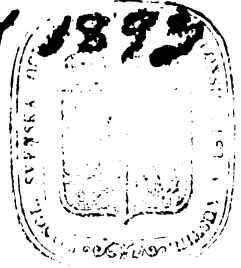


Swanee Palm
Arthur Tappan
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LECTURES



ON THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

DELIVERED AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA,

DURING THE SESSION OF 1860-1.

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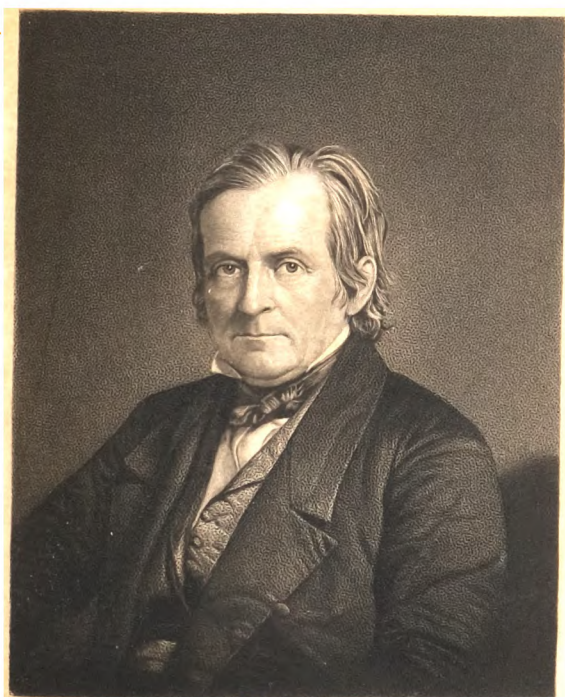
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Miracles,
CONSIDERED AS AN EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY
REV. HENRY RUFFNER, D.D., LL.D.

3.



A. H. Ruffin

Henry Ruffin

ACCORDING to the evangelical records, Jesus Christ appealed to his miracles as evidences of his Divine mission. (John v. 36.) His apostles made the same appeal. (Acts ii. 22; Heb. ii. 4.) They did not require men to believe the gospel on the bare word of its preachers. They founded its claim to a Divine origin on the attestation of God, as given in the mighty signs and wonders which he exhibited, first by the agency of the Great Founder, and then by the instrumentality of the twelve apostolical witnesses, who were commissioned to publish the gospel among all nations.

Without some miraculous token of the Divine sanction, no system of religion can present infallible evidence of its being a revelation from God.

Men may publish doctrines that are sublime, pure, benevolent, and fully approved by the reason and conscience of mankind; yet, however they may appear worthy to have emanated from heaven, they may still be the product of merely human wisdom. Whatever the human mind is capable of receiving by revelation from God, it may also by possibility originate by the exercise of its own powers. Divine revelation, though flowing from an infinite source, is necessarily limited to the capacity of the recipient. In God and in his works, are depths of wisdom, reaching infinitely beyond all the profundities of human thought. The human mind seems indeed to have an indefinite range of thought; it can form combinations innumerable of those elements of thought, which it derives from sense and reason. But it can form no conception of anything beyond the informations of sense and the suggestions of reason. Therefore while human nature remains unchanged, the Spirit of God can reveal nothing to the spirit of man, but what is already within the natural range of human conception, and intrinsically undistinguishable from the natural products of the mind. Many a poor enthusiast has mistaken the ardor of his feelings and the vividness of his conceptions for the inspirations of God. Without an external sign from God no man can certainly distin-

guish a Divine revelation from what is purely human ; for revelation is necessarily so humanized in passing through a human medium, that nothing indicating its Divine origin remains distinctly impressed upon it. As external evidence is necessary to distinguish genuine history from ingeniously wrought fictions, so without the criterion of miracles we might confound the revelations of the Holy Spirit with the dreams of the enthusiast and the inventions of the impostor.

But when God connects miraculous demonstrations with the doctrines of inspired men, we know that the teachers speak by his authority ; for whilst we know that men can originate whatever doctrines men can understand, we know also that no man can work a miracle, unless God be with him.

My subject is miracles, their nature, their susceptibility of proof, and the evidence which they afford of the Divine origin of Christianity.

I shall first discuss the theory of miracles in general, and secondly, the miracles of Jesus in particular, considered as an evidence of his Divine mission.

I. The general theory of miracles comprehends two points of inquiry,—1st. What is a miracle ? and 2d. Can the occurrence of a miracle, if it should take place, be proved by the testimony of men ?

First, then,—What is a miracle ? Various definitions have been given. A miracle is a suspension or violation of the law of nature. It is a supernatural event : It is a deviation from the course of nature, &c. Any of these definitions with a little explanation will answer. But I will offer another which is more explicit. *A miracle is a sign, obvious to the senses, that God has interposed his power to control the established course of nature.*

The novelty of an event does not make it miraculous ; else every new discovery in natural science would be a miracle. Nor is an event which is simply unaccountable, to be esteemed miraculous. Unaccountable events sometimes occur, such as the fall of meteoric stones, which come hissing, glowing, and exploding, from the upper regions of the atmosphere. All that we can say of them, is, that we know not whence they come, nor how they originate. But for aught that we know, they may be the product of natural causes.

It should be observed that our knowledge of the laws of nature, and of their various complicated workings, is very partial and

defective. We see many effects of which the causes are hidden. If they are such as frequently occur, we reasonably infer from their frequency, that they spring from natural causes. Even when the event is extraordinary in its nature and of rare occurrence, we may still judge from circumstances, that it is merely the effect of a rare combination of natural causes, like the connection between the Siamese twins. The rarity of an event may also be accounted for sometimes by the regularity of nature in her courses, producing only once in a long time the most striking coincidences. Thus the planets vary their aspects in the heavens continually;—age after age they pursue their mazy dance through the zodiac, presenting innumerable figures to the astronomer's eye; until at last they all meet together in a splendid group, a wonder to human eyes; then they begin their grand cycle again; to meet once more perhaps long after the generations of mankind shall have passed away. In this case we know that the event proceeds from the regular movements of nature: but why may not equally rare phenomena, result from a secret concatenation of natural causes, stretching back to the creation of the world?

Phenomena purely mental or spiritual cannot be demonstrably miraculous, although they may be such in reality. We understand too little of the nature of spirit and of the action of spirit upon spirit to distinguish the natural from the supernatural in spiritual agency. We cannot trace the various phases of human madness to their causes: how then can we determine what is or is not according to nature in the deeper mysteries of the spiritual world?

A miracle, to be cognizable by mortal man, must appear within this "visible diurnal sphere," in which he is an agent and a looker-on, from the cradle to the grave. Here he learns by his own experience and that of the generations before him, what are the constitution and laws of nature, what is the orderly course of events, what are the causes of many things, and what is within the power of those living agents that God has created upon the earth. All his experience of external things is gained through the medium of the senses, and the objects of sense are those with which he is best acquainted. Here then is the field within which he can distinguish between the natural and the supernatural. Here, if anywhere, will God give him signs from heaven, by which the revelations of God may be distinguished from the wisdom of

the philosopher, the dreams of the enthusiast, and the impostures of the false prophet.

But there are false miracles as well as false prophets,—delusive appearances by which the credulous are often deceived. Hence the necessity of an infallible criterion by which the miracles of God may be distinguished from the impositions of man.

As we derive all our knowledge of external things from the senses, so we must hold that our senses give infallible evidence of what they perceive. Jugglers and false prophets may elude our senses and impose on our understandings; but they can do it only on the supposition that we see what we see and hear what we hear. They deceive us by what they conceal, not by what they exhibit. If we could perceive by our senses all that was done, the deception would be at an end and the wonder would disappear. But because our understandings are liable to delusion, when objects are but partially and indistinctly apprehended by the senses; nothing should be construed as a miracle, but what is in the first place definitely, distinctly, and evidently perceived by the senses,—in the second place, clear and intelligible to the understanding;—and in the third place, manifestly inconsistent with the established order of nature; and therefore impossible to be accounted for without supposing that God has interposed to control the law of nature.

When we consider that a real miracle is a sign which God exhibits of his power to control the laws of nature, we cannot doubt that every real miracle will have in it a dignity and a character befitting its sublime and glorious author. God can never descend to play the petty tricks of a juggler, or to employ his miraculous power for so low an end as to puzzle the understanding or to excite idle wonder in his creature man: nor would he endow a human being with supernatural power for any base or trifling end. Hence a miracle must not be in the power of a man to produce at will, or by the use of means. It must not come by magical incantations, nor by mesmeric “passes,” nor by questions to be answered by “spiritual rappings.” It must not submit to be sold by perambulating lecturers at so much a ticket. It must be nothing ridiculous or fantastic, nothing like the petty tricks usually ascribed to the devil, because the puzzled spectators know not to what else they should ascribe them. It must not be an unmeaning sign, an insignificant display of supernatural power, teaching nothing but the fact, which is better taught by nature in her regular move-

ments, that there is a God. Do not the heavens and the earth evidently show the handiwork of their Creator? Is not nature herself the greatest of all miracles? When God makes nature deviate from her prescribed course, it must be for a special sign of some extraordinary communication from himself.

Again, if a miracle be supernatural; if it imply a suspension of some known law of nature:—then I hold that no created agent can by his own power work a miracle. No angel nor demon, however “great in might,” can break the order of nature, or disturb the operation of those physical laws by which the creation is regulated and preserved. God has so constituted the system of nature, and so regulated its operations, that the whole is a glorious manifestation of his supreme power, wisdom and goodness. Were he to subject any part of this magnificent and well-ordered system to the discretionary control of any created being, then nature would cease to be altogether an expression of his Divine attributes; the workings of her infinitely complex machinery, would be no longer under his exclusive control; some of his own creatures would share with him the sovereignty; the inferior creatures, such as man, would be in some measure dependent on subordinate rulers of the world, who would justly be feared as gods, and the ancient system of heathenish idolatry would be founded on fact.

But can we believe that the Author of nature would subject any part of the system to the will of a creature, who is himself but a part of the same system, and, consequently, subject to its laws? He has endowed created agents with faculties greater or less; but these are themselves subordinate to the preordained laws of nature. Rational beings may violate the moral law; but so much the more necessary is it, that they should be strictly subjected to those physical laws, by which God maintains his sovereignty over nature.

