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FROM THE LIBRARY OF  
THOMAS HILL, D.D.,  
LATE PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY.

THE GIFT OF HIS CHILDREN.

4 January, 1892.

John J. Parker



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THE  
**EVIDENCES**  
 OF THE  
**CHRISTIAN RELIGION,**  
 WITH  
 ADDITIONAL DISCOURSES ON THE  
 FOLLOWING SUBJECTS, VIZ.

Of God, and his Attributes.	Dignity of the Scripture Language.
The Power and wisdom of God in the Creation. . .	Against Atheism and Infidelity. . . . .
The Providence of God.	Against the Modern Free-thinkers. . . . .
The Worship of God. . .	Immortality of the Soul, and a Future State. . . .
Advantages of Revelation above Natural Reason.	Death and Judgment. . .
Excellency of the Christian Institution. . . . .	

Collected from the Writings of  
 THE RIGHT HON. JOSEPH ADDISON, ESQ.

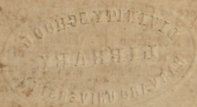
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1812.

4 January, 1892.

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1812 P R E F A C E.

THE character of Mr. ADDISON, and his writings, for justness of thought, strength of reasoning, and purity of style, is too well established to need a recommendation; but their greatest ornament, and that which gives a lustre to all the rest, is his appearing throughout a zealous advocate for virtue and religion against profaneness and infidelity. And because his excellent discourses upon those subjects lie dispersed among his other writings, and are by that means not so generally known and read as they deserve, it was judged to be no unseasonable service to religion at this time to move the Bookseller to publish them together in a distinct volume, in hopes that the politeness and beauty peculiar to Mr. ADDISON's writings would make their way to persons of a superior character and a more liberal education; and that, as they come from the hands of a layman, they may be the more readily received and considered by young gentlemen as a proper manual of religion.

Our modern sceptics and infidels are great pretenders to reason and philosophy, and are willing to have it thought that none who are really possessed of those talents, can easily assent to the truth of Christianity. But it falls out very unfortunately for them and their cause, that those persons within our own memory, who are confessed to have been the most perfect reasoners and philosophers of their time, are also known to have been firm believers, and they laymen; I mean Mr. Boyle, Mr. Locke, Sir Isaac Newton, and Mr. Addison; who, modestly speaking, were as good thinkers and reasoners as the best among the sceptics and infidels at this day. Some of them might have their particular opinions about this or that point in Christianity, which will be the case as long as men are men; but the thing here insisted on is, that they were accurate reasoners, and, at the same time, firm believers.

Mr. Boyle, the most exact searcher into the works of nature that any age has known, and who saw atheism and

infidelity beginning to shew themselves in the loose and voluptuous reign of King Charles II. pursued his philosophical inquiries with religious views, to establish the minds of men in a firm belief and thorough sense of the infinite power and wisdom of the great Creator.

This account we have from one who was intimately acquainted with him, (Dr. Burnet) and preached his funeral sermon. "It appeared to those who conversed with him in his inquiries into nature, that his main design in that (on which, as he had his own eye most constantly, so he took care to put others often in mind of it,) was to raise in himself and others vaster thoughts of the greatness and glory, and of the wisdom and goodness of God. This was so deep in his thoughts, that he concludes the article of his will, which relates to that illustrious body, the Royal Society, in these words: Wishing them a happy success in their laudable attempts to discover the true nature of the works of God; and praying that they, and all other searchers into physical truths, may cordially refer their attainments to the glory of the great Author of nature, and the comfort of mankind." The same person also speaks thus of him: "He had the profoundest veneration for the great God of heaven and earth that ever I observed in any person. The very name of God was never mentioned by him without a pause, and a visible stop in his discourse."

And of the strictness and exemplariness of the whole course of his life, he says, "I might here challenge the whole tribe of Libertines to come and view the usefulness, as well as the excellence of the Christian religion, in a life that was entirely dedicated to it."

Against the Atheists he wrote his *Free Inquiry into the received Notion of Nature*, (to confute the pernicious principle of ascribing effects to nature, which are only produced by the infinite power and wisdom of God;) and also his *Essay about final Causes of Things Natural*, to shew that all things in nature were made and contrived with great order, and every thing for its proper end and use, by an all wise Creator.

Against the Deists he wrote a treatise of things above reason; in which he makes it appear that several things, which we judge to be contrary to reason, because above

the reach of our understanding, are not therefore to be thought unreasonable because we cannot comprehend them, since they may be apparently reasonable to a greater and more comprehensive understanding. And he wrote another treatise, to show the possibility of the resurrection of the same body.

The veneration he had for the holy scriptures, appears not only from his studying them with great exactness, and exhorting others to do the same, but more particularly from a distinct treatise, which he wrote on purpose to defend the scripture style, and to answer all the objections which profane and irreligious persons have made against it. And speaking of morality, considered as a rule of life, he says, "I have formerly taken pains to peruse books of morality, yet since they have only a power to persuade; but not to command, and sin and death do not necessarily attend the disobedience of them, they have the less influence: for since we may take the liberty to question human writers, I find that the methods they take to impose their writings upon us may serve to countenance either truth or falsehood."

His zeal to propagate Christianity in the world appears by many and large benefactions to that end, which are enumerated in his funeral sermon: "He was at the charge of the translation and impression of the New Testament into the Malayan language, which he sent over all the East-Indies. He gave a noble reward to him that translated Grotius's incomparable book of the *Truth of the Christian Religion* into Arabic; and was at the charge of a whole impression, which he took care to order to be distributed in all the countries where that language is understood. He was resolved to have carried on the impression of the New Testament in the Turkish language; but the company thought it become them to be the doers of it, and so suffered him only to give a large share towards it.—He was at seven hundred pounds charge in the edition of the Irish Bible, which he ordered to be distributed in Ireland; and he contributed largely both to the impression of the Welsh Bible, and of the Irish Bible in Scotland. He gave, during his life, three hundred pounds to advance the design of propagating the Christian religion in America; and as soon as he heard that the East-

India Company were entertaining propositions for the like design in the East, he presently sent an hundred pounds for a beginning and an example, but intended to carry it much farther, when it should be set on foot to purpose. He had designed, though some accidents did, upon great considerations, divert him from settling it during his life, but not from ordering it by his will, that a liberal provision should be made for one who should, in a very few well-digested sermons, every year, set forth the truth of the Christian religion in general, without descending to the subdivisions amongst Christians; and who should be changed every third year, that so the noble study and employment might pass through many hands, by which means many might become masters of the argument.

In his younger years he had thoughts of entering into holy orders: and one reason that determined him against it was, that he believed he might in some respects be more serviceable to religion, by continuing a layman. "His having no interests with relation to religion, besides those of saving his own soul, gave him as he thought, a more unsuspected authority in writing or acting on that side. He knew the profane crew fortified themselves against all that was said by men of our profession, with this, that it was their trade, and that they were paid for it; he hoped therefore that he might have the more influence the less he shared in the patrimony of the church."

Mr. Locke, whose accurate talent in reasoning is much celebrated, even by the sceptics and infidels of our times, showed his zeal for Christianity, first, in his middle age, by publishing a discourse on purpose to demonstrate the reasonableness of believing Jesus to be the promised Messiah; and, after that, in the last years of his life, by a very judicious commentary upon several of the epistles of St. Paul.

He speaks of the MIRACLES wrought by our Saviour and his apostles in the strongest manner, both as facts unexceptionably true, and as the clearest evidences of a divine mission. His words are these: "The evidences of our Saviour's mission from heaven is so great, in the multitude of his miracles he did before all sorts of people (which the divine providence and wisdom had so ordered, that they never were nor could be denied by any of the

enemies and opposers of Christianity.) that what he delivered cannot but be received as the oracles of God, and unquestionable verity." And again, "After his resurrection, he sent his apostles amongst the nations, accompanied with miracles; which were done in all parts so frequently, and before so many witnesses of all sorts in broad daylight, that, as I have often observed, the enemies of Christianity have never dared to deny them; no not Julian himself, who neither wanted skill nor power to inquire into the truth; nor would have failed to have proclaimed and exposed it, if he could have detected any falsehood in the history of the gospel, or found the least ground to question the matter of fact published by Christ and his apostles. The number and evidence of the miracles done by our Saviour and his followers, by the power and force of truth, bore down this mighty and accomplished emperor, and all his parts in his own dominions. He durst not deny so plain matter of fact; which being granted, the truth of our Saviour's doctrine and mission unavoidably follows, notwithstanding whatsoever artful suggestions his wit could invent, or malice should offer to the contrary.

