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## ARTICLE VII.

"STUDIES IN THEOLOGY" AND HUME'S "ESSAY  
ON MIRACLES."<sup>1</sup>

BY HON. F. J. LAMB, MADISON, WIS.

A BOOK by A. C. McGiffert, Professor of Church History in the Union Theological Seminary, New York, is before the public.<sup>2</sup> It is advertised as one of a series of twelve volumes already published or in preparation. The announced aim or purpose of this Library of twelve volumes, called "Studies in Theology," is "to bring all the resources of modern learning to the interpretation of the Scriptures, and to place within the reach of all who are interested the broad conclusions of men of distinction in the world of Christian scholarship on the great problems of Faith and Destiny." Organizing these twelve volumes into a Library for teaching in Theology is evidence that justifies the conclusion that distinct teaching of any important doctrine of Christian Theology in any book of the series is the doctrine of the Library as an organic whole. An opposite conclusion would make the Library self-destructive — a house divided against itself.

Our attention has been specially called to the teaching of Professor McGiffert's book on the subject of Scripture Miracles. It is found at page 221, and is based on the hostile "Essay on Miracles" by the skeptic David Hume:—

<sup>1</sup> Studies in Theology: A New Series of Hand-books, being aids to interpretation in Biblical Criticism, for the use of Ministers, Theological Students and general readers. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

<sup>2</sup> Protestant Thought before Kant. (Studies in Theology.)

"Critics of Hume are quite right in saying that it is not necessarily impossible to prove a miracle, that is, they are right if a miracle be understood simply as an otherwise unheard-of event inexplicable in the light of our present knowledge. But Hume was really concerned primarily to destroy the apologetic value of miracles [i.e., in our unlatinized vernacular, to *destroy the testimony of God given to men through the Scripture miracles*], and for that purpose his argument was valid, and has never been successfully refuted. That it cannot be historically proved that any particular event was wrought by a supernatural power with the purpose of testifying to a person's divine commission, is a commonplace among historians to-day. For such proof assumes a complete knowledge of all possible natural forces which may have operated to produce the event, a knowledge of which no one now thinks of pretending. While Hume's essay then tended to throw discredit upon all reports of wonderful and unusual events, it did not show them to be unprovable, but it did destroy the apologetic value which had been ascribed to them. Against the apologetic position of the day Hume's argument was really final. Miracles had been regarded, not simply as a proof, but the supreme proof of Christianity. This they could no longer be where his essay was understood."

We have here the doctrine of this Library of Studies in Theology on the Scripture miracles. The contentions of Hume's essay are approved. Professor McGiffert's book adds refinements and grounds unknown, or at least unnamed, by Hume for upholding the contentions of his essay; viz. that although the events (miracles) recorded in Scripture can be proved, yet (a) it cannot be proved that any of them was wrought by supernatural power, or for the purpose of proving a person's divine commission, because (b) it is commonplace evidence among historians to-day that it cannot be proved historically, for (c) that proof cannot be made unless by testimony of a witness who has a complete knowledge of all possible natural forces which may have operated to produce the event (miracle) — knowledge of which no one now thinks of pretending, and (d) that Hume's essay has such potency that when understood it prevents the miracles

of God, Supreme in the cosmos, from being Supreme proof of Christianity.

Many replies were made to Hume's essay in his lifetime and afterwards. McGiffert says that generally the writers misunderstood the essay—that Hume's wrongful use of language induced misapprehension. That fault, as will be seen, pervades the essay. Lists of replies are given by McGiffert (p. 221); also by Horne's "Introduction" (vol. i. p. 242), and in Greenleaf's "Testimony of the Evangelists" (p. 36). These presumably embrace all replies that are important. Examination shows that the writers all followed the trail,—the line of discussion chosen and used by Hume in his essay,—that no one of them challenged the essay or dealt with it from an independent standpoint. Hume's essay was clearly obnoxious to challenge from the standpoint of science and to examination by the rigor and thoroughness of the scientific method of investigation.

This redivivus of Hume's attack upon the Scripture miracles by Professor McGiffert's book, and the Library of which the book is constituent, forces serious issues upon the believers in the Word of God. To get these issues fairly before us it is necessary to trace somewhat the history and changes Hume made in his essay. When first published in 1748, Hume contended:—

*"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 complete 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 derived from human testimony."*

From the last clause, which we have italicized, grew the maxim heard then and since from skeptics, infidels, agnostics, and to-day from Advanced Higher Critics of the Bible,

that the Scripture miracles cannot be proved. Hume had evidently modified his views before he issued a later edition of his essay; for in the later edition Hume inserted a prefatory advertisement, indicating changes in his essay and complaining of unjust treatment, and demanded expressly as follows: "Henceforth the Author desires that the following pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles."<sup>1</sup>

The "Essay on Miracles" follows as Section X., in which Hume cuts out—omits entirely—the above clause which we have italicized. In the amended essay he also confessed that it might be possible to prove a miracle by human testimony, but not as foundation of a system of religion. The foregoing from Hume and the addition thereto by Professor McGiffert's book *ante* (p. 106) present the issues involved. They are primarily issues of fact. But issues on the quality or philosophical value of Hume's essay are also involved. We will examine them in that order.

