

## CHAPTER III.

### The Alleged Miracles of Jesus.

If it has now been reasonably shown, that up to the time when he began to work miracles, Jesus had exhibited no other than a human nature; and if neither the probable object of his public career, his personal character, nor his religious and moral instructions, give any evidence of his divinity, we are to inquire as to the reality of his alleged miracles, not only without any previous assumption or bias in their favor, but with the same suspicion and incredulity that we should feel towards the pretended miracles of any other person, and with a determination to scrutinize them as closely as we would any others, and to detect their falsehood, if any falsehood can possibly be detected in them.

It has been argued that no amount of human testimony can be rational evidence of the reality of an alleged miracle; because such testimony must always be liable to this objection, viz: that experience has proved that it is more probable that any number of men would lie, or would be deluded, imposed upon, or mistaken, than that a miracle would be performed. And this objection seems to be a good one ; because we do know that persons have, in cases almost innumerable, been imposed upon by pretended miracles, but we do not know that a real miracle has ever been wrought by the agency of man, or that any miraculous occurrence has ever taken place since the order of nature was established. It probably might also be maintained, that a man's own senses could not be reasonable evidence of a miracle; because men's senses have, in thousands of instances, deceived them in regard to pretended miracles; but we know certainly of no instance where they ever proved the reality of a miracle.

Nevertheless, the following attempted explanation of the alleged miracles of Jesus will not insist upon these arguments, but will proceed upon the supposition that human testimony can be sufficient evidence of the reality of a miracle — assuming, however, the soundness of this principle, viz: that we are not to believe a miracle on human testimony, so long as we can actually discover an inconclusiveness in that testimony, or can detect a possibility of mistake or falsehood in the witnesses. The correctness of this principle I suppose Christians themselves will not have the face to dispute.

One other principle also they must admit, viz: that the object, for which the alleged miracles of Jesus are said to have been wrought, can weigh nothing in favor of their reality; because, if we say that God caused them to be wrought for the purpose of proving a Revelation, we thereby assume that a Revelation exists — which is the very thing in dispute, and which is to be proved by the miracles, if proved at all, and therefore is not proved at all until the miracles are established. If we attempt to prove the Revelation by the miracles, and also the miracles by the Revelation, we reason in a circle. The alleged miracles of Jesus therefore must stand exclusively upon the historical evidence, which tends to sustain them, without any regard being had to the purpose for which they were wrought, if they really were wrought. And they must be supported by evidence as strong as would be necessary to prove the reality of miracles, for the working of which no reason at all could be assigned. [\*1]

But to proceed with the evidence. It is worthy of especial remark, and should be constantly borne in mind, that at the time of Jesus, a miracle was considered, among the Jews, a very common occurrence. Jesus acknowledges that others could perform some of the same kind of miracles, which he himself did, viz : casting out devils. “If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you, (Mat. 12 — 27 & 28. Luke 11 — 19 & 20.) Jesus here impliedly admits, as I understand him, that others performed deeds similar to some of those, which, by himself possibly, and by his disciples unquestionably, were believed to be miracles, and which he professed to perform for the purpose of proving his Messiahship. He however would make a distinction between his supposed miracles, and those of others, by pretending that his were done by the help of the spirit of God, and that those of others were wrought by the help of a different power. But the Pharisees had just been charging him with working by the power of Beelzebub, and how is an impartial person to judge who works by Beelzebub, (supposing there were a Beelzebub,) and who by the power of the Almighty, when both persons perform the same miracles, and each charges the other with working by Beelzebub? or how is an impartial person to know which are real miracles, and which are false, when both are apparently alike? What reason then is there for supposing that the works of Jesus were any better miracles than the works of others?

Jesus also admits (Mark 9 — 38, 39 and 40) that the man, whom his disciples told him they had found casting out devils on his own account, was performing real miracles. True, this man used the name of Jesus; but he did so without authority — so that the miracles must be considered as much his own, as if he had used his own name, or no name at all.

Now, if, as Jesus himself acknowledges, the miracles of others were real ones, the inference is inevitable from these facts, that the power to cast out devils was no evidence that a man was commissioned by God. But, if these performances were not real miracles, Jesus, like the rest of his countrymen, was so ignorant as not to know it, because he expressly acknowledges that they were real.

Again Jesus says (Mat. 24 — 24) that false Christs “shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect.” Now this is equivalent to acknowledging that false Christs could perform works so wonderful that it would be exceedingly difficult to distinguish them from such as he himself wrought. Indeed it is equivalent to acknowledging that an impartial observer would be as likely to believe those to be real, as to believe his to be so. But he evidently believed that there was some supernatural cause why the “elect” would not be deceived by them, for he says, “if it were possible” they would be. And he found it necessary, by declaring such works to be the works of false Christs, and by cautioning his disciples in the strongest manner against them, to prevent them from regarding, or giving any credit to, those works, which, to unbiassed [sic] minds, would appear equally miraculous with his own, and would furnish equally strong evidence as his, that each of the authors of them was the real Messiah instead of himself.

If the works of Jesus were so much more wonderful than man could perform as to deserve to be called miracles, was it not nonsense to caution his disciples so strongly against being deluded by the works of others? [\*2]

What the works of these pretended Messiahs (of whom it is admitted by Christians that there were about seventy, who lived about the time of Jesus), were, I know not — but it is related, on such authority as Christians admit to be true, that some of them got large sects after them. The Rev.. John Newton, in his Dissertations on the Prophecies, (Chap. 19) says that one of them obtained thirty thousand followers. This number is probably many times larger than that of those, who believed in Jesus, during his life lime. The largest estimate, which I have found of his followers at any one time, is, “about five thousand men, besides women and children,” (Mat. 14 — 21), and this estimate is undoubtedly a great exaggeration. Besides, it would appear that of those, who sometimes followed him about in the early part of his career, nearly all soon abandoned him. If then, those, whom Jesus calls false Christs, were so much more successful than himself in gaining adherents, it is in the highest degree probable that their works gave evidence, to those who saw them, of greater miraculous power than his did. So that if we believe there ever was such a being as a real Messiah, we ought, judging from the testimony of the eyewitnesses, (whose testimony alone is good for any thing), on every principle of reason, as far as the evidence of miracles is concerned, to believe that Jesus was not the actual one — but that the one, who obtained, during his life time, the greatest number of followers, was the true one; because these followers, were the eyewitnesses whose testimony constitutes the evidence in either case, and by following a man they expressed their belief in the reality of his pretended miracles. Of course the witnesses must have been more numerous, who could testify to the reality of the miracles of others, than of those of Jesus; and we ought certainly to believe the testimony of a large number rather than the testimony of a few.

The number of those, who were not eyewitnesses, but who might believe on a particular one of these pretended Messiahs after his death, and simply upon the testimony of others, is no evidence at all that one was the real one; because there might be many circumstances, which had nothing to do with the reality of the miracles, that would nevertheless make the pretended miracles of one believed after his death, when those of another would be forgotten. For example, if the followers of one should spread the accounts of his doings, after his death, such an one would continue to be believed after his death, when another, whose disciples should neglect this step, would naturally be forgotten, although his works might be even many times the more wonderful of the two, This was the case with Jesus. He had few followers, in his life time, compared with those of others; but some of his followers circulated the story of his doings, after his death, and by that means his memory was preserved.

It appears to me that even what little has now been said, would be sufficient to satisfy men that Jesus never performed any real miracles, if they would but judge of the probabilities on this subject, as they do on any other subjects of history. But it is not with the Bible as it is with other books, in respect of being believed. There are few men, and probably no women, who believe it because it is probable, (for they do not know, nor dare they inquire, whether or not it be probable), or for any other reason that has any thing like evidence or argument in it. They believe it, almost universally, for one, or the other, or both, of these very potent reasons, viz: either simply because it is the Bible, or because they expect they should be damned if they were to disbelieve it, however improbable it may be — thus virtually charging their Maker with being wicked enough to torture men through eternity, for not having believed, in this world, what was improbable. That “he that believeth not shall be damned,” appears to be the strongest of all

arguments, in the minds of the many, in support of the Bible. It is thus that Christianity, by seizing upon men's fears, and thus making dupes and slaves of their understandings, has preserved its credit in their minds, and its power over their reason, has brought down with it, to this day, some of that credulity for the marvellous [sic], in which it was first established, and has thus prevented men from inquiring, in a rational manner, as otherwise the enlightened portion of the world probably would have done, as to what was probable, and what improbable, in relation to the designs and government of God.

Since then a further examination of the subject of miracles is necessary, I will go into an examination of the separate evidence of each and every miracle, that Jesus is said to have performed, and of which there is any particular account in either of the four narratives of his acts and preaching. The number of these is thirty-three, and no more. Some of these are mentioned by one of the narrators, some by two, some by three, and a single one of them by the four. There are many other general and indefinite accounts of his miracle, such as that, in particular places, he "cured all manner of diseases," or that "he healed all, who were vexed with unclean spirits," or "those who were tormented with plagues," &c. But since many of these thirty-three were recorded by Matthew thirty years afterwards [\*3]— and as many of the same were recorded many years afterward by Mark, who was a follower of Peter, and probably knew nothing of Jesus personally, [\*4] and by Luke also, who was a citizen of Antioch, converted by Paul, and who of course never had any personal knowledge of Jesus, [\*5] there can be no doubt that these were considered the most remarkable that he was ever supposed to perform; otherwise they would not have been remembered and circulated so as to be the most remarkable ones that should come to the knowledge of each of these three different persons.

Many of these supposed miracles will be attempted to be accounted for, by showing them to have been the work of the imagination. Such ones will be examined first, and the others afterward.

The influence of the imagination upon sick persons is known to be very great, and in many cases of modern date, it has been observed and recorded by physicians to have been surprising. There are perhaps few adults, who have ever attended a sick person, that have not observed the sensible and sudden effect of a newly excited hope upon him. All know the importance of sustaining the hopes of a sick man. The reason of this, is, that his nervous system is then, vastly more than in health, susceptible to the influence of particular states of the mind. It is one of the most common observations, in relation to a person dangerously ill, that "if his courage be maintained, and he think he shall recover, he will recover, but if he think he shall die, he certainly will die." The frequent expression of such opinions shows that we are all aware of the influence of the imagination upon the sick, although the philosophy of its operation is perhaps not known to all who know the fact.

There is perhaps no man, even at the present day, who, when sick, although he perfectly well understood every thing about the power of the imagination, is not nevertheless in a very great degree under its influence. Physicians understand this principle in physiology, and many of them avail themselves of it, by holding out encouragement whenever they can do it without running too great a risk of occasioning an injurious effect by a disappointment of the expectations thus raised. It requires very little of the excitement of hope to string the nerves of a sick man, because

they are exceedingly susceptible. Thus many physicians will often give to a sick man medicines, which are simple and powerless of themselves, merely for the sake of the beneficial influence, to be derived from his imagining that he has taken something which is benefitting him.

We all know, too, how little excitement of the feelings, upon a man, who is sick, and apparently destitute of all strength, will occasion insanity, and cause him to exhibit wonderful power. Now he really has no more strength in his muscles, during his insanity, than he had before; but his nervous system has been excited by the operations of his mind, and his latent strength thus called out. It is by the operation of the same principle, that other excitements of the feelings, as a newly inspired expectation of recovery for example, often calls out the latent strength of a sick man to a considerable degree, without making him insane, unless a man may be always properly called insane in just so far as his imagination deceives him.

Further evidence of the power of the imagination to operate upon the sick, and to cure diseases, is furnished by the following extracts, taken from Rees's Cyclopaedia — article, Imagination.