To those who ask, "What need was there of a Saviour? what advantage have we by Jesus Christ?" Mr. Locke replies, "It is enough to justify the fitness of any thing to be done by resolving it into the wisdom of God, who has done it; whereof our narrow understandings and short views may utterly incapacitate us to judge. We know little of this visible, and nothing at all of the state of that intellectual world (wherein are infinite numbers and degrees of spirits out of the reach of our ken or guess) and therefore know not what transactions there were between God and our Saviour in reference to his kingdom. We know not what need there was to set up a Head and a Chieftain in opposition to THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD, THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR, &c. whereof there are more than obscure intimations in scriptures. And we shall take too much upon us, if we should call God's wisdom or providence to account, and perty condemn for needless all that our weak and perhaps biassed understanding cannot account for." And then shews at large the necessity there was of the gospel revelation, to deliver the world from the miserable state of darkness and

ignorance that mankind were in, 1. As to the true knowledge of God, 2. As to the worship to be paid him, 3. As to the duties to be performed to him. To which he adds the mighty aids and encouragements to the performance of our duty, 1. From the assurance the gospel gives of future rewards and punishments; and, 2. From the promise of the Spirit of God to direct and assist us.

The holy scriptures are every where mentioned by him with the greatest reverence. He calls them the Holy Books, the Sacred Text, Holy Writ, and Divine Revelation; and exhorts Christians "to betake themselves in earnest to the study of the way to salvation, in those holy writings wherein God has revealed it from heaven, and proposed it to the world; seeking our religion where we are sure it is in truth to be found, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." And, in a letter written the year before his death to one who asked this question, "What is the shortest and surest way, for a young Gentleman to attain to a true knowledge of the Christian religion, in the full and just extent of it?" his answer is, "Let him study the holy scripture, especially the New Testament. Therein are contained the words of eternal life. It has God for its Author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter." A direction that was copied from his own practice, in the latter part of his life, and after his retirement from business; when, for fourteen or fifteen years, he applied himself especially to the study of the holy Scriptures, and employed the last years of his life hardly in any thing else. He was never weary of admiring the great views of that sacred book, and the just relation of all its parts. He every day made discoveries in it, that gave him fresh cause of admiration."

Of St. Paul in particular, upon several of whose epistles he drew up a most useful commentary, he says, "That he was miraculously called to the ministry of the gospel, and declared to be a chosen vessel:—That he had the whole doctrine of the gospel from God by immediate revelation:—That for his information in the Christian knowledge, and the mysteries and depths of the dispensation of God by Jesus Christ, God himself had condescended to be his instructor and teacher:—That he had received the light of the gospel from the Fountain and Father of light him-

self :—and, That an exact observation of his reasonings and inferences, is the only safe guide for the right understanding of him, under the Spirit of God, that directed these sacred writings.”

And the death of this great man was agreeable to his life ; for we are informed by one who was with him when he died, and had lived in the same family for seven years before, that the day before his death he particularly exhorted all about him to read the holy scriptures : That he desired to be remembered by them at evening prayers ; and being told, that if he would, the whole family should come and pray by him in his chamber, he answered, he should be very glad to have it so, if it would not give too much trouble : That an occasion offering to speak of the goodness of God, he especially exalted the love which God shewed to man, in justifying him by faith in Jesus Christ ; and returned God thanks in particular for having called him to the knowledge of that divine Saviour.

About two months before his death he drew up a letter to a gentleman (who afterwards distinguished himself by a very different way of thinking and writing.) and left this direction upon it, “To be delivered to him after my decease.” In it are these remarkable words, “This life is a scene of vanity that soon passes away, and affords no solid satisfaction, but in the consciousness of doing well, and in the hopes of another life. This is what I can say upon experience, and what you will find to be true, when you come to make up the account.”

Sir Isaac Newton, universally acknowledged to be the ablest philosopher and mathematician that this or perhaps any other nation has produced, is also well known to have been a firm believer, and a serious Christian. His discoveries concerning the frame and system of the universe were applied by him, as Mr. Boyle's inquiries into nature had been, to demonstrate, against Atheists of all kinds, the being of a God, and illustrate his power and wisdom in the creation of the world. Of which a better account cannot be given, than in the words of an ingenious person who has been much conversant in his philosophical writings : “At the end of his mathematical principles of natural philosophy he has given us his thoughts concerning the Deity, wherein he first observes, that the similitude found

in all parts of the universe, makes it undoubted that the whole is governed by one supreme Being, to whom the original is owing of the frame of nature, which evidently is the effect of choice and design. He then proceeds briefly to state the best metaphysical notions concerning God. In short, we cannot conceive either of space or time otherwise than as necessarily existing; this being therefore, on whom all others depend, must certainly exist by the same necessity of nature; consequently wherever space and time is found there God must also be. And as it appears impossible to us that space should be limited, or that time should have had a beginning, the Deity must be both immense and eternal."

This great man applied himself, with the utmost attention, to the study of the holy scriptures, and considered the several parts of them with an uncommon exactness; particularly, as to the order of time, and the series of prophecies and events relating to the Messiah. Upon which head he left behind him an elaborate discourse, to prove, that the famous prophecy of Daniel's weeks, which has been so industriously perverted by the Deists of our times, was an express prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Mr. Addison, so deservedly celebrated for an uncommon accuracy in thinking and reasoning, has given abundant proof of his firm belief of Christianity, and his zeal against idolaters of all kinds, in the writings that are here published: of which it is certainly known that a great part of them were his own compositions.

I mention not these great names, nor the testimonies they have given of their firm belief of the truth of Christianity, as if the evidences of our religion were to be finally resolved into human authority, or tried in any other way than by the known and established rules of right reason; but my design in mentioning them is,

1. To shew the very great assurance of those who would make the belief of revelation inconsistent with the due use of our reason; when they have known so many eminent instances, in our own time, of the greatest masters of reason, not only believing revelation, but zealously concerned to establish and propagate the belief of it.

2. The remembrance of this will also be a means, on



one hand, to hinder well meaning people from being misled by the vain boasts of our modern pretenders to reason; and, on the other hand, to check the inclination of the wicked and vicious to be misled, when both of them have before their eyes such fresh and eminent instances of sound reasoning, and a firm faith, joined together in one and the same mind.

3. Further, as these were persons generally esteemed for virtue and goodness, and notwithstanding their high attainments, remarkable for their modesty and humility; their examples shew us, that a strong and clear reason naturally leads to the belief of revelation, when it is not under the influences of vice or pride.

4. And finally, as they are all laymen, there is no room for the enemies of revealed religion, to allege that they were prejudiced by interest, or secular considerations of any kind. A suggestion that has really no weight, when urged against the writings of the clergy in defence of revelation, since they do not desire to be trusted upon their own authority, but upon the reasons they offer; and lawyers and physicians are not less trusted, because they live by their professions; but it is a suggestion that easily takes hold of weak minds, and especially such as catch at objections, and are willing to be caught by them. And, considering the diligence of the adversary in making proselytes, and drawing men from the faith of Christ; equal diligence is required of those who are to maintain that faith, not only to leave men no real ground, but even no colour or pretence for their infidelity.

The following discourses, except that concerning the Evidences of Christian Religion, were all published in separate papers some years ago, and afterwards collected into volumes, with marks of distinction at the end of many of them, to point out the writers. Mr. Addison's are there distinguished by some one of the letters of the word CLIO; and the same marks of distinction are here continued; as are also the rest, where any letter was found at the end of the discourse.

\* \* Mr. ADDISON having left his treatise on the truth of the Christian religion unfinished, the Publisher, to make it somewhat more complete, selected, from the Spectator, several papers (mostly the author's) on the being and perfections of God, the nature of religion, the immortality of the soul, and a future state; and printed them with it. But though the treatise and the other papers are well calculated to prove the truth of, and recommend the Christian religion to, the faith and practice of mankind; yet their influences will be but small, till men are awakened out of that insensibility into which they are fallen, and brought to believe how much they are interested in the great truths Christianity reveals. To beget thought and excite inquiry it was judged the following extract from Mons. Pascal's Thoughts, against an atheistical indifference, would neither be an improper, nor an unacceptable introduction to the subsequent papers.

## INTRODUCTION.

IT were to be wished that the enemies of religion would at least bring themselves to apprehend its nature before they oppose its authority. Did religion make its boast of beholding God with a clear and perfect view, and of possessing him without a covering or veil, the argument would bear some colour, when men should alledge, that none of the things about them do indeed afford this pretended evidence, and this degree of light. But since religion, on the contrary, represents men as in a state of darkness, and of estrangement from God; since it affirms him to have withdrawn himself from their discovery, and to have chosen in his word, the very style and appellation of *Deus absconditus*; lastly, since it employs itself alike, in establishing these two maxims, that God has left in his church certain characters of himself, by which they who sincerely seek him shall not fail of a sensible conviction—and yet that he has, at the same time, so far shaded and obscured these characters as to render them imperceptible to those who do not seek him with their whole heart; what advantage is it to men who profess themselves negligent in the search of truth, to complain so frequently that nothing reveals and displays it to them? For this very obscurity under which they labour, and which they make an exception against the church, does itself evince one of the two grand points which the church maintains, (without affecting the other) and is so far from overthrowing its

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doctrines, as to lend them a manifest confirmation and support.

