

5. 26. '03.

From the Library of
Professor William Henry Green
Bequeathed by him to
the Library of
Princeton Theological Seminary

SCC
2262
v. 6

W. Henry Green

Philadelphia

March 1857

TRACTS
OF THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

General Series.



VOL. VI.

PRINTED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
150 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK.

THE
BIBLE OF DIVINE ORIGIN.
A DIALOGUE.

BY REV. JOHN DE WITT,

PROFESSOR THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.

ZENAS. ANCUS. CAIUS.

ANCUS. I was lately struck with a sentiment, whether justly ascribed to Lord Byron or not I am unable to say, which fastened deeply on my attention. It often recurs to me as an affecting truth, and I am not philosopher enough to succeed in banishing it from my mind.

ZENAS. Pray, what is it ?

ANCUS. I will repeat it. "Indisputably, the firm believers in the Gospel have a great advantage over all others, for this simple reason, that, if it be true, they will have their reward hereafter; and if there be no hereafter, they can be but with the infidel, in his eternal sleep; having had the assistance of an exalted hope through life."

ZENAS. So confident a sceptic as you, moved by so simple a reflection! Why, you have a hundred times laughed in derision at the strongest arguments which that same Gospel can advance for its support.

ANCUS. Ay, Zenas, so I have; and I proudly boasted that I could confute its ablest advocates. Nor do I yet drop my plume before the world. When I am alone, however, Byron's remark will steal over my feelings, and lead me back to the days of my early youth. Then I read my Bible, and heard two sermons on the Sabbath; and then, I confess, Zenas, I was happier than I am now. In spite of my infidelity, I often catch myself wishing to go back to those days of simplicity and ignorance.

ZENAS. I am glad to hear you speak so *frankly*, on so important a subject. My own mind is ill at ease. I am like a man trying to touch ground in deep waters, who finds himself every moment sinking deeper. I have long desired an opportunity of hearing a fair statement of what can be urged in favor of a religion, which, if it be true, must bring with it the purest joy into the soul.

ANCUS. Well, if you are so disposed, you are in a fair way to be gratified ; for here comes Caius, a staunch believer in the divine origin of the Scriptures, and well acquainted with the foundation of his faith ; a little spice too hot, though.

ZENAS. Good morning, Caius. I hope we are well met. Ancus and I were this moment speaking of the grounds of the Christian faith ; and it would be gratifying probably to both of us, might we on this subject enjoy the privilege of your conversation, were it only for an hour.

CAIUS. With all my heart ; and I hope, my friends, that we shall enter upon the discussion with an earnest desire of “ buying the truth.”

ZENAS. It is not controversy that I solicit. I wish to hear the reasons of a Christian’s belief in the divine authority of the Bible. It was never made the subject of my early instruction, and now I am involved in uncertainty. I desire to examine the question ; but I know not where to commence. Sometimes my doubts rise to such a pitch, that I am ready to say there is no truth in any system of religion. In such moments, my heart is oppressed by despair ; and I wish I had never been born.

CAIUS. I trust our gracious Lord will yet bring you into his marvellous light. He has himself said, that “ the whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.”

ANCUS. But, Caius, I forewarn you, that in me you must not expect to find a disposition so ready to yield. My opinions are established ; nor have they been adopted without investigation. I have examined all the arguments which Christianity can plead, and they are very far from satisfying my mind.

CAIUS. I deeply deplore it. Still, as the solicitude of Zenas interests me, and as I hope that your heart is not so set against conviction as you seem to think it, I will cheerfully go into this debate. You tell us, Ancus, that you have examined *all* the evidences of Christianity. I have often observed this boast in the writings of infidels. *All* is a pretty comprehensive word; and an examination of *all* the evidences of our religion, is a task requiring rather uncommon qualifications as to talents, literature, patience, and industry; and if we are permitted to judge by the ablest productions of freethinkers, it is one of those tasks which they have not yet accomplished. I suppose you are well acquainted with the original languages of our venerable oracles, the Greek and the Hebrew?

ANCUS. I must confess I am not. I never fancied them.

CAIUS. Well, that is a great pity; since a number of petty objections, which infidels pretend to raise, are easily removed by a reasonable knowledge of those ancient languages. But a person who has examined *all* the evidences of revelation, is, doubtless, deeply read in ecclesiastical and profane history, and in the writings of the fathers, as well as of those heathen philosophers and historians who lived nearest the times of Christ and his apostles.

ANCUS. As for the fathers and the heathen writers, with reference to this question, I never opened one of them.

CAIUS. Why, that takes off another vast slice of your great monosyllable *all*. An acquaintance with those early writers would soon have convinced you, that the enemies of our religion not only impose statements upon their followers which are flatly contradicted by the united voice of all antiquity, but that they disingenuously overlook those statements which undeniably prove the authenticity and veracity of the sacred records. You would also have learned what was conceded, and what denied, by those great forerunners and patriarchs of freethinking, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian. Your time, however, has perhaps been too much occupied

by inquiries into the customs, institutions, and opinions of the Jews, and their neighboring nations ?

ANCUS. And pray, Caius, what have these to do with the evidences of revelation ?

CAIUS. What have these to do with the evidences of revelation ? You surprise me. Is a man qualified to examine even the most important, much less, *all* the evidences for the genuineness and truth of a piece of history, which claims to belong to a very remote period, and which treats of the concerns of a nation which then existed, who is ignorant of the rites, customs, and institutions peculiar to that period and nation ? Is he able to ascertain whether the style, the accidental allusions, the constant references to persons, places, and customs—in one word, whether the whole dress of that piece of history harmonizes with the age and the nation of which it treats ? Had you studied these branches of antiquity, you would have seen that the sacred writers undesignedly exhibit so various, familiar, and detailed a knowledge of the local, political, and religious peculiarities of the subject of their discourse, as stamps their productions with incontrovertible marks of genuineness. You would also have been enabled to laugh at a number of little quibbling objections which infidels parade with vast consequence, but which are entirely the creations of their own ignorance. As we cannot descend to notice all, let me give you one specimen instead of many. Voltaire charges Luke with contradicting himself, because in his history he represents our Saviour's ascension to have taken place from Bethany ; but in the Acts, from the mount of Olives. The infidel did not know that Bethany was a small village near Jerusalem, on the mount of Olives. Such objections—and there are numbers of them—display malignity, and would never have been advanced by men who had studied the subject, and were properly furnished for this important inquiry. It seems, then, that your boasted examination of *all* the evidences must be set down as a rhetorical flourish. I wish to direct your attention to another point. Have you

ever taken a comprehensive view of the mode in which the controversy has been conducted ?

ANCUS. I do not understand you ; pray explain yourself.

CAIUS. Have you carefully observed the manner in which each party manages its own side of the discussion ? The advocates of revelation adduce the testimonies which prove the authenticity of the sacred records, and the truth of the facts which they relate, by appealing to a succession of writers, consisting of enemies as well as friends, who lived at and soon after the beginning of the Christian era. They then examine the character of the witnesses of the gospel facts ; and they show their testimony to be rational, explicit, full, disinterested, and credible. And then they insist upon the miracles, the prophecies, and the intrinsic excellency of revealed religion.