I argue also from analogy against the opinion that any created being can, by his own power, work a miracle. We know that man has vastly more power, both mental and corporeal, than the worm which he treads under his feet. His understanding is comparatively infinite, his strength ten thousand fold greater, yet is he as absolutely subject to the laws of nature as the worm in the dust, or the animalcule, whose life-time is a day, and whose world is a drop of water. He can devise and construct machines, of which the poor worm can form no conception, but for the effect of these, and all his other operations, he is entirely dependent on

the laws of nature. What these enable him to do, he can do; but, contrary to these, he can do absolutely nothing at all. He cannot make a hair of his head either white or black,—he cannot make a grain of sand either heavier or lighter,—he cannot make a thorn-bush bear grapes, nor reanimate the dead body of a fly. Suppose his wisdom and his physical strength to be increased a thousand fold; will he then be able to do any of these things? Will he then have advanced a single step towards a sovereign power over the laws of nature? No; nor is the mightiest demon in the universe any more able to control a law of nature, than a Solomon or a Samson,—a worm or an animalcule. The power that can work a miracle must differ, not only in degree, but in kind, from that of created beings. It is a creative power. A man may kill his brother man, because the law of nature gives him the power; but when he has killed, neither he nor all the hosts of heaven and hell can restore that dead man to life. Only the God that made him can raise him from the dead.

I conclude, therefore, that every miracle, every manifestation of a power superior to the law of nature, is a sign from God, that he has, for some important and holy end, seen fit to interrupt the established course of nature.

I proceed to the second inquiry under this head, which is,—*Are miracles susceptible of proof by testimony?* In other words, *Can we in any case reasonably believe men, who testify that they have witnessed a miraculous event?*

A miracle must, from its nature, be a highly improbable event. It is an exception to the uniform rule of nature; a partial derangement in the long-established working of this great machine, the universe.

One of the earliest lessons that experience teaches mankind, is the uniformity of nature. Our belief in this uniformity seems to be constitutional, and to be developed immediately after experience begins. The burnt child dreads the fire. He believes from one experiment that it is the nature of fire to burn. So his instinct teaches him to reason about nature in general. Experience in general confirms our first conclusions respecting the established relation between causes and effects. God has wisely ordained that things should be distinguishable by their permanent properties, and that the course of events should depend upon established relations between antecedents and consequents, causes and effects. Without steadfastness in the course of nature, human

reason could have no guide, human sciences and arts could not exist, neither instinct nor intelligence could avail the creatures of God, and nature herself would have no voice to proclaim her Divine original.

In a disordered universe, there could be no miracle, because there would be no law of nature by which reason could distinguish the natural from the supernatural. If the Deity often changed the course of nature, the laws of nature would be weakened; and the course of events being unsteady, the signs of God would be less manifest, both in the regularity of nature and in her deviations. As miracles more frequently occurred, the less miraculous would they appear. They would come to resemble the jarrings of an ill-constructed machine, and would be expected as things of course.

Miracles, therefore, to answer any useful purpose in the moral government of God, must necessarily be reserved for rare and important occasions. But for the very reason that they must be the most rare and extraordinary of all events, they are in themselves the most improbable, and require the strongest evidence to render them credible.

Besides the intrinsic improbability of miracles, the frequency of false reports of supernatural events, and the ingenious methods by which impostors often delude credulous people, should make us particularly cautious how we give credence to any report or any appearance of a miracle. So improbable an event should not gain our belief, until we have carefully scrutinized both the nature of the fact reported and the evidence of its occurrence.

But reported miracles are not all equally improbable. The degree of their antecedent improbability depends on the nature, circumstances, and relations of the event. Though all miracles are equally impossible with man and equally possible with God, they are not equally improbable in themselves. Reason teaches us to expect that if God work a miracle, he will not on the one hand make it so portentously great as to derange the general course of nature, nor on the other hand so contemptibly small as to excite ridicule. He would not summon the thunders of heaven to kill a fly. Whilst he made the miraculous nature of the event sufficiently evident, he would also make it correspond in moral significancy with the occasion on which it was introduced; making it a miracle of benevolence, when it was designed to authenticate a mission of mercy, and perhaps a miracle of punishment, when

it was designed to enforce the authority of a violated law. I deem it reasonable to assume that God would not turn nature out of her regular course without some moral necessity, nor exhibit a sign that was incongruous to the occasion. Much less would he affix his signature to anything that was revolting to the reason and the moral sense which he implanted in the human breast. How absurd is it to imagine that he would sanction by miracles the scheme of a wicked man, the vagaries of a fool, or the visions of a half-crazy fanatic! Or is it credible that God Almighty would be so lavish of his miraculous signs, as to employ them for the establishment of relic-worship and transubstantiation?

But when the reported miracles appear to have been morally necessary for the establishment of some great and salutary truth, and when they are in themselves, their circumstances and their human agents, altogether worthy of their Divine Author; then I think that in the opinion of all candid men, they are not so improbable, as to put their proof beyond the reach of human testimony.

Consider, friends, what the consequences would be, if God had so constituted the nature of things as to make it impossible to prove a miracle by the testimony of eye-witnesses. In this case the Father of mankind would have forever precluded himself from making a supernatural revelation of his will. In my introductory remarks I showed that miracles are the only reliable test of Divine revelation. I have also shown that frequency of miracles would detract from their efficacy as signs of God. But how exceedingly common and how apparently natural would they become, if they were exhibited to all mankind as evidence of a Divine revelation! I have not the presumption to say absolutely that God could not prove a revelation to mankind, by working miracles before the eyes of all in every age. But I can say without presumption that such a method would bear no analogy to the general system of Divine government. It is true that God has written the signs of his existence and perfections over the whole face of nature, and displayed them to the eyes of all mankind; yet how few are able of themselves to give them the right interpretation! How generally did mankind, with the heavens and the earth in view, fail to discover the One Only Living and True God, and in their blindness worship imaginary gods and dumb idols! Is it probable, that they would have succeeded

better in the interpretation of a universal system of miracles in proof of a revelation from God? A French atheist* once demanded, why, if there be a God, he did not give a proof of his existence, by so arranging the stars in the form of letters, that they should spell his name! But the poor fool did not say, in what language God would write his name in the heavens more intelligibly than he has already done. Without discussing this point farther, it is sufficient to say that God has made the mass of mankind dependent on testimony and on the instruction of qualified teachers, for nearly all their knowledge; and we may presume that this is on the whole the wisest and best way in which the knowledge of revelation could be imparted to the human race. In this way, it would be impossible for God to verify a system of revealed truth, unless he made miracles capable of proof by testimony.

And consider whether there be not questions of the utmost importance, which men cannot solve by the light of nature, but which our Father in Heaven might be disposed to solve by revelation; such questions as these, for example. Are our souls immortal? Shall we be rewarded and punished in a future state for the deeds done in the present life? Will God forgive us our sins; and if so, on what conditions? These are questions on which human destiny hangs, on which human laws and morals depend for their principal sanctions, and human society for its improvement from age to age. Without faith founded on a Divine revelation of future rewards and punishments, and of pardon for sin on the conditions of repentance and atonement, the motives to virtue and amendment of life would be defective. Without a revealed religion, the generations of men must ever wander in the mazes of error and superstition, or cast off the shackles of false religion only to run into the licentiousness of practical atheism.

Without a revelation from God there can be no assurance of immortal life, of retributions after death, of Divine forgiveness of sins, of grace, to help us in our time of need, or of a Heavenly Father's watchfulness and care over the helpless children of mortality. Human philosophy cannot unveil the secrets of death; reason has invented a telescope that can penetrate the starry skies; but wherewith shall the soul of the living pierce the

* Mirabeau, in his *Système de la Nature*.

"shadows, clouds, and darkness," that rest upon the eternal state of man?

For all that man needs to know respecting the material world and the common affairs of life, nature and reason are sufficient teachers; but if this world be only the cradle of the soul, or at the most its infant-school—and if for its better training here, and its happier state hereafter, it needs a spiritual instruction which nature and experience cannot give—then surely it is not impossible, nor so very improbable, that the Parent of mankind should send us a message of instruction, adapted to our wants, and accompanied by visible signs of its heavenly origin.

Now, supposing that we should hear of a teacher who professed to be a messenger from heaven, who taught a religion, solving the great questions before mentioned, and embracing a pure and benevolent code of morals—a teacher whose personal character was every way befitting his profession, and who wrought miracles of mercy and goodness in proof of his mission—I ask, would such a report, taken altogether, be so utterly incredible, that no sort or amount of testimony could make it worthy of credit? May I not appeal to the common sense of every one who hears me to bear me out in the assertion, that such a report might be verified to the satisfaction of any reasonable man by the testimony of witnesses? The reported miracles, taken in connection with the other reported facts, could not be so improbable as to make all possible testimony in their favor unworthy of belief.

But the celebrated historian and philosopher David Hume attempted to frame an argument against miracles, which he fancied would overthrow all faith in revealed religion, by showing that human testimony could not in any case afford proof of a miraculous event. This argument, invented by a skeptical philosopher, fond of paradox, has received more attention than it deserves; but as it is ingeniously framed, and contains all that can be said against the credibility of reported miracles, I shall give you the sum and substance of the argument in his own words, and then point out the fallacies interwoven with it, and demonstrate the sufficiency of human testimony to prove any fact, however improbable.

"Experience (says Hume) is our only guide in reasoning."
"A wise man weighs the evidence; he considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments; to that side he inclines with doubt and hesitation." "When the fact which the

testimony endeavors to establish partakes of the marvellous—the evidence resulting from testimony admits of a diminution, greater or less, in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual.”

“The reason why we place any credit in witnesses, is not derived from any connection which we perceive *a priori* between testimony and reason, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them.”

“When the fact is such as has *seldom fallen under our observation*, here is a contest between two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains.” “But let us suppose that the fact is not only marvellous, but really miraculous; and suppose that the testimony amounts to an entire proof (considered apart and by itself;) in that case there is proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force, in proportion with that of its antagonist.”

“A miracle is a violation of the law of nature, and as *a firm and unalterable experience has established that law, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.*”

“Nothing is a miracle that happens in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man seemingly in good health should die on a sudden, because such a kind of death has been frequently observed. But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life, because *that has never been observed in any age or country*. There must therefore be *a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation*. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof from the nature of the fact against the existence of any miracle; nor can such proof be destroyed or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof which is superior.” Consequently, “No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact which it endeavors to establish.”

Such is Hume's argument, from which he concludes that “No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle.”

The general principle of reasoning stated by Hume is not materially objectionable; but a fair use of that principle would not have served his purpose; he therefore connected with it several

gratuitous assumptions, by which an argument otherwise legitimate though inconclusive, has been converted into a mere sophism. He assumes by way of premise, that "*a miracle has never been observed in any age or country,*" that the "*uniform experience of mankind is against every miraculous event, otherwise it would not merit that appellation*"—that is, the mere fact that an event has happened, proves that it deserves not the appellation of a miracle; and on this assumption, he grounds the assertion, that "there is a direct and full proof from the nature of the fact against any miracle."

What is all this but a mere begging of the question, an arbitrary assumption of the matter in dispute?—"No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle," is Hume's conclusion. What is the reason? (we ask.) Because, (says the philosopher) no miracle has ever been observed, and no observed event can merit the appellation of a miracle!—Indeed! (we may well exclaim) if so, the argument is at an end: *that* is the conclusion of the whole matter. Why infer anything about the insufficiency of testimony to prove what has never been observed, and what, from the nature of the fact, never can be observed? When a philosopher can take it for granted that a thing *is not and cannot be*,—surely it is puerile in him to come forth triumphantly with the conclusion, that it *cannot be proved*.