If they would give their objections any strength, they ought to urge, that they have applied their utmost endeavour, and have used all means of information, even those which the church recommends, without satisfaction. Did they express themselves thus, they would indeed attack religion in one of its chief pretensions. But I hope to shew, in the following papers, that no rational person can speak after this manner, and I dare assert that none ever did. We know very well how men, under this indifference of spirit, behave themselves in the case. They suppose themselves to have made the mightiest efforts towards the instruction of their minds, when they have spent some hours in reading the scriptures, and have asked some questions of a clergyman concerning the articles of faith. When this is done, they declare to all the world they have consulted books and men without success. I shall be excused, if I refrain from not telling such men (what I have often told them) that this neglect of theirs is insupportable. It is not a foreign or a petty interest which is here in debate; we are ourselves the parties, and all our hopes and fortunes are the depending stake.

The immortality of the soul is a thing which so deeply concerns, so infinitely imports us, that we must have utterly lost our feeling, to be altogether cold and remiss in our enquiries about it. And all our actions,

or designs, ought to bend so very different a way, according as we are either encouraged or forbidden to embrace the hope of eternal rewards, that it is impossible for us to proceed with judgment and discretion, otherwise than as we keep this point always in view, which ought to be our ruling object and final aim.

Thus is it our highest interest, no less than our principal duty, to get light into a subject on which our whole conduct depends. And therefore, in the number of wavering and unsatisfied men, I make the greatest difference imaginable between those who labour with all their force to obtain instruction, and those who live without giving themselves any trouble, or so much as any thought, in this affair.

I cannot but be touched with a hearty compassion for those who sincerely groan under this dissatisfaction ; who look upon it as the greatest of misfortunes, and who spare no pains to deliver themselves from it, by making these researches their chief employment and most serious study. But as for those who pass their life without reflecting on its issue, and who, for this reason alone, because they find not in themselves a convincing testimony, refuse to seek it elsewhere, and to examine to the bottom, whether the opinion proposed be such as we are wont to entertain by popular simplicity and credulity, or such as though obscure in itself, yet is built on solid and immoveable foundations, I consider them

after quite another manner. The carelessness which they betray in an affair where their person, their interest, their whole eternity, is embarked, rather provokes my resentment than engages my pity; nay, it strikes me with amazement and astonishment; it is a monster to my apprehension. I speak not this as transported with the pious zeal of a spiritual and rapturous devotion. On the contrary, I affirm, that the love of ourselves, the interest of mankind, and the most simple and artless reason, do naturally inspire us with these sentiments; and that to see thus far, is not to exceed the sphere of unrefined, uneducated men.

It requires no great elevation of soul to observe, that nothing in this world is productive of true contentment; that our pleasures are vain and fugitive, our troubles innumerable and perpetual; and that after all, death, which threatens us every moment, must, in the compass of a few years, (perhaps of a few days) put us into the eternal condition of *happiness*, or *miser*y, or *nothing*. Between us and these three great periods, or states, no barrier is interposed but life, the most brittle thing in all nature; and the happiness of heaven being certainly not designed for those who doubt whether they have an immortal part to enjoy it, such persons have nothing left but the miserable chance of annihilation, or of hell.

There is not any reflection which can have more reality than this, as there is none which

has greater terror. Let us set the bravest face on our condition, and play the heroes as artfully as we can, yet see here the issue which attends the goodliest life upon earth!

'Tis in vain for men to turn aside their thoughts from this eternity which awaits them, as if they were able to destroy it, by denying it a place in their imaginations. It subsists in spite of them; it advanceth unobserved: and death, which is to draw the curtain from it, will, in a short time, infallibly reduce them to the dreadful necessity of being forever nothing, or forever miserable.

We have here a doubt of the most affrighting consequence, and which therefore to entertain may be well esteemed the most grievous of misfortunes; but, at the same time, it is our indispensable duty not to lie under it without struggling for deliverance.

He then who doubts, and yet seeks not to be resolved, is equally unhappy and unjust. But if withal he appears easy and composed; if he freely declares his indifference; nay, if he takes a vanity in professing it, and seems to make this most deplorable condition the subject of his pleasure and joy. I have not words to fix a name on so extravagant a creature. Where is the very possibility of entering into these thoughts and resolutions? what delight is there in expecting misery without end? what vanity in finding one's self encompassed with impenetrable darkness? or what consolation in despairing forever of a comforter?

To sit down with some sort of acquiescence under so fatal an ignorance, is a thing unaccountable beyond all expression: and they who live with such a disposition ought to be made sensible of its absurdity and stupidity, by having their inward reflections laid open to them, that they may grow wise by the prospect of their own folly. For behold how men are wont to reason, while they obstinately remain thus ignorant of what they are, and refuse all methods of instruction and illumination!

Who has sent me into the world, I know not; what the world is, I know not, nor what I am myself. I am under an astonishing and terrifying ignorance of all things. I know not what my body is, what my senses, or my soul. This very part of me which thinks what I speak, which reflects upon every thing else, and even upon itself, yet is as mere a stranger to its own nature as the dullest thing I carry about me. I behold these frightful spaces of the universe with which I am encompassed; and I find myself chained to one little corner of the vast extent, without understanding why I am placed in this seat rather than any other; or why this moment of time, given me to live, was assigned rather at such a point, than at any other of the whole eternity which was before me, or of all that which is to come after me. I see nothing but infinities on all sides, which devour and swallow me up, like an atom; like a shadow, which endures but a single instant,



and is never to return. The sum of my knowledge is, that I must shortly die ; but that which I am most ignorant of, is this very death which I feel myself unable to decline.

As I know not whence I came, so I know not whither I go ; only this I know, that at my departure out of the world, I must either fall forever into nothing, or into the hands of an incensed God, without being capable of deciding which of these two conditions shall eternally be my portion. Such is my state ; full of weakness, obscurity, and wretchedness. And from all this I conclude, that I ought therefore to pass all the days of my life, without considering what is hereafter to befall me ; and that I have nothing to do but to follow my inclinations, without reflection or disquiet, in doing all that which, if what men say of a miserable eternity prove true, will infallibly plunge me into it. 'Tis possible I might find some light to clear up my doubts ; but I shall not take a minute's pains, nor stir one foot in the search of it. On the contrary, I am resolved to treat those with scorn and derision who labour in this inquiry with care ; and so to run, without fear or foresight, upon the trial of the grand event ; permitting myself to be led softly on to death, utterly uncertain as to the eternal issue of my future condition.

In earnest, 'tis a glory to religion to have so unreasonable men for its professed enemies ; and their opposition is of so little dan-

ger, that it serves to illustrate the principal truths which our religion teaches. For the main scope of Christian faith is to establish these two principles, the corruption of nature, and the redemption by Jesus Christ. And these opposers, if they are of no use towards demonstrating the truth of the redemption, by the sanctity of their lives, yet are, at least, admirably useful in shewing the corruption of nature, by so unnatural sentiments and suggestions.

Nothing is so important to any man as his own estate and condition; nothing so great, so amazing, as eternity. If therefore we find persons indifferent to the loss of their being, and to the danger of endless misery, 'tis impossible that this temper should be natural. They are quite other men in all other regards: they fear the smallest inconveniences; they see them as they approach, and feel them if they arrive; and he who passeth days and nights in chagrin or despair, for the loss of employment, or for some imaginary blemish in his honour, is the very same mortal who knows that he must lose all by death, and yet remains without disquiet, resentment or emotion. This wonderful insensibility with respect to things of the most fatal consequence, in a heart so nicely sensible of the meanest trifles, is an astonishing prodigy, an unintelligible enchantment, a supernatural blindness and infatuation.

A man in a close dungeon, who knows not whether sentence of death is passed upon

him, who is allowed but one hour's space to inform himself concerning it, and that one hour sufficient, in case it have passed, to obtain its reverse, would act contrary to nature and sense, should he make use of this hour not to procure information, but to pursue his vanity or sport. And yet such is the condition of the persons whom we are now describing: only with this difference, that the evils with which they are every moment threatened do infinitely surpass the bare loss of life, and that transient punishment which the prisoner is supposed to apprehend. Yet they run thoughtless upon the precipice, having only cast a veil over their eyes, to hinder them from discerning it, and divert themselves with the officiousness of such as charitably warn them of their danger.

Thus, not the zeal alone of those who heartily seek God demonstrates the truth of religion, but likewise the blindness of those who utterly forbear to seek him, and who pass their days under so horrible a neglect. There must needs be a strange turn and revolution in human nature, before men can submit to such a condition; much more, ere they can applaud and value themselves upon it. For, supposing them to have obtained an absolute certainty that there was no fear after death, but of falling into nothing; ought not this to be the subject rather of despair than of jollity? And is it not therefore the highest pitch of senseless extravagance, while we want this certainty, to glory in our doubt and distrust?