In what manner is the argument conducted on the other side ? Do the champions of infidelity meet this testimony ? Do they neutralize it by counter testimony ? Do they meet document with document, and witness with witness ? Do they disprove any material fact, or even any minute allusion or reference contained in these ancient writings ? Do they convict the witnesses of the gospel history of incompetency in regard to the soundness of their understandings, or their opportunities of obtaining exact information ? Do they show their number to be too small ? Do they convict them of duplicity, or concert, or dishonesty, or selfishness ? Do they explain, in a rational manner, the conduct of these men, who abandoned all that man holds dear, and sacrificed their lives in testifying that they had personally and severally witnessed the facts of the gospel history, on the supposition that those facts had no foundation in truth ?

ANCUS. Your language strongly implies, that they do not. Can you prove, as well as prefer the charge ?

CAIUS. Tell me, Ancus, dare you, who stake so much upon their correctness, affirm that they fairly meet and invalidate this testimony ? Do they ever attempt it, except

by a distorted and defective exhibition of facts, or by insinuations and conjectures unsupported by proof, and discordant with the established and ascertained principles of human nature? No, Ancus; they are aware that this testimony cannot be shaken, and hence, they seldom assail it. Lest this should pass for mere declamation, I will adduce an example which you yourself will acknowledge a complete illustration. That ingenious but determined sceptic, Rousseau, thus expresses himself: "It would be more inconceivable that *several men* should have agreed to fabricate such a book, than that a single personage should have furnished its subject. Never could Jewish authors have invented either this *tone* of character, or this *morality*. And the Gospel has marks of *veracity*, so *great*, so *striking*, and so perfectly *inimitable*, that the *inventor* of it would be *more astonishing* than the *hero*." Would you not suppose that, after such concessions, the man must either turn Christian, or, if he continued an infidel, invalidate these proofs of veracity? He does neither, my good friend; but he immediately adds, "granting all this, this *same Gospel* is full of *things incredible*, *things that are repugnant to reason*, and which it is impossible for *any man in his senses* to *conceive* or to *admit*." And this is the way with the whole race. They direct their assaults principally against the doctrines of revelation. Doubts, difficulties, objections, constitute the air, meat, and drink of infidels. Here they revel. The Trinity is an absurdity; it is a contradiction of reason. The incarnation is an absurdity; it is incomprehensible. The atonement is an absurdity; it is inconsistent with all our ideas of justice and mercy. The doctrine of a particular Providence is an absurdity; it is daily contradicted by the course of events. A religion which teems with doctrines so irreconcilable with reason, is unworthy of God. He cannot be its author.

ANCUS. And can greater absurdities, more unintelligible doctrines, more revolting mysteries, be imagined?

CAIUS. All too fast, Ancus. We are not yet prepared

to say any thing about the consistency of the doctrines: it is with the inconsistency of the mode in which infidels reason that we are at present concerned. I am showing you how strangely they depart from all the laws of sound investigation. In every other investigation, where the design is to get at the truth of facts, correct inquiry universally commences with testimony. It is so in courts of justice, in historical inquiries, in natural and moral philosophy. The proofs must be accurately weighed; the witnesses must be examined and cross-examined; and upon the testimony, and upon that alone, the decision must rest. But the infidel inverts this order. He asks not, "*Has God spoken? where is the evidence that he has spoken?*" but, "*what has he spoken?*" He slips by the *fact*, and plunges into the *matter*; and when he finds one difficulty in the *matter*, he regards it as a sufficient condemnation of fifty good arguments for the *fact*.

And who are these men who disregard the testimony for the *fact*, under the pretence of inconsistencies in the *matter*? Is the *matter* of revelation a subject within their grasp? Are they omniscient? Are their minds capacious like God's? Do they know all about his being, his nature, his perfections? Do their minds embrace in one view the universe, in all its parts, circumstances, and relations? What profound ignorance of the most common objects of sense has been removed by the progress of modern science within a few past years! The very instruments employed by the wisest men in exploring the secrets of nature—the retort, the crucible, the electrical apparatus, the air-pump, the microscope, the telescope—all, *all* proclaim their ignorance even of those portions of matter which lie most within their reach. Of the human mind they know nothing, save a few general laws. As to what regards the union between their own spirits and bodies, they grope in absolute darkness. And yet these men must sit in judgment upon what is worthy or unworthy of the glorious Jehovah, whom no man hath seen nor can see. They penetrate and compre-

hend his nature and essence! They must decide how it is proper for him to exist; and what system of administration is best adapted to the state of the universe; and what conduct most becomes his infinite perfections! Men, who confess their incapacity to dissect a gnat, must needs, with unparalleled gravity, pretend to dissect the Deity!

Is it thus they proceed in other questions? Do they urge the incomprehensibility of other truths as a demonstration of their *falsity*? Mathematicians have not been, and are not yet agreed as to the meaning of the signs plus and minus in algebra; and yet all are agreed in the utility and importance of these symbols. The doctrine of imaginary quantities has hitherto been involved in impenetrable obscurity, even in the hands of the greatest analyst; and yet, notwithstanding this obscurity, these very expressions have led to the discovery of some of the most beautiful and general theorems in geometry; and have enabled analysts to resolve questions which, without their aid, would have been altogether untractable.* The infinite divisibility of matter is, on either side, incomprehensible; and yet who ever thought that circumstance a good argument against the truth or the importance of the doctrine? Your friends, Ancus, make me think of a would-be astronomer, who takes his position at a telescope. We will suppose that, for the first time in his life, he finds the planet Saturn. What are the suggestions of sound reason? "A new object is before you; be modest; use and believe your senses; observe with accuracy; note down with care the facts which your glass so sublimely, and yet so clearly presents to your view." But what is the course adopted by our astronomer? He immediately exclaims, "Why, through this glass, Saturn shows but two rings. This is inconsistent with reason. Every man of sense knows that six would keep him tighter. And what man, endowed with reason, would think of hanging such a huge ball upon nothing? I'll believe none of it: away with the instrument—it is all an optical illusion;

* Edinburgh Encyclopedia, art. Imaginary Quantities.

away with it." Whereupon our sage calls for a sledgehammer, and falls to demolishing the faithful telescope for revealing to him the glorious wonders of the heavens. Is the picture like any inquirers of your acquaintance, Ancus?

ANCUS. It seems, then, Caius, according to your censures, that testimony binds us to swallow what we know to be the grossest absurdities, or even falsehoods.

CAIUS. Again all too quick, Ancus. Common sense teaches us, that when we are required to believe upon testimony, what we *know* to be an absurdity or a falsehood, such *knowledge* is a sufficient proof to us that the testimony alleged cannot be true. See to it, however, that your knowledge is *absolutely perfect* and *certain*. But where the subject is one which is mysterious in its own nature, or which does not fall within the sphere of our senses and faculties, or has never been subjected to our observation, it would be the greatest folly to reject satisfactory evidence, because we are required to assent to what we cannot comprehend, or what may be at variance with our own experience. And when we know that our love of sensual pleasures, and our vicious appetites and passions, strongly incline us against the truths and the duties of the Gospel, we should be doubly jealous of ourselves, lest we reject the evidence on which they rest, for no other reason than because we dislike them. In regard to these topics, the only question can be, Have I evidence that God has spoken? And I shall act the part of the mad astronomer, if I reject the attested fact that he has spoken, because what he has spoken is irreconcilable with my prejudged opinions. It was not my place to form opinions on a subject confessedly and infinitely above my reach; and if I pertinaciously adhere to these opinions, the amount will be, that *I reveal something to God*—not *God something to me*.