“In the year 1795, an American, of the name of Perkins, introduced into this country (England) a method of curing diseases, for which he obtained the royal letters patent, by means of two small pieces of metal denominated Tractors. These were applied externally near the part diseased, and moved about, gently touching the surface only; and thus multitudes of painful disorders were removed, some most speedily, and some after repeated applications of the metallic points. Pamphlets were published, announcing the wonderful cures accomplished by this simple remedy; and periodical journals and newspapers teemed with evidence of the curative powers of the tractors; insomuch that in a few months they were the subject of general conversation, and scarcely less general use. The religious sect of the Quakers, whose benevolence has been sometimes displayed at the expense of their sagacity, became the avowed and active friends of the tractors; and a public establishment, called the “Perkinean Institution,” was formed under their auspices, for the purpose of curing the diseases of the poor, without the expense of drugs or medical advice. The transactions of this institution were published in pamphlets, in support of the extraordinary efficacy of these new instruments. In somewhat less than six years Perkins left the country, in possession, as we have been informed on good authority, of upwards of ten thousand pounds, the contributions of British credulity; and now (1811) the tractors are almost forgotten.

“We by no means intend to impeach the veracity, of those, who attested the many extraordinary cures performed by the application of the tractors; on the contrary, we have no doubt that many of them were actually accomplished, at least temporarily: after what we have already stated, when treating of animal magnetism (such as the sudden cure of the artist's head-ache, on the bridge, by M. Sigault's gestures), and what we shall proceed to state respecting the effects of counterfeit tractors, it were impossible not to admit the truth and correctness of the majority of the accounts of the efficacy of Perkinism. We must observe, however, that the efficacy was founded on the delusion; and had not the scientific world been at that time in a state of comparative ignorance respecting the principle of which Galvani had recently obtained a glance; had they been in total ignorance of that principle, or possessed of more than that “little knowledge” of it, which “is a dangerous thing,” such an imposture would scarcely have gained ground for a day, among those who were acquainted with the proceedings of “the French

Commissioners in the affair of Mesmer. [\*6] But Perkins associated the idea of the Galvanic principle, or animal electricity, with the operation of his tractors, by constructing them of two different metals, which the Italian philosopher had shown to be necessary to excite the operation of the agent, which he had discovered: and the obscurity, which hung over this subject, left a new field for hypothesis, and the anomalous character of the facts contributed to induce even philosophers to listen to the relation.

“But Dr. Haygarth, to whom his profession and his country are deeply indebted for more important services, suspected the true source of the phenomena produced by the tractors, from the first promulgation of the subject. Recollecting the development [sic] of the animal magnetism, he suggested to Dr. Falconer, about the end of the year 1798, when the tractors had already obtained a high reputation at Bath, even among persons of rank and understanding, that the nature of the operation of the tractors might be correctly ascertained by a pair of false tractors, resembling the real ones: and it was resolved to put the matter to the test of experiment in the general hospital of that city. They therefore contrived two wooden tractors, of nearly the same shape as the metallic, and painted to resemble them in color. Five cases were chosen of chronic rheumatism, in the ankle [sic], knee, wrist and hip: one of the patients had also gouty pains. All the affected joints, except the last, were swelled, and all of them had been ill for several months.

“On the 7th, of January, 1799, the wooden tractors were employed. All the five patients, except one, assured us that their pain was relieved; and three much benefitted by the first application of this remedy. One felt his knee warmer, and he could walk much better, as he showed us with great satisfaction. One was easier for nine hours, and till he went to bed, when the pain returned. One had a tingling sensation for two hours. The wooden tractors were drawn over the skin so as to touch it in the slightest manner. Such is the wonderful force of the imagination.

“Next day, January 8th, the true metallic tractors of Perkins were employed exactly in like manner, and with similar effects. All the patients were in some measure, but not more relieved by the second application, except one, who received no benefit from the former operation, and who was not a proper subject for the experiment, having no existing pain, but only stiffness in her ankle [sic]. They felt, (as they fancied) warmth, but in no greater de-degree [sic] than on the former day.” Of the imagination as a cause, and as a cure of the disorders of the body, exemplified by fictitious tractors and epidemical convulsions. By John Haygarth, M. D. F. R. S. &c. Bath, 1800.

“Such were the experiments attempted with the view of ascertaining the nature of Perkinism. But Dr. Haygarth’s pamphlet contained an account of still more decisive trials made in the Bristol infirmary, by Mr. Smith, one of the surgeons to that establishment. This gentleman first operated with two leaden tractors, on Tuesday, April 19th, on a patient, who had been some time in the Infirmary, ‘with a rheumatic affection of the shoulder, which rendered his arm perfectly useless.’ In the course of six minutes no other effect followed the application of these pieces of lead than a warmth upon the skin: nevertheless the patient informed Mr. Smith, on the following day, that ‘he had received so much benefit, that it had enabled him to lift his hand from his knee, which he had in vain several times attempted on the Monday evening, as the whole ward witnessed.’ But although it was thus proved that the patent tractors possessed no specific powers independent of

simple metals, he thought it advisable to lay aside metallic points, lest the proofs might be deemed less complete. Two pieces of wood, properly shaped and painted, were next made use of; and in order to add solemnity to the farce, Mr. Barton held in his hand a stop watch, whilst Mr. Lax minuted the effects produced. In four minutes the man raised his hand several inches, and he had lost also the pain in his shoulder, usually experienced when attempting to lift any thing. He continued to undergo the operation daily, and with progressive good effect, for on the 25th, he could touch the mantle-piece.

“On the 27th,” Mr. Smith continues, “in the presence of Dr. Lovell and Mr. J. P. Noble, two common iron nails, disguised with sealing wax, were substituted for the pieces of mahogany before used. In three minutes the same patient ‘felt something moving from his arm to his hand, and soon after he touched the Board of Rules, which hung a foot above the fire place. This patient at length so far recovered, that he could carry coals, &c. and use his arm sufficiently to assist the nurse: yet previous to the use of the spurious tractors, ‘he could no more lift his hand from his knee than if a hundred weight were upon it, or a nail driven through it,’ as he declared in the presence of several gentlemen. The fame of this case brought applications in abundance, indeed it must be confessed, that it was more than sufficient to act upon weak minds, and induce a belief that these pieces of wood and iron were endowed with peculiar virtues.” See Dr. Haygarth’s Pamphlet, p. 8.

“Many other equally striking instances of the curative operation of the imagination, when excited by the sham tractors, might be quoted from the pamphlet in question. \*\*\*\*\*

“After having perused this abundant evidence of the powers of the imagination, not only in producing various affections of the body, but in removing others which exist, we can have no difficulty in crediting many relations of cures performed by persons supposed to be gifted with extraordinary powers, or employing other pretended agents, all of which may be referred to the same common principle. One of the most singular instances of this kind, both from the number of cures performed, and the rank, learning and character of the persons, who attested them, is to be found in the person of Valentine Greatraks, who flourished in the latter part of the 17th century.

“The proceedings of this pious and apparently -sincere man are very interesting, as affording a history of the power of imagination and confidence over certain disorders of the body. He was the son of an Irish gentleman of good education and property, who died in his childhood. Disgusted with the religious and political contentions of his country in the time of Cromwell, he retired from the world, apparently in a state of melancholy derangement and bad health, which had nearly terminated fatally. On recovering, he became one of the puritans of the day, and after having acted sometime as a magistrate, he had ‘an impulse of strange persuasion’ in his mind, which continued to present itself, whether he was in public or in private, sleeping or waking, ‘that God had given him the blessing of curing the king’s evil.’ Accordingly he commenced the practice of touching for this disease about the year 1662, which he continued for three years; at this time the ague became very epidemical, and the same impulse within him suggested ‘that there was bestowed upon him the gift of curing the ague,’ which he also practised with success, by laying his hands on the patients. At length he found his power extended to epilepsy and paralytic disorders, &c; but he candidly acknowledges that many were not cured by his touch.

Nevertheless the unbounded confidence in his powers, and consequently the facility with which the imaginations of the ignorant would be acted upon, must be manifest from the following statement, which he sent to Mr. Boyle. ‘Great multitudes from divers places resorted to me, so that I could have no time to follow my own occasions, nor enjoy the company of my family and friends; whereupon I set three days in the week apart (from six in the morning till six at night,) to lay my hands on all that came, and so continued for some months at home. But the multitudes which came daily were so great, that the neighboring towns were not able to accommodate them; whereon, for the good of others, I left my home, and went to Youghall, where great multitudes resorted to me, not only of the inhabitants, but also out of England; so that the magistrates of the town told me, that they were afraid that some of the sick people that came out of England might bring the infection into the place: whereon I retired again to my house at Affane, where (as at Youghall,) I observed three days, by laying my hands on all that came, whatsoever the diseases were (and many were cured, and many were not;) so that my stable, barn and malt house were filled with sick people of all diseases almost, &c.’

“We shall not extend this article by quoting the histories of cases certified by several physicians, as well as by divines and philosophers; among whom were the names of Robert Boyle, Dr. Cudworth, Dr. Whichcot, &c. We may remark, that some of the cases of headache and rheumatism resemble most accurately those which were cured by the spurious tractors abovementioned; and that the hand of Greatraks can only be conceived to have operated in the same way. The influence of the imagination was likewise obvious in several convulsive affections, in the same manner as in the woman at Passy, who fell into the crisis before the magnetism was applied. Greatraks mentions several poor people that went from England to him, ‘and amongst the rest, two that had the falling sickness, who *no sooner saw me, than they fell into their fits immediately;*’ and he restored them, he affirms, by putting his hands upon them. Nay, he tells us, that even the touch of his glove had driven many kinds of pains away, and removed strange fits in women; and that the stroking of his hand or his glove had, in his opinion, and that of other persons present, driven several devils, or evil spirits, out of a woman, one after the other, ‘every one having been like to choke her (when it came up to her throat,) before it went forth.’ Now this whole description contains a pretty accurate picture of an ordinary hysterical fit, with its attendant *globus*, terminating with the discharge of flatus.

“About the same period, a Capauchin friar, whose name was Francisco Bagnon, was famous in Italy for the same gift of healing, by the touch of the hands only; and was attended wherever he went by great multitudes of sick people, upon whom he operated numerous and surprising cures, which were deemed true miracles. So general was the belief in his curative powers, that even a prince of Parma, who had labored under a febrile disease for the space of six months, was induced to apply to him, and was immediately cured by his voice only. The prince himself, and many others that were present, afterwards bore public testimony to the fact.” \* \* \* \* \*

“ But it is unnecessary to enumerate the individuals, the De Mainaducs, the Prescotts, &c. who have at various times been distinguished by the possession of various occult methods of healing the sick. The practice has occasionally prevailed in almost all ages; and we have seen, in the details of experiments above related, that the faculty of the imagination, in certain habits and conditions of the body, and especially in the irritable female constitution, is actually capable of



producing all those effects on the corporeal frame, which have been deemed the result of occult agency and extraordinary powers.”

“Admitting this, then, as an established principle of the human constitution, and making due allowances for the exaggerations and misrepresentations of ignorance and superstition, we are enabled to give a rational explanation of many historical relations, which have been considered as altogether fabulous, or as direct violations of truth. We are well aware of the facility with which the imagination is excited in an uninformed person, and more particularly in an age of profound ignorance, which is, for that reason, commonly an age of superstition. We know, too, that in the middle ages, when every form of science was almost unknown, and the laws of nature had not been investigated, the smallest discovery in natural philosophy, chemistry, or astronomy, was deemed the result of supernatural communication with the world of spirits; and the discoverer or possessor of the knowledge was looked upon as a being gifted with supernatural powers. In such a state of the human mind, when natural philosophy, meagre as it was, was disguised with the name, and clothed with all the supposed agencies of magic; and when every person, with a little more knowledge than his neighbors, was master of so many magnets so many tractors, by which he could rule the imaginations of the multitude; it cannot be the subject of our wonder, that the magician’s rod (or the philosopher’s cane) should produce such mighty operations, or that a scrap of his writing should be a remedy for many maladies. These only executed what was afterwards performed by M. Deslon’s extended fingers, and Valentine Greatrak’s glove! The effects, then, of the incantations, amulets, and all the arts of magic, witchcraft and astrology, by which the more artful pretenders to superior knowledge imposed upon the people, may be allowed to have actually occurred, and to have been the result of natural causes; and they are plainly referrible [sic] to one common source, with those of animal magnetism, Perkinism, and various other modifications of the imagination in fetters.