And yet after all, it is too visible, that man has so far declined from his original nature, and as it were departed from himself, as to nourish in his heart a secret seed plot of joy, springing up from these libertine reflections. This brutal ease or indolence, between the fear of hell and of annihilation, carries somewhat so tempting in it, that not only those who have the misfortune to be sceptically inclined, but even those who cannot unsettle their judgment, do yet esteem it reputable to take up even a counterfeit dissidence. For we may observe the largest part of the herd to be of this latter kind, false pretenders to infidelity, and mere hypocrites in atheism. There are persons whom we have heard declare that the genteel way of the world consists in thus acting the bravo. This is that which they term throwing off the yoke, and which the greater number of them profess, not so much out of opinion, as out of gallantry and complaisance.

Yet, if they have the least reserve of common sense, it will not be difficult to make them apprehend, how miserably they abuse themselves, by laying so false a foundation of applause and esteem. For this is not the way to raise a character, even with worldly men, who as they are able to pass a shrewd judgment on things, so they easily discern, that the only method of succeeding in our temporal affairs is to approve ourselves honest, faithful, prudent, and capable of advancing the interest of our friends; because men nat-

urally love nothing but that which some way contributes to their use and benefit. But now what benefit can we any way derive from hearing a man confess, that he has eased himself of the burden of religion; that he believes no God, as the witness and inspector of his conduct; that he considers himself as absolute master of what he does, and accountable for it only to his own mind? Will he fancy that we shall be hence induced to repose a greater degree of confidence in him hereafter, or to depend on his comfort, his advice or assistance in the necessities of life? Can he imagine us to take any great delight or complacency, when he tells us, that he doubts whether our very soul be any thing more than a little wind and smoke; nay, when he tells it us with an air of assurance, and a voice that testifies the contentment of his heart? Is this a thing to be spoken of with pleasantry? or ought it not rather to be lamented with the deepest sadness as the most melancholic reflection that can strike our thoughts?

If they would compose them to serious consideration, they must perceive the method in which they are engaged to be so very ill chosen, so repugnant to gentility, and so remote even from that good air and grace which they pursue, that, on the contrary, nothing can more effectually expose them to the contempt and aversion of mankind, or mark them out for persons defective in parts and judgment. And indeed should we demand from

them an account of their sentiments, and of the reasons which they have to entertain this suspicion in religious matters, what they offered would appear so miserably weak and trifling, as rather to confirm us in our belief. This is no more than what one of their own fraternity told them with great smartness, on such an occasion. If you continue (says he) to dispute at this rate, you'll infallibly make me a Christian. And the gentleman was in the right: for who would not tremble to find himself embarked in the same cause with so forlorn, so despicable companions.

And thus it is evident, that they who wear no more than the outward mask of these principles are the most unhappy counterfeits in the world; in as much as they are obliged to put a continual force and constraint on their genius, only that they may render themselves the most impertinent of all men living.

If they are heartily and sincerely troubled at their want of light, let them not dissemble the disease. Such a confession could not be reputed shameful; for there is really no shame, but in being shameless. Nothing betrays so much weakness of soul, as not to apprehend the misery of man, while living without God in the world: nothing is a surer token of extreme baseness of spirit, than not to hope for the reality of eternal promises: no man is so stigmatized a coward, as he that acts the bravo against Heaven. Let them, therefore, leave these impieties to those who are born with so unhappy a judgment

as to be capable of entertaining them in nearest. If they cannot be Christian men, let them however be men of honour. And let them, in conclusion, acknowledge that there are but two sorts of persons who deserve to be styled reasonable, either those who serve God with all their heart, because they know him; or those who seek him with all their heart, because as yet they know him not.

If then there are persons who sincerely inquire after God, and who, being truly sensible of their misery, affectionately desire to be rescued from it, it is to these alone that we can in justice afford our labour and service, for their direction in finding out that light of which they feel the want.

But as for those who live without either knowing God, or endeavouring to know him, they look on themselves as so little deserving their own care, that they cannot but be unworthy the care of others: and it requires all the charity of the religion which they despise, not to despise them to such a degree, as even to abandon them to their own folly. But since the same religion obliges us to consider them, while they remain in this life, as still capable of God's enlightening grace; and to acknowledge it as very possible, that, in the course of a few days, they may be replenished with a fuller measure of faith than we now enjoy, and we ourselves, on the other side, fall into the depths of their present blindness and misery; we ought to do for them what we desire should be done

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to us in their case, to intreat them that they would take pity on themselves, and would, at least, advance a step or two forward, if perchance they may come into the light. For which end it is wished, that they would employ, in the perusal of this piece, some few of these hours which they spend so unprofitably in other pursuits. 'Tis possible they may gain somewhat by the reading; at least they cannot be great losers. But if any shall apply themselves to it, with perfect sincerity, and with an unfeigned desire of knowing the truth, I despair not of their satisfaction, or of their being convinced by so many proofs of our divine religion as they will here find laid together."



THE  
EVIDENCES  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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SECT. I.

- I. General division of the following discourse, with regard to Pagan and Jewish authors, who mention particulars relating to our Saviour.
- II. Not probable that any such should be mentioned by Pagan writers who lived at the same time, from the nature of such transactions.
- III. Especially when related by the Jews.
- IV. And heard at a distance by those who pretended to as great miracles of their own.
- V. Besides, that no Pagan writers of that age lived in Judea, or its confines.
- VI. And because many books of that age are lost.
- VII. An instance of one record proved to be authentic.
- VIII. A second record of probable, though not undoubted, authority.

I. **T**HAT I may lay before you a full state of the subject under our consideration and methodise the several particulars that I touched upon in discourse with you, I shall first take notice of such Pagan authors as have given their testimony to the history of our Saviour; reduce these authors under their respective classes, and shew what authority their testimonies carry with them. Secondly, I shall take notice of \*Jewish authors in the same light.

II. There are many reasons why you should not expect that matters of such a wonderful nature should be taken notice of by those eminent Pagan writers, who were contem-

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\* The author did not live to write this second part.

poraries with Jesus Christ, or by those who lived before his disciples had personally appeared among them, and ascertained the report which had gone abroad concerning a life so full of miracles.

Supposing such things had happened at this day in Switzerland, or among the Grisons, who make a greater figure in Europe than Judea did in the Roman Empire, would they be immediately believed by those who live at a great distance from them? or would any certain account of them be transmitted into foreign countries, within so short a space of time as that of our Saviour's public ministry? Such kinds of news, though never so true, seldom gain credit, till some time after they are transacted, and exposed to the examination of the curious, who, by laying together circumstances, attestations, and characters of those who are concerned in them, either receive or reject what at first none but eye-witnesses could absolutely believe or disbelieve. In a case of this sort, it was natural for men of sense and learning to treat the whole account as fabulous: or, at farthest, to suspend their belief of it, until all things stood together in their full light.

III. Besides, the Jews were branded not only for superstitions different from all the religions of the Pagan world, but in a particular manner ridiculed for being a credulous people: so that whatever reports of such a nature came out of that country, were looked upon by the Heathen world as false, frivolous, and improbable.

IV. We may further observe, that the ordinary practice of magic in those times, with the many pretended prodigies, divinations, apparitions, and local miracles among the Heathens, made them less attentive to such news from Judea, till they had time to consider the nature, the occasion, and the end of our Saviour's miracles, and were awakened by many surprising events, to allow them any consideration at all.

V. We are indeed told by St. Matthew, that the fame of our Saviour, during his life, went throughout all Syria; and that there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, Judea, Decapolis, Idumea, from beyond Jordan, and from Tyre and Sidon. Now, had there been any historians of those times and places, we might have expected to have seen in them some account of those wonderful transactions in Judea; but there is not any single author extant, in any kind, of that age, in any of those countries.

VI. How many books have perished in which possibly there might have been mention of our Saviour? Look among the Romans, how few of their writings are come down to our times! In the space of two hundred years from our Saviour's birth when there was such a multitude of writers of all kinds, how small is the number of authors that have made their way to the present age.

VII. One authentic record, and that the most authentic Heathen record, we are pretty sure is lost, I mean the account sent by the

governor of Judea, under whom our Saviour was judged, condemned, and crucified. It was the custom in the Roman Empire, as it is to this day, in all the governments of the world, for the prefects and viceroys of distant provinces, to transmit to their sovereign a summary relation of every thing remarkable in their administration. That Pontius Pilate, in his account, would have touched on so extraordinary an event in Judea, is not to be doubted: and that he actually did, we learn from Justin Martyr, who lived about a hundred years after our Saviour's death, resided, made converts, and suffered martyrdom at Rome, where he was engaged with philosophers, and in a particular manner with Crescens the Cynic, who could easily have detected, and would not fail to have exposed him, had he quoted a record not in being, or made any false citation out of it. Would the great apologist have challenged Crescens to dispute the cause of Christianity with him before the Roman senate, had he forged such an evidence? Or would Crescens have refused the challenge, could he have triumphed over him in the detection of such a forgery? To which we must add, that the apology which appeals to this record, was presented to a learned emperor, and to the whole body of the Roman senate. This father, in his apology, speaking of the death and suffering of our Saviour, refers the emperor for the truth of what he says to the acts of Pontius Pilate which I have here mentioned.