ANCUS. But, Caius, all our authors deride the necessity of a revelation from God. They insist that the light of nature is a sufficient guide.

CAIUS. The wisest men of the heathen world thought

and felt differently. They frankly confessed their ignorance of the most important supernatural truths. They longed for instruction from heaven. Into their emotions a Christian can enter, for he, too, feels his need of imparted spiritual wisdom. Will you not allow, Ancus, that those who lived without the aid of revelation were best qualified to inform us how far the light of nature answers as a sufficient guide in religion?

ANCUS. I will.

CAIUS. Let me then remind you, that reason never had a fairer theatre for the trial of its best powers in divinity, than in ancient Greece. Were not the Greeks endowed with the brightest genius? Did they not, by their wonderful powers, carry the arts and sciences to a pitch of perfection which has commanded the admiration of all subsequent ages? And yet, so far were they from proportionably improving in their knowledge of God, and of man's duty and happiness, that the longer they were left to themselves, and the older they grew as a nation, the more absurd were their theories, and the more corrupt their morals. Let me refer you to a few undeniable facts.

The wisest of their philosophers acknowledged, that, on a variety of the most important subjects, they knew nothing with certainty.

They acknowledged, that it was by tradition, or divine teaching, that they arrived at all their religious truths—Plato, in *Timæus*, *Gorgias*, *Philebus*, and *Phædo*.

They acknowledged their need of heavenly instruction, in very affecting terms—Plato, in *Philebus* and *Alcibiades*.

The great legislators of heathen antiquity, by claiming a divine origin for their institutions, evinced how deep was the sentiment of the times in favor of communications from heaven. Minos pretended to be inspired by Jupiter; Lycurgus by Apollo; Zaleucus by Minerva; Numa by the nymph Egeria.

The actual state of religion and morals was corrupt beyond description.

ANCUS. But, Caius, the principles of genuine morality were well understood long before the era of the Christian faith. Many of the best principles of the Gospel may be found in the writings of the best heathen sages.

CAIUS. It is true, that the great principles of morality were clearly laid down by divine authority in the writings of God's ancient people—how well these principles were understood among the heathen, is abundantly manifest from their practice. How could their morals be otherwise than debauched, whose views of God were so prodigiously false and corrupt? Some one has justly said, Show me your gods, and I will tell you your morals; and tell me your morals, and I will show you your gods. Yet we do not deny, Ancus, that amidst this awful darkness there were some gleams of light. How far this concession furnishes an argument in proof of the sufficiency of the light of nature, I submit to your own judgment. For what, pray tell me, would have been the efficacy of a few moral maxims, scattered here and there in the writings of different philosophers; never collected into a moral code; never published and explained to the common people; never clothed with the requisite authority and sanction of laws given by a Supreme Legislator, for the violation of which men are bound to appear before Him in judgment; and the whole mixed up, by those who recorded them, with other principles too licentious and vile to be repeated? You perceive, then, that, even where all the circumstances of the case were most propitious to her efforts, the light of nature has completely failed.

ZENAS. The point is undeniable. And if such was her failure under those advantages, it is easy to see what is to be expected from her guidance among nations abandoned to a savage state. We need only contemplate the condition of our own American savages, to learn how successful a teacher of religion reason proves to be, when left to her own unaided powers.

CAIUS. Nay, Zenas, I can send you to stronger evidence than the barbarous tribes you mention. I will send

you to one who was no savage—to David Hume, the prince of free inquirers. He strenuously maintains that polytheism must have been the *first religion*; and that the doctrine of the divine unity and infinity, simplicity and spirituality, originated in the disposition of the vulgar to praise and panegyric. *Essays*, vol. 2 : 403–440. And as to the principles of morality, his natural light led him to inculcate, that moral, intellectual, and corporeal virtue are all of the same kind; that adultery must be practised, if men would obtain all the advantages of life; that suicide is lawful; and that there is no God!

ZENAS. I cannot bring myself to believe that indecencies and blasphemies so monstrous ever proceeded even from a savage, much less from a philosopher and a moralist.

CAIUS. I call upon you, Ancus, to deny, if you are able, that these are the sober speculations of Mr. Hume.

ANCUS. I have nothing to do with the speculations of Mr. Hume. It will be well if you can defend your own. According to your views, those who are left to the unaided light of nature are involved in a state of hopeless ignorance and misery. Your Deity, who, you say, possesses infinite goodness, bestows that light which all need upon only a small portion of mankind. The rest are left to perish for the want of a revelation. Away with the gross injustice and partiality of such a system. I, for one, cannot endure it.

CAIUS. Will you inform me, Ancus, which you esteem the greatest blessings and enjoyments of human existence?

ANCUS. Willingly. I would rank good bodily health, sound mental faculties improved by education, civil liberty, a competence of wealth, and the social and domestic relations, among the chief sources of happiness.

CAIUS. And you would number disease, pain, ignorance, insanity, oppression, slavery, loss of beloved friends, and pinching poverty, among the principal calamities?

ANCUS. Indeed I would.

CAIUS. Now carefully survey the condition of our race. Count the multitudes who are pining away under the wast-

ing power of these calamities, and how small is the proportion of those whom you find enjoying the blessings which you have enumerated! I turn you over to your own difficulties. How will you reconcile these facts, which occur under your own observation, with impartial justice? All men possess an equal capacity and feel an equal thirst for happiness, and yet the gift, instead of being extended to all, is conferred upon only a small number of mankind; and what renders your difficulty greater, it is often conferred upon the least deserving: the rest are left to perish amidst privations and sufferings at which our feelings recoil. If you cannot endure partiality in the one case, how will you endure it in the other? Your system, Ancus, furnishes no explanation of these difficulties. You want a key, which can be found only in the sacred writings. It is the common sense and conviction of mankind in every age, that man is an apostate, guilty being. The verbal and sacrificial acknowledgments of every nation of which I have ever heard, proclaim it. This awful truth is authoritatively declared in the word of God. It will also be the decision of every honest mind that carefully scrutinizes itself. It follows, that God lies under no *obligation* to bestow *any favors* upon *any* of our race, farther than he sees it to be best on the whole. Facts speak for themselves: ask them, and they will tell you that, whilst God is the fountain of all good, he does not bestow either his temporal or his moral gifts in the same measure upon all. Revelation also explains the nature of his afflictive dispensations towards those who fear him: they are needed paternal chastenings. It further reveals a future judgment, at which infinite wisdom, justice, and mercy, will rectify all. And, doubtless, were the reasons of his administration to be brought forth, throughout the universe there would be heard but one voice, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments."

ANCUS. After all, I see no necessity for an extraordinary interposition of God. In my own character, I daily observe the principles of order and virtue. It is true, I do not wholly

escape the sins and errors to which man is liable, but I sincerely deplore them, and I earnestly strive to avoid them. I trust there is but little in my conduct deserving of disapprobation; and that when God beholds my repentance, he will graciously cover my sins.

CAIUS. Far be it from me, my friend, to depreciate your excellent qualities. Still, the question of our acceptance with God is too solemn, too important, to rest upon the esteem of our fellow-men. In the first place, consider well, Ancus, by whom the judgment is to be passed. Have you to deal with your fellow-man, who regards you with the partiality of gratitude as a benefactor, and takes cognizance only of your external acts; or with that Being whom you can lay under no obligation; who will try you by the strictest justice; whose eye glances through the inmost recesses of your heart; and whose decision will include its most secret motives and ends?