“It is scarcely necessary to add, that during the same periods of ignorance and superstition, those extremely pious and comparatively learned persons, who have been enrolled in the catalogue of saints, must necessarily have obtained the most complete veneration and confidence from the multitude; and hence, after their death, every relic of their bodies or clothing, the shrines in which they were entombed, fragments of the instruments of their execution (in cases of martyrdom,) and every other object that could excite, by association, those reverential feelings, usually called up by a contemplation of their characters, would become so many agents upon the imaginations, by which all the extraordinary changes in the animal economy above described, might be effectually produced. Thus we cannot doubt that there is much foundation for the histories of recovery from various diseases, occasioned by removing the sick to the tombs of celebrated worthies, or placing them before the statues and images of these persons, or by touching them with nails taken from the coffins, or rings from the fingers, or the bones of the fingers themselves of these saints, or by the influence of an infinity of relics of this sort, which cannot be supposed to possess less power over a superstitious mind, than the painted tractors of a surgeon, or the glove of an enthusiast.”

In the New Edinburgh Encyclopaedia, (Am. Ed.) in the article on Animal Magnetism, we find the following, among other testimony to the power of the imagination in curing diseases.

The pamphlet of Dr. Haygarth, on the metallic tractors, “amply confirms the general principle, that the power of the imagination in the cure of diseases is almost without limits; so that, except a complete and sudden alteration of physical structure, or the restoration of lost parts, there is scarcely any change so considerable, which may not be effected through its intervention. It not only possesses an indefinite power over what are styled nervous diseases, where the primary affection consists, as far as we can judge, in some change in the action of the brain and its appendages ; but even diseases of the sanguiferous system, and of the different organic functions, appear to be by no means exempted from its influence.”

“In proof of his hypothesis, and of the power of magnetism over the human body, Mesmer” (the pretended discoverer of animal magnetism,) “and his adherents confidently appealed to their success in the cure of diseases; and so great did this appear, and so unquestionable was the evidence, on which it seemed to be founded, that, for some time, scarcely any opposition was made to it, and it was regarded as the most unreasonable scepticism to doubt of its reality.”

And yet after this method of curing diseases had had this astonishing success, and had obtained this astonishing reputation, it was completely ascertained, by experiments made upon persons blindfolded, and upon those who doubted the system, (whose imaginations of course would not be so easily affected), that the previous cures had all been but the work of the imagination. These experiments were conducted by nine Commissioners, men of learning and science, appointed by the French King in 1784 to investigate the matter. Of this board of Commissioners, Dr. Franklin, then American Minister at Paris, was one.

Many other cases, of wonderful cures wrought by the imagination, are cited in the article in Rees' Cyclopaedia, from which a part of the foregoing extracts are taken. But enough have been quoted to establish, beyond cavil, I trust, that the imagination is capable of exerting a sudden and very exciting power over the nervous system, and of thus producing, what, by the ignorant and superstitious, would be considered miraculous effects in the restoration of the sick.

Now there probably have seldom, if ever, been causes in existence calculated to operate so strongly upon the imagination of a sick man, without making him actually insane, as were those which must have operated upon such as, for the time, thought themselves cured by Jesus; and perhaps the world never furnished a people more easily to be operated upon by the method and pretensions of Jesus, than were those among whom he preached. They were simple and superstitious to a degree hardly to be conceived of by us, as is proved by the fact of their running all agog after so many of those pretended miracle-workers, that infested Judea at that time.

The nation of the Jews at large, believed themselves the peculiar favorites of God; they believed that God often sent messengers to them, and in order to prove such to be his messengers, gave them miraculous powers. About the time of Jesus they expected a remarkable one to be called the Messiah. They supposed he would possess these powers in an unusual degree. Those, who followed Jesus, and supposed themselves benefitted by him, believed him to be this Messiah. It was evidently necessary, in order to be benefitted by his power, that they should believe, in advance, that he possessed it, as appears from Matthew 13-59, “and he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” At another time, (Mat. 9-28 and 29,) when two blind men wished to be cured, he asked them, “Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said “yea, Lord.”

Then says he, “according to your faith, be it unto you.” The same inference is fairly deducible from numerous other passages and circumstances.

Keeping these facts in our minds, let us look at the cure of the palsy, as described by Matthew, (9-2 to 8) Mark (2-1 to 12) and Luke (5-17 to 26)—by Luke the most minutely.

Imagine Jesus surrounded by a multitude, who came to him from every quarter, who believed him to be the Messiah, and to have miraculous power; imagine him to have been going from place to place, preaching as if by the authority of God- the report going before him that he cured all manner of diseases wherever he went; imagine so great a crowd around him that the man sick of palsy could not be carried in at the door of the house and that it was necessary to uncover the roof to let him down there where Jesus was, in his ability to cure him carried on a bed by four, to the place where Jesus was, full of the highest expectations; imagine him waiting and witnessing the crowd around full of the same extravagant expectations with himself, witnessing also the preparations being made to let him down through the roof of the house, to bring him into the presence of the wonderful being who was to restore him at a word—(during such a scene, if he had a spark of nervous vitality in him, it must have been set most powerfully at work;) imagine him at length laid in the presence of this messenger from God, this Messiah, imagine Jesus pardoning his sins with the assumed authority of God; imagine him telling the bystanders, in the hearing of the sick man, that he could cause him to rise up and walk as easily as he could forgive his sin; (certainly, at this time, the man’s nervous system must have been wrought to an extraordinary degree of excitement, if he had life in him)- then hear Jesus pronounce, in his oracular and confident manner, “That ye may know that the son of man hath power on earth to forgive his sins, I say unto thee, arise; and take up thy couch, and go thy way into thy house;” and is there anything strange in the fact that he should receive strength, should rise up and walk? or that he should take with him his bed (such a sack of straw as it probably was, judging from the circumstance of its being let down through the roof of the house)? To my mind there is nothing in all this, which cannot be accounted for in the well known principles of physiology, even supposing the restoration to have been a permanent one. Here are the plain and obvious causes, sufficient to produce the effect, without any supernatural evidence whatsoever. [\*7]

If these views are correct, here was no miracle at all, even supposing the man to have really had palsy. But suppose (a thing to the mind exceedingly probable) that this man only imagined himself to have palsy- or that he had some slight infirmity, which he, knowing nothing of the disease, as the ignorant and simple people of that age and nation probably did, brought himself to believe to be the palsy;—and what sort of miracle do we have here to prove that Jesus possessed supernatural powers? I say it is probable that the disease was not a real palsy, because ignorant, superstitious, and timid men, such as those that among whom Jesus preached, generally magnify a slight infirmity into a grievous disease, particularly if there is any person going about the country pretending to cure diseases in a wonderful manner. Persons who live within the circuit of such a man’s travels, generally have diseases more malignant, and more in a number than the rest of the human family.

Besides, Luke, after relating the fact of Jesus’s being where he was, of their being great assemblage, &c., says, that a man was brought, who “was taken with a palsy.” This language naturally conveys that a man was taken just at that time, and if so, there are a thousand chances

against one that these simple men who would make something marvelous out of every circumstance that could, by the aid of an enormous gullibility, be made so; who probably knew no more of the disease than they knew about astronomy, and who the character of the attack, rather than that it should be the real palsy; because that is an illness, that very rarely occurs. The patient himself too, would be as likely to be mistaken as the bystanders, and if he thought he had the palsy, (and is such a suggestion had been made, he would be very likely to think so,) and that Jesus would take the trouble to display his miraculous power upon him, he would most surely keep up the appearance of a palsied man as well as he could.

Further, if the bare conversation, of those around, about Jesus performing strange cures, should make a simple man imagine he had some disease which needed curing, when he had no real illness or difficulty at all, it would be no very remarkable instance of the power of the imagination.

Reader, decide upon the testimony before you go any farther. Is there, or is there not here, unequivocal evidence that a genuine miracle was performed? Decide upon this case again, separately and independently of all others. Each alleged miracle must stand solely upon its own evidence; for even if Jesus performed any real miracles, there is no doubt the country would be full of stories about miracles which were not real, and therefore we are not to believe there was a real miracle in any particular case. I will answer for the reader, that there is not room for even a decent pretence that here was a miracle.

The second supposed miracle of Jesus, that will be examined, is related by Matthew, (8-14 and 15,) Mark (1-30 and 31,) and Luke (4-39 and 39.) It is the cure of Peter's wife's mother. The stories here leave quite too wide a latitude for doubt as to the reality and severity of the disease; for these simple beings probably did not know a fever from any other trivial complaint. Luke indeed says it was "a great fever." But Luke was not there, and possibly before the story reached his ears, several years afterwards, the truth might have been a little exaggerated. This too is precisely such language as one would use, who wished to make it appear that a miracle was actually wrought, when the supposed miracle was of a sort, that, unless there were some qualifying word, as "great," in this instance, inserted, those, who should read the account would see at once that there was doubtless no miracle at all.

But, independently of the word "great," Luke's whole account goes to show that this fever was all imaginary and brought on (as diseases sometimes are now) by the vicinity of a physician, who was thought able to cure any thing. He says that Jesus "entered into Simon's house," and immediately he adds, "that Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever." It would appear from this account that she was taken after Jesus had entered the house. If he were thus suddenly taken and thus suddenly cured, both the sickness and the cure were undoubtedly the work of the imagination.

But supposing the affair not to have been quite so farcical as it probably was, and supposing that when Jesus entered the house, she thought herself somewhat ill, and lay on the bed, and that when he "stood over her and rebuked the fever," pretending to have miraculous power, she, felt able to rise and do what she is said to have done, still here is no evidence fit to be thought of to prove a miracle. From the greatness of the number of sick, whom Jesus is said to have cured, it is

evident that the diseases were either trivial or entirely imaginary; and this was undoubtedly a case of the common kind, and one that could have been cured as well by the sight of Paul's handkerchief, or by the shadow of Peter, as those that were thus cured. (Acts 19-12-and 5-15 and 16.)

The third case to be examined is that of the woman, who had an "issue of blood," (menorrhagia undoubtedly) It is related by Matthew (9-20-22,) Mark (5-25 to 34,) and Luke (8-43 to 48.) This case affords all excellent illustration of the manner in which miracles were wrought upon the sick. This woman not only believed that Jesus had miraculous power to cure the sick, but she even believed that a miracle would be wrought upon her simply by her touching his garment without his knowledge, and of course, without his power being exerted. And so the event proved, if Mark and Luke are to be believed. It was the simple touching of his garment, as they say that healed her. Mark says that "straightway" after touching, "she felt in her body that she was made whole of that plague," and also, that after Jesus had made the sagacious discovery that "virtue had gone out of him," and inquired who touched him, the woman "knowing what was" (already) "done in her," came forward and told him the truth. He then told her that her faith had already made her whole.

Luke also says that the issue of blood stanch'd immediately upon her touching his garment. The he goes on to say that Jesus made the inquiry, who had touched him, and that the woman declared to him before them all, that she had touched him, and how "she was" (had been) "healed immediately." There is no room for quibble upon this language. Either his garments possessed miraculous power, or it was her imagination that healed her, or she was not healed at all—for though an evangelist say it, and though Jesus himself may have said it, (which is not very likely,) no reasonable being can believe that he was filled with a sort of miraculous "virtue," which, when a person touched his garment, passed out of him, as electricity passes out of a cylinder, and that he would feel it leave him, as he is represented to have done, and that too when he did not know beforehand that any person was going to touch his garment.

But—to throw this disgusting nonsense about his "virtue", out of the question—there is a rational and obvious explanation of this matter. It is this. Her faith, in the efficacy of simply touching his garment, was so strong, that when she had touched it, she immediately did imagine, or did "feel in her body," that she was healed, and told the bystanders so. They took her word that it was really so, without ever troubling themselves to ascertain whether she were permanently healed. There were too many of these cures going on before their eyes for them to inquire a second time in relation to one, which they supposed had once had once been well performed. From the moment of the supposed cure, the story would circulate, and these narrators afterwards recorded it as it came to them having probably never heard of the condition of the woman after the time of the transaction; yet not doubting that there were both a permanent cure and a miracle.