Tertullian, who wrote his apology about fifty years after Justin, doubtless referred to the same record, when he tells the governor of Rome, that the emperor Tiberius having received an account out of Palestine in Syria, of the divine person who had appeared in that country, paid him a particular regard, and threatened to punish any who should accuse the Christians; nay, that the emperor would have adopted him among the deities whom they worshipped, had not the senate refused to come in to his proposal. Tertullian, who gives us this history, was not only one of the most learned men of his age, but, what adds a greater weight to his authority in this case, was eminently skilful and well read in the laws of the Roman Empire. Nor can it be said, that Tertullian grounded his quotation upon the authority of Justin Martyr, because we find he mixes it with matters of fact which are not related by that author. Eusebius mentions the same ancient record, but as it was not extant in his time, I shall not insist upon his authority in this point. If it be objected that this particular is not mentioned in any Roman historian, I shall use the same argument in a parallel case, and see whether it will carry any force with it. Ulpian the Great Roman lawyer gathered together all the imperial edicts that had been made against the Christians; but did any one ever say that there had been no such edicts, because they were not mentioned in the histories of those Emperors? Besides,

who knows but this circumstance of Tiberius was mentioned in other historians that have been lost, tho' not to be found in any still extant? Has not Suetonius many particulars of this Emperor omitted by Tacitus, and Herodian many that are not so much as hinted at by either! As for the spurious acts of Pilate, now extant, we know the occasion and time of their writing, and had there not been a true and authentic record of this nature, they would never have been forged.

VIII. The story of Abgarus, king of Edesa, relating to the letter which he sent to our Saviour, and to that which he received from him, is a record of great authority; and though I will not insist upon it, may venture to say, that had we such an evidence for any fact in Pagan history, an author would be thought very unreasonable who should reject it. I believe you will be of my opinion, if you will peruse, with other authors who have appeared in vindication of these letters as genuine, the additional arguments which have been made use of by the late famous and learned Dr. Grabe, in the second volume of his *Spicilegium*.

## SEC. II.

- I. What facts in the history of our Saviour might be taken notice of by Pagan authors.
- II. What particular facts are taken notice of, and by what Pagan authors.
- III. How Celsus represented our Saviour's miracles.
- IV. The same representation made of them by other unbelievers, and proved unreasonable.
- V. What facts in our Saviour's history not to be expected from Pagan writers.

I. **WE** come now to consider what undoubted authorities are extant among Pagan writers: and here we must premise, that some parts of our Saviour's history may be reasonably expected from Pagans. I mean such parts as might be known to those who lived at a distance from Judea, as well as to those who were the followers and eye-witnesses of Christ.

II. Such particulars are most of these which follow, and which are all attested by some one or other of those Heathen authors, who lived in or near the age of our Saviour and his disciples. "That Augustus Cæsar had ordered the whole empire to be censured or taxed," which brought our Saviour's reputed parents to Bethlehem: this is mentioned by several Roman historians, as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dion. "That a great light, or a new star, appeared in the east, which directed the wise men to our Saviour:" this is recorded by Chalcidius. "That Herod, the king of Palestine, so often mentioned in the Roman history, made a great slaughter

of innocent children," being so jealous of his successor, that he put to death his own sons on that account: this character of him is given by several historians: and this cruel fact mentioned by Macrobius, a Heathen author, who tells it as a known thing, without any mark or doubt upon it. "That our Saviour had been in Egypt:" this Celsus, though he raises a monstrous story upon it, is so far from denying, that he tells us, our Saviour learned the arts of magic in that country. "That Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea; that our Saviour was brought in judgment before him, and by him condemned and crucified:" this is recorded by Tacitus. "That many miraculous cures and works, out of the ordinary course of nature, were wrought by him; this is confessed by Julian the apostate, Porphyry, and Hierocles, all of them not only Pagans, but professed enemies and persecutors of Christianity. "That our Saviour foretold several things which came to pass according to his predictions;" this was attested by Phlegon in his annals, as we are assured by the learned Origen against Celsus. "That at the time when our Saviour died, there was a miraculous darkness, and a great earthquake:" this is recorded by the same Phlegon the Trallian, who was likewise a Pagan, and freeman to Adrian the emperor. We may here observe, that a native of Trallium, which was not situate at so great a distance from Palestine, might very probably be informed of such remarkable e-



vents as had passed among the Jews in the age immediately preceding his own times, since several of his countrymen with whom he had conversed might have received a confused report of our Saviour before his crucifixion, and probably lived within the shake of the earthquake, and the shadow of the eclipse, which are recorded by this author. "That Christ was worshipped as a God among the Christians; that they would rather suffer death than blaspheme him: that they received a sacrament, and by it entered into a vow of abstaining from sin and wickedness," conformable to the advice given by St. Paul: "That they had private assemblies of worship, and used to join together in hymns;" this is the account which Pliny the younger gives of Christianity in his days, about seventy years after the death of Christ, and which agrees in all its circumstances with the accounts we have in holy writ, of the first state of Christianity after the crucifixion of our blessed Saviour. "That St. Peter, whose miracles are many of them recorded in holy writ, did many wonderful works," is owned by Julian the apostate, who therefore represents him as a great magician, and one who had in his possession a book of magical secrets, left him by our Saviour. "That the devils or evil spirits were subject to them," we may learn from Porphyry, who objects to Christianity, that since Jesus had begun to be worshipped, Esculapius, and the rest of the Gods, did no more converse with men. Nay, Celsus him-

self affirms the same thing in effect, when he says, that the power which seemed to reside in Christians proceeded from the use of certain names, and the invocation of certain demons. Origen remarks on this passage, that the author doubtless hints at those Christians who put to flight evil spirits, and healed those who were possessed with them: a fact which had been often seen, and which he himself had seen, as he declares in another part of his discourse against Celsus. But at the same time he assures us, that this miraculous power was exerted by the use of no other name but that of Jesus; to which were added several passages in this history, but nothing like any invocation to demons.

III. Celsus was so hard set with the report of our Saviour's miracles, and the confident attestations concerning him, that though he often intimates that he did not believe them to be true, yet knowing he might be silenced in such an answer, provides himself with another retreat, when beaten out of this, viz. that our Saviour was a magician. Thus he compares the feeding of so many thousands, at two different times, with a few loaves and fishes, to the magical feasts of those Egyptian impostors, who would present their spectators with visionary entertainments, that had in them neither substance nor reality: which, by the way, is to suppose, that a hungry and fainting multitude were filled by an apparition, or strengthened and refreshed with shadows. He knew very well that there

was so many witnesses and actors, if I may call them such, in these two miracles, that it was impossible to refute such multitudes, who had doubtless sufficiently spread the fame of them, and was therefore in this place forced to resort to the other solution, that it was done by magic. It was not enough to say that a miracle, which appeared to so many thousand eye-witnesses, was a forgery of Christ's disciples; and therefore supposing them to be eye-witnesses, he endeavours to shew how they might be deceived.

IV. The unconverted Heathens, who were pressed by the many authorities that confirmed our Saviour's miracles, as well as the unbelieving Jews, who had actually seen them, were driven to account for them after the same manner: for, to work by magic, in the Heathen way of speaking, was, in the language of the Jews, to cast out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. Our Saviour, who knew that unbelievers, in all ages, would put this perverse interpretation on his miracles, has branded the malignity of those men, who, contrary to the dictates of their own hearts, started such an unreasonable objection as a blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and declared not only the guilt, but the punishment of so black a crime. At the same time he condescended to shew the vanity and emptiness of this objection against his miracles, by representing, that they evidently tended to the destruction of those powers, to whose assistance the enemies of

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his doctrine then ascribed them : an argument, which, if duly weighed, renders the objection so very frivolous and groundless, that we may venture to call it even blasphemy against common sense. Would magic endeavour to draw off the minds of men from the worship which was paid to stocks and stones ; to give them an abhorrence of those evil spirits, who rejoiced in the most cruel sacrifices, and in offerings of the greatest impurity ; and, in short, to call upon mankind to exert their whole strength in the love and adoration of that one Being, from whom they derived existence, and on whom only they were taught to depend every moment for the happiness and continuance of it ? Was it the business of magic to humanize our natures with compassion, forgiveness, and all the instances of the most extensive charity ? Would evil spirits contribute to make men sober, chaste, and temperate ; and, in a word, to produce that reformation which was wrought in the moral world by those doctrines of our Saviour that received their sanction from his miracles ? Nor is it possible to imagine, that evil spirits would enter into a combination with our Saviour to cut off all their correspondence and intercourse with mankind, and to prevent any for the future from addicting themselves to those rites and ceremonies which had done them so much honour. We see the early effect which Christianity had on the minds of men in this particular, by that number of books which were

filled with the secrets of magic, and made a sacrifice to Christianity by the converts mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. We have likewise an eminent instance of the inconsistency of our religion with magic in the history of the famous Aquila. This person, who was a kinsman of the emperor Trajan, and likewise a man of great learning, notwithstanding he had embraced Christianity, could not be brought off from the studies of magic by the repeated admonitions of his fellow Christians; so that at length they expelled him their society, as rather chusing to loose the reputation of so considerable a profelyte, than communicate with one who dealt in such dark and infernal practices. Besides, we may observe, that all the favourers of magic were the most professed and bitter enemies to the Christian religion. Not to mention Simon Magus, and many others, I shall only take notice of those two great persecutors of Christianity, the emperors Adrian and Julian the apostate, both of them initiated in the mysteries of divination, and skilled in all the depths of magic, I shall only add, that evil spirits cannot be supposed to have concurred in the establishment of a religion which triumphed over them, drove them out of the places they possessed, and divested them of their influence on mankind: nor would I mention this particular, though it be unanimously reported by all the ancient Christian authors, did it not appear, from the authorities above cited, that this was a fact confessed by Heathens themselves.