#### FACTS.

At the time of Hume and until near the middle of the nineteenth century, the assumption, it seems, prevailed that the documents constituting the Bible were not competent evidence.

Considered fundamentally and rationally, the ultimate standard for the competency of evidence is that which the Creator has given to every normal human being, through what jurists designate as the judging faculty or power,<sup>2</sup> the faculty in constant daily use by every one in deciding all matters of one's life, small or great. Whatsoever, coming to that judging faculty, produces belief, assurance, or conviction as

<sup>1</sup> Hume's Works, vol. iv. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Code of Evidence (Livingston), vol. i. p. 421. 1823-1873.

to the verity or non-verity of any matter, is thereby shown to be competent evidence, because it performs the function of evidence, i.e. that of producing belief, assurance, or conviction in that faculty. The credence produced may be slight or potent — that is a matter of degree; but if it is effective in any degree, it is evidence. Hence Jeremy Bentham, in his book on the "Rationale of Evidence," laid down the doctrine that, "In the character of objection to competency no objection ought to be allowed."<sup>1</sup>

Courts, however, in the exercise of discretion have from time to time enforced more exacting standards of competency in litigations between man and man.

That eminent jurist Simon Greenleaf, LL.D., was professor of law in Harvard from 1833 to 1848, and during that time was writing and delivering the lectures that produced his great work "Treatise on the Law of Evidence" (3 vols.), standard authority on that subject on both sides of the Atlantic. During that time and evidently in connection with his lectures, Professor Greenleaf took up the mooted question of the competency of the books of the Bible as evidence. He took his stand in such inquiry on the proposition that neither skeptic, infidel, nor any other has any right or reason that can justify one in demanding a greater or more exacting standard for competency of evidence than that which sagacity and experience have enabled courts of justice to establish and enforce in controversies before them, between man and man, in administering the science of jurisprudence. The books of the Bible, like all written or printed documents, purport to be evidence of their contents. Jurisprudence is the science that deals especially with evidence, and by its principles, rules, and standards determines the

<sup>1</sup> *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*, vol. 1. p. 8. 1827.

competency of what is proposed as evidence — discriminates truth from error, and through evidence establishes fact and truth; for truth is conformity to fact.

Professor Greenleaf found that early in the establishment of the science of jurisprudence, it was seen that justice, right, and human welfare made it imperative that evidence embraced in written documents should be safeguarded from loss, by other sanctions than the sanction which living contemporaries could give by their testimony of corroboration; for men, from death, sickness, permanent absence, or other causes, are unable to testify in person, and so the corroborating testimony of contemporaries is lost. Acting on experience, in view of that imperative requirement, it was determined that (1) preservation of such documents, (2) in proper custody, (3) for a generation,—fixed at thirty years,—was due and adequate sanction; that when those three facts were conjoined regarding a written document they should sanction it, and the document be competent and admissible evidence in all controversies between opponents.

The doctrine which Greenleaf found, established, and expressed in the administration of jurisprudence in courts of justice is known as the "Ancient Document rule of evidence." It is fully set forth in the first volume of his "Treatise on the Law of Evidence" (sect. 21). It is found in every standard work on evidence. It applies to all possible kinds of writings, including private letters, entries in family Bibles, etc. The rule applies to copies as well as originals. Professor Greenleaf's investigation in regard to the Bible documents resulted in his standard work on the subject,<sup>1</sup> holding that the Bible documents are clearly within the rule

<sup>1</sup>The Testimony of the Evangelists, Examined by the Rules of Evidence as administered in Courts of Justice. New York: James Cocroft and Company. 1846.

of Ancient Document evidence — that they were kept in custody of the Israelite church or synagogue before the institution of the Christian church, and have been in its custody since — that the custody has been proper — the place was the only one to look to for the documents. We may, we hope, be pardoned in saying that a few years ago we put forth a volume, "Miracle and Science," in which, following Greenleaf, we made examination of the decisions of all prominent courts for the last three hundred years; that a multitude of cases have been adjudged deciding this doctrine; that the decisions are unanimous, upholding the doctrines laid down by Greenleaf, none to the contrary. In the twelfth edition of Greenleaf on Evidence, the doctrine as found in his "Testimony of the Evangelists" is embodied in Vol. I. Sect. 142.