The fourth case, which will be examined is that of the man, who was said to have a withered hand. It is related by Matthew (12-10 to 13,) Mark (3-1 to 6,) and Luke (6-6 to 11.) Independent of the improbability that a miracle was ever wrought on earth, there are two palpable ones against the truth of this story. One is, that a withered limb is met with so rarely, that the chances are as all hundred to one, that those ignorant persons would call a limb withered, when it only

had some slight affection, rather than that it should be in reality withered. Another improbability of the change, in a man's power to use his hand, being so great as to afford any evidence of miraculous power, arises from the circumstance, that of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were among the most enlightened part of the community, and of course the least likely to be imposed on in any case of an attempted or pretended miracle, there were some present, and they, when they say the act which others supposed to be a miracle, were enraged at Jesus for what he had done. The narrators of this event attribute their anger to the fact that this act was done on the Sabbath day. But it is most manifestly absurd to suppose that men, such as they undoubtedly were, could look on and see a man's hand, that was actually withered, restored and made whole by a word, and then have the hardihood to attempt violence, or plot mischief against the being who had done it. Men are not such monsters. But if the fact was as all the probability of the case goes to show it to have been, viz, that in consequence of some slight infirmity, this simple man imagined his hand to be withered, and had not used it as usual, but, when commanded by Jesus, in whose miraculous power he had confidence, to stretch it forth, he used a little more effort than he was accustomed to, and stretched [sic] it out, and then, that many of the more ignorant ones, such as his disciples, should say a miracle had been wrought, it is perfectly natural that the Scribes and Pharisees should be enraged at seeing them thus duped by a fanatic and mere pretender.

Jesus made few or no converts among the enlightened part of the very nation that he pretended to be sent more especially to convert. Instead of working his miracles freely before such that they might be convinced, he, when in another instance, they had asked him to show them a sign—apparently for the express purpose of enabling them to determine whether he were the Messiah—called them (probably not to their face however) a wicked and adulterous generation for seeking a sign, by which they might ascertain that fact, (Mat. 16-4.) He was also continually fomenting the most narrow, liberal and spiteful prejudices against them, in the minds of his ignorant followers. Such conduct, on his part, can be accounted for only by the fact, that when they saw, with their own eyes, those acts, which he called miracles, they, instead of being satisfied that he was the Messiah, were satisfied that he was an impostor.

The Bible represents the Jews as having been a people, upon whom God had bestowed peculiar privileges, with a view of making them the depositories or the true relations and or preparing them for the reception of the Messiah. Now if these representations in the Bible were true, and if Jesus were the Messiah, whom God had been preparing the minds of the Jews to receive it is absolutely absurd to suppose that they would not have been the very first to have been convinced and the fact, that they were not convinced, can be accounted for only by supposing, either that God was defeated and disappointed in his attempts to prepare them to receive the Messiah, or that Jesus was not the Messiah.

But to return. After Jesus had performed his supposed miracle, "he withdrew himself from thence," (evidently through fear of the Jews,) "and charged the people that had followed him, "that they should not make him known," (Mat. 12-14 to 16.) Very dignified conduct, indeed, for a Son of God, or a Saviour of the world, and one too who could work miracles! But such was his course continually; and such cowardice reveals the character of the man, and shows us how much credit is due to his pretensions. If he had really been what he claimed to be, or had had any thing like moral courage, he would have better sustained the character he had assumed, and

would have scorned that practice of skulking, which he so often adopted—another still more contemptible instance of which, related by John (7-1 to 10,) has been before referred to.

The fifth case, that related by John (5-2 to 9) only, of the “impotent man” at the pool of Bethesda, was probably like the last. The man, as simple ones generally, and others sometimes, do, probably magnified his infirmity, in his imagination, to a degree beyond the reality, and when he was commanded to rise and walk, he made more effort, and walked better, than usually, and that was a miracle.

The man evidently had full faith that he should be restored by being put into a pool, as is shown by the fact of his being, at the pool for that purpose; and if he had been put in precisely at the time when the supposed the angel had troubled the waters, he would probably have been restored in the same manner that others were. But if he had been put ill at any other time, he would have received no benefit- and for the very good reason, that he would not have expected to receive any.

The facts that a great “multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt and withered,” waited at this pool for the meet to trouble the waters; that every one was cured of whatever disease he had, by being the first then to step in; and that none were cured, except such as stepped in first, prove that both the diseases and the cures were entirely, or in a great degree, imaginary. There was apparently just as much efficacy in the supposed troubling of the pool by an angel, and in the diseased person’s being the first to step in after that had been done, as there was in the command of Jesus to rise and walk, and no more. They both directed the imaginations of the superstitious, and that effected till the cures there were in the cases.

Here too we are enabled to see how much of a miracle Jesus performed in restoring the “withered hand,” for John says that the “withered” could be restored by stepping into this Pool, after the angel had troubled it, and before any other had been in. If then the withered, could in any case be cured by the power of the imagination, they would as likely be when Jesus pretended to work a miracle upon them, as when they stepped into a pool.

The circumstance too that there were so many withered people, as it is intimated by John that there were, at this point, shows that that there is no reason in believing that they were actually withered; because that is an affection, that is exceedingly rare. Yet those at the pool, who imagined themselves withered, are as likely to have been really so, as the one whose hand Jesus is said to have restored.

The sixth case, that one of the woman, who had “a spirit of infirmity,” being “bound by Satan,” as Jesus said (Luke 13-11 to 16); also the seventh case, the cure of one leper, (Mat. 8-2 to 4, Mark 1-40 to 44, Luke 5-12 to 14); also the eighth case, the cure of ten lepers!(Luke 17-12 to 19), (who ever saw ten lepers at a time?) also the ninth case, the cure of the dropsy, (Luke 14-2 to 4), were all undoubtedly cures of the same kind as those that were performed by Valentine Greatrak’s glove, or by stepping into the pool of Bethesda first after it was supposed that the waters had been troubled by an angel. It is very probable that nine, out of the ten, of these lepers, did not consider themselves restored, for although one returned to thank Jesus for what he had done, the nine did not take that trouble.

We here have the opportunity to see on how slight a pretence these narrators would make up a story of genuine, undoubted miracle. These lepers are represented as standing “afar off,” from Jesus, and calling him to be healed. He simply tells them to go to the priest. They go, and nine of them do not return. Yet Luke says the whole were cleansed. Now, if they did not return, how did they know whether they were cleansed or not? Why, he inferred they must have been, and related it for a fact that they were, although he knew nothing about it.

There is no reason for supposing that any of these cures were any better ones than those effected at the pool, and it is clear that the cures at the pools were all the work of the imagination, or that the diseases themselves were so, and that there was no efficacy in the waters; because, if there had been any efficacy in the waters, people would have learned that the second one, who should step in after gurgling the water, could be healed as well as the sons, whom Jesus cured, it is reasonable to suppose, had no diseases more real, or more difficult to cure, than the others, and were restored, or apparently restored, solely by being made to imagine themselves miraculously operated upon.

There are four different cases recorded of the cure of the blind persons, viz: one in Matthew (9-27 to 30), where two were cured; one in Mark (8-22 to 26), where one was cured; one in John (9-1 to 7), where one was cured; one in Mathew (20-30 to 34), Mark (10-46 to 52), and Luke (18-35 to 43), where one, according to Mark and Luke, and two, according to Matthew, were cured. The accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, in the last case, refer to the same transaction, as appears by the context—for it took one place, as they all say, when Jesus was near Jericho; and the similarity of the language, quoted by all, as having been used by the blind person or persons, confirms the fact. True it is, these cautious and credible historians disagree as to the number cured; but in relating so probably facts as miracles, such a slight discrepancy does not at all impair the credibility of the men as to all important particulars. Such a disagreement is not, in fact, at all material, for blind men in those days, judging from the Bible, were nearly as frequent as those who could see.

These also were probably cured in the same way as were those “blind” persons, who, John says, (5-3 and 4), were cured at the pool of Bethesda- and they were probably just as blind as these, and no more so. How did it happen that these blind persons were so numerous? Was the blindness real, feigned, imaginary, total or partial? To give a correct answer to this last question, it is only necessary to take into consideration the number of those called blind, and the manner in which those at the pool were cured.

Some of these blind men also seem to have had the power of locomotion rather unusual, to say the least, in really blind persons. On one occasion, (Mat. 9-27, 28), “two blind men followed Jesus, and when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him.” On another occasion (John 9-7) he told the blind man to “go, wash in the pool of Siloam,” and the blind man “went his way.”

In some cases it appears that Jesus cured the blind man on certain conditions. For example, in one case (Mat. 9-28 and 29), he required of the blind men that they should believe, in advance, that he was “able” to restore their sight, and consented to heal them only in proportion to their



faith. It requires but half an eye to see that the object of this condition was, to have something to attribute his failure to, in case his “miraculous power” should not “work well.” He, in that case, would unquestionably have said “O ye of little faith, why did ye doubt?” and would thus have made those masses believe that the failure was owing to their doubts. In other instances he used more jugglery and ceremony than would seem to be necessary, if he were a real miracle worker. In the case related by John (9-6 and 7), “he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said to him, go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” In the case, which is related by Mark only (8-22 to 26), he led the man out of the town to do it; he then spit on his eyes, and put his hands on him, and then asked him if he could see. The man could not then see clearly, although he could see well enough to discover that a man looked like a tree. Jesus then put his hands upon his eye again, and bade him look up! whereupon the man saw distinctly. Jesus then commanded him, “neither to go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town”—a very singular command to be given by one, who was working real miracles in order to prove to the world at large that he was the Messiah.

We, of course, cannot say absolutely that there could not have been real miracles performed here; but, if there were, any but “blind men” can see that they were not wrought in a workmanlike manner.

The next case, being the fourteenth, that will be examined, is that of the alleged restoration of the daughter of Jairus from the dead, and is related by Matthew (9-18 to 26), Mark (5-22 to 48), and Luke (8-41 to 56). Now, supposing the story true, that the child arose, when Jesus “took her by the hand,” that does not prove that a miracle was performed, because we do not know that she was dead. These narrators say only what is equivalent to saying that those in the house believed her dead; but it would appear, from Luke’s account, that after Jesus had seen the child, he said she was not dead, but that she slept.

The child, say the accounts, was twelve years old. How often is it that children of that age have fits, which for a sort time, cause them to appear dead, and immediately afterwards, restored to health? How soon, after Jesus went into the room, she arose, we cannot know, because those who give us the story, did not see the transaction—they expressly say that, of his followers, only Peter, James and John were suffered to go with him. Whether Jesus lifted her up, as he did Simon’s wife’s mother, we do not know, but there is ground for the strongest presumption that he did, because “he took her by the hand.”

The most rational supposition that can be formed from the three indefinite and carelessly told stories, which come from men—who did not see the transaction, is, that the child had a fit, (perhaps only a common fainting fit), and lay apparently dead at the time the father ran for Jesus; and that when he arrived at the house, and therefore he went into the room where the child was, those, that had been in the room, but had then come out, told him that she was dead; but that, by the time he had come to the child, the fit had left her, and she lay asleep; and that then, in the course of the time he remained in the room, (how long that might be is uncertain), he spoke to her, took her by the hand and lifted her up, and that she then had in a considerable degree recovered. If such were the case, the story has come to us in just the shape we would suppose such a story would, coming, as this does, from men, who did not see anything that they relate, but who honestly believed, from what they heard, that a miracle was performed.