V. We now see what a multitude of Pagan testimonies may be produced for all of those remarkable passages which might have been expected from them ; and indeed of several, that, I believe, do more than answer your expectations, as they were not subjects, in their own nature, so exposed to public notoriety. It cannot be expected they should mention particulars, which were transacted amongst the disciples only, or among some few even of the disciples themselves, such as the transfiguration, the agony in the garden, the appearance of Christ after his resurrection, and others of the like nature. It was impossible for a Heathen author to relate these things ; because, if he had believed them, he would no longer have been a Heathen, and by that means his testimony would not have been thought of so much validity. Besides, his very report of facts, so favourable to Christianity, would have prompted men to say that he was probably tainted with their doctrine. We have a parallel case in Hecataeus, a famous Greek historian, who had several passages in his book conformable to the history of the Jewish writers, which, when quoted by Josephus, as a confirmation of the Jewish history, when his Heathen adversaries could give no other answer to it, they would need suppose that Hecataeus was a Jew in his heart, though they had no other reason for it, but because his history gave greater authority to the Jewish than the Egyptian records.

## SECT. III.

- I. Introduction to a second list of Pagan authors, who give testimony of our Saviour.
- II. A passage concerning our Saviour from a learned Athenian.
- III. His Conversion from Paganism to Christianity makes his evidence stronger than if he had continued a Pagan.
- IV. Of another Athenian philosopher converted to Christianity.
- V. Why their conversion, instead of weakening, strengthens their evidence in defence of Christianity.
- VI. Their belief in our Saviour's history founded at first upon the principles of historical faith.
- VII. Their testimonies extended to all the particulars of our Saviour's history.
- VIII. As related by the four Evangelists.

I. **T**O this list of Heathen writers, who make mention of our Saviour, or touch upon any particulars of his life, I shall add those authors who were at first Heathens, and afterwards converted to Christianity; upon which account, as I shall here shew, their testimonies are to be looked upon as the more authentic. And, in this list of evidences, I shall confine myself to such learned Pagans as came over to Christianity in the three first centuries, because those were the times in which men had the best means of informing themselves of the truth of our Saviour's history; and because, among the great number of philosophers who came in afterwards, under the reigns of Christian emperors, there might be several of them who did it partly out of worldly motives.

II. Let us now suppose that a learned Heathen writer, who lived within sixty years of

our Saviour's crucifixion, after having shewn that false miracles were generally wrought in obscurity, and before few or no witnesses, speaking of those which were wrought by our Saviour, has the following passage. "But his works were always seen, because they were true; they were seen by those who were healed, and by those who were raised from the dead. Nay, these persons who were thus healed, and raised, were seen not only at the time of their being healed and raised, but long afterwards. Nay, they were seen not only all the while our Saviour was upon earth, but survived after his departure out of this world; nay, some of them were living in our days."

III. I dare say you would look upon this as a glorious attestation for the cause of Christianity, had it come from the hand of a famous Athenian philosopher. These forementioned words, however, are actually the words of one who lived about sixty years after our Saviour's crucifixion, and was a famous philosopher in Athens. But it will be said he was a convert to Christianity: now consider this matter impartially, and see if his testimony is not much more valid for that reason. Had he continued a Pagan philosopher, would not the world have it said that he was not sincere in what he writ, or did not believe it; for if so, would not they have told us he would have embraced Christianity? This was indeed the case of this excellent man; he had so thoroughly examined the



truth of our Saviour's history, and the excellency of that religion which he taught, and was so entirely convinced of both, that he became a profelyte and died a martyr.

IV. Aristides was an Athenian philosopher, at the same time famed for his learning and wisdom, but converted to Christianity. As it cannot be questioned that he perused and approved the apology of Quadratus, in which is the passage just now cited, he joined with him in an apology of his own to the same emperor on the same subject. This apology, though now lost, was extant in the time of Ado. Vinefis, A. D. 870, and highly esteemed by the most learned Athenians, as that author witnesses. It must have contained great arguments for the truth of our Saviour's history, because in it he asserted the divinity of our Saviour which could not but engage him in the proof of his miracles.

V. I do allow, that generally speaking, a man is not so acceptable and unquestioned an evidence, in facts which make for the advancement of his own party. But we must consider, that, in the case before us, the persons to whom we appeal were of an opposite party, till they were persuaded of the truth of those very facts which they report. They bear evidence to a history in defence of Christianity; the truth of which history was their motive to embrace Christianity. They attest facts which they had heard while they were yet Heathens, and had they not found reason to believe them, they would have still

continued Heathens, and have made no mention of them in their writings.

VI. When a man is born under Christian parents, and trained up in the profession of that religion from a child, he generally guides himself by the rules of Christian faith, in believing what is delivered by the evangelists; but the learned Pagans of antiquity, before they became Christians, were only guided by the common rules of historical faith; that is, they examined the nature of the evidence which was to be met with in common fame, traditions, and the writings of those persons who related them, together with the number, concurrence, veracity, and private characters of those persons; and being convinced upon all accounts that they had the same reason to believe the history of our Saviour, as that of any other person to which they themselves were not actually eye-witnesses, they were bound, by all the rules of historical faith, and of right reason, to give credit to this history. This they did accordingly, and in consequence of it published the same truths themselves, suffered many afflictions, and very often death itself in the assertion of them. When I say, that an historical belief of the acts of our Saviour induced these learned Pagans to embrace his doctrine, I do not deny that there were many other motives which conduced to it, as the excellency of his precepts, the fulfilling of prophecies, the miracles of his disciples, the irreproachable lives and magnanimous sufferings of their

followers, with other considerations of the same nature; but whatever other collateral arguments wrought more or less with philosophers of that age, it is certain, that a belief in the history of our Saviour was one motive with every new convert, and that upon which all others turned, as being the very basis and foundation of Christianity.

VII. To this I must further add, that as we have already seen many particular facts which are recorded in holy writ, attested by particular Pagan authors, the testimony of those I am now going to produce, extends to the whole history of our Saviour, and to that continued series of actions which are related of him and his disciples in the books of the New Testament.

VIII. This evidently appears from their quotations out of the evangelists, for the confirmation of any doctrine or account of our blessed Saviour. Nay, a learned man of our nation, who examined the writings of our most ancient fathers in another view, refers to several passages in Irenæus, Tertullian, Clements of Alexandria, Origen, and Cyprian; by which he plainly shews that each of these early writers ascribed to the four evangelists by name, their respective histories; so that there is not the least room for doubting of their belief in the history of our Saviour as recorded in the gospels. I shall only add, that three of the five fathers here mentioned, and probably four, were Pagans converted to Christianity, as they were all of

them very inquisitive and deep in the knowledge of Heathen learning and philosophy.

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SECT. IV.

- I. Character of the times in which the Christian religion was propagated.
- II. And of many who embraced it.
- III. Three eminent and early instances.
- IV. Multitudes of learned men who came over to it.
- V. Belief in our Saviour's history the first motive to their conversion.
- VI. The names of several Pagan philosophers who were Christian converts.

I. **I**T happened very providentially, to the honour of the Christian religion, that it did not take its rise in the dark illiterate ages of the world, but at a time when arts and sciences were at their height, and when there were men who made it the business of their lives to search after truth, and sift the several opinions of philosophers and wise men, concerning the duty, the end, and chief happiness of reasonable creatures.

II. Several of these, therefore, when they had informed themselves of our Saviour's history, and examined, with unprejudiced minds, the doctrines and manners of his disciples and followers, were so struck and convinced, that they professed themselves of that sect; notwithstanding, by this profession, in that juncture of time, they bid farewell to all

the pleasures of this life, renounced all the views of ambition, engaged in an uninterrupted course of severities, and exposed themselves to public hatred and contempt, to sufferings of all kinds, and to death itself.