Then, by what standard will the trial be conducted? by the loose and variable principles of morality which govern society, or by the spiritual, holy, and immutable laws of an infinitely perfect Lawgiver? Unless you have gone the length of Mr. Hume, you will acknowledge him essentially and infinitely holy, just, and benevolent. If such his attributes, what does he deserve at your hands? Nothing below the habitual supreme love, homage, and service of every moral creature. In him also you live, move, and have your being. To obey and honor him should therefore be the commanding principle in every thought, word, and deed. The least failure here, a Being who has such claims must regard as a violation of his right, and an infraction of his law. The reasonableness of all this you cannot deny. If such is to be the standard, what will, what must be the decision? And dare you say, "My heart and life meet the standard; I am assured of my acceptance upon the ground of my merit?"

Let me next inquire, are you certain that the light of reason warrants the expectation of the forgiveness of your sins on the ground of your repentance? As sin lieth at the

door, your reason cannot be certain that vengeance lies not near it too. Have you offended God? Then you have no claim upon his favor—your right is forfeited. He is under no obligation to forgive. If he does forgive, he must do it of his own free choice. And if he does not *tell* you that he chooses to forgive you, whence can your reason infer that he will? Nay, reason rather decides, that indignation against sin, and punishment upon the guilty, are inseparably connected with the idea of infinite, perfect justice. Then again; whence can reason infer that *repentance* is the ground on which God will forgive sin? Can your repentance undo your past defection? Alas, it is irrevocable; tears and groans cannot recall it. The claim for perfect and supreme service and homage continues; it is not suspended an instant. More than justice demands of you for the instant, you cannot render, do your very best. Not a single exercise, affection, or act, can you withhold from the present demand, and transfer it as a satisfaction for a past delinquency. Still you look back, and with dread you behold the dark cloud of guilt, fraught with danger, pursuing and lowering on your rear. If you reason from experience, you find that repentance has no influence over the past. If you forfeit your property or your reputation by vice, the bitterest regrets cannot recall them: even these penalties your repentance cannot remove. Your experience, therefore, is directly opposed to the efficacy of repentance in procuring the remission of punishment.

Nor is this all. Let us suppose that, on the grounds you state, all is well in your own case. Yet, for one thus situated, there are multitudes polluted by every species of crime; the pests of society, hardened in impenitence. Do the principles upon which you rest bring a ray of light and hope to these? If the question of acceptance is to be tried upon merit or repentance, what will, what must be their doom?

And let it be farther noted, Ancus, that you are very far from exhibiting, in your own person, a fair example of

the light of unaided reason. You are indebted, beyond calculation, to the light of revelation. This I know you are disposed to deny. But would you test the point of what your reason can accomplish in divine knowledge with fairness, you must conceive of yourself as having been wholly removed, even from your birth, from the influence of all the light which God has at any period communicated from heaven. What a contrast between the results of such a state and your present attainments would then have been witnessed!

It is, therefore, demonstrable, that the light of nature does not afford the knowledge of divine forgiveness. And yet that knowledge is necessary to the sinner's return unto God. Without it, how deep must have remained his ignorance, his terror, his despair! Hence, if the offended God *designed* to exercise mercy towards the guilty, it was absolutely necessary that he should *reveal* his gracious determination. That revelation, it is reasonable to believe, would be accompanied by adequate proofs of its divine origin. The proofs requisite must be sufficient to command a rational belief, to quiet apprehension, and to inspire a lively hope.

If ever an occasion presented, on which it was a glorious act in God to put forth his hand, it was when he revealed his purpose of mercy. Even could reason have surmised the probable exercise of this attribute, yet the uncertainty suspended over the sinner's fate would have consumed his spirit. In such a case, it would have been a condescension infinitely desirable in Divine goodness, to have taken the guilty wanderer by the hand, and imparted to him the assurance of peace.

ANCUS. It would be uncandid in me to deny the weight of your suggestions. But my difficulties do not end here. Should it be granted that a supernatural revelation is necessary, what is our evidence that it is contained in that book which Christians call the Bible? You will not deny, that a multitude of writings, falsely ascribed to the apostles, were extensively circulated at a very early period. In the midst of such a number and variety of romances, all claim-

ing divine authority, how was it possible to distinguish the good from the bad, the genuine from the spurious? And by what rule can the authentic Scriptures now be ascertained, after the lapse of nearly twenty centuries?

CAIUS. Our bankers could easily answer that question. Whatever spurious paper may be in circulation, they always know their own bills. The apostles wrote the different books of the New Testament, and intrusted them to the churches which they had just planted. The churches were faithful in ascertaining and preserving the sacred books distinct from others which were forged; and by a transmission more sure than exists in the case of any other literary productions, they have been brought down to the present age. The precepts, doctrines, and example of Jesus Christ, were designed to endure, for the government and direction of mankind, unto the end of time. Now, Ancus, what does common sense teach us to expect from the Founder and the first propagators of a religion upon which they considered the salvation of the latest generations to depend?

Is it reasonable to suppose, that Jesus Christ would have neglected to adopt the most infallible and permanent methods for perpetuating the knowledge of his will? No method was so sure as that of written documents.

Is it reasonable to suppose, that the paternal care and zeal so manifest in the apostles, would have permitted them to neglect furnishing the churches, planted by their hands, with authentic accounts of the doctrines and life of their divine Master, whose constant attendants they had been, and whose witnesses they were unto the ends of the earth?

Is it reasonable to suppose, that the converts of the apostles would have omitted soliciting their spiritual fathers to prepare such authentic records, not only for their own guidance, but also for that of their successors?

And after such important authentic documents were prepared by the apostles, and deposited in the archives of the first churches, is it reasonable to suppose, that the early Christians, whose love for the Gospel surpassed that of

misers for gold, would have permitted the sacred trust to be confounded with forgeries destitute of satisfactory proof of their genuineness?

Common sense does not hesitate to reply, that, under such circumstances, all these suppositions violate the principles of our nature. And what we perceive to be so agreeable to the anticipations of common sense, we can prove to have actually taken place, by a mass of testimony incomparably more weighty and worthy of confidence, than exists in support of the genuineness and authenticity of any other writings of a remote age. Permit me, Ancus, to ask, upon what grounds do you receive the works of Cicero as genuine?*

ANCUS. Upon the testimony of those writers who lived in the orator's day and immediately after.

CAIUS. And why do you select their testimony?

ANCUS. That needs hardly to be answered. Those writers, whether friends or enemies, were deeply interested in the subject. Both parties had abundant means of ascertaining which were Cicero's genuine productions. There are also many internal marks of style and manner which may aid us in the examination.

CAIUS. And does this testimony fully satisfy you?

ANCUS. It does, fully.

CAIUS. Now, Ancus, listen to the following facts; and then I would ask you, with what consistency can you continue to receive the works of Cicero as genuine, and, in opposition to your own views of satisfactory testimony, reject the sacred Scriptures as forgeries?

1. The four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, all the Epistles of Paul, except that to the Hebrews, and the first Epistles of John and Peter, were known and received as genuine from the beginning. They were never called into question. They are all contained in the earliest catalogues: in the catalogue of Origen, A. D. 210; of Eusebius, 315; of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, 315: of Cyril, Bishop

* Cicero died 43 years before Christ.

of Jerusalem, 340; of the Council of Laodicea, 364; of Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, in Cyprus, 370; of Gregory Nazianzen, Bishop of Constantinople, 375; of Philostrius, Bishop of Brixia, in Venice, 380; of Jerome, 382; of Augustin, Bishop of Hippo, in Africa, 394; of the third Council of Carthage, 394. Many others might be mentioned. These catalogues, you perceive, were made by different men, in parts of the world remote from one another, and at successive periods.