But there are two or three circumstances, which render it extremely doubtful whether there was anything in this occurrence, which, to the eyes of the actual witnesses, appeared so marvelous as the case, above supposed, would have been likely to do. One is, that Jesus, when they came to him first, and told him the child was dead, would permit but three of his disciples to go in with him; and after the transaction (whatever it might be) was over, he charged them, and the parents also, to say nothing of it to anyone. Another link in this chain of suspicious circumstance, is, that John, who, as the others say, was an eye-witness, says not a syllable about the matter. Now, since Jesus would permit but three of his disciples to go in, and charged all, who were eye-witnesses, to reveal nothing, and as John, in his narrative obeys this injunction, the fair presumption is, that Jesus, when he heard she was dead, doubted his ability to restore her, and did not choose to have too many witnesses to a failure, and that after he had come into the room, the transaction was not of such a kind, that he thought it safe for his reputation as a miracle-worker, that it should be known abroad; but that Matthew, Mark and Luke afterward obtained an inkling of the affair, which in some way leaked out, and which proved sufficient to enable them to make such a brief account of a supposed miracle as they have done.

Are we to believe a revelation on the testimony of works done in secret, and ordered to be kept secret?

The fifteenth case is related by John (4-46 to 54) of the cure of the son of a nobleman of Capernaum. It appears that Jesus did not see the subject of this miracle, He was at home; the father came to Jesus, and was told by him that his son lived; he (the father) then went away alone, and, as John says, met his servants, who told him that his son was better, &c. Now, since John did not go with the father, nor see the son, or know any thing personally about the time of his beginning to amend, all the testimony, that we have here to support the slightest possible pretence of a miracle, is simple John's virtual declaration that he heard how, or from whom, he heard it, the deponent saith not), that at the same hour when Jesus told the man his son should live, the son began to amend; and that he (John) had no doubt, from these circumstances, that Jesus wrought a miracle upon the sick man. But I suppose the day has gone by when such "circumstantial evidence" as this, is sufficient to prove a miracle.

The sixteenth case, is that related by Matthew (8-6 to 13) and Luke (7-2 to 10), of the Centurion's servant at Capernaum, and is probably the same one as the last; but as the accounts differ a little. I thought proper to consider them as referring, to different transactions. Here two the person sick was at a distance from Jesus; so that even if Jesus were at the time, (which, if true, is not stated), he could not have personally known any thing about the cure, and could only have heard of it, in a particular case, of such circumstances as satisfied his minds that there was one. Besides another part of Matthew's story cannot be true. That man said his servant was "sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." This could not be the case, because palsy, instead of grievously tormenting folks, never occasions pain, but generally deprives them of all sensibility to pain.

But supposing the servant did have sudden painful attack of some sort, which alarmed the Centurion, and then, while the Centurion was gone to Jesus, did actually recover from it, that is no proof of a miracle, because such temporary illnesses are frequent occurrences.

I now come to the examination of those cases, where Jesus is said to have cast out devils. But we will first inquire whether there ever were such a thing as men's being possessed of devils. There is perhaps not an enlightened Christian in America, who, notwithstanding he in may believe that, at the time of Jesus, men were possessed of devils, believes that they ever have been in any other instances, either before or since. And those, who believe that such was the fact then, believe it simply because a particular set of superstitious men, in a superstitious age, believed so, and have related some circumstances about it, which they say happened at that time.

The testimony of the whole Jewish nation, who did not also believe in Jesus, would not have made them credit it for a moment. If the same thing, had been stated in any other book than the Bible, men now would no more credit it, than they would an assertion that men were inhabited by the spirits of oxen and horses. Yet such is the unparalleled gullibility of some men in relation to every thing related in the Bible, or connected with Christianity.

There are indeed many Christians now, who do not pretend to believe in this matter literally. They will say that they suppose those individuals, out of whom Jesus was said to cast devils, were insane, or had some disorder, which the people of that nation, being ignorant of diseases, attributed to the influence of "evil or unclean spirits;" and that whatever that disorder may have been, Jesus cured it miraculously. But if such men will look at the accounts as they are told to us in the New Testament, taking the collateral circumstances, which are related, as facts, it is absolutely out of the power of the human mind, either by sophistical interpretation of language, or by any possible perversion of intellect, to believe that those persons were insane, or that they had any disorder, unless an imaginary one, other than that of being actually and unequivocally inhabited by such evil spirits, as, if they really existed, might more properly be denominated devils than anything else. The narratives of the doings of Jesus state the precise number of devils, that went out of particular individuals—thus leaving no chance for equivocation, or any apology for the pretence till the persons were insane, in the ordinary acceptation of the word. For example, out of Mary Magdalen there actually went seven devils—seven individual spirits, or this affair being possessed of devils was all a delusion. In other cases, Jesus is said to have cast out one, and, and in one instance a legion. If therefore risen will believe the Bible, they just believe in Devils too.

These accounts say further that these devils would speak. Mark says (5-12), after having spoken of a legion of devils being cast out, that "all the devils besought him, saying, send us into the swine, treat we may enter into them." If we believe the truth of these narratives, there is no escape from believing that there were such living and speaking creatures as devils, who inhibited both men and—swine!

Here the believer, or rather the one who wishes to be a believer (for I do not think it possible for any person of common knowledge and common sense any longer to be actually so) may perhaps, in the height of his embarrassment, put the question, how then are these accounts to be explained, unless we believe that those, who relate them, were knaves and liars? To answer this question is very easy. The people of that nation were superstitious enough to believe in devils, (as people have sometimes believed in witches), and to believe that they entered into men, and then controlled them as they pleased. When such a belief was prevalent, it is to be expected that

among, the more ignorant, who composed the great body of the community, there would be multitudes, who would imagine themselves to be possessed of them, just as some person, who have believed in witchcraft, have imagined themselves; bewitched. A person, who should suppose himself under the dominion of devils, would imagine himself actually compelled, by a power which he could not resist, to such unnatural and strange conduct as he believed an evil spirit would instigate men to. And this fact accounts for the conduct of the man, (or men, for here the stories disagree), spoken of by Matthew (8-28 to 34), Mark (5-1 to 17), and Luke (8-27 to 36), who was said to live among the tombs; to be driven by the devil into the wilderness, &c. A man in this condition, could be restored in no other way than by some deception of the imagination. This man was so restored. He believed Jesus to be the son of God, as is proved by the fact that he addressed him as the "Son of the most high God." He believed also that Jesus had power over evil spirits, as is proved by the circumstance that he besought him not to torment him." When therefore this powerful being should command the devils to go out of him, he, of course, would suppose that they had left him, and would then appear the sane. As for the rest of the circumstances related, such as that of the devils talking going into the swine, &c., they are only such embellishments as a story of that kind would naturally gain by a very little circulation in such a community as that—and these historians, who give us the accounts, having, like the rest of their countrymen, perfect faith in the reality of such circumstances, would relate them, as they board them, without in the least doubting their truth. It is evident that they only recorded the flying story of the, from the fact that they disagree as to the number healed. Matthew says two, Mark and Luke but one. That their different accounts refer to the same transaction, is evident from the similarity of the stories, and the language of each, and also from the circumstance that they are related by each immediately after the story of Jesus's calming the tempest.

Besides the above, there are five different instances of Jesus's casting out devils. One is related by Mark (1-23 to 26), and Luke (4-33 to 35). From both these accounts, it appears that the man, out of whom the devil was supposed to be cast, considered Jesus "the HOLY one of God; and that circumstance is sufficient evidence that the cure, like the disease, was the work of the imagination.

Another case is related by Mark only, (7-25 to 30). All that Mark knew of this case, as appears from his account, was, that he heard, (for he is not supposed to have been with Jesus) that a woman come to Jesus, and told him that her daughter, who was at home, was possessed or a devil; that he told her the devil had gone out; and that when she arrived at home, she found her daughter lying on a bed. To Mark's mind, and perhaps also to the minds of some men in more modern ages of the world, these facts, thus obtained, proved a miracle.

Another case is related by Matthew (17-14 to 21), Mark (9-17 to 29), and Luke (9-38 to 42). According to Mark's account, Jesus "rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit. I charge thee, COME OUT OF HIM, and enter no more into him." (Can anything be imagined more ludicrous or disgusting than such a speech? Verily, "never man spake like this man"). Still, after he had said thus, "the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him, and he was as one dead, insomuch that many said he is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he—AROSE!" and from the circumstance that he did arise, and probably appear more calm than before, they all inferred that he had been delivered of a real devil.

This wonderful exhibition of miraculous power so astonished Jesus's disciples, that they afterwards asked him why they could not cast him out? (They, it seems, had attempted it, and failed, (Mark 9-18). He answered—doubtless with an air and manner becoming the solemn nature of the case—that “this kind (of devils) can come forth (be brought forth) by nothing, but by prayer and—fasting!

Another case is related by Matthew only (9-32 to 34) of the cure of a dumb man, possessed of a devil. I will here add nothing, but a note of admiration, which appears to be very much needed, to the following brief, but graphic description of this affair by Matthew himself. “And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake, and the multitudes marvelled!”

The last case of this kind of miracle-working, that remains to be mentioned, is that of the cure of the man, who, according to Luke (11-14), was dumb, but, according to Matthew (12-22), was blind and dumb. Both accounts refer to the same transaction, as may be seen by the context following each. The difference in the accounts, of course, proves only the honesty of the writers; it does, by no means, prove their lack of inspiration, their carelessness about particulars, or their readiness to record any idle story, which they might hear, without inquiring cautiously into its truth. Each one supposed that future generations could only wish to know the simple fact that a miracle was wrought; and therefore, not imagining that they themselves could ever be suspected of having been mistaken as to the reality of the miracles did not trouble themselves to relate many of those circumstances, that would enable men now to judge whether they actually were or not.

Matthew says that “they brought unto Christ one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.” Luke says, “and Christ was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake, and the people wondered.”

Language could hardly be selected, that should tell a stronger tale of superstition, than is conveyed in these brief lines. Men imagining themselves possessed of a devil! and that the devil prevents them from seeing! and speaking! others standing around to see the Son of God dislodge a devil, as boys stand around to see the tricks of a juggler.

If the Bible has accomplished enough of good to atone for the numerous and mischievous superstitions, which, in various ways, it has entailed upon, and introduced into, men's minds, it has done more good than, I think, is apparent to most impartial observers of the whole of the history of Christendom, as compared with that of other nations of the same degree of intelligence. Even if it has not originated, it has, at least, justified, spread, and probably prolonged a belief in ill witchcraft and sorcery—it has introduced superstitions about a Son or God; ABOUT HIS VISITING THE EARTH IN THE DISGUISE OF A MAN! about a Holy Ghost, or Holy phantom; about a fictitious atonement, and a barbarous and useless sacrifice, which have for ages and centuries engrossed the minds of the few learned men, who otherwise might have been engaged in liberal schemes for improving society. And finally, it has spread wide a belief in angels, and miracles, and evil spirits—in a devil and his ten thousand deputies prowling about the universe.

I must now think that, of the thirty three miracles of Jesus, twenty two have been disposed of in a manner, if not satisfactory to, at least, answerable by, the most resolute believer. Eleven remain to be examined.

One is that of calming the tempest, recorded by Matthew (8-24 to 27), Mark (4-37 to 41), and Luke (8-23 to 25). Matthew says “the ship was covered with the waves.” Mark says “the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.” Luke says “they were filled with water.” Now we know that these accounts cannot be true because Jesus would not have remained asleep, had this been the case. These errors are mentioned entirely to show the propensity these men had to exaggeration—a propensity, that, in many other instances, is manifest enough; but which is here so palpable that it cannot be denied.

