted to the examination of mankind; and as again under the head of the credibility of those books, we discovered that no account of the admitted facts of Christianity was ever given but the narrative therein contained; so now, under the head of miraculous operations, we see that no other religion was ever attempted to be established in the first instance by miracles, but the religion of the bible. Thus solitary, in unapproachable dignity, stands the proof of the gospel.

I. Are you not then convinced, for I must pass on to the CONCLUSION, by the statements laid before you? I address the docile and sincere. Does not the impression left on your minds by the review of the Christian miracles, resemble that which was produced on the multitudes in whose presence they were first wrought? Yes, all your previous hesitation and doubts are dispersed. You feel the force of truth. You are *astonished beyond measure*. You *glorify God*, with the people in our text, *saying, We never saw it on this fashion*. You bear witness to the grace

and power and divine mission of the Son of God.

The impression, the first dictate of the unsophisticated conscience, the language of the heart of man, on reading the miracles of Christ, is, *Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel. This is the prophet that was to come into the world. He hath done all things well.* We have probably now quite as strong evidence of the divine miracles as the first Christians. We have not seen them indeed with our eyes, and so the sensible proof cannot be so lively, but other parts of the demonstration are more clear to us. The concurring marks of the Messiahship of Christ are more distinct; the direct miraculous character of the wonderful works is better recognized. Those doubts, for instance, which arose from the notions of magic, of the occult powers of nature, and the agency of evil spirits, are passed away; and with the brighter light of modern philosophy and science, we distinguish far more decisively the miracles of Christ from the ordinary course of God's providence.

II. Let us then yield to the conviction which these miracles are designed to produce. Let us pray to God for his grace that we may renounce all interfering prejudices and appetites;

and submit unreservedly to the Christian doctrine. Miracles only serve to introduce the Saviour, to verify his doctrine, to send us to his promises, his warnings, his encouragements. Miracles cannot give a right disposition of heart. That must be sought for from the Holy Spirit, whom our risen Lord poured out upon his church. We have great cause to fear for ourselves. If we harden our hearts to the voice of conscience, no arguments can convince, no moral proofs subdue. It is probable that external evidences to miracles COULD NOT be stronger than ours actually are, considering the nature and circumstances of man as a responsible creature.¹⁷ But this is nothing if the heart be fixed on the world and sensual pleasure; if the will be debauched by vice; if the understanding be perverted and blinded by pride and conceit.

Let the example of the heathen philosophers at the time of our Lord, be a warning to us. For what did Tacitus and Suetonius and Seneca and Pliny know of the Christian doctrine? What conviction did the miraculous works of Christ produce on their minds? *The preaching of the cross was foolishness* to them. In their proud search after wisdom, and their

¹⁷ Penrose.

contempt of the whole Jewish nation, they looked not beyond the surface. They examined nothing with candour and seriousness. They never approached the Christian question. They dismissed it, so far as they heard of it by rumour, as unworthy their regard. With the same spirit as the modern literary unbeliever, they gave no heed to the divine message, bestowed no pains on ascertaining its truth, and lived and died in the gross and miserable bondage of their vices and ignorance. Such is the tendency of pride in the fallen heart of man. Let us guard against the first approaches to such a state of mind. Let us be led by the miracles to a serious study of the scriptures, that we may see the doctrine of a crucified Lord to be *the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

III. But we must not rest in a formal adherence to the Christian faith. The example of the Jews may warn us against this opposite, but not less dangerous, evil. They were near the Saviour. They saw his miracles. They received, at the time, the deepest impression of his divine mission. They knew and acknowledged, at first, that he was the Christ the Saviour of the world. But as our Lord after-

wards developed his character and doctrine, as he rebuked the vices of the Scribes and Pharisees, condemned their traditions, exposed their hypocrisy, expounded the spiritual nature of his kingdom, and called them to repentance and conversion, they began to hate his person and steel their hearts against his most decisive, miraculous works. They persuaded themselves that he opposed their law, which they well knew to be divine. They attributed his miracles to evil spirits. They tempted him by cavils, and watched for his words that they might accuse him. They persisted in their unbelief, till that came upon them which was spoken of by the prophets, *By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed: lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

That you may avoid this awful state, yield now to the conviction which calls you to heaven. Open wide the gate, so to speak, that the truth may enter in. Close your ears to vain objections, and your hearts to corrupt pleasures, and give yourselves up to preparation for the doc-

trine of Christ. *Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.* The glorious apparatus of miracles brings you up to the feet of Christ. There fall prostrate. There confess your sins. There implore his mercy. There renounce every criminal passion. There supplicate the inward influences of grace. There enter upon new resolutions of obeying the religion you profess, and acting on the evidences you have received. Remember, the higher you rise in privileges, the lower will be your fall, if you abuse or neglect them. The knowledge you have been blessed with, cannot but bring with it a correspondent accountableness. Call to mind the doom of those cities in which our Lord's mightiest deeds had been performed—*Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day.*¹⁶

¹⁶ St. Matthew xi. 21—23.

May God grant that the blessed purpose of our Lord's miracles may be fulfilled in our humiliation and salvation! For this is their high end—*These things were written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.*