

ON MIRACLES.

Nisi signa et prodigia videritis, non creditis. Unless ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.—John iv, 48.

The nobleman mentioned in the gospel, who besought our Saviour to go down and heal his son, had not a proper faith in Jesus Christ, till he saw his child miraculously cured: for only then did he himself believe and his whole house. Our Saviour therefore said to him, when he made his request: *Unless ye see signs and wonders you believe not.* By these words he gives us to understand that our faith in him should not be always requiring new signs and wonders to confirm it. And he lets us know by his conduct on this occasion, that, having once given miraculous evidence of the truths of his doctrine, we are not to expect, as often as we could wish, to see such evidence renewed; but that we are to rely on the testimony of those who at first have witnessed such evidence. He was aware that what is too common, however wonderful it may be, is apt to make but little impression on our minds: as it happened in fact with the Israelites of old, who were at last so little moved at the sight of those prodigies performed by Moses, because they had become frequent and ordinary. He therefore meant to reserve miracles as rare and striking proofs of his doctrine, to be manifested when and in what manner he in his infinite wisdom might think fit.

The Pharisees, though they had the testimony of the whole Jewish nation, that was daily witnessing the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ, would not however content themselves with this testimony; but were ever calling upon him by some new sign to prove his divinity.—Their curiosity, more than any desire of knowing the truth, prompted them to make these demands; and therefore our Lord did not choose to comply with their request. "This wicked and adulterous generation, (says he,) seeks a sign: and no sign shall be given to them, but the sign of Jonah the prophet."—Matt. xii, 89. As they prided themselves in the knowledge of the law and the prophets, he referred them to those, by whom he was so clearly foretold and prefigured. Miracles, it would seem, he intended more as proofs to the heathens and ignorant, who had not such unquestionable evidence, as they. "Search the scriptures, (said he to them,) in which you think to have life everlasting: and these are they that bear testimony of me."—John v. 39."

King Herod also knew by the common report of the nation that our Saviour performed the most wonderful prodigies, and therefore rejoiced at his being sent to him by Pontius Pilate, in hopes of seeing him work some miracle before him. But our Lord did not choose to gratify his vain curiosity. For it was not certainly as any proof of his doctrine that Herod wished to have seen a miracle performed. He had such proof sufficient by report. Nor did he ever doubt of our Saviour's power to work such wonders; else he would not have made himself so sure of seeing one wrought by him. Herod, therefore, believing in the miracles of Christ, without

believing in Christ, which clearly shows that even signs and wonders may not always enforce conviction. It were wrong therefore to desire them, while we have more than sufficient evidence of our faith besides, in the testimony of all christians in every generation since his time. It is this testimony precisely that our Lord wishes us to ground our faith upon; and he therefore declares that he who will not hear the church, is to be looked upon as a heathen and a publican.—Matt. xviii. 17. —While at the same time he blames those who wish to have their faith confirmed by signs and wonders. *Unless you see signs and wonders you believe not.*

I would believe, says the Infidel, in the mysteries of the Christian Religion, did I myself but see such wonders wrought, in their confirmation, as those I find recorded in scripture. Thus would he arrogantly prescribe to the Deity the terms on which he would choose to admit his sacred and infallible word for the truth.—Still might this be so far excusable, had he no other proof left him, than that of miracles. But can he desire a more forcible and convincing proof than the unanimous testimony of all nations ever since our Saviour's time? Let him name, if he can, that single fact in history, which has such incontrovertible evidence in its favor. Indeed, were he to believe nothing without such evidence, how few things would he then believe? Yet such is the inconsistency of our free-thinkers, that they who call in question facts so well authenticated, and facts so very important, that on their admission or rejection our eternal happiness depends, make not the least difficulty to credit, on the testimony of a few heathen authors, facts of small or no consequence whatever. The exploits of an Alexander, the wisdom of a Socrates or a Plato, &c, are never once doubted of. Yet can such for a moment, however unquestionable, be thought supported by an equal authority with the doctrine, miracles, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Still, if they require signs and wonders to confirm their faith in him, they have them of the most striking kind in that very church which he has established, and whose authority they despise. They have them in the manner in which she was propagated over all the earth; and in the manner in which she still continues to subsist.