Matthew says “there arose a great tempest,” and Mark says “there arose a great storm of wind.” But since these men have already been convicted of exaggeration, we may now judge for ourselves how great a “tempest” would be likely to arise on a little petty lake; (fourteen miles long and five wide;) and, unless we have a very strong desire to believe in miracles, we shall probably come to the conclusion that a slight squall arose, such as generally continues for a few minutes; that, it being in the evening (as Mark says, and as is probable from the circumstance that Jesus was asleep,) these timid and superstitious men thought they should certainly be drowned; that Jesus, being called, commanded the waves of this mighty sea to be quiet; that when this sudden squall had passed, which probably happened very soon, the waves subsided, and they then thought the act of Jesus was a miracle. These narrators, although they generally appear very fond of using the word “immediately,” when relating any occurrence, which they themselves could not have seen, but in relation to which that word is necessary in order to make out a good miracle, have, nevertheless, in this case, neglected, for some reason or another, to tell us how soon, after the command was given, quiet was restored—the fair presumption of them that the wind and waves took their own time in this matter, as they always have done in every other of the same kind. [\*8]

Another is that of Jesus’s walking on the sea, related by Matthew (14-24 to 32,) Mark (6-47 to 51,) and John (6- 15 to 21.) John says that after Jesus had entered the ship, “immediately it was at land whether they went”—of course, it must have been near the shore when Jesus came to it. Furthermore, they all agree that it was in the night; John says that it was dark. Now, inasmuch as Jesus never shewed any inclination to trust himself on the water in the day-time, without anything to bear him up, is it not probable that at this time a plank, a slightly built raft, a small boat, or something else to stand on, which those in the ship or large, which those in the ship or large boat did not see, or that he walked in the water instead of on it, rather than he attempted to perform a miracle of that sort, and at that time, when none but his disciples, and probably not even these, would observe it? If he really could walk on the water, why did he not, at least once in his life, do it in any day-time, and in the presence of a concourse of people? He surely had opportunities enough.

But perhaps it will be asked, how did Jesus get to that side of the lake, unless he walked across the water? and a person, who should simply read the accounts of this affair, without looking at the map, would probably be misled into the supposition that the boat had crossed the lake, to the other side from where the disciples had left Jesus, and therefore that he could not have come to

them unless he had crossed the lake also. But according to John (6-23,) it was at or near Tiberias, that the disciples left Jesus, and they landed (Mat. 14-34) in “the land of Gennessaret;” and it so happened that Tiberias and Genessaret are on the same side of the lake, (see Ingraham’s map of Palestine) adjoining each other. Jesus, therefore, undoubtedly walked from one place to the other, (perhaps a mile or two) on the land, while the disciples went in the boat.

The third one of the eleven is that of the fig-tree, related by Matthew (21-17 to 22,) and Mark (11-12 to 23.) Matthew says the fig-tree withered away “presently.” Mark says that as they passed the next morning they discovered that it was withered away. But they agree as nearly as we can reasonably two such persons would, who should relate miracles upon hearsay. Since the story has nothing probably about it, and since the accounts disagree, it is probable that they both differ a little from the truth, and that the fig-tree was withered away when they first came to it. This supposition is rendered more probable by the fact that Luke, who speaks of Jesus being at Bethany (19-29 to 40.) and of some other circumstances mentioned by Matthew, says nothing about the fig-tree. It is also rendered probable by the fact that there were no figs on the tree. Mark pretends to account for there being no figs on it, by saying that the time of figs had not yet come- but this is clearly a falsehood, for if such were the truth, why did Jesus go to the tree at all? Or why did he manifest so much disappointment at not finding figs, as to “curse” even a tree?” [\*9]

The fourth, related by Mark only (7-32 to 36,) is that of the cure of a man “who was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech.” Jesus, in order doubtlessly to have a fair opportunity to perform this miracle, and to do it in a manner to furnish evidence to the world of his miraculous power, “took the man aside from the multitude.” When he had done this, he “put his fingers into his ears;” “then spit, and touched his tongue;” then “looked up to heaven, and sighed,” and uttered the word Epliphatha, and thus, as Mark heard the story, opened the man’s ears, and loosed the string of his tongue so that he spake plain, and then “charged them that they should tell no man” of the occurrence.

The fifth, related by John (2-1 to 10,) is that of turning the water into wine. John says that this was the first miracle that Jesus ever performed; but does not say that he saw it done; and if it were his first attempted miracle, it is entirely improbable that John was present. Besides, towards the close of the preceding chapter, John speaks particularly of Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael, as having become disciples of Jesus; but mentions none others as such, previous to this wedding. We just therefore suppose that John here only tells us a hearsay story. Now it would be nothing strange if Jesus were to go to a wedding—nor would it be anything strange if they were to have wine there—nor would it be strange if Jesus should there make some pretensions to miracle-working—nor would it be strange, if, out of these circumstances, after he had obtained a little notoriety in his way, a story should be got up and circulated similar to that told by John; but it would be very strange of a man should work a miracle; and it would also be very strange that neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke should ever have heard of this miracle, if there really were on wrought, (if they had heard of it, some of them would undoubtedly have recorded it, since they have taken the pains to record so many things of no consequence at all); and it would also be very strange of the saviour of a world should perform either his first or last miracle of this kind. We should as naturally expect a Son of God would exhibit his powers by making brooms dance cotillions, as by such miracles as this. Still—as was before remarked—

such a man as I have supposed Jesus to have been, would, when first beginning hesitatingly to think about working miracles, be very likely to have made an attempt or pretension of this kind—and if he but made such an attempt or pretension, that circumstance alone would afford sufficient materials for a future story.

The sixth, related by Luke (7-11 to 16), is that of raising from the dead the son of the widow of Nain. This story is told by none but Luke. He, as I have said before, was a citizen of Antioch, and was converted to Christianity by Paul—of course he never knew anything of personally of Jesus or his miracles; he must therefore have depended entirely upon the stories of others for his information. Of whom he obtained it in this instance we know not. He wrote his narrative some thirty or forty years after the death of Jesus. So that all the evidence we have here to prove an occurrence so wonderful as that of a man's being restored to life after he had once died, is a simple declaration, made many years afterward, by a man living remote from the place and who could not have personally known anything about what he was writing, but who has been shown heretofore to be credulous enough to believe miracles in the testimony of others.

Furthermore, neither of the narrators, although two of them were of twelve, give us any account of such an occurrence, although, if it really happened, they would most surely have heard of it, and if they had heard of it, they would as surely have related it; for, in order to make their stories as marvelous as possible, they have already gone so far as to relate for undoubted miracles many things, which they could not have known to be true, even if they were true.

The seventh case, that of raising Lazarus from the dead, is related by John only, (11 Chapter)—John does not say that he saw the fact. If then we believe that, in this case, a man really died, and was then restored to life again, we must believe a fact, such as we could not now be made to believe if ten thousand of the most respectable men of any nation on earth should solemnly testify that they saw it. We must believe too on the testimony of a single individual—one who gives the account forty years after the transaction is alleged to have been performed; who does not even say that he saw it; who is not supported by a single one of the many alleged eyewitnesses, nor by the testimony of any other person.

If the ten thousand should testify as I have supposed, we should then say, either that the man had not been actually dead, or that some deception or another had been practised upon the witnesses—and we should say so with perfect confidence too, because we should know, as absolutely as it is possible for us to know any thing, that such an occurrence could not have happened. Yet we are called upon to believe it in this case, upon such testimony as I have mentioned. Is it possible that the attempt can be made at this day, to impose upon men's understandings by such stuff as this?

But there is evidence tending to discredit this story or John.

One part of this evidence is, that neither Matthew, Mark nor Luke speak of the affair. Yet Luke heard of, and even related (10-38 to 42), so small and unimportant a circumstance as that of Jesus's once being in Bethany, at the house of Martha, the sister of Lazarus, and yet he never heard (as we may safely infer from the fact that he never related it) of this miracle wrought upon Lazarus—a miracle too, that is so much more wonderful than Jesus was generally supposed to perform.



If Jesus had actually raised Lazarus from the dead, and the act could have been well authenticated, (hardly a supposable case however), it must have been evidence of the strongest character of any that his works had ever furnished, that, he possessed miraculous power—and so his disciples must have considered it, if they had possessed common understandings. Yet it was never noised abroad so as that any except John ever heard of it.

Matthew (26-6 to 13), Mark (14-3 to 9), and Luke (7-37 and 38) also heard of, and related, the circumstance of Mary, whom John says (11-2) was the sister of Lazarus, anointing the head of Jesus with ointment, yet they neither of them utter a syllable about his raising her brother from the dead. It is difficult to account for this fact, unless we suppose that John was actually dishonest, or that he took up, believed and recorded a flying story, which an occurrence of some kind had given rise to, but which was without any foundation in truth.

Furthermore, John says (11- 45, 46 and onward) what is equivalent to saying, that a part of the eye-witnesses themselves, not only disbelieved that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but believed that he was attempting to practise some imposition upon them. He says, “then many of the Jews, which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him, but,” he adds, (and this “ but” spoils his story) “ some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.” He then represents that the Pharisees forthwith attempted to apprehend him, on account of the stories that had been told them by some of those who had witnessed the transaction.

It seems hardly possible to vindicate John from the charge of actual dishonesty — for he pretends to relate even the conversation, which the Pharisees held on this subject, when he certainly could not have known it. He also attributes to them motives and designs, which it is impossible should ever inhabit the breasts of human beings, viz: such as wishes to take a man’s life because he had raised a person from the dead. It is also incredible that they should dare attempt such an act, even if they wished to have it performed.

I think it would not be difficult to show that John’s love of distinction, his hatred of the Pharisees, and his determination to spread Christianity, led him to dishonest lengths in other cases. ‘He was the one, (Mark 10 — 35 to 41), who was so eager to obtain from Jesus a promise of preference over the rest of his disciples, in heaven, (or more probably in the earthly kingdom), as that they were offended at him. He shows the same disposition afterwards, in his own narrative, by speaking of himself, in four or five different places, as “that disciple whom Jesus loved,” — thus pretending that he himself was the favorite over the others.

He also equivocates, (21-22 and 23), by pretending that Jesus, or the one whom he supposed to be Jesus, did not mean what his words most plainly import, and what John acknowledges that the disciples at the time understood him to mean. His motive for this equivocation may be traced to a circumstance related in his Biography in Lempriere’s Biographical Dictionary, where it is said that he wrote his narrative for the purpose of proving that Jesus was not a man, and in opposition to what he deemed an error, viz: a belief, at that time avowed, that he was but a man. This equivocation was necessary in order to make it appear that Jesus did not intend to intimate that certain things would happen, which had not happened, and were not likely to.

This purpose, in writing his narrative, accounts for his superior carefulness in relating, in connexion with the supposed miracles, any circumstances that might tend to discredit their reality; and also for the conversations which he relates as attending them; although it is evident that he must either have invented much of them, or adopted them from the mouths of others, without any thing like reasonable evidence of their genuineness — the former of which suppositions appears the more probable, both from his own character, (for he could then invent such conversation as would suit the circumstances of the case), and also from the fact that he could not, forty years afterward, have remembered such full, connected and unbroken conversations as he has pretended to relate.

John also (12-10 and 11) shows his bitter malignity, and his readiness to make the most diabolical charges, against such as did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah, by saying that the Chief Priests “consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death.”

Finally, he has more unmeaning theological cant in his narrative than all the other three together.

Nevertheless, it is possible that John has told an honest story in this case of Lazarus, and one too that is true in its main features. But if he has done so, he has implicated a man, whose character is of much more consequence to the Christian religion, than his own; and that man is Jesus. Several circumstances are related in this story, which, if they are considered to have really happened, furnish palpable and glaring evidence of collusion between Lazarus and Jesus. For example — Jesus knew, before he went, at this time, to Bethany where Lazarus lived, that Lazarus was dead, (John 11-14). Now how did he (being, as appears by the context, at a considerable distance off) know this fact, unless there had been a previous understanding between them that Lazarus should die about that time? He had heard (11- 3) that he was sick, but there is no evidence that he had heard of his death. On the contrary, the disciples were utterly ignorant of it (11- 11, 12 and 13) until the information unexpectedly came from Jesus himself. How came Jesus by this information without the knowledge of his disciples? If a messenger had brought it, they must have known it too, for some of them were undoubtedly all this time with him. We have no right to say that he obtained it supernaturally, because it is not yet proved that he had any supernatural power. Yet he knows the fact, when they do not, and there is a way by which he may have obtained this knowledge. That way is this — Lazarus may have directed his sisters to send this message to Jesus, that he was sick, and this may have been agreed upon as the signal by which Jesus might know that Lazarus was about to die. If such were not the purpose of this message, why was it sent? We are told that Jesus loved Lazarus. But why then did he not go to him immediately on hearing that he was sick, instead of waiting, apparently without any necessity, for two or three days? The reason is obvious — he waited for him to die, and he knew that he would die. But he could not have known that he would die, unless it had been previously agreed that he should die. I repeat that it cannot be said that Jesus knew, by means of his supernatural power, that Lazarus would die; because that would be attempting to defend the miracle, on the evidence of his supernatural power, instead of proving the supernatural power by the miracle. Besides, if he could know, by means of his supernatural power, either that Lazarus was dead, or that he would die, he could also, in the same way, have known that he was sick, and it must therefore have been unnecessary to send the information of his sickness to him. Is there then any way, other than by supposing collusion, in which this matter can be explained?

