

about to suffer? With equal cruelty are his Apostles and Disciples persecuted after him. Nevertheless, tho' 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 this 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; 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, wherever they go, the sacred books of the law and the prophets, which they continue to reverence, and which bear such ample testimony to the divinity of Jesus Christ; where 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 performances 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, what 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 Goshan, where all is light, not with the Egyptians, who grope in darkness, and cannot find their way, *Exodus x. 23.*

Still should they wish for *signs and wonders*, they may daily see enough to reclaim them from their incredulity in those which God works in the daily admiration of the universe. These, though common, yet, to one who thinks, are no less admirable than the greatest miracles; which strike us more forcibly only on account of their novelty, and because they seem deviations from the common course of nature, and the fixed order of things.—Did the infidel but consult the great book of nature as he ought, he would soon renounce his incredulity: and the believer would always find in it new motives of credibility, new and conclusive arguments to convince him still more and more of the truth of what he already believes.

We read in the gospel how our Saviour with a few barley loaves and some fishes, fed several thousands; and that, when the multitude had satisfied their hunger, several baskets were filled with the fragments left. Such a miracle, one would think, were sufficient to enforce conviction, and to compel the most obdurate infidel to profess himself a convert to the faith. Yet it had not generally this effect on those who had witnessed it: nor would it in all probability upon us: else how comes it that we are so little moved with a prodigy as great, if not greater, which is observable every year in the reproduction of the corn and other seeds, which are buried in the ground. Out of every grain we see rising a stalk, surrounded with leaves

and bearing many grains; and thus to man is rendered a hundred fold that which he had sown.— God still continues in a stupendous manner to multiply the loaves in the desert to feed his creatures; but the wonders, which he performs in the usual course of nature, strike us not, because they are common and ordinary.

We would stand astonished to see a dead man raised to life; and yet we are nothing surprised at the much more wonderful sight of millions of creatures, whom God is daily calling into existence, and on whom he bestows a being and a life, which they never enjoyed before.

We would easily discover the finger of a God in the change of an Aaron's rod into a serpent; of the rivers of Egypt into blood; of the water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana, in Galilee. And yet we see not the same finger in the daily and equally astonishing change it makes on ourselves, and on all living creatures, by converting the meat and drink we take, into the very substance of our flesh and blood; and even the substance and various juices of the earth, into the substance of trees, herbs, fruits, and flowers: which change shews the possibility of another still more wonderful one, which God has reserved for himself to work by the ministry of his lawful pastors in the great and unbloody sacrifice of the new law. And though this change is proved by none of the senses, but that of the hearing; yet on this very account, like the mystery of the Unity and Trinity of God, it is the most proper object and trial of our faith.— Faith, says the apostle, comes by hearing. *Fides ex auditu.* And our Saviour gives this clearly to be understood by his speech to the apostle St. Thomas, after his resurrection. *Because thou hast seen me; Thomas, said he, thou hast believed: but blessed are they, who have not seen, and yet have believed.*

Should we wish for *signs and wonders* to confirm our faith, there is abundance of them to be seen in nature; which are not the less astonishing that they are not miracles. Consider only with what admirable design the great Ruler of the universe sends forth his sun in the morning, and recalls him at night, when he has sufficiently warmed our earth with his rays; and afforded us light to discharge the necessary labours of the day. Then the cool which succeeds, condensating the vapours which his heat had raised, makes them descend in dews to refresh the earth. A sable curtain, as it were, is drawn round nature's couch: and every animal is invited to enjoy soft repose. Yet that nature may not seem to relapse into primeval darkness, and lest we should require some light even during the silence of the night, he has hung up his moon in the heavens, and has strewn the whole firmament with twinkling stars, to shed a milder lustre on us, which can neither disturb our rest by its excessive brightness, nor scorch our earth with its burning heat.

Consider the wonderful economy, with which he causes the air to bear aloft the rising vapour, to roll it into clouds; which, being wafted in every direc-