The manner of her propagation is certainly, in the eyes of every rational and thinking person, the wonder of wonders, and the greatest of miracles: and it proves the divinity of her founder as much as all his other miracles; for had he been less than God, how differently would he have prepared for such a prodigious enterprise? An enterprise which aimed at nothing less than overthrowing all the received erroneous opinions and external modes of worship, as well of his own nation, which alone had the knowledge of the true God, as of all the other nations of the earth; which opinions and modes of worship were sanctioned and defended by the laws of the several countries in which they were received? Yet to shew that he re-

quired no human or natural means to bring about so great an event, for thirty years of his life he remained retired from the world, working with his reputed father at the carpenter trade: and, during the other three years of his life, when he applied himself more particularly to this work, how did he betake himself in order to accomplish it? What sort of men did he make choice of for his associates in it? Twelve poor fishermen, without learning, riches, friends or interest. These he meant to oppose to all the learned, the eloquent, the rich and mighty ones in the world! And how did he say were they to prevail? By suffering and dying!—That they have prevailed was evidently impossible, had he not been God, who sent them; especially as they taught a doctrine so disagreeable to flesh and blood, against which the pride and sensuality of mankind must have revolted, as it still continues to revolt. He foretold them both the opposition they should meet with from the world, and their success.

The Jews are the first to take the alarm. The most learned among them conspire against him. He is reviled and persecuted; and at last, as he had foretold to his disciples, delivered up by the whole people to be crucified. But when I am exalted, says he, I will draw all things to myself; alluding as the Evangelist says, to what manner of death he was to die.—What man could speak with such certainty of what was to happen after his death, and with such indifference of so very cruel and ignominious a death, as that he foresaw he was about to suffer? With equal cruelty are his Apostles and Disciples persecuted after him. Nevertheless, the number of the Believers encreases; and the Christian faith, as St. Paul already testifies in his epistle to the Romans, c. i. 8. in so short a time extended to the most distant nations of the earth.

Rome, the mistress of the universe, and the capital of the heathen world, at the voice of a poor ignorant fisherman begins to tremble for her Gods. She collects her whole might to crush his new Religion at its very first appearance, and in its infant state. But she who could subdue all the nations of the earth, and dictate the fate of kingdoms, found all her efforts vain against the doctrine of a crucified God. In vain her emperors arm themselves against it. In vain for three hundred years do they continue to shed the innocent blood of the Christians. They warred against a God who was greater than all their Gods: and at length the doctrine of that God prevailed. Rome according to the expression of the ancient fathers of the Church, was quite astonished to find herself Christian ere yet she had forgotten that she was heathen.—Her emperors at last bow their necks to the yoke of Jesus Christ. Her philosophers, with all their boasted learning and eloquence, acknowledge themselves vanquished. The standard of satan is beaten down, and the cross of the Redeemer erected on the ruins of idolatry: and she, who was the Mistress of the pagan world, has become the head of the Christian Church.

Meanwhile the Jews, who refused to acknowledge their promised Messiah; and

who had put him to death, and first persecuted his infant Church, are themselves persecuted in their turn. Their city and temple, as he had so clearly foretold them, are destroyed: they themselves banished their native country, and condemned to wander without a home among the nations; yet still subsisting, a distinct people; never blended with those, among whom they reside; carrying about with them, wheresoever they go, the sacred books of the law and the prophets, which they continue to reverence, and which bear such ample testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ; whose most of the circumstances of his life and death are detailed with the establishment of his Church, and their own reprobation. Thus are they still preserved to be the living and most unsuspected vouchers of the truth of that Religion which they continue to reject.

The manner in which the Church of Christ continues to subsist, is no less wonderful than the manner in which she was propagated. For what can be more wonderful, than that this Church should continue to subsist, which has never ceased to be violently attacked? In every age she has had to contend with schisms and heresies, which have often so far prevailed, as to threaten her utter destruction. But always in these emergencies has Divine Providence interposed to save her: and still she exists visible and great, when the very names of most of her opponents are buried in oblivion.

Besides what a formidable host of enemies is at all times mustered up against her, of those who cannot bear the austerity of her doctrine, which thwarts their evil inclinations; denies them the criminal gratification of their passions; confines them against their will within the pale of justice and equity; binds them down to so many penitential exercises, and to the performance of so many painful and disinterested duties: thus always subjecting them to the practice of virtue, and holding forth to their belief so many mysteries surpassing their understanding, and to which their proud reason, which though so limited, would comprehend every thing, does not choose to stoop. Who can deny her existence in the midst of such mighty opposition, to be altogether miraculous? Who but must own that the finger of God is here? States and nations rise and fall; kingdoms and empires, with all their power, are changed or overthrown; but she still remains the same and outlives them all: I say of such as require miracles to confirm their faith, and reject the evidence of such a church, that should they see even signs and wonders, they would not believe.

Happy those, who can trust themselves to the direction of such a church! who can see in her very existence the evidence of the truths she inculcates! They need no other signs and wonders to confirm their faith, but those they discover in herself, and which are truly great. All is clear to them who allow themselves to be taught by her; which is dark to the unbeliever. They dwell among the people of God in the land of Goshen, where all is light, not with the Egyptians, who