

these laws come under the general cognizance of mankind. This would destroy man's free agency, and, instead of his conduct being determined by the ordinary motives which are essential to preserve the character of an accountable being, his actions would be always the result of an immediate inspiration, incompatible with his moral faculties as a creature possessing that liberty without which he would become a piece of mere machinery, wrought upon by a necessity as inevitable as that which is impressed upon the physical and natural universe around him.

The second method of revelation is, to admit that some particular persons were appointed to teach and authenticate it to the world. In this last case, they would stand in need of more than ordinary endowments. The very intrinsic excellence of religion, while it constitutes, to the reasoning powers, an irresistible internal evidence of its spirituality and its Divine source, acting upon the corruption of a depraved nature, and presented to a world sunk in superstition and immorality, would make against the cause which it actually demonstrated. Men would be slow to believe a system which opposed their passions and prejudices, and required a relinquishment of their favourite pursuits. Besides which, as we have intimated, a revelation, the necessity of which has arisen from the fallen state of human nature, must involve subjects of belief which are above the powers of unassisted reason either to discover or to demonstrate. It was therefore necessary that men propagating doctrines so new and so strange, should produce some seal to their mission, and receive from the Being under whose direction they professed to act, a sanction for their authority. This was actually afforded by miracles. It is within the power of the unassisted faculties of man to elaborate theories, and to propound doctrines; and on those inventions an impostor might urge his claims to a Divine mission. And suppose the Author of Christianity had rested his pretensions, as the Son of God, merely on his doctrines and the scheme of morals, of which he exhibited them as the fundamental and essential principles, might not any objector have met him with the confounding interrogation—You allege your superior sagacity as a proof of Divine commission; but, what evidence have we that all that you have proposed may not be the invention of your own intellect, the mere working out of your natural powers?

The appeal to miracles silences the objector at once. Nature and the God of nature, attest, that the pretender to a Divine mission is no impostor. Every act of supernatural power is a supernatural evidence that he is a delegate from the skies—that his doctrine is divine. But this evidence extends no farther than its necessity; it ceases when the last truth from Heaven is proclaimed, and transmitted in a permanent form to all succeeding generations; then both the revelation itself, and this extraordinary proof of its divinity, become equally the subjects of testimony. And now we are conducted, in the course of this general inquiry, to ask,

IV. What place the miracles of Jesus Christ occupy, in this peculiar species of evidence, to the truth of Divine revelation; and what are their distinguishing characteristics?

Revelation began in Paradise, and was accompanied through all the stages of its progress by miraculous confirmation. The Jews, from their earliest history, were familiar with the extraordinary corroboration of the religion, the substance of which they derived from the patriarchs. Inspired men, at every new communication of the Divine will, appealed to these wonders, to establish the prophecies they uttered, and the economy they introduced, and gradually consummated. Every page of the earlier records of this remarkable people, was crowded with strange events, with manifestations of Deity, with facts

which proclaimed that their nation was governed by a theocracy, which was continually, and at proper intervals, asserting its claim to their reverential obedience and devout regard. Miracle, in fact, was impressed upon their whole economy; but that economy was only the shadow of better things to come. The substance was Christ—"To him give all the prophets witness." After his personal ministry was concluded, and he had ascended on high, his inspired servants endowed with miraculous powers from his promised Spirit, which descended upon them on the day of Pentecost, in order to confirm the doctrines which they received, performed also many wonderful works, and attested the truth of their mission by the supernatural agency which made its appeal to the senses of all who heard them; but when the revelation was completed, these extraordinary powers ceased, and only charity remained, which never faileth.

Between the prophets of the former, and the apostles of the last and most glorious dispensation, stands Jesus Christ. The prophets, by their predictions and miracles, had pointed indefinitely to a Messiah; the apostles declared that the Messiah, so long expected, and whose advent had been preceded by so many marvels, was their Master—Jesus Christ. This fact they learned from him; and he also attested the justice of his pretensions by works such as had never been wrought before, and which were never equalled afterwards. He did the works which none other man ever did. This is his own testimony, and how are we to understand it?

Among all former and subsequent workers of miraculous power, the Saviour stands on an eminence which throws them into the distance of boundless inferiority.

1. The exercise of this miraculous agency always depended upon his own will. "Lord, if thou wilt," said the leper to him, "thou canst make me clean." Jesus answered, "I will, be thou clean; and immediately he was made whole." In the exercise of this power, while nothing stayed it, he made no appeal to another Power. When he sighed and looked up to heaven, before he commanded the ears of the deaf man to be opened, it was not a preparatory act of supplication, but a spontaneous emotion of his feeling and sympathising heart, excited by the variety and extent of human suffering. We have a similar instance of his sensibility as a man, when the Pharisees of Dalmanutha desired a sign of his mission, "He sighed deeply in his spirit;" but it was neither occasioned by the difficulty of the requisition, nor by reluctance to afford whatever evidence could reasonably be deemed necessary, to prove his Messiahship; it arose from his commiseration of their inveterate unbelief, and was caused by the dreadful consequences of it, which he foresaw. There is but one instance in which he appeared to appeal to another Power, and that one instance occurred at the grave of Lazarus. Then, indeed, he lifted up his eyes, and said, "Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me." But this prayer is expressly asserted, in its very language, to have been not on his own account, but for the sake of those who surrounded him, and who needed such a public seal to his mission, to render their belief without excuse. Therefore he added, "and I know that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me; that they may know that I came down from heaven, and that we are one; that while I am a man I am the Son of man, clothed with all power, in my divine nature, to work the same things which the Father works." On other occasions, the authority of his language is singularly impressive. "Thy sins are forgiven thee," "Arise, take up thy bed and walk;" "I command thee to come out of her." How inferior to this is all

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