

A variable experience gives rise only to probable evidence; a uniform experience amounts to a proof. Probability always supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence proportioned to the superiority. If the fact attested partakes of the marvellous, if it is such as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite extremes, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains. In such cases we must balance the opposite experiments, and deduct the lesser number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence."

Two things in these few sentences are to be carefully noted. The first is, that in all matters of fact we are to be influenced or directed exclusively by experience; and second, the proper law or rule by which we are to divide different experiences, and thereby arrive at a reasonable or philosophical conclusion. The first makes useless all other testimony save that of experience, and the second classifies and disposes of this experience according to the most approved system of philosophy, Mr. Hume being in the philosophical chair. But he is bolder when he says,—

"A miracle is more properly a subject of derision than argument.—A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire, as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. And if so, it is an undeniable consequence, that it cannot be surmounted by any proof whatever from testimony. A miracle, therefore, can never be rendered credible, even in the lowest degree."

Observe, Mr. Hume distinctly affirms that a miracle being contrary to the natural laws, can never be proved, established, or made credible by *any kind*—the very strongest testimony.—Again he says:—

"It is impossible for God Almighty to give a revelation, attended with such evidence, that it can be reasonably believed in after ages, or even in the same age, by any person who has not been an eye witness of the miracles by which it is supported."

After making these assertions and taking these positions, he illustrates them with great dexterity and ingenuity. We may yet give a few samples of what he has further said against the pretensions of miracles and religion; but meanwhile we are prepared to hear the Doctor. He thus speaks:—

"That the evidence of testimony is derived solely from experience, which appears to be an axiom of this writer, is at least not so incontestible a truth as he supposes; that, on the contrary, testimony has a natural and original influence on belief, prior to experience, will, I imagine, easily be evinced. For this purpose, let it be remarked, that the earliest assent, which is given to testimony by children, and which is previous to all experience, is in fact the most unlimited; that by a gradual experience of mankind, it is gradually contracted and reduced to narrower bounds. To say, therefore,