But Hume builds his argument upon the basis of experience. Let us see how he has managed to raise an insuperable barrier of experience against all possible testimony for miracles.

He begins with each individual's personal experience. He says, "When the fact is such as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest between two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other so far as its force goes, &c." What two experiences are those which he represents as coming in conflict, when the fact is such as we have seldom observed? They are our positive and our negative experience in relation to the fact. For illustration, suppose that a neighbor of yours told you, that he had seen a man's leg broken by a fall from a scaffold. You had never perhaps seen precisely such an event, but you had seen, we will suppose, one instance of a man getting his arm broken by a fall from his horse. Let this be your positive experience in respect to facts of that sort. It is something; but how small compared with your negative experience in relation to such events! You had lived and observed the events of human life for years,

and except in that single instance, you had never observed anything like the event which your neighbor reported as a fact. Now here according to Hume is a contest of opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other so far as its force goes. But if negative experience has any force against positive, then in this case the vast preponderance of the negative must overwhelm the positive, and make your neighbor's report exceedingly improbable. — *Would* it have that effect on your mind or that of any sane man? Certainly not; for no rational man reasons in this manner from his personal experience.

Our philosopher being aware that individual experience is too narrow a basis for his argument, makes a sly transition to the general experience of mankind, where he makes the assumption already mentioned, that no miracle has ever been observed, or in other words, that universal experience is against every miraculous event. But what I have to remark at present, is the fallacious manner in which he sets universal experience against testimony for miracles. He leaves out of view the fact, that we derive from testimony all our knowledge of what other men have experienced from the creation of the world to this day. Our personal experience is but a drop in the ocean of universal experience.

Now when he asserts that the uniform experience of mankind is against the occurrence of a miracle, if he means, as his language would imply, that all testimony is against miracles, the assertion is false, for there is much testimony in their favor; or if he means that all the testimony that goes to establish the general regularity of nature is true, but that all, without exception, which goes to prove occasional deviations from that regularity, is necessarily false, then we demand a reason why the one should be true and the other wholly false. It cannot be, because they are contradictory testimonies, and therefore the strongest should prevail. If one man testify that he has seen fishes without eyes, and ten thousand men should testify that all fishes ever seen by them had eyes, there is no contradiction in the statements; both may be true; the general fact is, that fishes have naturally two eyes, but in particular cases they have none. Here is no contest between opposite experiences or opposite testimonies, as Hume sophistically pretends. Hence you can easily perceive the fallacy of his argument, when he says, "A miracle is a violation of the law of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established that law, *the proof against a miracle, from the*

very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument can possibly be imagined." Here he assumes, artfully and sophistically, that all the proof by which the law of nature is established, lies in full force against the occurrence of a miracle: whereas, on the contrary, no miracle can occur where there is no law of nature; for according to Hume's own definition, a miracle is a violation of the law of nature. Be it so then,—that human experience proves the existence of the law of nature: we all admit the fact,—we must admit it before we can believe the occurrence of a miracle. Where there is no law there is no violation of a law; where there is no rule there is no exception. Milton represents the chaos, or unformed elements of nature, to be full of wild hubbub and confusion. No wonder; chaos has no law, and none of its disorderly workings can be deemed miraculous. Now to represent the experience which proves the law of nature as being an entire proof against a miracle, is exceedingly illogical; for such experience, however firm and unalterable, it may be, is entirely consistent with any supposed experience of a miracle, which, "from the nature of the fact," must be an exception to the general experience of mankind.

The only condition on which experience can furnish any *proof* against a miracle, is, that it be opposed to the particular fact reported as a miracle. Thus, if one man testifies that, at a particular time and place, he saw the sun miraculously darkened at noon-day; and another man who was present at the same time and place, testifies that he saw no such thing, or only a natural obscuration of the sun by a cloud; in such a case there is an opposition of reported experiences, of which those on the negative side may amount to full proof against the miracle.

But Hume's argument assumes that a general negative experience, or mere non-experience of a fact by mankind in general, amounts to an entire proof against its existence. On this principle many facts of very rare occurrence are disproved by a firm and unalterable experience of the generality of mankind. So singular a phenomenon as the Siamese twins would be disproved by the experience of mankind; so rare a phenomenon as the fall of meteoric stones from the atmosphere, would be incapable of positive proof, because the negative experience of nearly all mankind has raised an insuperable barrier against its credibility.

One more remark on this part of the argument will suffice. Though the experience to which Hume refers is merely negative

in respect to miracles, it is positive, so far as it goes, in respect to the law of nature. I have already shown that this does not make it inconsistent with the supposition that a miracle has been experienced, but that, on the contrary, a miracle supposes a pre-existing law of nature. Yet there is a supposable case, in which positive evidence of the regular operation of the laws of nature would disprove the occurrence of a miracle in times past. If we knew from experience, or otherwise, that every event had come to pass heretofore in accordance with the laws of nature, then, of course, any supposed miracle would be inconsistent with our positive knowledge. So far must our knowledge of nature and of the events of time go, before Hume's argument from experience can have any validity. The moment you admit that our knowledge of events and of their causes is defective; that innumerable events have occurred of which we know nothing, and that many events have been observed to happen from causes unknown;—that moment is it evident that human experience does not, as Hume affirms, afford an entire proof, or anything like it, against the occurrence of a miracle. And you know this to be the fact. No living man or set of men are acquainted with the millionth part of those facts which the generations of mankind have experienced; and of that very minute fraction of them, that we have ourselves observed, how many have resulted from causes of which we have no certain knowledge! All this numerous class of contingent events may or may not have happened in the regular course of nature. For aught that we know, some of them at least may have resulted from the interposition of Divine Providence, by which the natural course of things has been changed. Take an instance given by Hume: a man apparently in good health suddenly dies from a cause unknown. He says that this is no miracle, because it has been frequently observed. Certainly, we do not call it a miracle, but the true reason why we do not, is that we are ignorant of the cause. Did we know that according to the law of nature, the man would have lived for years, but that God killed him by a stroke of supernatural power, then it would be a miracle. Take another instance: a man apparently at the point of death from disease, recovers, we know not how nor why. Does experience of events like these and innumerable others of the like contingent nature, prove anything either positively for the uniformly regular operation of the laws of nature, or negatively against occasional devia-

tions by the act of God? Certainly not. But they do demonstrate conclusively, that experience—even common, every-day experience—raises no such insurmountable proof against miracles, as Hume pretends; and that, in fact, experience is not inconsistent with the supposition, that the Deity does sometimes vary the course of nature for particular ends. But then, supposing that God does produce contingent events by controlling the course of nature, we do not recognize any event as miraculous unless it be manifestly contrary to the law of nature; and as, for reasons before mentioned, such events must rarely occur, they are still so improbable as to require stronger proof than ordinary facts. Although negative evidence cannot amount to a proof, as Hume's argument assumes, it can, nevertheless, extend so far as to raise a strong presumption against a reported fact, and this it does in the case of miracles.

Having thus disposed of the principal sophistries which Hume has wrought into the body of his argument, I come now to consider the principle from which the argument derives all its logical force. Had the skeptical philosopher made a legitimate use of the principle, unmixed with unwarrantable assumptions and other tricks of sophistry, in combating the testimony in favor of miracles, his argument, though inconclusive against the miracles of Christ, would have been fair and worthy of respectful consideration.

He thus lays down the principle: "No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous [that is, more improbable,] than the fact which it endeavors to establish."

This is a just principle. The improbability of a miracle must be overcome by proof, which must be stronger in proportion as the improbability is greater. That proof must, to those who are not eye-witnesses, be furnished by testimony. But human testimony is liable to error and falsehood. Hence, it is only probable that a witness will tell the truth, and more or less probable according to his competency, his moral character, and the motives that operate on his mind in giving his evidence. Without some particular motive to falsify, all men will probably tell the truth, substantially at least.

But, however lowly we may estimate the veracity of mankind in general, certain it is that testimony is susceptible of indefinite accumulation, by increasing the number of witnesses; especially when the witnesses are of good character, and are competent to report

correctly what they have observed. Still, however, the credibility of their testimony, in a particular case, will be weakened in proportion to the improbability of the fact to which they testify. Hence, to justify our belief of an improbable fact, we must judge the fact to be less improbable than the falsehood of the testimony; and the degree of our belief will be stronger, as the weight of the testimony preponderates more strongly over the improbability of the fact. Hence, because a miracle is a very improbable sort of event, a firm faith in its occurrence ought not to be entertained without much stronger proof than is necessary in regard to ordinary facts. The testimony ought to be such, that its falsehood shall be decidedly more improbable than the fact itself. This is Hume's principle, and I adopt it in arguing against Hume's conclusion, that "no testimony is sufficient to prove a miracle."

The argument is now on the general question, whether or not a miracle is susceptible of proof by testimony. Hume denies it; we affirm it. We take for granted, that a miracle is, from its nature, a very improbable sort of event, and that the testimony of man is fallible, yet capable of affording evidence, more or less, of any possible event. We have to determine, whether it can have sufficient weight to overcome the improbability of a miracle.

I undertake to demonstrate that human testimony is susceptible of such a cumulative force, that it can overcome any assignable degree of improbability in the fact which it tends to establish.