As these works are extensively in use and accessible generally, we do not further enter into details here. But that all may see how clearly and completely the books of the Bible are within the Ancient Document rule, and are competent evidence under standards constantly enforced in enlightened courts of justice, we will state an important case, viz. that of *Attorney-General v. Boulton*,<sup>1</sup> as follows:—

The case involved an alleged trust made one hundred and forty-one years before the trial. It was of such importance as to require as complainant the highest law officer of Great Britain — the Attorney-General. Those interested in the trust offered in evidence a paper as a copy of an alleged original writing creating the trust, which opponents resisted as incompetent and inadmissible. We note the identity of conditions of that alleged copy with those of the Bible documents. In that case, as in the case of the Bible documents, only an alleged copy could be produced. Likewise no wit-

<sup>1</sup>3 Vesey, Jr., 220.



ness could be produced to prove the execution or existence of the original, or to account for loss or destruction of the original, or any evidence to account for the absence of the original save the very long lapse of time. The alleged copy in that case, like the Bible documents, as expressly stated in the report, had "*neither date nor signature.*" Furthermore, like the Bible documents, no proof could be given that the alleged copy had ever been compared with the original; but, as in the case of the Bible documents, the paper was more than thirty years old, and those living at the time of the transaction described in the copy, and who could have testified concerning the original, had long before departed from the scene of action — the paper had been kept in proper custody and from the first, when the contents of the paper came to be acted upon, it had been dealt with and acted upon as a valid copy of a valid original. In short, the conditions and circumstances of the paper affecting its competency and admissibility as evidence were identical in all material respects with the conditions and circumstances of the Bible documents as they now exist. After argument by eminent counsel and thorough consideration, the trial court held the alleged copy competent and admissible evidence, and that it should be received and given effect as evidence according to its full extent and import. On appeal to the Lord Chancellor, that eminent jurist called in the chief-justices of the other national courts of England, the Lord Chief-Justice Eyre and the Lord Chief-Baron McDonald, to act with him in the case. Their decision was unanimous, affirming the judgment of the lower court in all respects.

Tested even by standards of all enlightened courts, the books of the Bible are competent and admissible evidence.

They are to be read as the depositions of the writers.

What we call the Gospel of Matthew is the deposition of Matthew, the personal eyewitness and earwitness of and participator in the events and transactions therein set forth. The Gospel of John and his Epistles and Revelations are the depositions of John, the eyewitness and earwitness of the events and transactions therein set forth. So too of Mark. When miracle released Peter, Mark was of such maturity, character, and standing that Luke, in identifying a house in Jerusalem, used the name of Mark, i.e. the house of John Mark's mother (Acts xii. 12). Mark may well have been the "certain young man" who "followed" Jesus and did not flee until attacked (Mark xiv. 51, 52).

Luke has two special depositions, i.e. in the first few verses of Luke and of Acts. Luke in them testifies that the contents of the Book of Luke are a record of what Jesus did and taught from the beginning of his ministry until his ascension, gathered from eyewitnesses of and participants in those transactions; that Luke had himself personally traced accurately the course of all things from the first; and that he had done all for the purpose of giving to a disciple certainty of knowledge of Christianity. The contents of Luke and the earlier part of Acts are historical evidence of the first quality and character. Commencing with Acts xvi. 10, Luke testifies thereafter personally. Peter's two books are depositions of Peter, eyewitness and earwitness of the facts and verities therein recorded. So too of the depositions of Paul, of James and Jude. Those depositions detail the facts constituting the miracles. Their testimony is full, express, and ample. There is no opposing testimony. They establish the verity of the many miracles they describe. So too of the books of the Old Testament. As indicated by Professor Greenleaf in "Testimony of the Evangelists" (p. 25), a juror sworn as

such, who should duly read or have read to him the eleventh chapter of the deposition of John, no opposing evidence being produced, and yet refuse to give his verdict affirming the resurrection of Lazarus from death to life, would violate his oath, which is the crime of perjury — an act of moral turpitude.

Professor McGiffert's book, while admitting that the events recorded in the Scriptures as miracles are provable, yet contends as set forth *ante* (p. 106).

We will examine these contentions with as much brevity as due consideration will permit. Jesus, the paramount witness, is an historical person, a Jew, born in the city of Bethlehem in the Roman province of Judea during the reign of the Roman Emperor Cæsar Augustus; he lived, wrought, and was known as a carpenter in the city of Nazareth in Palestine until thirty years of age, when he commenced teaching and founding the Christian religion in the world; he was crucified, at the age of thirty-three, through the hatred of his countrymen, who procured the warrant for his death from Pontius Pilate, Roman Governor at Jerusalem. As Hooker in his work "Ecclesiastical Polity" records: "The Gospels . . . do all historically declare something which our Lord Jesus Christ himself either spoke, did or suffered."

