

that case, it is easy to see, that I have nineteen hundred and ninety-nine degrees of evidence, that my information is false. Or is it necessary, in order to make it credible, that the single instance have two thousand times as much evidence, as any of the opposite instances, supposing them equal among themselves; or supposing them unequal, as much as all the two thousand put together, that there may at least be an equilibrium: This is impossible. I had for some of those instances, the evidence of sense, which hardly any testimony can equal, much less exceed. Once more—must the evidence I have of the variety of the witness be a full equivalent to the two thousand instances which oppose the fact attested? By the supposition, I have no positive evidence for or against his veracity, he being a person I never saw before. Yet if none of these be the balancing the essay writer means, I despair of being able to discover his meaning.

“Is then so weak a proof from testimony incapable of being refuted?—I am far from thinking so; although ever so weak a proof could not be overturned by such a contrary experience. How then may it be overturned? *First*, by contradicting testimony. Going homewards I meet another person, whom I know as little as I did the former, and finding that he comes from the ferry, I ask him concerning the truth of the report. He affirms that the whole is a fiction; that he saw the boat, and all in it, come safe to land. This would do more to turn the scale than fifty thousand such contrary instances as were supposed. Yet this would not remove suspicion. Indeed, were we to consider the matter abstractly, one would think, that all suspicion would be removed, that the two opposite testimonies would destroy each other, and leave the mind entirely under the influence of its former experience, in the same state as if neither testimony had been given. But this is by no means consonant to fact. When once testimonies are introduced, former experience is generally of no account in the reckoning; it is but like the dust of the balance, which has not any sensible effect upon the scale. The mind hangs in suspense between the two contrary declarations, and considers it as one to one, or equal in probability, that the report is true, or that it is false. Afterwards a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, confirm the declaration of the second. I am then quite at ease. Is this the only way of confuting false testimony? No. I suppose, *second*, that instead of meeting any person who can inform me concerning the fact, I get from some, who are acquainted with the witness, information concerning his character. They tell me he is notorious for lying; and that his lies are commonly forged, not with a view to interest, but merely to gratify a malicious pleasure, which he takes in alarming strangers. This, though not so direct a refutation as the former, will be sufficient to discredit his report. In the former, where there is testimony contradicting testimony, the author's metaphor may be used with propriety. The things weighed are homogenous; and when contradictory evidences are presented to the mind, tending to prove positions which cannot be both true, the mind must decide on the comparative strength of the opposite evidences, before it yields to either.

“But is this in the supposition first made? By no means. The two thousand instances formerly known, and the single instance attested, as they relate to different facts, though of a contrary nature, are not contradictory. There is no inconsistency in believing both.