Before I proceed to analyze the force of testimony, let me call your attention to some familiar examples of its power to produce conviction against strong antecedent improbabilities. You know that we derive the far greater part of our knowledge from the reports of other men, that is, from testimony. All our belief in facts beyond the narrow sphere of our personal experience, is founded on testimony. Many of these facts are highly improbable, if we judge them by our own observation and experience. We shiver in the moderate cold of our winters, yet we firmly believe the men who report, that whole tribes of mankind live and enjoy life in an atmosphere that freezes mercury. We know that the general mass of materials composing this globe is incombustible, yet we believe that mountains disgorge rivers of melted rocks, even amidst frozen oceans and glaciers of eternal ice. We know that masses of stone are with difficulty heaved a few yards into the air; but we fully credit the reports of a few men who profess to have seen red-hot stones of considerable weight fall from the upper regions of the

atmosphere, though we cannot imagine how they were projected to such a height, or whence they could have originated. When we consider the present state of the earth, and what we know of its living tribes, it is hard to believe that monstrous animals, four times as large as the elephant, should once have lived by tens of thousands in the frozen regions of Siberia; yet we give our unhesitating assent to the testimony of a few travellers, who declare that innumerable bones of such animals are found in the icy soil of that country. We also hold it for certain, on the testimony of men, that the skeletons of strange monsters of various kinds, have been found imbedded hundreds of feet deep in the solid rocks of this globe. And how improbable in themselves are the stories which travellers relate concerning the artificial wonders of Egypt! What is Egypt but a narrow vale between immense deserts, where no rain falls, and where two or three millions of poor inhabitants draw subsistence from the mud of the Nile. Yet here do travellers pretend to have found the most stupendous monuments of human labor, that the world ever saw—the pyramids, the catacombs with their millions of mummies, and the ruins of Thebes. How could such structures and such excavations in solid rock, have been made by human hands in such a country? You wonder, and yet you believe with as firm a faith as if you had seen those unaccountable objects with your own eyes. And how much like a wild romance is that ancient story of Alexander of Macedon? Can you believe that so petty a king, whose hereditary dominions were a small space between the mountains and the sea in a corner of Europe, could have conquered Asia with 30,000 men?—that he could have overthrown millions of soldiers, and crossed vast deserts, in his victorious march, from the Mediterranean sea to the Indian ocean? Yet although the story is more than 2000 years old, and rests upon the authenticity of a few ancient records, every reading man has full confidence in its truth. You may never have seen the Alps, yet you easily believe on testimony that they are a mountain barrier, so high, so precipitous, so covered with perpetual ice and snow, that it is very difficult for travellers to cross, except by a modern road constructed with immense labor. What think you, then, was the feasibility of marching a great army across them in ancient times, when there was no road, when every valley and gorge was occupied by savage mountaineers, ready to roll huge rocks from the precipices upon every invader? Yet on the authority of a few ancient historians, you

believe that Hannibal led an African army of 60,000 men through those narrow gorges, up those frightful precipices, over those fields of ice, over those snowy peaks, and down again into the gulfs that led to fair Italy; that he took with him not only his 60,000 men, but all their provisions, forage, tents, arms, horses, and elephants—all, over a route where often even the experienced chamois-hunter would scarcely venture to climb. You have no doubt of these facts.

Consider how *absolutely certain* you feel concerning innumerable facts, of which your knowledge is derived wholly from testimony, oral or written. Does anything appear more certain to you, and to all other intelligent men, than the existence of such a country as Japan, or the former existence and actions of such men as Christopher Columbus, Martin Luther, and Napoleon Bonaparte? But in respect to most facts that have come to your knowledge, and of which you feel *indubitably certain*, the testimony on which you rely is exceedingly indirect. Between you and the original witnesses are many intermediate reporters. Yet the man who should presume to deny these facts would be wondered at as a curious specimen of the *genus homo*—a very peculiar sort of fool.

The illustrations just given of the power of testimony to produce a firm conviction of even the most improbable facts, are sufficient to show that belief in testimony is a law of our nature, and that no conceivable fact can be rejected as incredible, when the full power of testimony is brought to bear upon the mind.

I now proceed to analyze the force of testimony, and to show how it is susceptible of indefinite augmentation, until it shall overcome the highest conceivable degree of improbability in the fact to which it is applied.

In the first place, testimony may derive any degree of force from undesigned coincidence in the statements of different witnesses, who give independent testimony.

Witnesses and their testimony are said to be independent when there is no previous concert or design by which the testimony of one witness is made to coincide with that of another. It is an evidence that the coincidence is undesigned, when the witnesses have not communicated with one another about the matter of their testimony. But this is not necessary to constitute independent testimony. It is sufficient that each witness tells his own story, without depending on the information or instruction of an-

other as to what he shall testify. You have probably remarked in the manner of witnesses, and in the matter and circumstances of their testimony, sufficient evidence that they spoke independently from their personal knowledge of facts, and not from the promptings of another. But I need not explain by what means we may ascertain the independency of witnesses. It is enough for you to know that there are such witnesses, and that the coincidence of their testimony is not the result of concert or design. Then the coincidence can result only from chance, or from the truth of their testimony. We suppose that the facts of which they testify are of a contingent nature, and capable of being known as facts only from actual observation.

Thus, if two men were to tell you independently that they had seen a certain man killed accidentally by the fall of a tree, it is evident that either the report is true, or they must by mere chance have hit upon the same falsehood. In proportion as it is improbable that such an undesigned coincidence in falsehood should occur, is it probable that the testimony is true, even though the witnesses were personally unworthy of credit.

Now the more numerous the particulars in which these witnesses concur in their statements, the more improbable is it that the coincidence should have resulted from chance; not only so, but the improbability increases in a geometrical ratio, as the points of coincidence increase in number. Contingent events are infinitely diversified in time, place, and circumstances. Many men have been killed by the fall of trees, yet probably no two instances have coincided in all their circumstances. Two men might possibly feign or fancy an incident of this sort about the same time; it is not impossible that they should happen to do it near the same place; nor will I pronounce it impossible that they should happen to tell this fiction of theirs to the same person, as a fact which they had seen. But you will allow that an undesigned coincidence, even to this extent, is exceedingly improbable. What would you say then if they agreed exactly in regard to the time and place of the accident, the sort of tree that fell, the cause of its fall, what sort of injury it inflicted on the man, &c.? Would you not feel that it was morally impossible to attribute such a web of coincidences to chance? Hence, if it be granted that the witnesses were independent, you would say at once that the testimony *must* be true.

I said that the degree of probability increased in a geometrical

ratio as the points of coincidences increased in number. This is capable of mathematical demonstration; but I shall not enter fully into this method of proof. I shall only illustrate the principle sufficiently to make it intelligible.

Suppose the two men referred to should happen to conceive the idea of telling the falsehood, that a certain man was killed: yet the chances we will suppose are only 100 to 1 against their happening to coincide in respect to the manner of his death by the fall of a tree. Then suppose they each invent for himself a place at which they will locate the accident, the chances are at least 1000 to 1 against their coinciding on this point. But the chances were 100 to 1 against their coinciding in the other, therefore the chances would be 100,000 to 1 against their coinciding in both at once. Now, suppose they consider, each for himself, what sort of tree he shall pitch upon as the cause of the man's death. Here the range of choice is limited; say the chances are only three to one against their coinciding in this particular; then the probability is, that they would coincide three times as often in the two former points as in all three at once. Therefore, the chances are 300,000 to 1 against their coinciding in all these three points. So, as they coincided in four, five or six, or more points, would the chances against the falsehood of their testimony be multiplied, until they amounted to a moral certainty that the testimony could not be false.

But equally potent is an increase in the number of independent witnesses to multiply the chances against the falsehood of their testimony, or, what is the same thing, to multiply the degree of probability in favor of its truth. I supposed that when two men happened about the same time to invent a lie respecting a certain person's death, the chances were at least 100 to 1 against their both hitting upon so rare a cause of death as the fall of a tree. I have assumed too low a number, but let it stand. Now, supposing the very improbable case, that three men should at once, without concert, take it into their heads to fabricate a tale about the same person's death. We will leave out that improbability, and suppose that the three did chance to do this improbable thing, and that the chances were, as aforesaid, 100 to 1 against any two of them coinciding in respect to the cause of his death. Then it is evident that two of them would coincide in this particular 100 times as often as all three would; that is, the chances would be 10,000 to 1 against their all coinciding at once. And so on

would we have to multiply the former results throughout, as we added witness after witness. You can easily conceive then that the power of testimony, considered merely as undesignedly coinciding, is practically unlimited, and capable of such accumulation, as to overcome any assignable degree of improbability in the fact to which such testimony is applied.

Should any of the younger part of my audience not have as yet a clear conception of the grounds of this mathematical sort of reasoning on chances or probabilities, I can only refer him to any good mathematician, or any good treatise on the subject, for a fuller explanation. No method of human reasoning is more certain in its results than this. The only room for error is in the numbers assumed to express the chances, or the degrees of probability or improbability. The method of calculation is infallible; and I have given you a specimen of it merely to show how rapidly the probabilities of truth are multiplied, as the points of coincidence and the number of the independent witnesses increase, and how soon they accumulate to such a degree of moral certainty, as to overcome any conceivable degree of improbability in the nature of the fact.

To illustrate the principle of this method of reasoning, I will propose to you some simple case, in which events are referred to what we call chance. Suppose for example, that you had before you a confused heap of printer's types, and you thrust your hand among them at haphazard, and drew out successively two types, with the design of spelling the little word *so*. Would you not probably have to make many trials before you succeeded in drawing the right letters in the right order? But suppose that you chose a word of three letters instead of two, as the monosyllable *man*. Consider how much the chances of failure would be multiplied by this single addition of a letter; how often you might hit the two first letters without hitting the third at the same time? So it is with coincidences when they result from chance. And then if two of you should try the same experiments together, how often might the one or the other succeed before both should succeed at the same trial? So is it with independent testimony, when we increase the number of witnesses. How often might one of them hit upon a particular set of circumstances when he invented a lie, before both should hit upon them all at the same trial.

I trust that I have sufficiently demonstrated the power of independent testimony to establish the most improbable sort of facts;

and that too without respect to the moral character of the witnesses.

In the second place, testimony derives force from the character of the witnesses, for veracity and competency; and this too is susceptible of infinite accumulation.

Men naturally tell the truth; and although motives of interest and passion may lead them to swerve from it, sometimes, there is also implanted in the human breast a moral feeling which resists the motives to falsehood, and gives more or less weight to the testimony of honest men, even when they are tempted to utter a falsehood. Regard to reputation is another powerful check upon the motives to falsehood. A liar is one of the most infamous characters in society. Mankind feel the necessity of maintaining truth with one another. Therefore they brand the false witness as a dangerous character, and point at him with the finger of scorn. But nature prompts even liars to tell many more truths than falsehoods; and nature and moral principle and regard to reputation combined, give a general character of truth to the testimony of mankind; at least of substantial truth, even when interest or prejudice causes it to be somewhat disfigured.

But men may err in their testimony through incompetency to observe and report correctly the facts of which they testify. Due allowance must be made for this in estimating the credibility of a witness. When the facts are simple and obvious to the senses, almost any man is competent to testify about them. He can tell what he plainly saw and heard and felt, though he may not be qualified to reason on the subject.

To demonstrate that testimony may have force sufficient in the personal credibility of the witnesses, it is not necessary to assign to each witness a high degree of credibility. Let it only be probable that a witness will tell the truth, and the force of the testimony will, as in the former case, be multiplied by every additional witness. Let the probability be only as two to one, that a single witness will tell the truth; then the probability will be as four to one that the testimony of two such witnesses, when they concur, is true;—and so on the probability of truth will be doubled by each additional witness. But when the witnesses are honest, conscientious men, you will readily admit that the probable truth of their testimony is far greater. When such a man is not very powerfully tempted to swerve from the truth, you will allow that 1000 to 1 is a very low estimate of the probable truth of his tes-

timony. Then let two such witnesses concur, and the probability is a thousand thousands, or a million to one, that their testimony is true; and every additional witness of this character will multiply the probability a thousand-fold. Now suppose that twelve such witnesses concur; if you calculate the force of their united testimony, it mounts up to an almost inconceivable quantity,—to a moral certainty of truth so powerful, that no degree of improbability in the fact attested, can resist its force. Yet the number of witnesses is supposed to be only twelve: what if it were a hundred or a thousand?