Again. Jesus declared (11- 4), when he first heard of the sickness of Lazarus, that one object of this sickness was, “that the Son of God might be glorified thereby,” (that is, that he himself might get some credit by it). Now, how did he know that it would terminate so as that he should get credit by it? We cannot, I again repeat, say that he knew it by means of his supernatural power, because that would be assuming him to have supernatural power, and then attempting to prove the miracle by it; whereas the power must first be proved by the miracle. Besides, there are too many cases of his making inquiries for the sake of ascertaining what his inquiries imply that he did not know, to leave any apology for pretending that he knew any thing supernaturally. There is then ‘but one answer to the question, how he knew beforehand the manner in which this sickness would terminate? and that answer is, that it had been agreed between him and Lazarus how it should terminate, and Jesus inferred that he should gain some credit by it.

Again. There is something very suspicious in the manner, in which he communicated to his disciples the fact, that Lazarus was dead. He communicates it to them as if it were something, which he was aware would surprise them, but which nevertheless was not new to him. The manner, in which he introduces the matter, is peculiarly suspicious. He does not at once come to the point; but speaks allegorically, says Lazarus is asleep, &c, and that he must go and wake him.

Another suspicious circumstance is, that Lazarus was buried neither in a grave, nor a tomb, but in a cave. The man might live very well in a cave; he might himself have deposited provisions there beforehand, and he might have told his sisters where and how soon to bury him, after he was dead. He seems also to have had a very short sickness: his sisters send word to Jesus that he is sick, and the next thing we know of him is, that in about two days, (as it would appear from the story, although it is not explicitly stated), he is dead. He seems too to have been buried in a great hurry; for when Jesus arrived, “he had lain in the grave four days.”

Another suspicious circumstance is, that the stone, that lay upon the cave, must be removed, (11- 39), by hand too, before the supernatural power could operate so as to bring the dead man out. A stone, laying over the mouth of a cave, must be a great obstacle in the way of a miracle.

Another circumstance, of the same import, is, that when Jesus came to the work of raising Lazarus, “he cried with a loud voice,” to call him out. Now it might be necessary to speak loudly to make a living man, who was in a cave, hear; but a dead man could have heard a less labored tone equally well.

Again. There was an altogether unusual ostentation about this miracle. Jesus talked a great deal about it beforehand; spoke of it as an affair that was to accomplish great things in the way of glorifying God, and himself too.

Another circumstance against the reality of this resurrection from the dead, is, that Jesus never raised any others from the dead. (I here take it for granted that it has been shown that there is no sort of reason for pretending that he raised the son of the widow of Nain, or the daughter of Jairus). If he could really raise men from the dead, why did he not show his miraculous power again and again, in this way, so as to place it beyond dispute; instead of curing sick folks, casting out devils, spitting in men’s eyes, filling them with clay, touching their tongues, putting his

fingers in their ears, and such like disgusting farces, ten thousand of which would be no evidence of any thing except that he was an impostor or a fool? If he could really raise men from the dead, he could have established himself at once on the credit of his miracles. And yet one solitary case, and that too surrounded by circumstances of the strongest suspicion, is all the evidence he ever gave, in his whole career, of his power to raise the dead.

Again. Judging naturally of a portion of this story (11-45 and 46) we have abundant evidence that a part of the eye-witnesses themselves detected the hoax on the spot. The story is that some of them believed, but that others went forthwith to the Pharisees—known enemies of Jesus—and made such representations that measures were immediately taken to have him apprehended. How is this conduct of these witnesses to be accounted for, unless they discovered the cheat?

It appears also (John 12-10), that the Chief Priests were satisfied—probably by the story of the same witnesses—that Lazarus also was a knave, for they are said to have consulted to put him to death—a thing, which they never could have dreamed of doing for the cause which John assigns.

The world has been full of alleged miracles, but I do not believe another record of one can be produced, containing such irresistible evidence of fraud as this. [\*10]

To proceed with the examination of the remaining miracles. There are two cases, where Jesus is said to have fed the multitude miraculously. One case is mentioned by Matthew (14-15 to 21), Mark (6-41 to 44), Luke (9-12 to 17) and John (6-3 to 14) where five thousand (an undoubted exaggeration—another “great tempest”) were said to have been fed from five loaves and two fishes. The other instance, where he is said to have fed four thousand, is mentioned only by Matthew (15-32 to 33) and Mark (8-1 to 9). All that is necessary to reply to such accounts as these, is, first, that neither of those, who tell the story, says that he himself was present, and even if any one of them had said so, they have all been convicted of so much exaggeration and misrepresentation, that they would not deserve to be credited so far as to have a miracle, or any other improbable story believed on their testimony—and secondly, that if Jesus ever had any thing to do in distributing food to five thousand men, who believed in his miraculous power, there were then five thousand probable chances; and if he ever had any thing to do in distributing food to four thousand of the same sort of believers, there were then four thousand probable chances, that stories respecting the circumstance would be told, and would get magnified into a miracle, although there were none, and that these stories would be believed by all his followers— these narrators among the rest— who should not absolutely know the contrary, and who were eager to believe every marvellous story about him, of which there was to their minds a possibility of truth.

In the last of these two cases, a very good reason can be conjectured, why the fragments, that remained, should be equal to the amount distributed. It appears (Mat. 15-32, Mark 8-2) that this company had been in “the wilderness” three days, and it is probable that the loaves and fishes had been there the same length of time. The climate of Judea is warm.

Another case is that of the miraculous draught of fishes. It is related by Luke only (5-4 to 11). He says that fishes enough were caught in one net, at one draught, to fill two “ships” so full that they began to sink. (Mr. Luke, that’s a great story to tell). Matthew (4-18 to 22) and Mark (1- 16, 18)

both speak of the same occasion, and of some of the incidents related by Luke, yet neither says any thing about any fishes being taken — the probability is, therefore, that Luke was misinformed in this respect. Besides, Luke says (5-9 and 10) that John was there, and that he “was astonished at the draught of the fishes which they had taken” — yet, for some reason or another, John did not see fit to vouch for this miracle, or even to allude to it — perhaps he had a little more discretion than Luke.

One miracle only remains. This is related by Luke only (22 — 50 and 51). He says that when a servant of the High Priest had his ear cut off, Jesus touched it, and healed it. It is a sufficient answer to this, to say that Luke was not there, and probably never heard even of the ear being cut off until many years afterward — that during this time a story about so insignificant an incident as the cutting off of a man’s ear, would very naturally gain the appendage, which is here attached to it, viz: that it was also healed. But there is another answer, which, even if it stood alone, would be sufficient. That is, that although Matthew, Mark and John (two of whom were of the twelve, and were probably at or near the spot at the time) relate the fact of the ear being cut off, neither of them says a word about its being healed.

Thus much for the reality of those miracles, that have imposed on a larger proportion of enlightened men, in modern times, than at the time when they were supposed to have been performed. If an hundredth part of the effort, which has been made to prove these events to have been really supernatural, had been directed (as on the plainest principles of reason it should have been) to the accounting, in a natural manner, for the stories respecting them, the difficulty would have long since vanished.

Honesty of intention may, nevertheless, in general, fairly be accorded to these writers, in circulating these stories about miracles, for the truth of which they do not explicitly vouch as eye-witnesses. Some of these transactions were probably supposed by Matthew and John, who were of the twelve, to have occurred when they were absent; and they, having often seen him, as they believed, cast out devils, and heal the sick, which, to their minds, were as real miracles as the raising of the dead, or the removal of a mountain, would not in general doubt in the least the truth of any stories that they might hear. Mark and Luke, not being of the twelve, but being, Luke certainly, and Mark probably, subsequent converts, of course depended upon the stories of others for every thing they relate. Luke, depending upon this source of information, has gone so far as to relate (Chap. 1), for realities, even the conversations, that angels were said to have held with persons on earth fifty or sixty years before the time when he wrote his narrative. Can any stronger evidence be desired to prove that many of those conversations and circumstances, which these narrators recorded so many years after the transactions, were such as their own imaginations, from having long dwelt upon those occurrences, and the imaginations of others, among whom the stories had previously circulated, furnished as appendages to the truth? Or can any stronger proof be required of the credulity and superstition of these writers, or of their readiness to adopt any story, however improbable in itself, that should be floating in that community? a community, the very atmosphere of which, it would seem, must have been saturated with reports of the marvellous works of the various Christs or Messiahs, who each appear to have been attempting to prove their pretensions by the same kind of means. Yet it is almost entirely this kind of hearsay testimony, such as would be scouted at in a Court of justice,

if offered for the purpose of proving the most common and natural events, upon which men believe in occurrences vastly more improbable than any that ever resulted from natural causes.

One argument, that is frequently alluded to in support of the reality of the miracles of Jesus, is perhaps worthy of a notice here, in addition to what has been said. This argument is, that even the opposers of Jesus acknowledged that he wrought true miracles. One answer to this argument is, that their admissions are not at all binding upon us: and therefore even if they did make them, we have an undoubted right to inquire whether they may not have been mistaken. And if we make this inquiry, we shall unquestionably find that they may have been, because among them a miracle was considered to be a very common occurrence, and capable of being wrought apparently by almost any one who was disposed to attempt it. It would be nothing strange therefore if some of the opposers of Jesus should acknowledge that he wrought miracles. He himself virtually acknowledges (Mat. 24-24) that the false Christs could work miracles, and also that the man, who used his name to cast out devils (Mark 9-38, 39 and 40), wrought real miracles.

Another answer is, that these admissions generally appear to have been made, if made at all, not upon actual observation, but upon the representations of others. They also appear not to have been heard, by these writers who relate them, but simply to have been heard of, or inferred, by them; as they evidently must have been in the case of Lazarus (John 11-47), because these disciples could not have been present at the consultations held on this subject by the Priests and other leading men. What then would a million of such facts be worth to prove miracles?

There are a few additional circumstances tending, so obviously, to confirm the views I have taken of the miracles of Jesus, that they are not to be omitted.

Luke says (23 — 8 and 9) that when Jesus was brought before Herod, Herod desired to see him work some miracle, and asked him many questions; but that Jesus answered nothing. It appears that Herod intended to deal uprightly with Jesus, and was also prepared to believe the evidence of miracles. Why then did not Jesus, if he possessed miraculous power, take advantage of such an opportunity, to do something before this assembly to prove that he was what he had professed to be?

At another time the Jews (John 2- 18 to 21) asked him to show them some sign (miracle) as an evidence of his right to attempt to drive them from the temple — and a very reasonable request it was. But the only miracle, that he proposed to work, was to rebuild the temple in three days, provided they would first destroy it. But they, like rational men, had not sufficient confidence in his power to do it, to induce them to demolish it, for the sake of giving him an opportunity to try the experiment.

John says that Jesus here referred to “the temple of his body.” This is evidently another of John’s equivocations, for if he did refer to his body, he was a cheat and an intentional deceiver, since he must have known that he was, by his language, causing them all to understand him as referring to the temple, in which they then were.