III. Of this sort we may reckon those three early converts to Christianity, who each of them was a member of a senate famous for its wisdom and learning. Joseph the Arimathean was of the Jewish sanhedrim, Dionysius of the Athenian, Areopagus, and Flavius Clemens, of the Roman senate; nay, at the time of his death, consul of Rome. These three were so thoroughly satisfied of the truth of the Christian religion, that the first of them, according to all the reports of antiquity, died a martyr for it; as did the second, unless we disbelief Aristides, his fellow citizen and contemporary; and the third, as we are informed both by Roman and Christian authors.

IV. Among those innumerable multitudes, who, in most of the known nations of the world, came over to Christianity at its first appearance, we may be sure there were great numbers of wise and learned men, besides those whose names are in the Christian records, who, without doubt, took care to examine the truth of our Saviour's history before they would leave the religion of their country, and of their forefathers, for the sake of one that would not only cut them off from the allurements of this world, but subject them to every thing terrible or disagreeable

in it. Tertullian tells the Roman governors, that their corporations, councils, armies, tribes, companies, the palace, senate, and courts of judicature, were filled with Christians; as Arnobius asserts, that men of the finest parts and learning, orators, grammarians, rhetoricians, lawyers, physicians, philosophers, despising the sentiments they had been once fond of, took up their rest in the Christian religion.

V. Who can imagine that men of this character did not thoroughly inform themselves of the history of that person whose doctrines they embraced? For however consonant to reason his precepts appeared, how good soever were the effects which they produced in the world, nothing could have tempted men to acknowledge him as their God and Saviour, but their being firmly persuaded of the miracles he wrought, and the many attestations of his divine mission, which were to be met with in the history of his life. This was the ground-work of the Christian religion; and, if this failed, the whole superstructure sunk with it. This point, therefore, of the truth of our Saviour's history, as reckoned by the evangelists, is every where taken for granted in the writings of those who, from Pagan philosophers, became Christian authors, and who, by reason of their conversion, are to be looked upon as of the strongest collateral testimony for the truth of what is delivered concerning our Saviour.

VI. Besides innumerable authors that are

lost, we have the undoubted names, works, or fragments of several Pagan philosophers, which shew them to have been as learned as any unconverted Heathen authors of the age in which they lived. If we look into the greatest nurseries of learning in those ages of the world, we find in Athens, Dionysius, Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras; and in Alexandria, Dionysius Clements, Ammonius, and Anatolius, to whom we may add Origen; for though his father was a Christian martyr, he became, without all controversy, the most learned and able philosopher of his age, by his education at Alexandria, in that famous seminary of arts and sciences.

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SECT. V.

- I. The learned Pagans had means and opportunities of informing themselves of the truth of our Saviour's history.
- II. From the proceedings,
- III. The characters, sufferings,
- IV. And miracles of the persons who published it.
- V. How these first apostles perpetuated their tradition, by ordaining persons to succeed them.
- VI. How their successors in the three first centuries preserved their tradition.
- VII. That five generations might derive this tradition from Christ, to the end of the third century
- VIII. Four eminent Christians that delivered it down successively to the year of our Lord 254.
- IX. The faith of the four above-mentioned persons the

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same with that of the churches of the east, of the west, and of Egypt.

- X. Another person added to them, who brings us to the year 343, and that many other lists might be added in as direct and short a succession.
- XI. Why the tradition of the three first centuries, was more authentic than that of any other age, proved from the conversation of the primitive Christians
- XII. From the manner of initiating men into their religion.
- XIII. From the correspondence between the churches.
- XIV. From the long lives of several of Christ's disciples, of which two are instances.

I. **I**T now therefore only remains to consider, whether these learned men had means and opportunities of informing themselves of the truth of our Saviour's history; for unless this point can be made out, their testimonies will appear invalid, and their inquiries ineffectual.

II. As to this point, we must consider, that many thousands had seen the transactions of our Saviour in Judah; and that many hundred thousands had received an account of them from the mouths of those who were actually eye-witnesses. I shall only mention among these eye-witnesses, the twelve apostles, to whom we must add St. Paul, who had a particular call to this high office, tho' many other disciples and followers of Christ had also their share in the publishing this wonderful history. We learn from the ancient records of Christianity, that many of the apostles and disciples made it the express business of their lives, travelled into the remotest parts of the world, and in all places



gathered multitudes about them, to acquaint them with the history and doctrines of their crucified Master. And indeed, were all christian records of these proceedings intirely lost, as many have been, the effect plainly evinces the truth of them ; for how else, during the apostles' lives could Christianity have spread itself with such an amazing progress through the several nations of the Roman empire ? how could it fly like lightning, and carry conviction with it from one end of the earth to the other ?

III. Heathens therefore of every age, sex, and quality, born in the most different climates, and bred up under the most different institutions, when they saw men of plain sense, without the help of learning, armed with patience and courage, instead of wealth, pomp, or power, expressing in their lives those excellent doctrines of morality, which they taught as delivered to them from our Saviour, avering that they had seen his miracles during his life, and conversed with him after his death : when, I say, they saw no suspicion of falshood, treachery, or worldly interest in their behaviour and conversation, and that they submitted to the most ignominious and cruel deaths, rather than retract their testimony ; or even be silent in matters which they were to publish by our Saviour's especial command, there was no reason to doubt of the veracity of those facts which they related, or of the divine mission in which they were employed.

IV. But even those motives to faith in our Saviour would not have been sufficient to have brought about, in so few years, such an incredible number of conversions, had not the apostles been able to exhibit still greater proofs of the truths which they taught. A few persons of an odious and despised country could not have filled the world with believers, had they not shown undoubted credentials from the divine person who sent them on such a message. Accordingly we are assured that they were invested with the power of working miracles, which was the most short and the most convincing argument that could be produced, and the only one that was adapted to the reason of all mankind, to the capacities of the wise and ignorant, could overcome every cavil, and every prejudice. Who would not believe that our Saviour healed the sick, and raised the dead, when it was published by those who themselves often did the same miracles, in their presence, and in his name? Could any reasonable person imagine that God Almighty would arm men with such powers to authorise a lie, and establish a religion in the world, which was displeasing to him, or that evil spirits would lend them such an effectual assistance to beat down vice and idolatry?

V. When the apostles had formed many assemblies in several parts of the Pagan world, who gave credit to the glad tidings of the gospel, that, upon their departure, the memory of what they had related might not perish,

they appointed out of these new converts men of the best sense and of the most unblemished lives to preside over these several assemblies, and to inculcate, without ceasing, what they had heard from the mouths of these eye-witnesses.

VI. Upon the death of any of these substitutes to the apostles and disciples of Christ, his place was filled up with some other person of eminence for his piety and learning, and generally a member of the same church, who, after his decease, was followed by another in the same manner; by which means the succession was continued in an uninterrupted line. Irenæus informs us, that every church preserved a catalogue of its bishops in the order that they succeeded one another, and (for an example) produces the catalogue of those who governed the church of Rome in that character, which contains eight or nine persons, though but at a very small remove from the times of the apostles.

Indeed the lists of bishops, which are come down to us in other churches, are generally filled with greater numbers than one would expect. But the succession was quick in the three first centuries, because the bishop very often ended in the martyr; for when a persecution arose in any place, the first fury of it fell upon this order of holy men, who abundantly testified, by their deaths and sufferings, that they did not undertake these offices out of any temporal views: that they were sincere and satisfied in the belief of what they taught;

and that they firmly adhered to what they had received from the apostles, as laying down their lives in the same hope, and upon the same principles. None can be supposed so utterly regardless of their own happiness as to expire in torment, and hazard their eternity, to support any fables and inventions of their own, or any forgeries of their predecessors, who had presided in the same church, and which might have been easily detected by the tradition of that particular church, as well as by the concurring testimony of others. To this purpose, I think it is very remarkable, that there was not a single martyr among those many heretics who disagreed with the apostolical church, and introduced several wild and absurd notions into the doctrines of christianity. They durst not stake their present and future happiness on their own chimerical imaginations, and did not only shun persecution, but affirmed that it was unnecessary for their followers to bear their religion through such fiery trials.

VII. We may fairly reckon, that this first age of apostles and disciples, with that second generation of many who were their immediate converts, extended itself to the middle of the second century; and several of the third generation from these last mentioned, which was but the fifth from Christ, continued to the end of the third century. Did we know the ages and numbers of the members in every particular church which was planted by the apostles, I doubt not but in most of them there might be found five persons, who, in a

continued series, would reach through these three centuries of years, that is, till the 265th from the death of our Saviour.