Because Jesus wrought miracles — healing the impotent man at Bethesda, and giving sight to the man born blind — on the day of the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted Jesus, denying his divine commission as Messiah and teacher sent from God, saying, "This man is not of God, for he keepeth not the Sabbath day" (John ix. 16). That made an issue which Jesus at once brought to trial. Jesus reminded deniers that they had sent a deputation to John the Baptist, to inquire if

he was the Messiah. John replied, No, and pointed out Jesus as the Messiah — the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. Jesus testified to his persecutors that John's testimony was true, i.e. that he, Jesus, was the Messiah. But Jesus testified further: "The witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works [miracles] which the Father hath given me to accomplish . . . bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (Am. Rev.).

This testimony of Jesus is broader, deeper, more comprehensive, than for that special occasion. It was and is Jesus' testimony that all the miracles he had wrought or should work were, each and all, the testimony of God authenticating Jesus as Messiah and teacher sent from God, i.e. to prove Jesus' divine commission (John v. 36).

Again, Jesus testified to Pharisees and doctors of the law at Capernaum, when he wrought the miracle healing the palsied man, that the miracle was wrought as the testimony of God to authenticate Jesus in his divine office.

Jesus' audible prayer before the open tomb in which Lazarus' dead body lay, discloses the profound fact that God the Father and Immanuel the Son, in mutual counsel, had concurred in all the details of proceedings in the Lazarus episode, and that the miracle raising Lazarus from death to life was the testimony of Deity to prove Jesus' divine commission, i.e. "that thou [God] hast sent me." Every deposition in the New Testament that touches the subject corroborates the foregoing. There is no evidence to the contrary. The evidence is overwhelming that the Scripture miracles are the testimony of God to authenticate his messages and messengers to man.

Professor McGiffert bases his denials in this matter on what he calls the "commonplace" evidence of a very small

company, i.e. the historians,—small when compared with the mass of mankind. Commonplace evidence is that which, having been many times found adequate as proof to any proposition, makes unnecessary any further tests. To be of any value, however, commonplace evidence must be general. When it is general, it finds its way into literature and standard lexicons. The *σημείον* (English "sign") is used to describe testimony given by God. A sample of commonplace evidence is given in the Century Dictionary in its eighth definition of "sign," viz.—

"In Biblical use: (a) That by which a person or thing is known, especially as divinely distinguished (Luke ii. 12; Rom. iv. 11; 2 Cor. xii. 12). Hence (b) Especially an appearance or occurrence indicative of divine presence or power, and authenticating a message or messenger (Acts ii. 22, vii. 36; 1 Cor. i. 22)."

Acts ii. 22 is part of the deposition of Peter, viz. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved [authenticated] of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know . . . ye have . . . slain."

Commonplace evidence that is recognized, generally proves, and the historical evidence proves, the precise opposite of Professor McGiffert's contention.

The final struggle of Professor McGiffert to uphold the skeptic Hume in his effort to destroy the testimony of God given to men through the Scripture miracles is the contention he proclaims that although the Scripture miracles can be proven (and as we have seen are proven) to have been wrought by the power of Deity, the Bible Christians must go farther and prove a negative, i.e. produce a witness to prove not only that it was divine potency, but also that it

was not force of nature that wrought the event, i.e. the miracle.

Preposterous as this contention of McGiffert's is, it is now constituent in the Library, and we will look into the contention to see what the evidence shows on the subject. A multitude was present at Capernaum at the time Jesus sent out his apostles, and the afflicted were healed. Luke adds, "The whole multitude sought to touch him [Jesus]; for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all" (Luke vi. 19). A woman in that region, suffering from an issue of blood twelve years, unhelped by physicians, "having heard the things concerning Jesus" (Mark v. 27, 28, Am. Rev.), came to believe "If I touch but his garments, I shall be made whole." She evidently shrank from public disclosure of her malady in asking Jesus to heal her. Being in Capernaum, and seeing Jesus, his disciples, Jairus, and neighbors, a large concourse that "thronged" Jesus, passing, she mingled with the throng, and furtively behind Jesus' back "touched the border of his garment: and immediately [*παραχρήμα*, "along with the touch"] her issue of blood stanchèd." Jesus halted the procession, saying, "Who touched me?" All denied, and wondered that he should ask such a question. But Jesus persisted, because, as he testified, he had perceived virtue go forth from him. No one except the woman and Jesus knew of the woman's secret act, and none but she and Jesus knew of the miracle. There was no objective evidence to others, no laying on of hands, no fiat word spoken. But when Jesus persisted in his inquiry and the woman saw her act could not be "hid," she came forward trembling and confessed all. The deific energy that wrought the miracle was so intrinsically connected with the sensitive faculties of Jesus' physical life, that when it operated in working the miracle, Jesus