Observe that we put the probability of truth in one scale of the balance, and the improbability of the fact in the other, as Mr. Hume directs; and then give our judgment in favor of the side which preponderates. We must therefore allow the testimony its full weight independently of the nature of the fact; taking care not to let the improbability of the fact itself detract anything from the testimony, until we put them into the scales.

If any one should be at a loss to understand how the addition of one witness can in this case so multiply the force of the testimony, I ask his attention to this observation. When the question is whether a particular event has or has not occurred, if we can believe any one witness, who testifies that it has occurred, then we must consider the fact as established. All that we need, therefore, to justify our belief of the fact, is to feel morally sure that one witness out of all who testify can be relied upon as true. Then it matters not whether we can rely upon the rest, or not; for if any one tells the truth, then it follows that all who concur with him, also tell the truth in that case, though they should falsify in other cases. In this case, if one be true, all must be true; and it is only on the supposition that all concur at once in the same falsehood, that their testimony can be discredited.

From this observation, it may be easily understood, when witnesses are probably honest, how an addition to their number not only increases but multiplies the force of their testimony, because it multiplies the chances that some one among them can be relied on as a true witness, or what is the same thing, multiplies the improbability that they should all concur in the same falsehood.

I have now shown satisfactorily, I trust, that human testimony is susceptible of two sorts of force, each of which may be aug-

mented to any extent necessary to overcome the improbability of any conceivable event.

What shall we say, then, of the force of testimony, when it combines these elements of strength ;—when the force of undesigned coincidence in the testimony is multiplied by the force of honesty and good faith in the witnesses ? Yet these elements of strength may be, and often are, combined. How miserably diseased with skepticism must a man's intellect be, who can affirm, as Hume did, that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle !

But I need not urge the force of testimony any further ; for this same skeptical philosopher, after elaborating an argument by which the force of all possible testimony for miracles was to be paralyzed, does in the same Essay give up the point, by admitting that the most stupendous miracle might be proved by the testimony of men ;—no less a miracle than this, namely, that at a certain time, ages ago, the sun was totally darkened for the space of eight days. If testimony might, as Hume says, have force enough to prove such an awful derangement in the course of nature, how much less would be sufficient to prove that a teacher sent from God had miraculously healed some diseased persons, and had himself risen from the dead ?

But whilst he thus concedes that testimony is of force to prove an unheard-of miracle, void of all moral use and signification, he resolves that religion shall not benefit by his concession, for he expressly excepts religious miracles as wholly incredible, because mankind have been often imposed on by stories of such miracles. He summarily disposes of religious miracles forever, by declaring that they ought to be universally rejected without examination. But if the frequency of imposture in relation to a class of facts be a sufficient reason for scouting the whole as incredible, then we ought to reject all reports of cures by medicine, because mankind are daily imposed on by the worthless nostrums of advertising quacks.

And this, at last, is the result of Hume's Essay on Miracles, which has given so much trouble to writers on the Evidences of Christianity. After packing together a mixture of sound principles and miserable sophisms into the form of an infallible argument against miracles, the author himself virtually abandons his argument, and falls back upon the last refuge of a despairing skeptic,—a resolution not to believe in Christianity, whatever may be its evidence, and to scout all religious miracles without exami-

nation. This resolution shows that he found *it very hard to disbelieve the miracles of Jesus Christ.*

II. I come now to the second head of the general subject, which is to consider the nature and the evidence of the mighty works ascribed to our Saviour Jesus Christ. I confine myself to these among all that are recorded in the Bible, in order, by simplifying the discussion, to reduce it to the narrow limits of a lecture; nor is it necessary to go beyond them; for these are obviously the test miracles, by which the Christian religion must, so far as its Divine authority is concerned, either stand or fall.

First, then, let us examine the nature of these mighty works, and determine whether any of them were really miraculous or not. I say, *any of them*, because even one undoubted miracle is sufficient to prove the Divine interposition, and to establish the doctrines of the great teacher. The certainty, also, that one or a few were real miracles, will also determine the nature of those which, if considered by themselves, might be in some degree questionable.

In determining the nature of the mighty works ascribed to Jesus Christ, we must take the facts as they are related in the evangelical records; for we are not considering whether those facts actually occurred, but whether, supposing them to have occurred, they were really miraculous or not.

In respect to some of them, it is easy to determine that they could not have resulted from natural causes: they must, therefore, have been miraculous. Of this sort was Christ's walking upon the sea (Matt. xiv. 25); his feeding thousands with a few small loaves and fishes (Matt. xiv. 15.); his giving sight to a man born blind by the application of clay moistened with spittle (John ix.); his raising Lazarus from the tomb (John xi.), and his own resurrection from the dead and visible ascent to heaven.

Next to these is a sort of cases, which, if taken singly, are not demonstrably supernatural, but when taken collectively and in connection with the circumstances, must also be considered as unquestionably miraculous. Of this sort are the numerous cases in which Christ instantaneously healed men of diseases, which were almost, if not quite incurable by natural means,—such as inveterate leprosies, palsies, epilepsies, lunacy, &c. (Matt. viii. Luke v. Mark v. John v.) Admitting that in some rare instances, persons deeply affected with such diseases, might naturally recover, I think that you will esteem it impossible for any man without

miraculous power to effect instantaneously many cures of this sort in succession, and without a failure, as often as the patients presented themselves. What I have to say on a third sort of cases will apply with additional force to these also, and remove any doubt that may linger in your minds.

In the third sort of cases, the events were such as might proceed from natural causes, and the only evidence of their miraculous character, consisted in the circumstances and manner of their production. Such was the sudden fall of the wind on Lake Tiberias, when Jesus commanded it to cease (Matt. viii. 18). The recovery of patients from ordinary diseases without the application of remedies, as in the case of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, who was ill of a fever (Luke iv. 38). Into this class I also put the cases of Jairus's daughter and the widow's son, who were resuscitated after apparent death (Luke viii. 41, Luke vii. 11, 12). For although cases of revival after apparent death are rare, yet as they do sometimes occur from natural causes, the mere occurrence of the fact is no evidence of a miracle.

But whilst events of this sort are not necessarily miraculous, neither are they necessarily the result of natural causes. The most common sort of event is miraculous, when it happens out of the regular course of nature,—when the cause on which it naturally depends is wanting, and its occurrence can be accounted for only on the supposition of a supernatural cause. A gust of wind may suddenly blow over,—a sick man may regain his health, and a blind man may recover his sight; and a man after lying breathless for hours may return to life; and though the cause may be unknown, yet the circumstances of the case may give no indication of a miracle. Before a miracle can be inferred, there must be a sign of supernatural agency. What was the sign in these cases? It was the wonderful coincidence between certain acts of Jesus and the events which immediately followed. According to the law of nature, the acts of Jesus could not have produced such effects; yet the events sprang forth instantaneously, as the effect springs from the cause, and quite as certainly and regularly as if all had occurred in the ordinary course of nature. A storm agitates the waters and threatens to overwhelm the frail boat in which Jesus lies asleep. He is wakened with the fearful cry, Lord save, or we perish! He rises, and commands the winds to be still. Instantly there is a great calm. A woman lies ill of a great fever. Jesus happens to arrive at the house, and seeing her condition, he takes

her by the hand and rebukes the disease: the fever flies at his command, the woman rises and attends to her household duties as usual. A blind man happens to meet with Jesus and begs for the restoration of his sight. Jesus touches his eyes, immediately the film that had for years drawn its dark curtain over them is dispelled, and the world again flashes upon his sight. At another time Jesus happens to meet a funeral procession, attended with extraordinary lamentation and woe; he learns that a heart-broken widow is following the dead body of her only son to the tomb. He orders the bier to be stopped; he uncovers the corpse, and commands the dead to rise. Immediately the current of life resumes its flow, the pale cheek reddens, the lungs breathe, the eyes open, the limbs move, the soul resumes its tabernacle of clay, and the poor widow embraces her recovered son.

Such a coincidence between the word of a man, and the forthcoming of an event,—between the command of a mortal and the obedience of nature,—if it happened once would be deemed extraordinary; if twice in succession, wonderful; if ten times or a hundred times without a failure, certainly miraculous. And justly would it so appear; for although such a coincidence might once or possibly twice occur by chance; yet that it should continue to happen regularly a dozen and even hundreds of times, is a sure indication of supernatural power.

If further proof were required that such coincidences could not be accidental, it could easily be afforded by reducing the argument to a mathematical form, as I did when discussing the force of testimony. Take for instance the case in which the wind ceased at the command of Jesus. A violent gust of wind in full blast might chance to fall on a sudden when a man uttered a command that it should; but you will admit this to be so improbable, that it could not be expected to happen oftener than one time in a hundred. So a high fever, as it does, though very rarely, happen to cease all at once without apparent cause, might possibly happen once in a thousand times to do so at the moment when a certain man called at the house and rebuked the disease. If we assume these numbers as correctly expressing the improbability of the two coincidences taken singly, then it would follow that the two could happen in succession only once in a hundred thousand times that the trial should be made. If we suppose again that a person who has been for hours apparently dead, would chance to revive at the moment when a certain man met the fu-

neral procession and commanded the dead to rise, as often as once in ten thousand times; then compounding this case with the other two, the three would not successively occur by chance oftener than once in ten thousand times one hundred thousand times; that is once in a thousand millions of times. Such then is the degree of improbability that lies against the supposition of accidental coincidence in only three out of hundreds of similar cases recorded or alluded to in the Gospels. How then can any man imagine that all these cases should be the result of accidental coincidence between the acts of our Saviour and the apparently miraculous effects that immediately followed?

Had Jesus failed in many instances or even in a few, when he attempted to produce such wonderful effects, the argument would lose much of its force, but as not a single failure appears to have occurred, we must reject the hypothesis of accidental coincidence as utterly absurd.

But there is another, which may be reasonably applied to many reported cases of miraculous healing, and which deserves therefore to be respectfully considered in the present argument.

The hypothesis is that the *faith* and *imagination* of the patient, often have a wonderful effect upon the disease, and sometimes produce a cure when ordinary remedies fail.

This is true, and what seems to give the hypothesis more applicability to the miraculous cures related in the Gospels, is that Jesus often required faith in his power to heal, as a condition on which he would undertake the cure (Matt. viii. 10; ix. 22. Mark x. 52).

But however plausible this hypothesis may at first sight appear, a little examination will prove that it cannot throw even a doubt upon the miraculous nature of our Saviour's mighty works.

It may sufficiently account for some extraordinary cures performed among superstitious people, by faith in the relics of a dead saint, or in the prayers of some austere fanatic, believed to have miraculous power;—but in reference to the miracles of Christ, it is either inapplicable, or where applicable yet inadequate to solve the phenomena.