All these books have, moreover, been *most abundantly cited, as divinely inspired Scripture*, by the earliest Christian writers, residing in almost every part of the world. Such a universal agreement of writers from the first date of Christianity, in quoting the same books, and no other, as inspired Scripture, is—if the fact be true, and it is undeniable—a demonstrative indication that the Canon was ascertained with certainty. It can be accounted for upon no other supposition, than either that those writers had never seen any other books claiming to be divine, or, if they knew of other books, that they also knew them to be unworthy of credit; and hence, that they did not esteem them as divine in their origin.

It is also undeniable, that all the books above mentioned were publicly read, as the word of God, in the worship of the primitive churches.

Thus, whatever doubts may have existed in the minds of some individuals, for two or three centuries, in regard to the second and third Epistles of John, the second of Peter, those of James and Jude, that to the Hebrews, and the Apocalypse, yet those books, which contain the whole body of facts, doctrines, and precepts, constituting our Christian faith, we have received by an unbroken, unquestionable tradition, from the very hands of the apostles. I might here also urge the faithful scrutiny and watch exercised by the early Christians with respect to the sacred Canon, evinced by the very fact that the last named books were for some time viewed by them with jealousy. But I proceed to observe,

2. That to the same truth we have the assent of all the enemies of the Christian religion, without a single exception, from the earliest day of its publication. Both Jews and Pagans were, from the first, the fierce and untiring opposers of the Gospel. All the wealth, all the learning, all the talent, and all the religion of the Jewish and heathen worlds, was interested and united in putting down the new superstition and its troublesome advocates. Why did they not, when it could have been accomplished with ease, expose forgeries so impudent and gross? But they never denied the authenticity of these writings. The charge of fraud was never whispered during the first four centuries. I appeal to the apostate Emperor Julian, in the fourth century; to the learned Porphyry, in the third; and to the no less celebrated Celsus, in the second. The assent of these bitter and laborious enemies of Christianity to the genuineness and authenticity of the holy writings, is entitled to the greatest consideration.

You cannot but perceive, that the testimony which supports the claims of the books of the New Testament, began with their first publication; was accessible to friend and foe; was continued down, unbroken and unimpeached, to modern times; and thus fully squares with your own standard of evidence. You cannot consistently move a doubt as to the genuineness of these writings, which does not impeach the credibility of all history; which does not undermine our confidence in all documentary evidence; which does not affect, with even greater force, the genuineness and authority of every other ancient literary production.

ANCUS. I confess that the reasons which you urge in proof of the genuineness of the Christian records are forcible. They shall receive my earnest and early consideration. What advantage, however, is to be derived from the most unquestionable evidence on this point, whilst the contents of these records are unworthy of belief? They are stuffed with the most improbable events. Those who say they witnessed them, were illiterate men, weak of brain, liable to

be deceived by appearances, and interested in believing, and causing others to believe, the truth of the new religion. In short, they were either deceived, or they were deceivers; perhaps a little of both.

CAIUS. I follow you into this field as to a banquet. Upon the truth of the witnesses whose testimony is recorded in these books, I am willing to join issue. Their testimony has every mark of veracity stamped upon its front.

You say the apostles and witnesses of Jesus Christ were liable to be deceived by appearances. Were they not the constant attendants, the familiar friends of their Master; who were with him from the beginning; who went in and out with him all the time from his baptism to his ascension, Acts 1: 21, 22, witnessing all, hearing all, intrusted with all? A more favorable opportunity of detecting fraud, and obtaining the most exact information, cannot be imagined.

You say they were liable to be deceived by appearances, as if the events to which they testify were not real; as if they were delusive shadows. But what do these writers relate? They relate the discourses, the journeys, the actions, the sufferings, the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of their Lord. They relate facts—broad, palpable facts; subjected to the examination of the senses of all the witnesses; most open to scrutiny; great in number, and witnessed by hundreds and thousands besides themselves. Well might they say, “*That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life, (see particularly Luke 24: 39,) declare we unto you.*” If the senses of all these witnesses, constantly agreeing in their testimony, were deceived by appearances; if, when they saw Jesus perform supernatural works, they yet saw him not; if, when they conversed and ate with him, and felt him, after his resurrection, they yet did not converse and eat with him, and feel him, then it is high time that we begin to suspect our own senses, and to disbelieve our own consciousness. Then all testimony resting upon the senses of witnesses, which has

always been regarded the strongest, must henceforth be rejected, and held most deceptive and treacherous.

You say they were ignorant, weak men. Ignorant of worldly science they indeed were; but what evidence can you produce of their weakness? Were they weak in understanding? The want of strong sense and sound judgment could not have been great in men who, by artless and persuasive means, were able to conquer all the prejudice, wisdom, policy, and power of the whole world. Idiots could not have invented a religion, the foundations of which have survived the assaults of an unparalleled enmity, and the changes of nearly two thousand years. Men, whom infidels believe capable of devising and propagating such a system of imposture, were surely possessed of a degree of reason and judgment adequate to their bearing rational testimony in matters of fact falling under their own observation.

Were they possessed by a blind credulity? What occasion can you produce which exhibits a neglect of the fullest evidence? Do their deep-rooted prejudices against their Master's spiritual empire, their constant doubts, objections, and unbelief, prove them credulous? Were they credulous in regard to the grand fact and doctrine of the Gospel, the resurrection of their Lord? Although it was expressly predicted by his own lips, they did not expect it. When it was reported, they did not believe it. They rejected all testimony but that of their own senses. Luke 24: 36-43; Mark 16: 14; John 20: 24-30.

Were they fanatics and enthusiasts? What marks of fanaticism can you discover? Fanatics rush headlong into their wild schemes, but the conviction of these men was produced with the utmost difficulty; it was the work of nearly four years' constant attendance on the instructions and miracles of their Master. Zealous and indefatigable they were in their vocation; but on the supposition of the truth of their religion, their ardor was not greater than such a cause demanded. In the midst of all their zeal, their discourse and conduct was sober, rational, chastened by gravity,

uniform, full of innocence and meekness, mildness and prudence.

You say they were liable to be deceived. But was not the prospect before them sufficiently appalling to render them most critically scrupulous, before they ventured to engage in the new religion? What was the prospect? dazzling to the senses—calculated to throw their reason off its guard? Their Master most faithfully destroyed every hope of earthly emolument. He set before them persecution and death. He required them to surrender all that is endeared to man below, as the sole condition of their employment as his witnesses. If ever men were goaded, by all that flesh can hope or dread, to look sharp to the grounds of their duty, the apostles were those men.

Not the slightest vestige of evidence, therefore, exists, that the apostles were deceived in the matters which they recorded. If they were deceived, it is a fact of which no rational solution can be given. He who attempts to account for a fact so opposite to all the principles of our nature, must give us something more than a bare *perhaps*.

There are but two suppositions remaining. If they were not deceived, they either fabricated the history which they have left us, and hence they deserve to be viewed as falsifiers, and their writings as impious falsehoods; or the events which they relate occurred as they are related; and therefore, instead of inventors of falsehoods, and deceivers, they are to be regarded as credible witnesses, and all their statements are to be received as sacred truth. This you deny. Now for the trial.