knew that virtue passed from him. The real single and only power that operated in producing the miracle is distinctively, affirmatively, and conclusively proven. The "way" of proving it was not the "way" Professor McGiffert proposed, but it was Christ's way, God's way,—many times different from man's way (Isa. lv. 8, 9). The paramount testimony of Christ proves that the power that wrought the miracle was deific power—that of God. The evidence distinctively and indubitably excludes natural forces, and distinctively and conclusively refutes McGiffert's contention that it could not be proved. The transaction is a conspicuous working out in actual human life of the very essence of the justly famous maxim of jurisprudence: "Expressio unius—exclusio alterius." The *vera causa* operating in producing the miracle having been distinctly and affirmatively proven, all other, and all supposititious causes are conclusively excluded. Furthermore, it must be remembered that this too is one of the miracles that Jesus testified was wrought to bear witness of God the Father, to prove Jesus' divine commission.

The books of the Bible are competent evidence; the evidence they furnish proves the verity of the Scripture miracles, their divine source, and their divine purpose. That proof refutes the infidelic contentions of David Hume's essay. That evidence also confutes the effort of Professor McGiffert to uphold the infidelic essay of Hume, and confutes McGiffert's contention that there is such potency in Hume's essay that it prevents the testimony of Him who is Supreme in the cosmos from giving Supreme proof of Christianity by his miracles.

These conclusions are established in considering the evidence and facts. Facts are fundamental, primary, and rule supreme over all theoretical, hypothetical, and philosophical

contentions. We have therefore considered first the facts regarding Hume's essay. But we are persuaded that the same conclusions will be reached in considering the character, quality, and philosophy of the essay.

#### THE ESSAY.

In beginning his essay, Hume flatters himself that he has discovered an argument that will be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, not naming his alleged discovery, leaving that to be discerned. Examination of the essay shows that, instead of discovering an argument, Hume invented a device, a formula to serve as an instrument by means of which he could evolve views and contentions as arguments in his attack upon the miracles; and shows that Hume proposed to, and did, employ arithmetical elements in the essay. Hence, he made the instrument mathematical—equational, a formula, in the opposite members of which he could set objects to be compared.

Contemplating the many and multiform qualities inherent in inanimate creations, and designating those qualities brought to light when such creations are acted upon or with as "laws of nature," Hume set inanimate creations with so-called laws of nature in one member of his formula and in the opposite member set human beings and their activities, and proceeds in form and words to institute a comparison between the objects so contrasted, basing his comparison upon moral quality, the criterion of the ethical value of truthfulness. That is, Hume attempts to make comparison between

(1) Activities of human beings—souls endowed with intelligence, freedom of will, conscience, power to choose between right and wrong, capable of ethical virtue (and its



opposite), subject to temptations from passions within and seductions and terror without—occupying one member of his formula; and

(2) Lifeless, soulless, conscienceless, insentient creations and their so-called laws occupying the opposite member of his formula—creations incapable of thought, purpose, intent or choice, incapable of mendacity (or its opposite), incapable of vice (or its opposite), incapable of the ethical virtue of truthfulness (for ethical virtue can be attributed only to intelligent acts of living beings, possessing freedom capable of and purposely choosing, and in fact and life conforming to, the true and right because true and right, and rejecting the false because false).

It is obvious at once that comparison between the objects Hume contemplates as set in contrast is impossible, because of the absence of the indispensable prerequisite for comparison; namely, that the quality, character, or attribute adopted as the basis of comparison must be identically inherent in, be actually common to, each of the objects to be compared. Here that ethical quality or virtue of truthfulness is not only absent from, but is intrinsically impossible in, the inanimate, insentient creations and their qualities or forces called laws of nature, and always has been.

That Hume was conscious of the obstacle to his purposed comparison is shown by his resort to expedients, to make it appear that the comparison could properly be made. Examination of the more important of these expedients is necessary to enable us to understand the essay—its character, quality, and value. One expedient prominent in this essay is Hume's persistent contention that our knowledge (1) of the quality of human testimony and (2) of the so-called "laws of nature" is acquired solely by experience. This contention