In many of Christ's miracles, faith and imagination could have no effect, as when Christ himself "walked the waves,"—when he multiplied the loaves and fishes in the wilderness,—when he raised the unconscious dead, and when he was himself raised from the dead. And in many cases in which the subject of the miracle

could exercise faith, the effect was too great and too sudden to be ascribed to this cause. How could faith suddenly dispel the cataract from a blind man's eyes, or instantaneously infuse perfect health and vigor into the half-dead members of a bed-ridden paralytic?

Respecting the healing power of faith and imagination, it should be observed that it operates by producing strong emotions, by which the vital energy is increased and salutary effects are often, but not always produced. As most medicines are liable to failure, so it is with faith as a curative agent. In some cases it effects a complete cure either speedily or slowly; in others it produces only partial and temporary relief; and in others again it wholly fails to benefit the patient. Some diseases too are beyond the reach of its influence.

Now the fact, according to the gospel narrative, that in every case and in every sort of ailment, the cure was immediate and perfect, demonstrates that the cures ascribed to Jesus Christ could not have been effected by any degree of faith or any workings of the imagination in those who were healed: and the additional fact that in not a few cases, no faith or fancy could operate at all, is conclusive evidence, that if the gospel narrative be true, Christ did possess miraculous power, and to this power alone should we ascribe all his mighty works.

But if so, why did he in some instances require faith in those upon whom he exercised his healing power? This may, I think, be reasonably accounted for without supposing that he depended in any case on the patient's faith for his ability to effect a cure.

Many of his works were intended, not merely to prove his Divine mission, but to teach moral lessons of the highest importance. There is an obvious analogy between the nature of his miracles and the object of his mission. His miracles were works of salvation; his mission was to save sinners. His works of Divine power were illustrations of Divine mercy. He manifested his power to redeem men from their iniquities by redeeming them from the evils of mortality. But whilst he could save their lives and restore their health by a physical operation on their bodies, he could save their souls only by a moral operation upon their spiritual nature through the medium of faith. To inculcate the necessity of faith in him as the Saviour of the soul, he also required that applicants for his healing power should profess their confidence in his ability to save them from disease and death.

This was conformable to his usual mode of teaching. He made all the incidents of his ministry and all the occurrences of life the means of conveying moral instruction. He required faith of those who came to him for health and life, because he also required faith of those who should come to him for salvation from spiritual disease and death.

No more needs be said to prove that the mighty works ascribed to Jesus Christ were real miracles. If these works or any of them were truly reported by the evangelists, then they afford evident signs of the Divine mission of our Saviour, and of the Divine authority of his gospel.

But before we can reasonably believe the gospel on this evidence, we must have satisfactory proof of the authenticity and substantial truth of the evangelical records in which these miracles are related. I say, *their substantial truth*; for if we have reason to believe that Christ wrought any such miracles as are recorded in the Gospels, we shall have sufficient ground of belief in his Divine mission, although the Gospels should appear to contain the usual portion of error to which historical records are subject.

I come now in the last place to investigate the proof on which our belief in the miraculous power and Divine mission of Jesus Christ is founded. The question is, *Have we sufficient evidence of the substantial truth of the evangelical records to overcome the intrinsic improbability of the miraculous events which they relate?*

The amount of evidence required will depend on the degree of improbability to be overcome. According to the theoretical principles laid down in the former part of this discourse, a miracle is necessarily an improbable event, and requires for its establishment a greater amount of proof than a common event, and so much the greater as the nature and circumstances of the miracle render it more improbable. But we must observe that in this case the amount of proof needs not to be augmented in proportion to the number and variety of miracles ascribed to Jesus Christ; for you will readily admit that if he had power to work miracles at all, he could as easily work many as few, and great miracles as small; because when the Divine power interposes to produce supernatural events, we readily understand that some great occasion has arisen, and that God will probably multiply and vary his signs, so as to make them evident to the senses and understanding of all observers. Also by exhibiting them at divers times and places, and in a vari-

ety of forms, they would be more susceptible of proof and better fulfil the great design for which they were exhibited. Hence, the improbability of Christ's miracles is rather diminished than increased by the number and variety of those ascribed to him.

Further to estimate the degree of their improbability, we ought to consider the professed object for which the Deity was said to have interposed, the character of the person through whom he was said to have wrought miracles, the doctrines which that person professed to confirm by signs from God, the sort of miraculous signs which he is supposed to have exhibited, and any other circumstances by which a reasonable man could judge what degree of improbability should be assigned to the facts for which testimony is adduced.

What then is the *object* for which God is supposed to have endowed Jesus Christ with miraculous power? No less an object than this, to introduce a new and holy religion for mankind through the agency of his own Son, who was to confirm it and render it efficacious by the sacrifice of himself; and by which mankind might be saved from the errors of idolatry, the prevalence of sin, and the ignorance under which they labored respecting their future destiny. Surely, if ever the Father of mankind should exhibit in this world the miraculous tokens of a revelation from himself, it would be for an object like this,—to bring life and immortality to light,—to disperse the dark clouds of superstition, and open to his erring and sinful creatures the pathway to peace on earth and glory in heaven.

And what sort of person was he, through whom, as the Gospels tell us, these miraculous signs were given, and this revelation of light and mercy was sent? Do they so represent his character and actions, as to make it credible that he should be honored with this Divine mission and endowed with miraculous power?

According to the programme of this course of lectures, another has assigned to him the delightful task of portraying the character of Jesus of Nazareth. Suffice it to say here that by the acknowledgment even of infidels, if ever a human being was worthy to represent the moral majesty and goodness of our Father in heaven, the Jesus of the gospel is that man; who without the vain pomp, and glory of the world, or any circumstance which could dazzle to blind, presents a character so morally pure, so humanly amiable, and yet so divinely great, that neither the examples of history, nor the ideal portraitures of genius, have ever exhibited his

parallel. With a soul as gentle as the dews that fell upon Mount Hermon, all melting with pity for the sorrows of humanity, all forgetful of self, and regardless of worldly applause and pomp and power, he possessed a fortitude which nothing could break,—a patience which nothing could exhaust,—a zeal for the cause of God, which glowed like a star of heaven, a philanthropy which could sacrifice both honor and life for the welfare of man,—and withal a heaven-taught wisdom which confounded the subtlety of lawyers and scribes, separated the good from the bad in religion and morals, and produced a system of doctrines, worthy to have emanated from God whose glory they display, and worthy to be accepted by man, who, if he would hope for heaven's bliss, must find it through the religion of Jesus Christ, or despair of it forever: for if such a teacher as Christ, and such principles of piety and morality as he taught cannot guide us aright,—then where—oh where in all the earth shall we look for a heaven-taught "Guide to everlasting life through all this gloomy vale?"

What shall we say then? Does the character of Jesus Christ—does the religion which he taught—reflect discredit upon the miraculous power ascribed to him? Is there anything in the miracles of mercy recorded in the evangelical histories—any incongruity, any want of dignity, any sign of imposture, or any circumstance whatsoever, that should make them either intrinsically or circumstantially more improbable than miracles must of necessity be? May I not, on the contrary, affirm, that of all the reported miracles in the annals of the world, those ascribed to Jesus Christ are in their nature and their circumstances the least improbable, and therefore require the least amount of proof to render them credible?

But do not mistake my meaning. I do not offer the character of Christ and of his doctrines as affording any proof whatsoever of his miraculous power or of the truth of Christianity. My present object is not to prove his miracles, but to estimate in a general way the degree of improbability attached to them, and consequently the amount of proof requisite to overcome that improbability and to justify our belief of his Divine mission. In the first part of my lecture, in which I discussed the theory of the subject, I showed that all reported and all conceivable miracles are not equally improbable. The degree of their improbability varies according to the nature, the circumstances and the occasion. I leave it now to your candid judgment to determine

whether the miracles ascribed to Jesus Christ be more or less improbable than the generality of those which have been reported in ancient and in modern times.

I come now to consider the evidence by which the miracles of Christ are supported.

Not having witnessed them ourselves, we must rely upon the testimony of others who professed to have been eye-witnesses. But as Jesus Christ lived upwards of 1800 years ago, we have to rely upon written documents for all the facts. All the evidence is to us historical. The great distance at which we are separated from the original witnesses of "what Jesus did and taught," may seem to weaken the evidence so much as to make it inadequate to prove a miracle. But notwithstanding the wide interval of time, we are in fact within a step or two of the original testimony. A single step takes us back about 1800 years to the publication of the New Testament records, especially to the four evangelical histories of Jesus Christ, purporting to have been written partly by eye-witnesses of his acts, and partly by contemporaries who professed to derive their information from original witnesses.

The first step is to ascertain the authenticity of these records. This being done, we have reached the testimony of the original witnesses: then the only remaining question will be, Has their testimony sufficient force to overcome the improbability of the miraculous facts which they profess to have witnessed?

Respecting the authenticity of the evangelical records, I must pass it over with a brief remark or two, because I have not time to discuss it, and because that will be done by another lecturer from whom you doubtless will hear a satisfactory argument on the subject. I will only remark, that, according to all accounts in every age, from the first century downwards to this day, the four gospels and most of the other books of the New Testament were considered on all hands as being genuine documents of apostolica times, and as containing true accounts of what the apostles and other primitive Christians *reported* concerning the acts and doctrines of Jesus Christ.

I shall take it for granted, therefore, not only that the twelve Apostles who first preached the gospel, professed to be eye-witnesses of what Jesus did and taught, but also that we have in the New Testament a substantially correct account of what they and other primitive Christians testified respecting Jesus Christ.

But before we consider the credibility of these original wit-

nesses, we must remove an objection which infidels have frequently urged against the evangelical records of their testimony. No one pretends to dispute the sufficiency of these records to establish a number of leading facts. Few even of the French infidels have denied that such a man as Jesus of Nazareth lived and taught and was crucified; and that twelve men called his apostles professed to have witnessed his mighty works and his resurrection from the dead; and that on the strength of their testimony they did with much labor and suffering make many converts and found many churches in different countries, and that the four Gospels are authentic records of what was reported among Christians in apostolical times respecting the life and miracles of Jesus.

So far there is no dispute worth noticing between believers and unbelievers in the Divine mission of Christ. But the unbelievers object to the four evangelists, that they disagree in their statements, and as two of them were apostles, and the other two were companions of apostles, the inference is that the twelve apostles disagreed in their testimony, and are therefore unworthy of credit.

The truth of the matter is this: when we compare the four evangelists we find a general and substantial agreement in all their narratives; but they differ in several respects.

1. Some relate facts which others wholly omit: this argues no disagreement, since none of them profess to relate all the facts relative to their subject.

2. They differ somewhat in the order of the facts related: but neither does this argue anything to their discredit, since they do not profess to give those facts in the order in which they occurred.