You affirm they were deceivers, falsifiers, and therefore they are unworthy of belief.

Falsifiers and deceivers, unless they are mad, never invent facts of recent occurrence; never name dates, places, and persons. But these witnesses proclaim the particulars of their history, immediately after they were transacted. In the most public and fearless manner, and without the least softening, they publish facts, most galling and offensive to

their enemies. They mention names, times, and circumstances, so minutely as to place their own detection and exposure within the power of a slight investigation. This is not the course of men who are conscious of inventing enormous and provoking lies. Matt. 14 : 13-22 ; 15 : 29-39 ; John 11 ; Acts 2, 3, 4.

Falsifiers and deceivers devise their crafty plots always with a view to some personal advantage. Interest moves, and the fear of injury restrains them. But these writers and witnesses invent and propagate the most wanton falsehoods ; and they pretend to supernatural powers, not only without regard to personal advantage, but with an absolute certainty of extreme loss and suffering. They uniformly manifest a thorough contempt of all worldly interest. When money is offered them, they spurn it. Acts 8 : 18-20 ; 20 : 33, 34. When honors, they refuse them. Acts 8 : 18-20 ; 14 : 13, 14. And what is still more opposite to the character and conduct of deceivers, in publishing and testifying the Gospel facts, they relinquish without a single earthly compensation, their occupations, their country, their homes, their reputation ; and, persisting in their disinterested course to the very end, they gladly lay down their lives, as the last and most solemn pledge of their veracity. Oh, Aeneas, is this the character and part of deceivers ?

They invent falsehoods, and yet not an individual of their number, not one of their many accomplices, was ever induced, either by the wit of their adversaries, or the power of their bribes, or the fear of suffering, or by exquisite tortures, to betray the fraud—not even the traitor Judas.

They invent falsehoods with the avowed purpose of requiring all men to believe them with an unhesitating faith ; and yet, when the whole field of fiction lies before them, and they are free to choose, they come forward with falsehoods, which are repugnant to the appetites, passions, habits, pleasures, prejudices, and religion of the whole world. The Author of their religion they represent as obscure in his parentage ; mean in his outward state ; subject to hunger

and thirst, poverty and sorrow; hated by his countrymen; betrayed, forsworn, and forsaken by his own disciples; and dying the death of an accursed, ignominious malefactor, upon the cross. Thus wilfully and needlessly they render their fiction a stumbling-block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Greek. Those deceivers must be mad indeed, who invent falsehoods which are sure, by their natural tendency, to defeat every rational end that can be proposed.

They invent falsehoods so remarkably absurd, that infidels have pronounced the sentence of fatuity upon those who believed, as well as upon those who contrived them; and yet, within a short period, not by force, not by stragem, not by eloquence, not by worldly influence, all classes, all orders of men, believe these ridiculous inventions, and are ready to lay down their lives in their defence!

They invent falsehoods, which awoke the attention of the world wherever they were published, and drew down upon the deceivers a storm of indignation; and yet not one of all these falsehoods, extraordinary as they were, has ever been detected and disproved. From the hour of its first publication until now, not one of all the enemies of the Gospel, whether Jew or Pagan, with every advantage on his side, has succeeded in detecting these witnesses in a single misstatement. With what ease, for example, might the Jewish Sanhedrim, forewarned of the event by the Saviour himself, and intent upon defeating it as they were, have detected and exposed the tale of the resurrection of Christ, had it not been a truth too firm to be overthrown! What would so triumphantly have crushed this troublesome combination, as to have convicted them of this capital and gross imposture? Truly, the infidels of those days must have been marvellously deficient in intellect—living at the very time, and in the very region where these impudent fabrications were first issued, and with the police and the wealth of the country at their backs—not to succeed in doing what an infidel, eighteen hundred years after, without adequate knowledge, without access to any other means than the bare writ-

ings of these impostors, is able to accomplish with the greatest ease! Prodigious! Why, Ancus, modern infidels, according to all this, must be a race of intellectual giants!

ANCUS. You are pushing on at a furious rate. Will you just give me leave to ask why Jesus did not discover himself, after his resurrection, to the Jewish and Roman authorities? This would have put an effectual end to all doubt and uncertainty. One of the apostles himself acknowledges, Acts 10 : 40, 41, that Jesus did not appear after his resurrection to *all the people*, but unto witnesses chosen before of God; that is, to his apostles. This looks like collusion. Why show himself only to his friends, if he wished the world to believe him arisen from the dead?

CAIUS. Why do you object to the testimony of *his friends*, if they can be proved to have been sufficiently numerous, and if their qualifications to bear testimony were unimpeachable? This is an objection often heard from scoffers; but I request your particular attention to this question. But further—the fact to be proved in this miracle was the identity of the person: of course, no witnesses were competent but those who possessed the most intimate knowledge of the person and character of Jesus Christ before his death. Such witnesses alone could testify that he, whom they had seen and handled after his return to life, was the same person with whom they had spent several years before he was slain by his enemies upon the cross. Were the priests and elders, and the Roman authorities, competent to bear such testimony? Had Jesus complied with your requisition, you would have still objected, and with greater effect than you can object at present, that neither the multitude nor their leaders were able to identify his person, because their intercourse with him, previous to his death, had been so transient and slight. Whereas I conceive, Ancus, that his appearing to the eleven apostles, with Matthias—compare Luke 24 : 33, with Acts 1 : 26, and 1 Cor. 15 : 5—the *witnesses before chosen of God*, is the capital circumstance which the evidence required to render it

adequate: it is that which constitutes its distinguishing value.

But let us return to the general question. The supposition, then, that these men were deceivers and falsifiers, is utterly incredible. If they were deceivers and falsifiers, and if these facts are the results of their invention, they acted a part which outrages all the laws of human conduct. All confidence in the veracity of witnesses, possessing full and accurate knowledge of the concerns which they minutely detail, and giving the highest and best marks of integrity, must for ever cease. Nothing, therefore, is left but to reject your position, that these men were interested deceivers, and that they fabricated the facts which they have committed to writing and sealed with their blood.

We must, therefore, regard them as holy men; faithful witnesses, whose testimony is true, and should be received with profound veneration and confidence. Other most weighty evidences might be brought, would our time permit. It is the only view which not only explains their conduct, but accords with their moral character throughout, with the doctrines which they announce, and with the style and manner of their narrative. Their whole lives were patterns unto others, of unexceptionable purity, temperance, patience, integrity, devotion, and charity. On all occasions they manifest an abhorrence of falsehood, and the most solemn regard for truth: they teach and enforce the omniscience, holiness, and justice of God; and a future judgment, in which every idle word shall be condemned: they tell a simple, unvarnished tale, without concealment, and they leave it to work its own effects: they betray no concern as to its reception: they relate the most uncommon events, they state the most sublime and comprehensive doctrines, and the most exalted hopes, in a calm, unmoved, and dignified way, becoming men who spoke under a superior guidance. If enough had not already been adduced, I might now insist on the confirmation which the veracity of the sacred writers receives from coetaneous heathen authors.

ZENAS. I lately saw an infidel publication, in which the assertion was confidently made, that "no writers of antiquity, but such as were interested, have written any thing respecting Jesus Christ;" and that "Tacitus has not only taken no notice of" the occurrences related in the Gospels, "but even as to the *person*, called Jesus, his history is wholly silent."