is obviously untrue. Experience is what befalls one, what one endures. Observation is looking on without necessarily being in any way affected by an event. To know the mendacity of a man's testimony or a so-called "stroke of lightning" by observation is one thing, and to know either by experience is quite another. For some six thousand years unnumbered thousands had experience of strokes of lightning without learning enough of the natural laws of electricity to enable human beings to obey the primal command, given at creation, to "subdue it" (Gen. i. 28). Franklin acquired that knowledge by observation; for experiment in search of knowledge is intelligent, purposeful observation. For a like thousands of years the race of mankind had experience every twenty-four hours of the movements of the heavenly bodies without learning the natural laws of their courses, or even the primary truth that, instead of the sun and uttermost stars' moving around the earth once in every twenty-four hours, the earth itself revolved on its own axis in that time, and moved around the sun in a year. Copernicus by intelligent, purposeful observation learned and gave to men that fact and the laws of its nature. We are safe, we believe, in saying that the great mass and detail of knowledge of laws of nature acquired by purposeful observation is, in comparison, so vastly in excess of knowledge gained by mere experience, that the latter is practically negligible. But if "observation" is substituted in Hume's essay in place of his word "experience," so that his contention is that we learn (1) the quality of human testimony and (2) the laws of nature by one and the same process, i.e. by observation, that does not overcome the fatal obstacle to making the comparison Hume pretends to make between the non-comparable objects contrasted in his formula. We get

our knowledge of earthquakes and comets and the laws of their natures, respectively, by purposeful observation. But that identity of method of acquiring that knowledge does not render them comparable ethically or physically, or enable or entitle us to subtract earthquakes from comets, or comets from earthquakes, or to subtract our experience of either from experience of the other.

Another expedient resorted to by Hume to overcome the obstacle to his comparison is his false use of the word "violation," in describing miracle as a "violation" of the laws of nature. Miracle does not violate laws of nature. This has often been demonstrated. But, as Hume makes such great use of his assertion in his effort to make non-comparable things appear comparable, we examine it once more. The force of gravitation is familiar to all. It is always operating; it never ceases to operate to draw ponderous objects to the earth. But suppose an electro-magnet, fixed at some distance above the earth, with dynamic attraction for iron in excess of that of gravity for iron. A piece of iron tossed up from earth is operated on by gravity to draw it to earth; but if in the toss it hits the magnet, it is not drawn to earth, but is held suspended by the magnet, which, having greater attractive force, operates at the time on the iron in a direction opposite to that of gravity. If the attractive force of the magnet be gradually diminished to a degree less than that of gravity (all the time operating), the iron is at once drawn to earth. A law of nature has been for the time prevented from producing normal results, but the law has not been violated. This is illustrated by the miracle recorded in 2 Kings v. 6. The iron ax-head sunk in the stream was, by the miracle, made to float; but neither the specific gravity of the iron nor that of the water was altered, nor

was the law of gravity suspended. It operated all the time. The miracle consisted only in a divine volition interpolating a transient force greater than the excess of the specific gravity of the iron over that of water and acting in a direction opposite to that of gravity. This is precisely analogous to the action of the human will—with this exception; man's will acts upon outward objects only indirectly, through the mechanism of his body, and directly only upon his voluntary muscles; while God's will acts directly upon every element of the world he has created.<sup>1</sup> The last clause is adequate exposition of all miracles in which so-called laws of nature are involved.

Hume persists all through his essay in this false use of the word "violation"; and he so uses the word to bolster his main contention, and make it appear that objects actually non-comparable may be properly compared by using the same word in describing them. This is shown in the essay (p. 146) where Hume says of the powers of the Almighty:—

"We only know them from their operation in nature and this still reduces us to past observation, and obliges us to compare the instances of the violation of truth in the testimony of men with those of the violation of the laws of nature by miracles in order to judge which of them is most likely and probable."

Miracle does not violate laws of nature. Hence, the comparison postulated by Hume is impossible, and Hume's attempt to make it appear possible is a delusion and a deceit.

Another expedient of Hume for his false comparison is his persistent and sophistical dealing with "proof"—the word and the concept. Proof and what it stands for are simple. Proof is a product, the product of evidence. Proof is the establishment of the verity of a matter by evidence.

<sup>1</sup> Hodge, *Outline of Theology*, p. 276.

What is proof? was considered and adjudged by the New York Court of Appeals in an important case. The answer of that eminent tribunal is brief, clear, and cogent, viz. "Evidence is the medium of proof; proof is the effect of evidence."<sup>1</sup> Plainly an event must come into being before any evidence can exist as to the event. The coming into existence, with its attending circumstances of time, place, and witnesses, produces or furnishes the evidence that can thereafter prove the event. Hence events, past or present, are capable of proof, but not anything non-existing, a thing imagined in the future; for there is not, and in the nature of things there cannot be, any evidence thereof. But Hume persists in argument that a man by experience in the past has in hand thereby evidence that proves the actuality of what is actually non-existent—a gross palpable absurdity. He begins (p. 125) by asserting that experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning "matters of fact," and at once insidiously proceeds to reason as to the weather six months or more in the future as a "matter of fact," which it is not, but is merely a matter of conjecture, speculation as to what may occur. Leading the uncareful reader in that way, Hume argues that some events are more likely to be experienced than some others; that when a man's experience of events has been unfailling, or, as Hume says, infallible, "he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a *proof*<sup>2</sup> of the future existence of the event," i.e. that that which is non-existent is an actuality.

