

But whether miracles be considered as absolutely opposed to the laws of nature, or only signal manifestations of powers before hidden from our knowledge, and which Omnipotent wisdom reserved to be brought forward on occasions where his moral government demanded the interposition of his power, we contend that the objection against them, on the ground of their contradicting the concurring and general experience of mankind, is a figment and a fallacy. It surely will not be maintained that this experience is acquainted with the deep arcana of the universe, with all the powers of nature which may exist, but which have not yet been put forth in the sphere in which human beings move and act? Nor even if this were the case, and this experience surpassed the perfect knowledge of all things and powers that have ever been created, with all their laws and usual operations, would it be able to predicate what an Almighty agent, in the infinite resources which he possesses in himself, may choose to exhibit in contradistinction to what he has hitherto done. Who can control the Divine will, fathom the Divine wisdom, or limit the manifestation of the Divine power? If sufficient reasons, founded on what we know of the moral government of God, can be assigned for the production of miracles in any given case, then incredibility, resting on what is termed universal or general experience, falls to the ground. Because they are in their nature deviations from this experience, as they cannot be ordinary and frequently occurring events; when they take place; must they be seen by all, or rejected by all? Must those who witnessed a miracle, deny that it ever existed, because it was not witnessed at the same time by all the rest of mankind? The supposition is absurd. But are miracles indeed opposed to experience? Certainly not; for strictly speaking, as Dr. Paley judiciously remarks, "The narrative of the fact is then only contrary to experience when the fact is related to have existed at a time and place, at which time and place we, being present, did not perceive it to exist. As if it should be asserted, that in a particular room, and at a particular hour of a certain day, a man was raised from the dead; in which room, and at the time specified, we, being present, and looking on, perceived no such event to have taken place. Here the assertion is contrary to experience, properly so called; and this is a contrariety which no evidence can surmount." If, according to the definition of this excellent writer, such a contradiction of positive evidence alone can be fairly deemed contrary to experience, then can it never be said of the miracles affirmed in the Scripture, that they were contrary to experience, seeing that they were performed in the face of open day, before many witnesses, both friendly and inimical to the cause which they were brought to support, whose testimony agrees in their favour, the one evincing their conviction by their silence, the other proclaiming their triumph by the propagation of these facts, uncontroverted by their contemporaries and adversaries. Dr. Paley goes on to say, "Short of this I know of no intelligible signification which can be affixed to the term, contrary to experience, but one, viz., that of not having ourselves experienced any thing similar to the things related, or such things not being generally experienced by others. I say, not generally; for to state concerning the fact in question, that no such thing was ever experienced, or that universal experience is against it, is to assume the subject of the controversy." He concludes, "The force of experience as an objection to miracles is founded on the presumption, either that the course of nature is invariable; or that, if it ever varied, variations will be frequent and general.

Of the first part of this presumption we have neutralized the force, in order to clear our definition of a miracle from the entanglements of Mr. Hume's

sophism, and the other may be soon despatched. For variations that are frequent and general can scarcely be deemed variations at all; those things which occur almost every day, and from year to year, so as to make their appeal to universal experience, seem to belong to the common and settled course of nature; but miracles, especially when received in connexion with their moral purpose, must, of necessity, be few, and confined within a comparatively narrow sphere, as to their actual exhibition. "The whole system of miracles requires only the admission of an occasional departure from the ordinary course of things, neither including frequency nor perpetuity." Unless miracle be sparingly used it loses its effect. The power which has wrought one may produce any number; but the same act, though repeated most monotonously, may be altered in its character, and that which *was* miracle, is so no longer. Miracles, the grandest displays of Divine power, change their nature the moment they are interwoven into a strict order and uniform series. Let a chain of miracles be drawn through every age, and around every individual, and the term is a solecism. The circumstance of frequency is the vitiating principle.

Thus have we endeavoured to define the nature of miraculous interposition, and to clear the definition of most of those difficulties with which infidel insinuations might perplex and embarrass it.

To be continued.

STUDY OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.

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(Continued from page 20.)

THE natural inference from the preceding observations is, *the Sacred Scriptures should be read*. Allusion has been already made to those who entirely neglect this depository of truth; they neither read the Sacred Volume, nor care to hear it read, and must, therefore, to a very alarming degree, remain ignorant of those truths which alone can make them wise unto salvation. These should be prevailed upon to lay aside their prejudices, become sensible of the value of the Scriptures, and with candid and unfettered minds, peruse their important contents.

They, who have read but occasionally should read them frequently. As an eminent painter once said respecting his profession, "*nulla dies sine linea*," no day without a line, so they should not allow a day to pass without seeking instruction and direction from God in his written word. As steadily as they endeavour to repair by temporal refreshment, the wastes which time makes in their bodies, they should seek to have their souls supplied with knowledge and heavenly wisdom from the pure source of divine inspiration. —As the mariner has, at least, daily recourse to his charts, safely to steer his course over the depths of ocean, so they should, at least, daily have recourse to the Word of God, the divine chart, to steer their course safely over the sea of life to the haven of eternal rest. Frequency of intercourse, as in the case of persons, will ripen into friendship and love; so that they who were once averse to this sacred exercise will exclaim, "O how love I thy law!" This love of the Word of God and constant examination of its contents, are characteristic of the pious man: "*My delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*"