CAIUS. How gross, how impudent a departure from truth! Tacitus, A. D. 110, as you well know, bears a direct and particular testimony to the great events of the Gospel history. Annals, b. 15. They are also noticed by Suetonius, Claud., chap. 25, Nero, chap. 16. These works are in the hands of every reader of the ancient classics. The calumny will therefore have weight with none but the wilfully blind. Why should I repeat the names of Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian? And nothing can be more satisfactory than the confirmation of the credibility of the sacred writers, exhibited in the celebrated letters of Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, A. D. 100. Plinii Epist. lib. 10 : 97.

In every point of view, therefore, the veracity of the Gospel historians is established on an immovable basis. Than theirs, no evidence can be more full, no knowledge of facts more particular, no motives more disinterested and honorable, no narrative better attested and sealed. Their claims to our undivided credence cannot be evaded. They cannot be evaded by asserting that they were themselves deceived, for so were they situated, in regard to the transactions of which they testify, that this was impossible; nor by asserting that they were deceivers, for the part which they acted is wholly irreconcilable with all the principles of deception. The falsehood of their testimony, under these circumstances, would be a violation of all the laws of our moral constitution, inexplicable upon any known principle, and unsupported by proof. To set aside, therefore, these evidences of their veracity, and to believe their testimony false, displays a degree of credulousness, of readiness to

believe what is unaccountable and unsupported by proof, which defies a remedy from reason.*

I have been particular in evincing the credibility of the evangelical writers, on account of its vast importance in this debate. If their credibility is firmly established, and the denial of it gives the death-blow to all our belief of truth resting upon the testimony of others, then the great question of the divine origin of the Bible is decided.

ZENAS. How does that appear?

CAIUS. We are, then, bound to believe all that these witnesses affirm. Consequently, we must believe in the reality of the miracles, which they affirm were performed by Jesus Christ and his apostles, as the credentials of their divine commission.

ZENAS. Will you show me the force of the evidence arising from miracles, which proves a divine commission?

CAIUS. Most willingly. If Jesus Christ required the Jews to change their institutions and to receive him as their Messiah, they had a right to demand unquestionable proofs that his mission was divine and his authority supreme. Now, what kind of attestation would best satisfy this demand? Not the doctrines taught, for the divine origin and authority of these is the main thing to be proved, and the last to be inferred; and therefore it would be reasoning in a circle, to prove the divine commission of the teacher by the doctrines.

* How justly is the character of the unhappy sceptic delineated by a writer of the seventeenth century: "A sceptic in religion is one who hangs in the balance with all sorts of opinions; whereof not one but stirs him, and none sways him. A man guiltier of credulity than he is taken to be; for it is out of his belief of every thing that he believes nothing. Each religion scares him from its contrary, none persuades him to itself. He would be wholly a Christian, but that he is something of an atheist; and wholly an atheist, but that he is partly a Christian; and a perfect heretic, but that there are so many to distract him. He finds *reasons* in all opinions, *truth* in none. Indeed, the least reason perplexes him, and the best will not satisfy him. He finds doubts and scruples better than resolves them, and *is always too hard for himself.*"

Nor would holiness of life alone constitute the requisite proof. This would prove the teacher a good man, whose lessons were worthy of attention ; but it would not give the sanction of God's authority to what he might deliver. But if, when he required them to receive his words as a revelation from God, and to convince them that he spoke by divine authority, he should exert supernatural power, and produce effects wholly different from what are regularly experienced as the constant course of nature ; if, for example, he should restore the dead to life, or feed a hungry multitude, consisting of several thousand men, with a few loaves, under such circumstances as to make it evident that the result was not fraudulent nor accidental, nor effected by second causes, but that it was supernatural, and connected with his character as a messenger from heaven ; it is clear that such works would afford a glorious demonstration that God had truly sent him. The Deity would not lend his almighty power in giving sanction to the impious appeal of an impostor. If God hears him, and sets his hand and seal to his word by enabling him to work miracles, it is a most solemn acknowledgment that he has commissioned him to speak and to act in his name and by his authority.

ANCUS. I have insuperable difficulties in regard to the miracles of Christ and his apostles. Miracles are impossible.

CAIUS. Surely you are not serious. Is it because there exists no adequate cause to perform them ? But you deny neither the Being nor the omnipotence of God. It is as easy for omnipotence to restore the dead to life, as it was to create the first human being. Or is it because the performance of miracles is unworthy of God ? They were performed to restore the soul of man to the enjoyment of forfeited bliss, and that has been evinced an end infinitely worthy of God. As soon as you can disprove the existence of God, or show that he regards our race with indifference, you may prove that miracles are impossible.

ANCUS. But miracles are so improbable. There is nothing in our experience like them ; nay, our experience is

against them. Every one regards the accounts of prodigies with suspicion, and in proportion to the strangeness of a man's story, is the unbelief which it provokes.

CAIUS. I grant that the uncommonness of an event should excite our caution in believing its report; but would it not be preposterous on that ground to reject it? Does the circumstance of its being strange and prodigious disprove it? The uncommonness of miracles, or their being dissimilar to all that we have ever experienced, does not justify you in discrediting them, unless you can prove that there is no God able to produce them; or that the restoration of peace and heaven to guilty man, is an object beneath the Divine regard; or that miracles do not afford a proper sanction of revelation; or that the testimony of those who both witnessed and performed them is undeserving of credit.

ZENAS. It would gratify me to hear your views of Mr. Hume's famous argument against miracles. He maintains that no miracle can be proved by human testimony. His reasoning may be summed up in a few words. *A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; but those laws have been established by a firm and unalterable experience.* Hence, he infers that it will always be more probable that the testimony in favor of a miracle should be false, than that uniform and unalterable experience should be violated.

CAIUS. When Mr. Hume says that the laws of nature are established by a *firm and unalterable experience*, he must mean one of two things: he means either that experience *universally, and without a single deviation*, has found the laws of nature to have their common and regular operation; or that, in *most instances*, or, *in his own personal experience*, the laws of nature have been found firm and unalterable. In either case his argument is powerless. If he chooses the first sense, he is guilty of assuming the point in debate as a thing granted. The point to be settled, is, whether God, for important ends, has not, in a few instances, suspended the ordinary operation of the laws of nature, and produced effects different from what would have resulted,

had those laws been suffered to take their usual course. For example, has not God, in some instances, restored the dead to life ; thus making these instances exceptions to the common laws which control the mortality of our race ? This Mr. Hume denies. What is his argument ? He says *uniform*, that is, *universal experience* is against it : that is, an experience which admits of no exceptions. Of course, this experience includes all the instances of death that have ever occurred, and leaves no room for a single restoration to life. Thus he takes for granted the very point which he undertook to disprove. He first asserts that the law of mortality, admitting no subsequent alteration, has been established by a firm and uniform experience—that is, *universally* ; and then it was easy indeed to draw the sweeping conclusion, that no instance of return to life was ever experienced. It is no wonder that no testimony can prove what never happened. If he chooses the second sense of his own premises, he fares still worse ; for his own personal experience on the subject of the restoration of the dead to life must have been so limited, that hundreds of miracles of that kind might have been performed, and his experience would still have been firm and unalterable. Should credible witnesses explicitly and solemnly assert that they had seen a dead person restored to life, would it impeach their testimony, should ten thousand Mr. Humes, multiplied by ten thousand more, assert that they had never experienced such a deviation from the laws of nature ? Is there not room for truth to exist on both sides ? Does Mr. Hume's experience, and that of the witnesses, relate to the same individual fact ? If they did, there would be a contradiction, and both could not be true. So that Mr. Hume's argument is either an assumption of the very point in dispute, or it is so feeble and inconclusive, that an illiterate clown might confute it. I have myself tried the experiment with a sensible child.