As thus fabricated by Hume, "proof" is only an empty form, a word without content or reality with which his

<sup>1</sup> 84 N. Y. Rep., p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Italics Hume's.

thoughts cheated themselves. The essay shows that this counterfeit word "proof" was devised by Hume to be employed by him, in claiming to offset it, to neutralize the testimony of eyewitnesses of the miracles; for Hume proposes a concrete instance—a miraculous fact—for so using the word. As he designates a miraculous fact for his illustration, we insert in brackets the resurrection of Lazarus. Hume says:—

"In order to increase the probability against the testimony of witnesses, let us suppose that the fact which they affirm [e.g. the resurrection of Lazarus], instead of being only marvelous, is really miraculous, and suppose also that the testimony, considered apart and in itself, amounts to an entire proof, in that case there is proof against proof."

That is, the testimony of Jesus, John, and other apostles, and that of Mary and Martha and their friends, which Hume admits "amounts to an entire proof"—nothing lacking—he contends is met, overthrown, or nullified by this chimera he has fabricated and calls "proof." Hume makes so much use of this word "proof," empty as fabricated by him, all through his essay and in the summary and conclusions, that we consider it somewhat further as used by him in his argument. He follows what we have just quoted with this:—

"Why is it more than probable that all men must die; that lead cannot of itself remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood and is extinguished by water; unless it be that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is required a violation of these laws or in other words, a miracle, to prevent them?" (p. 130).

Huxley, agnostic, in his "Life of Hume," answers this argument bluntly, but truly,—“The reply is obvious; not one of these events is more than probable”; and he adds: “Calling our repeated experiences ‘laws of nature’ adds nothing to its value, nor in the least increases any proba-

bility that it will be verified again, which [probability] may arise from its frequent verification." And in regard to Hume's assertion that the miracles he supposed violated laws of nature, Huxley says: "No one trained in the methods of science would imagine that any law of nature was violated thereby."

But Hume's infatuation for his chimera which he calls "proof" is such that he proceeds in downright earnest to put it forward to prove by it that God never wrought a miracle. On page 130 he says:—

"Nothing is esteemed a miracle if it happens in the common course of nature. But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life, because that has never been observed in any age or country. [Untrue and rank *petitio principii*.] There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise an event would [not be a miracle] not deserve the appellation. And as a uniform experience is a proof, there is here a direct and a full proof— from the nature of the fact *against the existence of any miracle* [even that of creation]."

That is, Hume's counterfeit "proof" demolishes the testimony of Jesus, and that of the "Widow of Nain" and her friends, and that of Jairus and his neighbors, and that of five thousand men hungry but fully fed with five barley loaves and two small fishes augmented and divided among them, and that of the man born blind and of all other witnesses of the Scripture miracles. Hume persists in the false use of the word "proof" to the end. As a part of his conclusions (p. 146), he asserts that no miracle has ever been proved; but if it has been, it is opposed by his chimerical "proof," and that it reduces all human testimony to "an entire annihilation."

Hume's essay is characterized throughout by discussing speculative suppositions. One is, that evidence cannot prove a miracle, unless the testimony of the witness if false would

be more marvelous than the miracle it avouches,—a mere speculative fancy. Hume speculates on what he would do if John, for instance, had told him he had seen Lazarus after being dead four days restored to life. Instead of discussing speculative fancies, let us examine the evidence and see how evidence of miracles, that of Lazarus, for example, did operate on the judging faculties of the chief priests and Pharisees at Jerusalem. They were not disciples of Jesus, not biased in his favor. They hated the effect of the miracle with such malignity that they conspired to kill Jesus, and succeeded. But when they gathered a council for the conspiracy they showed how the evidence affected them. They said: "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him alone, all men will believe on him" (John xi. 47-48).

Or consider the miracle wrought in the most public place in the great city of Jerusalem, a city of some hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, i.e. at the "beautiful gate" of the famous temple, at the hour of public gathering for prayer, wrought through Peter and John on the man born a cripple, always a cripple, forty years old, known to all. How did the evidence of that miracle operate on the minds of the seventy or seventy-one men constituting the Sanhedrin, the learned, the most eminent men of Jerusalem and Judea? They hated the effect of the miracle, and scourged Peter and John for their part in it. But as to the evidence of the miracle, they acted regarding it as men do normally. They confessed the effect of the evidence, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it" (Acts iv. 16).