3. In their account of the same facts, not only does one relate circumstances which another omits—as the most veracious witnesses and narrators are apt to do—but in a few instances they relate the same circumstances differently. Thus for example, in their accounts of the Saviour's resurrection, whilst they agree fully in regard to every material fact, they relate several of the circumstances differently. Take one of them as an illustration of the whole. Whilst they all agree that Jesus rose from the tomb early in the morning, and that Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb and discovered that he was not there, yet they differ as to the precise time of her coming. Matthew says that she

came when the day began to dawn ;—Mark says that she arrived there at sunrise ;—Luke says less definitely that it was “very early in the morning ;”—and John says that it “was yet dark.” Such are the variations of the evangelists in regard to this circumstance : and what is the amount of discrepance among them ? I answer, Little or nothing ; for if you suppose that John by its being yet dark meant a dusky twilight, and that Mark by “sunrise” meant a clear twilight, such as occurs when the sun’s rays first touch the high mountains, and then allow for the time that Mary Magdalene was on the way, perhaps a mile in length, and surely there is nothing here over which a man should blow the trumpet of infidelity. And as to the other circumstance, that John mentions Mary Magdalene alone on this occasion, and that the others mention another Mary as having gone with her, it is merely an instance of omission by one evangelist of what another mentions. Mary Magdalene was the one to whom alone Jesus showed himself on that occasion : therefore John names her alone in his account of the matter.

These variations in the evangelical histories, instead of invalidating, serve rather to confirm the substantial truth of their narratives ; for they show that the authors did not copy from one another, but wrote independently and drew their information from independent sources. Who does not know that the most truthful witnesses, when they testify what they have observed respecting the same event, always differ in the same manner in their statements. An exact agreement in every particular would raise a strong presumption that they borrowed of one another, instead of giving independent testimony.

There is no reason, therefore, to doubt that we have in the four evangelists a substantially true report of what the twelve apostles testified respecting the life and miracles of Jesus Christ. The simple, unaffected, truthful manner in which they tell the wonderful story, adds no little to their credibility. And finally, as no other or contradictory account of what the apostles preached has ever been heard of among ancient records or traditions, I feel authorized to assume that we have the recorded testimony of the apostles in the New Testament. I may also assume that we have there a substantially true history, so far as it goes, of what the apostles did and suffered as witnesses for Christ, as well as what they testified respecting his doctrine and miracles.

Let us now consider what credit is due to their testimony as competent, as honest, and as independent witnesses.

First, then, were they competent to give us a correct account of such miraculous events as we find recorded in the Gospels? Were they sufficiently intelligent, accurate, and cautious observers to raise them above the suspicion of having been deluded, either by the arts of another, or by their own stupid credulity?

They were, it is true, but simple and unlearned men, they had nothing of the philosopher or the skeptic about them, but they were, nevertheless, as their own candid writings, and the writings of others about them, plainly show, men of good, sober, common sense; on some points rather hard to convince, especially in regard to the great miracle on which the truth of Christianity mainly depends, that is, the resurrection of their crucified master. There is nothing that indicates a want of competency on their part to observe and report with accuracy such facts as are recorded in the Gospels.

Be it observed, that we do not depend on their testimony for anything but simple facts, open to the senses, and requiring nothing but the sober senses and common memory of mankind to observe and to report. Give us these and we can judge for ourselves, whether there was any fraud in the exhibition, or any miracle in the facts exhibited.

Let us take for illustration, the case of the paralytic, of which we have an account in the 2d chapter of Mark. What were the facts and circumstances that presented themselves to the witnesses? Simply these: when Jesus is preaching to a crowded house in Capernaum, four men come to the place, bearing a helpless paralytic on a bed. Unable to press in through the dense crowd, they have to mount the low roof of the house and to let their patient down before the feet of Jesus, and consequently also in full view of many who were present. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Some scribes were sitting there, who inwardly charged him with blasphemy, in assuming the Divine prerogative of forgiving sins. Jesus then put the question to them, "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, take up thy bed and walk." Then he commanded the patient to rise, take up his bed and go home, and (says Mark) immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them

all ; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it in this fashion.

Such were the facts of the case, according to the testimony of the witnesses. Could not a fisherman observe and relate those facts as truly and as accurately as a philosopher ? We care not how the witnesses reasoned about them. Let us know all the material facts—all that they saw and heard, and we can do the reasoning for ourselves ; and thus it is, that like a lawyer before a court, I argue that the witnesses in this case could not have been deluded in respect to what they saw and heard ; for the facts were as plain and evident to the senses as any in the world, and were exhibited in open day before a throng of spectators almost touching the paralytic, and some of them scribes, disposed to watch and find fault with every act of Jesus. Nor can we presume that they were imposed on by a pretended paralytic. He was no doubt a man of the same town, known to some of those present. His looks and actions would also have betrayed him, had he attempted a deception. Had Jesus undertaken to delude people with a false paralytic and a false cure, he would not have chosen to try the experiment in open day before such a crowd of witnesses, and in a town where, according to the evangelists, he had many enemies.

Whether the cure was miraculous or not, every one may judge for himself. All that we want from the witnesses are the facts as they occurred. The apostles were surely competent to give them. Therefore no objection can lie against the witnesses on the score of competency.

The next question is in respect to their honesty or disposition to tell the truth. This is the main point. If we can rely upon the conscientious veracity of the apostles, their testimony respecting plain, simple matters of fact, like those just mentioned respecting the cure of the paralytic, must have great weight.

We must judge of the honesty of the apostles, as we judge of all ancient men,—that is, by their actions as recorded in history, by their writings and speeches, by the opinions of those who knew them, and by circumstances from which something may be inferred concerning them. In one way or another, we have, I think, all the evidence necessary to enable us to form a well-grounded judgment of the apostles.

And first, I may assert, negatively, that there is no evidence of any sort that tends to convict the apostles of dishonesty, worldly

ambition, hypocrisy, deceit, covetousness, or any base or selfish design in their labors as missionaries of Jesus Christ. All the evidence that we have, goes to establish their sincerity and disinterestedness. Their own writings, and all that others wrote of them in their own time and country, bear them witness that they fully believed Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and Saviour of the world, and that they believed it on the evidence of his miracles wrought in their presence, and especially on the evidence of his resurrection from the dead.

Let us consider for a moment this *miraculum crucis*, this decisive miracle of the resurrection, as affording the most natural solution of the conduct of the apostles, and the best criterion of their moral character.

Ask yourselves the question, Did the apostles believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again, or did they not? Then reason on each supposition,—that they did, and that they did not believe so,—and see which of the two will enable you to account most rationally for their conduct. Suppose, first, that they did believe what they published to Jews and Gentiles at the expense of so much labor and suffering, and at the frequent hazard of their lives; then if they were sincere good men, seeking the glory of God and the salvation of mankind, how natural was their conduct, how probable was all that others wrote of them! How consistent with nature and with truth are the style and matter of their own writings! How easily understood the origin and the institutions of the church?

But again, suppose that they did not believe their own story of the death and resurrection of Christ, then, how can you solve the problems that instantly present themselves? The voluntary labors and privations of the apostles; their unshaken constancy, their indomitable fortitude, the unwavering consistency of their testimony; and amidst occasional differences about personal matters, their enduring co-operation to the last in fulfilling their high commission, and establishing the great truth, that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and rose again. If they believed not their own statements, then they were wilful liars, and unprincipled impostors: in that case they must have acted from a selfish motive; they must have promised themselves some personal advantage. But what motive? What advantage? How can you account for their conduct? Yet their conduct must have been such as the New Testament represents it; or how can you account for

the existence of the church, and the doctrines and institutions that have come down to us from the age of the apostles?

And do you not feel the force of St. Paul's reasoning in the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians; which is directly to the point of our argument? "I delivered unto you first of all that Christ died for our sins,—that he was buried,—that he rose again,—that he was seen of Cephas (Peter), then of the twelve apostles, and after that of above 500 brethren at once; after that he was seen of James, and then again of all the apostles." So Paul reasons about the fact of the resurrection. Then he reasons about the motives of those who preached this fact, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain: yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ." He adds another consideration. "If in this life only we (apostles) have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." And so they were among the most miserable of mankind; they sacrificed the present life to propagate a lie, without a hope of the life to come. So they felt, and so they reasoned; and who can deny either the force of their reasoning, or the sincerity of their belief, that Christ had risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept?

And with such evidence as these twelve men alleged for the death and resurrection of Christ,—the evidence of their senses fortified by the evidence of many others,—who could doubt? or who could be mistaken? The same men affirmed that they had witnessed the miracles which Christ wrought during the years of his ministry, and that they were themselves endowed with miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, as a confirmation of their testimony. If they lied in regard to the one fact of the resurrection, so they did in regard to all the rest; so that if they were not honest witnesses, they were thorough-paced liars, full of all hypocrisy and deceit, and utterly destitute of moral principle. In such a case there is no medium. They cannot be considered as well-meaning enthusiasts acting under a delusion; nor as a compound of the self-deluded enthusiast and the wilful impostor, who, believing his ends to be good, believes that he may promote them by pious frauds. Such characters have often appeared, but such the apostles could not have been. The whole body of their ends and views was founded on the miraculous facts which they professed to have witnessed, and if these were false, all was false and wicked. Mahomet was a saint compared with these unscrupulous, untiring,

unblushing, insane, propagators of lies concerning Jesus Christ ;—lies which they invented to impose on mankind for no conceivable end of advantage to themselves or to others ;—lies which they solemnly affirmed in the name of God to be facts witnessed by themselves. How base, how thoroughly depraved must these twelve apostles have been, if they were not honest men ! Yes, the whole twelve, without a single exception, were thoroughly base and unprincipled. No bandits were ever more dishonest.

But on the supposition that they were such abominable liars and hypocrites, several circumstances are unaccountable.

How shall we account for it, that these lying apostles and hypocritical reprobates should have devised and propagated a religion supereminently holy and benevolent ?—That such unprincipled impostors should have set forth, as the Saviour of the world, a character of such purity and loveliness as that of Jesus Christ ?—That in everything except their falsehoods about miracles, they should appear, in all they did and all they said and wrote, to have been simple-hearted, good men, haters of everything false, deceitful, or any way dishonest ?—That they should have pointedly condemned all pious frauds,—that is, the practice of doing evil that good may come, and of promoting the glory of God by falsehood and deception ?*

And then if these men were lying impostors, how strange is it that in all that we read of them, especially in their own writings, we should see such numerous and evident tokens of the artless simplicity of their character, and such unmistakable signs of unaffected zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of men, and in their writings, such ardent outpourings of the heart, as could spring only from a deep conviction of the truth of what they inculcated. I need not quote passages from their writings in proof of this : for you cannot read any part of their epistles and discourses, without perceiving the evident signs of an unwavering faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world, and of an ardent zeal for the salvation of sinners.