From all that has been said, it follows, that the miracles which Jesus Christ performed, prove that he was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world ; and that the evangelical

teachers and writers, in their official character, acted by the command, and under the direction of God ; and, therefore, that what they have written is his own word.

ZENAS. I wish to ask whether it does not follow, that the Scriptures of the Old Testament must be received as the authentic word of God, revealed to the patriarchs and prophets before the advent of the Messiah ?

CAIUS. Such a consequence cannot be avoided, and it was my intention to have deduced it. To those writings, as being a revelation of God's will to the Jews, and as introductory to the facts, and the additional divine communications of the Gospel, there are particular and frequent appeals in every portion of the New Testament. The Old and New Testaments are so interlinked, that they stand or fall together ; they are the two essential parts of one grand system. Let me not, however, forget to suggest, that, independent of the authority ascribed to them in the New Testament, the sacred books of the Jews possess intrinsic evidences of their divine origin.

But, gentlemen, we have in reserve another mighty evidence of the divine origin of the Bible ; an evidence which applies to both Testaments ; which is still going on with increasing power ; and which sets all cavilling at defiance. It is that which results from the prophecies, and their fulfilment. A prophecy is a prediction of an event, or of a series of events, contingent and still future, the knowledge of which could have been derived by the prophet from no earthly source. Now, if such a prediction is accurately and minutely accomplished, it proves that its author must have been taught by omniscience itself. God alone knows the end from the beginning, and can declare it before it comes to pass. For examples, I refer you to the prophecies which relate to the person, sufferings, and glories of Jesus Christ. Gen. 3 : 15 ; 12 : 3 ; 18 : 18 ; 49 : 10 ; Numb. 24 : 17 ; Dan. 9 : 25, 26 ; Isa. 7 : 14 ; 11 : 1-10 ; Mic. 5 : 2 ; Hag. 2 : 7, 9. Compare, also, Zech. 11 : 12, with Matt. 26 : 15 ; Isa. 53 : 5, 9, 12 ; Zech. 12 : 10 ; and Ps. 22 : 7, 8, 16, 18, with John 20 : 25, 27, and Matt. 27 : 39, 43, 46, 57-60.

But there is one prediction which deserves particular attention. It is that recorded in Deut. 28th. The prophet had conducted the nation of Israel to the borders of Canaan. He then uttered a prophetic description, extending through more than three thousand years, of their national crimes; the judgments by which God would punish them; the ruin of their state by the Romans; the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem; their dispersion among all the nations of the earth; and the light in which they should be regarded, and the treatment which they should experience in the various countries of their exile. To complete this picture, add Lev. 26 : 44, and Jer. 30 : 10, 11 ; 31 : 35-37. There we behold this people, in their scattered, homeless state, preserved separate from every other nation to the latest posterity, and we are taught to look forward to their restoration, when they shall once more be gathered unto Zion. Weigh these predictions with a candid spirit, comparing them with past and present history, and you will not be able long to resist the conviction, that the prophets were inspired by God; and that a book which can plead such an attestation contains his revealed will, and should be the only fountain of our sentiments, and the only standard of our practice in religion.

This leads me to remark, that whatever a book, confirmed to be divine in its origin by such evidences, asserts concerning the mode of its communication from heaven, cannot reasonably be called into question. If, then, it declares that the evangelical teachers and writers, as well as the Hebrew prophets, spoke and wrote under the immediate direction of the Spirit of God, its affirmation is entitled to our unhesitating confidence. John 14 : 16-26 ; 16 : 13 ; 1 Cor. 2 : 4, 10, 13 ; 7 : 40 ; 14 : 37 ; Gal. 1 : 11, 12 ; 1 Pet. 1 : 10, 12 ; 2 Pet. 1 : 21 ; 2 Tim. 3 : 16. Hence, the sacred Scriptures were written by divine inspiration.

The time now bids us draw our conference to a close. Before we part, however, allow me to say a word in regard to the matter of the Gospel. Especially unto those who

have formed a just conception of themselves, it is a doctrine "worthy of all acceptance." It was designed for those who need a physician; hence, it is not strange that men who imagine themselves "whole," should treat it with neglect or scorn. It is a doctrine according to godliness. In the highest degree will it be found adapted to the sinful, forlorn, and perishing condition of man, and honorable to the character and government of Jehovah. He who has studied his own heart, must be conscious of a degree of moral disorder, which all the doctrines and precepts of ancient and modern sages can never remove; of a pollution unfitting him for the intimate communion of beings perfect in holiness, which all the tears of the bitterest regret can never wash away; of a want of peace and consolation which all the pleasures of the world can never satisfy.

But let him turn his attention to the gospel message. In the mediation of the Son of God, let him contemplate the reconciliation of that holiness and justice which fill him with dread, with that boundless love and mercy which alone are commensurate to his guilt. Let him revolve the Gospel scheme as proposing the pardon of his sins and the purification of his heart; as proposing to free him from the dominion of those lusts which make him loathe his very existence, and to associate him with those holy beings from whose fellowship he is now excluded. Let him follow out the scheme of redemption in all its holy influences, diffusing truth, love, and happiness through the various relations of the human family; and then let him ask, Is this the Gospel which to me has proved so long a rock of offence? And what is there in all this to offend me? Why should it not rather command my veneration, my gratitude, my submission?

Let it be approached under the solemn conviction of your need of illumination from heaven, and with humble and hearty prayers for the blessing and direction of God, and I am persuaded you will find it the only religion which the world has ever seen, that manifests the divine Majesty

as a suitable object of supreme affection, reverence, and trust; the only religion which provides a ransom for the guilty soul, whilst in the very act it upholds the government of God, and magnifies his violated law; the only religion which brings peace to the conscience, hope to the mind, and holiness to the heart and life.

Instead of ascribing to the Bible the crimes of those who have inconsistently styled themselves its friends, let us rather ask, from what grosser crimes have not these very persons been restrained by its mighty influence? How can that which, in its nature and tendency, is a pure and perfect antidote, be the cause of disease? The disease rages, because the antidote is despised and rejected. In truth, if the world has ever contained those who have "stood in the breach," who have opposed with any success the torrent of iniquity, who have borne an honorable and a soul-moving testimony for God and for righteousness, let it be ascribed to the true and only cause—the Bible. Thousands and millions have been converted by it to purity and joy; and but for it they would have remained the disgrace of their species, the curses of the world.

Were all the philosophers, from Socrates to Newton, to be united in the effort, they never could produce a book so benevolent in its design; so original, and yet so true in its views; so efficacious in its operation; so sublime in its discoveries. That it contains mysteries which angels desire to look into, is rather a confirmation than an objection. In one word, "Study the Holy Scriptures; therein are contained the words of eternal life." "They have God for their author, salvation for their end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for their matter." And "we appeal to the infidel himself, whether he does not approach the BIBLE with AWE, read it with FEAR, and close it with a painful CONVICTION OF ITS DIVINE AUTHORITY."

NOTE.—A premium of fifty dollars, proposed by a benevolent individual, was awarded to the authors of this Tract and Tract No. 227.