We notice one more matter which Hume brings forward



(pp. 137-144) to disparage the testimony of witnesses regarding the Scripture miracles; namely, alleged miracles of Rome, China, Turkey, of Alexander, and especially those alleged of the tomb of Abbé of Paris. Hume fails to notice the radical facts that differentiate the Scripture miracles, especially those of the New Testament, from those he cites; namely,—

(1) That Scripture miracles were distinctly announced as wrought as the testimony of God to authenticate God's messages and messengers to men—especially Jesus as teacher sent from God, to found, teach, and realize the Christian religion in the world; (2) *That the enemies of Jesus were compelled by the evidence to believe, and did believe, and admit the verity of the miracles;* (3) That when facts conjoined with ideas have operated upon nations or communities for long periods of time, changed their habits, philosophy, literature, and lives as a people, the facts as cause are proved by their effects and thereby the evidence of the facts is perpetuated. The mighty miracles of Christ, conjoined with the mighty ideas of the Christian religion since their conjoint operation, commenced in Judea, have operated on people and radically changed the life of the nations. They have abandoned the initial date of *Anno Mundi* and date their calendar by Jesus' advent in the world and previous events by B. C. Besides the foregoing matters, the essay of Hume gives much space to glorifying laws of nature and special suggestions disparaging human testimony, even appealing to his readers therefor. He says: "It is nothing strange, I hope, that men should lie in all ages. You have surely seen instances enough of that frailty" (p. 136).

We have, we believe, examined all essential matters advanced by Hume in his essay to justify the comparison he

assumes to make and the conclusions he announces. On page 146 he sums up his argument. Adhering specifically to his formula or scheme for comparing the objects he set therein in contrast to be compared—humanity and the laws of nature—he announces his conclusions as follows:—

"It is experience only which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but to subtract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion on one side or the other with that assurance, which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here explained, this subtraction with regard to all popular religions amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore, we may establish as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion."

This summing up and conclusion of Hume in his essay necessarily avers, and is his assurance, that he had actually and duly compared the objects he had set in contrast for comparison (viz. human beings and their testimony on one side, and inanimate creations and laws of nature on the other), basing the comparison on the ethical quality or virtue of truthfulness; and that, in the comparison, experiences of that ethical quality or virtue (or its opposite) realized from those contrasted objects, respectively, were contrary, and that experience from human testimony was derogatory, to such an extent as to reduce it to "an entire annihilation." But this averment and assurance from Hume, necessarily inherent in an honest summing up and announcement of conclusions of a serious essay, is met by the incontrovertible fact that experience of ethical quality or virtue of truthfulness (or its opposite) from inanimate creations or the laws of nature is, and necessarily always has been, impossible, because inanimate creations and laws of nature are

utterly and conclusively incapable of ethical quality or virtue of truthfulness (or its opposite); it has never existed, cannot exist, and necessarily has never been experienced. Assertion or pretense to the contrary is a delusion and a deceit. Yet this alleged but impossible experience is central—the gist and essence of Hume's claim; to that his contentions as arguments are addressed and on that untruthful claim he founds his conclusions. But when the gist and essence of the essay is examined, weighed in the balance, by the rigor and thoroughness which science exacts, it is found to be false, a hollow pretense; and all conclusions based thereon are without force or value—nullities.

Although examination shows Hume's essay is fallacious and its conclusions false, the sway it has had in the past, from 1748 to the present, i.e. 165 years, and its adoption now by the twelve-volume Library, seem to justify some farther notice.

We do not forget that Hume's "entire annihilation" of human testimony is applied specially to such testimony in support of Christianity. We may remind Hume's followers and his indorsers, that science is no respecter of persons or subjects,—jural science no more than others. The central quest of the science of jurisprudence is the ascertainment of fact and verity regardless of the character of the subject under inquiry, whether it be in the domain of man's material or his religious life; and jural science is as available to deal with and solve an issue of fact in regard to Christianity as any other issue dependent upon evidence.

Hume does not contend that all men always lie; but, because men sometimes lie, he condemns all—the true with the false—to "an entire annihilation." Following this philosophy to its logical result would reduce the race to barbarism,

banish justice from the earth, render the weak the victims of the strong. Hume's conclusions are not only bad philosophy, but they are condemned by science and are an affront to common sense; for common sense of men has in the ages devised and established the science of jurisprudence; and by actual test men have demonstrated that by the due employment of that science they have been able to cope successfully with, explore and expose, the mazes of falsehood,—to detect its artifices, to pierce its thickest veils, to follow and expose its sophistries, to compare with severity its different witnesses, to discern truth and separate it from error,—and through evidence ascertain and establish fact, and truth, which is conformity to fact.

Through that science and its due administration in the light of Christianity, peoples have been raised from barbarous conditions to the enlightened freedom, the prosperity and happiness, that the dominant nations of the world are enjoying to-day in every department of human welfare.