VIII. Among the accounts of those very few out of innumerable multitudes, who had embraced Christianity, I shall single out four persons eminent for their lives, their writings and their sufferings, that were successively contemporaries, and bring us down as far as to the year of our Lord 254. St. John who was the beloved disciple, and conversed the most intimately with our Saviour, lived till Anno Dom. 100. Polycarp, who was the disciple of St. John, and had conversed with others of the apostles and disciples of our Lord, lived till Anno Dom. 167, though his life was shortened by martyrdom. Irenæus, who was the disciple of Polycarp, and had conversed with many of the immediate disciples of the apostles, lived, at the lowest computation of his age, till the year 202, when he was likewise cut off by martyrdom, in which year the great Origen was appointed regent of the cathedric school at Alexandria; and as he was the miracle of that age, for industry, learning, and philosophy, he was looked on as the champion of Christianity, till the year 254, when, if he did not suffer martyrdom, as some think he did, he was certainly actuated by the spirit of it, as appears in the whole course of his life and writings; nay, he had often been put to the torture, and had undergone trials worse than death. As he conversed with the most eminent Chris-

tians of his time in Egypt, and in the east ; brought over multitudes both from heresy and heathanism, left behind him several disciples of great fame and learning, there is no question but there were considerable numbers of those who knew him, and had been his hearers, scholars, or profelytes, that lived till the end of the third century, and to the reign of Constantine the Great.

IX. It is evident to those who read the lives and writings of Polycarp, Irenæus, and Origen, that these three fathers believed the accounts which are given of our Saviour in the four evangelists, and had undoubted arguments, that not only St. John, but many others of our Saviour's disciples, published the same accounts of him. To which we must subjoin this further remark, that what was believed by these fathers on this subject, was likewise the belief of the main body of Christians in those successive ages when they flourished ; since Polycarp cannot but be looked upon, if we consider the respect that was paid him, as the representative of the eastern churches in this particular, Irenæus of the western upon the same account, and Origen of those established in Egypt.

X. To these I might add Paul the famous hermit, who retired from the Decian persecution five or six years before Origen's death, and lived till the year 343. I have only discovered one of those channels by which the history of our Saviour might be conveyed pure and unadulterated through those sever-

al ages that produced those Pagan philosophers, whose testimonies I make use of for the truth of our Saviour's history. Some or other of these philosophers came into the Christian faith during its infancy, in the several periods of these three first centuries, when they had such means of informing themselves in all the particulars of our Saviour's history. I must further add, though I have here only chosen this single link of martyrs, I might find out others among those names which are still extant, that delivered down this account of our Saviour in a successive tradition, till the whole Roman empire became Christians; as there is no question but numless series of witnesses might follow one another in the same order, and in as short a chain, and that perhaps in every single church, had the names and ages of the most eminent primitive Christians been transmitted to us with the like certainty.

XI. But to give this consideration more force, we must take notice, that the tradition of the first ages of Christianity had several circumstances peculiar to it, which made it more authentic than any other tradition in any other age of the world. The Christians, who carried their religion thro' so many general and particular persecutions, were incessantly comforting and supporting one another, with the example and history of our Saviour and his apostles. It was the subject not only of their solemn assemblies, but of their private visits and conversations. Our virgins, says

Tatian, who lived in the second century, "discourse over their distaffs on divine subjects." Indeed, when religion was woven into the civil government, and flourished under the protection of the emperors, men's thoughts and discourses were, as they are now, full of secular affairs; but in the three first centuries of Christianity, men who embraced this religion, had given up all their interests in this world, and lived in a perpetual preparation for the next, as not knowing how soon they might be called to it; so that they had little else to talk of, but the life and doctrines of that divine person, which was their hope, their encouragement, and glory. We cannot therefore imagine that there was a single person arrived at any degree of age or consideration, who had not heard and repeated, above a thousand times in his life, all the particulars of our Saviour's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

XII. Especially if we consider that they could not then be received as Christians till they had undergone several examinations. Persons of riper years, who flocked daily into the church during the three first centuries, were obliged to pass through many repeated instructions, and give a strict account of their proficiency, before they were admitted to baptism. And as for those who were born of Christian parents, and had been baptized in their infancy, they were with the like care prepared and disciplined for confirmation, which they could not arrive at, till they were



found, upon examination, to have made a sufficient progress in the knowledge of Christianity.

XIII. We must further observe, that there was not only in those times this religious conversation among private Christians, but a constant correspondence between the churches that were established by the apostles or their successors in the several parts of the world. If any new doctrine was started, or any fact reported of our Saviour, a strict enquiry was made among the churches, especially those planted by the apostles themselves, whether they had received any such doctrine or account of our Saviour, from the mouths of the apostles, or the tradition of those Christians who had preceded the present members of the churches which were thus consulted. By this means, when any novelty was published, it was immediately detected and censured.

XIV. St. John, who lived so many years after our Saviour, was appealed to in these emergencies as the living oracle of the church; and as his oral testimony lasted the first century, many have observed, that, by a particular providence of God, several of our Saviour's disciples, and of the early converts of his religion, lived to a very great age, that they might personally convey the truth of the gospel to those times, which were very remote from the first publication of it. Of these, besides St. John, we have a remarkable instance in Simeon, who was one of the seventy sent forth, by our Saviour, to publish the

gospel before his crucifixion, and a near kinsman of our Lord. This venerable person, who had probably heard with his own ears our Saviour's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, presided over the church established in that city, during the time of its memorable siege, and drew his congregation out of those dreadful and unparalelled calamities which befel his countrymen, by following the advice our Saviour had given, when they should see Jerusalem encompassed with armies, and the Roman standards, or abomination of desolation, set up. He lived till the year of our Lord 107, when he was martyred under the emperor Trajan.

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#### SECT. VI.

- I. The tradition of the apostles secured by other excellent instructions ;
- II. But chiefly by the writings of the evangelists.
- III. The diligence of the disciples and first Christian converts to send abroad these writings.
- IV. That the written account of our Saviour was the same with that delivered by tradition ;
- V. Proved from the reception of the gospel by those churches which were established before it was written.
- VI. From the uniformity of what was believed in the several churches.
- VII. From a remarkable passage in Irenæus.
- VIII. Records which are now lost of use to the three first centuries, for confirming the history of our Saviour.
- IX. Instances of such records.

I. **T**HUS far we see how the learned Pagans might apprize themselves, from oral information, of the particulars of our

Saviour's history. They could hear, in every church planted in every distant part of the earth, the account which was there received and preserved among them, of the history of our Saviour. They could learn the names, and characters of those first missionaries that brought to them these accounts and the miracles by which God Almighty attested their reports. But the apostles and disciples of Christ, to preserve the history of his life, and to secure their accounts of him from error and oblivion, did not only set aside certain persons for that purpose, as has been already shewn, but appropriated certain days to the commemoration of those facts which they had related, concerning him. The first day of the week was in all its returns a perpetual memorial of his resurrection as the devotional exercises adapted to Friday and Saturday were to denote to all ages that he was crucified on the one of those days and that he rested in the grave on the other. You may apply the same remark to several of the annual festivals instituted by the apostles themselves, or at furthest by their immediate successors, in memory of the most important particulars in our Saviour's history; to which we must add the sacraments instituted by our Lord himself, and many of those rites and ceremonies which obtained in the most early times of the church. These are to be regarded as standing marks of such facts as were delivered by those who were eye-witnesses to them, and which were contrived with great

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wisdom to last till time should be no more. These, without any other means, might have, in some measure, conveyed to posterity the memory of several transactions in the history of our Saviour, as they were related by his disciples. At least, the reason of these institutions, though they might be forgotten, and obscured by a long course of years, could not but be very well known by those who lived in the three first centuries; and a means of informing the inquisitive Pagans in the truth of our Saviour's history, that being the view in which I am to consider them.

II. But lest such a tradition, though guarded by so many expedients, should wear out by the length of time, the four evangelists, within above fifty, or, as Theodoret affirms, thirty years after our Saviour's death, while the memory of his actions was fresh among them, consigned to writing that history, which for some years had been published only by the mouths of the apostles and disciples. The further consideration of these holy penmen will fall under another part of this discourse.

III. It will be sufficient to observe here, that in the age which succeeded the apostles, many of their immediate disciples sent or carried in person the books of the four evangelists, which had been written by the apostles, or at least approved by them, to most of the churches which they had planted in the different parts of the world. This was done with so much diligence, that when Pantænus,

a man of great learning and piety, had travelled into India for the propagation of Christianity, about the year of our Lord 200, he found among that remote people the gospel of St. Matthew, which, upon his return from that country, he brought with him to Alexandria. This gospel is generally supposed to have been left in those parts by St. Bartholomew, the apostle of the Indies, who probably carried it with him, before the writings of the three other evangelists were published.

IV. That the history of our Saviour as recorded by the evangelists, was the same with that which had been before delivered by the apostles and disciples, will further appear in the prosecution of this discourse, and may be gathered from the following considerations.

V. Had these writings differed from the sermons of the first planters of Christianity, either in history or doctrine, there is no question but they would have been rejected by those churches which they had already formed. But so consistent and uniform was the relation of the apostles, that these histories appeared to be nothing else but their tradition and oral attestations made fixed and permanent. Thus was the fame of our Saviour, which in so few years had gone through the whole earth, confirmed and perpetuated by such records as would preserve the traditional account of him to after ages, and rectify it, if at any time, by passing through several generations, it might drop any part that was material, or contract any thing that was false or fictitious.