Finally, if the apostles were a set of lying impostors, who banded together to deceive mankind, how can you account for it that not one of them ever confessed the imposture, and that every one of them, and of their coadjutors, adhered to the falsehood under every temptation and trial, and either suffered mar-

* See Romans iii. 5-8. 2 Peter ii. 1-3. Also Ephesians iv. 14-25. 2 Timothy iii. 10-14.

tyrdom, or was ready to suffer it, in attestation of these useless and unprofitable fictions?

I conclude that the apostles could not have been such wicked and unprincipled impostors as they must have been, if they were not honest men and sincere believers in the miracles, the resurrection, and the Divine mission of Jesus Christ. We must therefore embrace the alternative, that they were honest men, and sincerely persuaded of the truth of what they testified concerning Jesus Christ. Therefore, so far as the facts which they stated were of the natural and ordinary sort, you and all rational men would readily believe their testimony. But as some of those facts were miraculous and therefore in their nature improbable, you may reasonably suspend your belief until you have duly considered whether the testimony has sufficient weight to overcome the improbability of the facts.

We have considered the testimony of the apostles only so far as it derives weight from the competency and honesty of the witnesses. It remains to consider whether the testimony derives any additional weight from the independency of the witnesses.

Although I think that we might safely rest the argument upon what has been already advanced, it is proper to consider also whether or not the testimony of the apostles and evangelists can be regarded as in any measure independent.

As the apostles were often together, both during the Saviour's ministry and shortly after his crucifixion, it might seem at first view, that they cannot be considered as independent witnesses. But the mere fact that they had opportunities of communicating with one another about the matter of their testimony, does not preclude us from considering them as independent witnesses. The independence of witnesses does not arise from their having no communication with one another about the matter in question, but on the fact that each witness speaks from his own knowledge, and not from the suggestion or information of another. The circumstance that the witnesses have had no communication with one another, is important only as a proof of their independence. But other circumstances may afford sufficient proof of independence. When we perceive that each witness tells the story in his own way, agreeing substantially, but not in all points circumstantially, with the rest, this is a strong argument of independence; especially when the manner and matter of each one's testimony bear that impress of personal knowledge in the witness, which is more easily

felt than described, when we hear the testimony. It consists partly in a certain promptitude and sincerity of manner, and partly in the incidental mention of minute circumstances.

There is nothing in the history or in the testimony of the apostles inconsistent with the supposition that they were independent witnesses. We have not on record the distinct testimony of every one: we must judge, therefore, from the specimens that we have. We have the testimonies of Matthew and John in the gospels which they wrote. They bear infallible evidence that these two apostles did not borrow from one another, nor from any common source. Mark and Luke were not apostles; but as their accounts were evidently not borrowed from Matthew or John, but derived from independent sources, we may justly consider them as being at second hand the testimony of other apostles and original witnesses. We have also in the Acts and apostolical Epistles frequent allusions to the actions, sufferings and resurrection of Christ, taken not from the four Gospels, but either from the personal knowledge of the writers, or from the mouths of original witnesses, and therefore favoring the hypothesis of independent testimony. On the whole, we may from all these facts conclude that the apostles and other original witnesses testified independently. I do not affirm that the independence of their testimony is perfect, and carries with it as much weight as under other circumstances it might have done. But your candor will lead you to admit, that whilst the occasional differences in small matters show the independence of the witnesses, the general coincidence in their testimony affords no small evidence of its truth, independent of the personal character of the witnesses.

Let us now endeavor to sum up the amount of the evidence, and to form some notion of its force. I shall not presume to measure it with mathematical precision, though as heretofore I may use numbers to aid our conceptions, without pretending that they give an exact expression of the quantities which they represent.

We have then, on reliable authority, the testimony of twelve competent and honest witnesses of our Saviour's miracles, and particularly of his resurrection from the dead. Though, for want of documents, we cannot distinctly exhibit what every one of these witnesses testified, yet we have satisfactory evidence that they all concurred in the material facts and circumstances of their testimony, that we have in the four Gospels the sum and substance of what they all avowed respecting Jesus of Nazareth.

If any of you still think that something more should be adduced before we can rely on having the testimony of twelve good witnesses to the gospel history, then I refer you to the great quantity of auxiliary evidence which the New Testament records present; for we can doubtless rely on these records for facts so ordinary in kind and so probable in themselves, as the fact that others, not few in number, besides the apostles, professed to have witnessed some at least of Christ's miracles. You will bear in mind that the apostles began their preaching and testimony only a few weeks after the crucifixion of Christ; that they began at Jerusalem, where he was crucified, to proclaim his resurrection before the multitudes of Jews collected from all parts of the land at the great festival of Pentecost;—that they exercised their ministry for several years in various parts of the Holy Land, where Jesus himself had travelled and exhibited the evidence of his claims as a missionary from God; and that not only had multitudes gathered around him, many believed in his mission, and many others, especially scribes and Pharisees, watched and opposed him, ascribing his mighty works to the devil—but the apostles, after his crucifixion, going over the same ground, and testifying before the same generation the fact of his resurrection, converted thousands, and established numerous churches on the faith of his miracles when alive, and of his resurrection after death.

Now if there be any truth in these statements, which cannot be reasonably denied, then the apostles were far from being the only witnesses who testified to the same facts. If the apostles told the truth, many others must have corroborated their testimony; if they published falsehoods, many others must have been able to contradict them: for they not only gave the facts of their story specifically and circumstantially, but they gave the times and places, and thus exposed them to decisive investigation, and virtually referred them to other witnesses for confirmation or denial.

It is true that Jesus did not after his resurrection show himself openly to all the people. This would have been useless, for he could not have been infallibly recognized, except by his intimate acquaintances, and by them only after an inspection so close and minute as would necessarily confine it to a few individuals. Recollect the instances recorded in history, of impostors successfully passing themselves off for dead princes, and how often you have yourselves, upon a slight or distant view, mistaken one man for another.

Recollect, also, that it was not easy for the apostles to be fully satisfied of Christ's identity after his resurrection. The fact was so extraordinary, so difficult of belief, that it was not until they had irresistible evidence of its reality, that all their doubts were removed. He had to appear to them at divers times and in divers manners; to eat with them, converse with them, and submit his body to a tactual examination, before all of them were satisfied. Yet these men had been with him in close companionship for years. How then could a public exhibition of himself have decided the question of his resurrection, even if he had submitted himself before his enemies to a degrading course of examinations, which would after all have afforded them an occasion for pretending that it was all a piece of imposture? Not only was it more consistent with his dignity, but a more conclusive mode of proof, to verify his resurrection by first giving his chosen witnesses infallible evidence of his identity, and then confirming their testimony by "signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost."

Now, to say nothing of the five hundred brethren to whom, as St. Paul informs us, he appeared once after his resurrection, we may affirm that all who witnessed the apostolical miracles, could afterwards by means of this testimony of God, confirm the testimony of the apostles by their own. When St. Paul, writing to the Galatians, appealed to the miracles which he had wrought among them, would not the testimony of these witnesses of his miracles afterwards corroborate St. Paul's own testimony respecting the truth of Christianity?

Thus supposing that the apostles testified what the New Testament records uniformly declare that they did testify, and supposing that they professed to confirm their testimony by miracles, as the same records declare,—then if these records are not wholly spurious and false, which no one can reasonably suspect, it follows that the apostles did not stand alone in their testimony. They could not have stood before unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, in the same places and in the same years in which all those alleged miracles, Christ's and their own, were exhibited, if exhibited at all, and have appealed successfully to those miracles, unless others besides themselves could be appealed to in corroboration of their statements.

I conclude, therefore, that we have for the miracles of Christ what is more than equivalent to the testimony of twelve honest

men, speaking independently from personal knowledge, that these men had no motive of interest or of passion to swerve from the truth, that their conduct and writings afford the strongest evidence of honesty and sincerity. I have before shown that they were fully competent to observe and report such plain facts as they relate concerning Jesus Christ.

Considering these things, what degree of credibility would you assign to each apostle's testimony, leaving out of view the nature of the facts to which he testifies? How often do you think that a man of such character would, ordinarily, tell the truth, before he would solemnly bear false witness? Surely, an upright, conscientious man would not, in ordinary cases, tell less than ten thousand truths to one lie. But it is enough and far more than enough, if we can assign a probability of only one thousand to one, for the truth of each apostle's testimony. Then the concurrence of two apostles would produce a probability of truth amounting to a thousand thousands, or a million to one. A third concurring would again raise it to one thousand millions; a fourth would swell it to a million millions to one. The twelve would multiply it to an inconceivable magnitude of evidence in favor of Christ's miracles. Subtract from it whatever amount of improbability you can reasonably assign to his miracles, and there must still remain an immense balance of evidence for the miracles of that purest and best of the sons of men, Jesus who died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

But this weight of evidence will be greatly augmented if we combine with the character of the apostles as honest men, their character of independent witnesses, whose manner of giving their testimony, so far as we know it from the records, shows that they did not borrow from one another. If we allow that only a few of them were independent, or that we have only a moderate probability in favor of the independence of the twelve as witnesses, then their testimony will come with greatly augmented weight against the improbability of the facts.

Should the result of my reasonings on the evidence for Christ's miracles surprise any one, because the weight of apostolic testimony appears to be astonishingly great; I refer him to his own experience. Let him consider this. He places full confidence in the testimony of two or three witnesses of common honesty, when they concur, when there is no opposing testimony, when they appear to be independent, and when they sacrifice much in

giving such testimony. The fact to which they testify must be exceedingly improbable to raise even a doubt that the witnesses speak the truth. But suppose that other witnesses are called, and one after another confirm the statements of the former, till twelve have testified, and all the twelve suffer much in consequence of their testimony, yet adhere firmly to it all their lives long. Is there any miracle recorded in the Gospels which he would not believe, or you would not all believe on such testimony? Surely not. Such testimony has irresistible force upon minds open to conviction.

Many in the apostolic age heard the testimony of the apostles without believing it. This is not surprising. They were imbued from the cradle with other religions and were filled with various sorts of prejudices. Not many heard the testimony of more than one or two apostles, after these witnesses left Jerusalem on different missions; and the notion that demons could work miracles enabled unbelievers to evade the force of evidence which we reasonably consider irresistible.

Here I close this long argument, too long if the subject had been less important or could have been satisfactorily discussed in less time. I was not willing to make a lame and impotent defence of our religion on the most essential part of its evidence as a revelation from God. I have been compelled to omit many things which might be adduced with advantage to the argument.

The prophecies of the Old and New Testament being sensible interpositions of God in control of the established course of things, which no natural causes can explain, are as really miraculous as any of the wonderful works of our Lord; and have the additional advantage of being subjected in their proof to our own observation: but as this topic has been assigned to another, I have of course entirely omitted it in the present discussion.

If what God has enabled me to say shall tend to strengthen any man's faith in the Divine mission of our Lord Jesus Christ—who loved us and gave himself for us—then to our merciful Father in heaven be the praise. Amen.