In the early part of his preaching, when he was at Nazareth, (Luke 4-16 to 30), he went into the synagogue, and pretended that he was the one who had been prophesied of, but virtually acknowledged that they had a right to expect that he would show them some miracle, by which they might know that he was what he pretended to be — and the only reason he assigned for not performing one, was this potent one, viz: that a prophet would not be respected in his own country. Those, who heard him, were so offended at what appeared to them (reasonably too) an attempt to dupe them, that they thrust him out of the city, and led him to the brow of a hill, as if they intended to cast him down headlong; but when they had come there, “he, passing through the midst of them, went his way” — which language, if we had the true version of the affair, would probably read thus — “when they had frightened him by pretending to be about to cast him headlong down the hill, they let him go.” [\*11]

John, speaking of another occasion, says (12-37) “though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him.” It appears extremely probable that God would send a messenger on earth, and, in order to prove him to the world to be his messenger, should give him miraculous power, and that then this messenger should not be able to perform miracles of such a kind as would convince even eye-witnesses.

In another instance Matthew says (13-58) “and he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” Now if it was the great purpose of his mission to bring men to believe on him, when he found any incredulous, that circumstance, instead of furnishing a reason why he should not work miracles before them, was only an additional reason why he should not fail to work such as would inevitably convince them.

Mark, (6-5 and 6), speaking of the same occurrence, says, “and he could do there no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them, and he marvelled because of their unbelief.” This declaration of Mark virtually denies his miraculous power in toto, because if he possessed it, he could certainly, wherever he might be, have found something beside sick folks upon which to exert it.

When the Pharisees wished to see some evidence of his being what he pretended to be, (Mark 8-11 to 13), he appeared (to his disciples at least) deeply afflicted that men’s hearts should be so hard as not to believe without evidence, and said he would not show them any sign, but “left them and departed.” Mark says the Pharisees asked him the question “tempting him.” But the question was certainly a proper one, and what evidence is there, that their motives, in asking it, were not of the same character?

For some reason or another, Jesus was very suspicious of the enlightened part of the community — a little more so: it seems to me, than a genuine Messiah would have any occasion to be. He was continually apprehending some trap, or design against him. He was also continually laboring to excite the prejudices of his disciples against them — conduct not very consistent with the idea that he was really a superior being.

Again. Jesus told his disciples (Mark 11 — 23), that if they were to command a mountain to move, and should not doubt in their hearts that it would move at their bidding, it actually would move. Now why did not he himself remove a mountain, if it could be so easily done, and thus

present to all future generations a convincing and eternal monument of his Messiahship? One such miracle would be worth a million performed upon persons that pretended to be sick, or possessed of devils. It would have been worth a million of those pretended miracles, that, like all the other pretended miracles with which the world has been filled, vanished at the moments, and left no trace behind. But one answer readily occurs to such a question, viz: he could not.

Some may say that it did not become him to perform miracles, that would not accomplish any physical good — but if he were such a being as he pretended to be, and his doctrines were true, it was of more importance to bring men to believe these facts, than it was to cure all the sick people that ever lived. He ought therefore to have adapted his miracles to the accomplishment of the most important purpose he had in view.

John says (6-30), that on a certain occasion, the people asked him directly, “What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work?” This was putting the question home to him, and why did he not meet it, if he could, as he evidently ought? Could any request have been more reasonable, or more candid? Or could any combination of circumstances whatever have called upon him more urgently to display his miraculous power, if he had any, than did those in which he was then placed? It appears by the context, that there was an assemblage of people present, who had taken much pains to find where he was, and to come to him, and their question implies a readiness to be convinced by miracles. Yet all the satisfaction, which this man, who went about the country boasting what he could do, gave to these honest, proper and candid demands, was to evade them, to stand on his reserved rights like one who had nothing else to stand upon, and then to run into a long fanfaronade about his being the bread that came down from heaven, about his being better bread than the manna that was given to the Israelites, about the effect of eating his flesh, and drinking his blood, [\*12] and such like stuff, disgusting enough to sicken any one except such as have made up their minds, in advance, to swallow, as a delicious morsel of divine truth, any thing, and every thing, that may be found in the Bible, be it whatever it may.

John also (6-66), after having related the above affair, adds, “From that time many of his disciples went back,” (as well they might) “and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, will ye also go away?” The terms of his question to the twelve seem to imply that all his disciples, who were present, except the twelve, deserted him at this time. But whether all deserted him, or not, there can be no reasonable doubt, judging from John’s account, that a large portion of them did. Now it appears, by the former part of the chapter, that but a short time before, he had five thousand persons following him— and yet he now finds himself so nearly destitute of friends, that he is afraid that even his chosen few will desert him also. It has been said by the advocates of Christianity, that we ought not to consider the reality of the miracles of Jesus as resting solely on the testimony of the narrators, but as being supported by the convictions of great numbers of eye-witnesses. How, let it be asked, will those advocates pretend to meet the fact above referred to? Here were “many” men, who had followed Jesus so long, that John calls them “his disciples,” — men, who undoubtedly had seen as much evidence of his miraculous power as he was able to exhibit — who were undoubtedly credulous enough to have been easily deceived by pretended miracles, and who yet desert him, and refuse to follow him any longer. The testimony therefore of “many” of his own followers, credulous and simple as they were, instead of being in favor of the reality of his miracles, is directly and positively



against them. The inquiry may now safely be put, whether Christians have it in their power to put into their ease, any evidence that can control this otherwise decisive testimony, which comes from those whom they had all along claimed as their own witnesses?

If any one wish now to determine whether a sufficient answer have been given to the alleged miracles of Jesus, he has but to look back, and see whether he can put his finger upon any individual case, and say that the evidence relating solely to that case is conclusive that there must have been a miracle. Unless it be conclusive of that fact, it is unreasonable at all to regard it; because the probability must always be against the miracle so long as there is a discoverable lack or uncertainty in the evidence. [\*13]

The supernatural occurrences, that are said to have taken place at the death of Jesus, may properly be referred to in connexion with the miracles.

Matthew (27-45), Mark (15-33) and Luke (23-44) say that while Jesus was on the cross, there was, for three hours previous to his death, “darkness over all the land[.]” The testimony of Mark and Luke to this matter is not worth noticing, because there is no reason to suppose that they state any thing but a hearsay story. As respects Matthew, he has said enough to prove, that, if there were any darkness at all, there was none that was so extraordinary as it must be supposed, from the fact of his mentioning it, that he intended to have people believe it to be. In the first place, if it had been thus extraordinary, the Jews must have been alarmed, and have desisted from the execution; but the fact that they did not desist, although by so doing, at any time during these three hours, they might have saved the life of Jesus, is sufficient evidence that there was no such darkness. Matthew (27- 36 to 49) says also what is equivalent to saying, that those, who witnessed the crucifixion, felt a curiosity to see whether anything extraordinary, or supernatural would happen, but saw nothing of the kind. — “Sitting down, they watched him there.” He then adds that some of them said, “Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” The “Chief Priests, Scribes and elders” also said “he saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he will have him.” And again, but just before his apparent death, when he had cried “Eli, Eli,” &c, and one had then run to put a sponge to his mouth, “the rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come and save him.” These things show that there was such a curiosity felt as I have mentioned, and that this curiosity continued until they supposed him dead. Now, is it to be believed that these men would have remained there, on the look-out for marvels, up to the very moment of his last gasp, as they supposed, and would then have so coolly said “Let be, let us see whether Elias will come and save him,” when they had been witnesses, for three hours, of a continued and surprising “darkness over all the land,” at mid-day? The thing is incredible — the falsehood is too bare to be disguised for a moment. John makes no mention of this darkness.

Matthew says also (27-50 to 53) that when Jesus died, “the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints, which slept, arose, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” But he does not say that he saw these things. Now is the word of this man Matthew — a man, nearly half of whose narrative appears to have been but the work of a “terrible-accident-maker” — to be taken for such facts as these? Who but he had ever heard of the earth’s quaking, the rocks rending, graves opening, dead rising, &c.? No human

being on earth, that we have any evidence. Besides, even John, who says (19-25 to 27) that he stood by the cross, and that Jesus, while on the cross, spoke to him, says not a word of any such events; yet there is not room for a reasonable doubt that he would have done so, had they ever happened.

Besides, it is incredible that the Jews, who knew that Jesus pretended to be the Messiah, and who were among the most superstitious people that ever lived, should not have been appalled by such a scene, if any such had happened, and have been converted; yet they were not converted; nor did they, although as I have said before, they were on the look-out for marvels see any thing to change their minds in relation to him.

This story again shows the extent of the delusion among the followers of Jesus, and that Matthew was ever ready to relate, for truth, not only everything, however impossible, that he heard spoken of, but probably also some things which he did not hear spoken of.

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[\*1] I might here safely leave the question of Jesus's miracles, without any further argument, were I so disposed; because no thinking man would for a moment believe them to have been real ones, unless he could see, or should fancy he could see, that it was important that they should be wrought for the purpose of proving a Revelation—yet, as has been shown, the purpose, for which they are said to have been wrought, cannot logically be taken at all into the account, when judging of their reality.

[\*2] Such facts as the above would furnish a complete answer to all the arguments — founded on the importance of the alleged purpose of establishing in men's minds a belief in a revelation — (supposing such arguments to be admissible), that Christians have ever urged in favor of the -probability and propriety of miracles; because the very testimony (the Bible), relied on to prove that miracles were employed for that purpose, declares also, explicitly and unequivocally, that, at the same time, and among the same people, other miracles, equally real, and equally wonderful as far as men's senses could discover, were performed, which are not pretended to have any connexion with a revelation, or any other important design. In order, therefore, to support the Bible history of these events, there is just as strong a necessity for arguing in support of the probability and propriety of God's giving miraculous power to some individuals for no discoverable purpose at all, as in favor of his giving it to others to enable them to convince men of the truth of a revelation, because, according to the Bible, he gave it in the former case as certainly as in the latter.

If the Bible be true, it is as certain also that God gave miraculous power to a pool of water, as it is that he gave it to Jesus or any of his disciples, (John 5 — 4.)

[\*3] See Lempriere's Biographical Dictionary,

[\*4] See Newton on the Prophecies Chap. 18.

[\*5] See Lempriere's Biographical Dictionary, also Newton on the Prophecies, Chap. 18.

[\*6] The pretended discoverer of animal magnetism.

[\*7] In further support of the reasonableness of this explanation, I quote the authority of Dr. Combe, who says, in his work on Physiology, that "so powerful, indeed, is the nervous stimulus, that examples have occurred of strong mental emotions having instantaneously given life and vigor to paralytic limbs." This extract may be found in No. 71, Harpers' Gamily Library, page 112.

[\*8] In confirmation of the truth of this explanation, I quote from Carne, a recent Christian traveler in Palestine, who says, in describing this lake, that "the boats used on it are, in some seasons of the year, much exposed from the sudden squalls of the wind, which issue from between the mountains."

I have taken some pains to procure "Carne's travels in the East," (or Letters from the East,) so as to be able to refer the reader to the page where this fact is stated; but the book is a rare one, and I have not found it. I can therefore only refer to an extract published in the American Traveller (Boston) Oct. 29, 1833, Article, Lake Tiberias.

[\*9] Mark 11-21. Master, behold the fig-tree, which though cursedst, is withered away.

[\*10] What evidence is there of the deliberate villainy of Mahomet, Matthias or Joe Smith, that can compare with this evidence of similar conduct on the part of Jesus?

Or what stronger evidence of his knavery can be wanted than his pretence of calming the tempest?

[\*11] Luke says (2-52) that as Jesus grew up to manhood, he “increased in favor with God and man.” Now this affair took place in “Nazareth, where he had been brought up,” (Luke 4-16). He seems therefore never to have got into very high “favor” with the people of his own village; for had he done so, they would not have been likely, on this occasion, to have treated him quite so shabbily.

[\*12] A rite grosser even than that of drinking from the skull bone of Odin, and more appropriate to be observed by cannibals than civilized men.

[\*13] If the reader wish any further confirmation that this view of the miracles of Jesus is correct, let him read the “Apocryphal New Testament,” from which he will at least learn what kind of miracles it was common for the early Christians to believe in, and will thus be enabled to judge whether such works as I have supposed the pretended miracles of Jesus to have been, would not have been likely, at that time and among so superstitious a people, to have passed for true miracles.