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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Of The Christian Religion.

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OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.
SECTION I.



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CHRISTIAN RELIGION
SECTION I

- I. General description of the religion of the Jews, and the manner in which they were brought to the knowledge of the Christian religion.
- II. The manner in which the Christian religion was first brought to the knowledge of the Gentiles, and the manner in which it was spread throughout the world.
- III. The manner in which the Christian religion was first brought to the knowledge of the Jews, and the manner in which it was spread throughout the world.
- IV. The manner in which the Christian religion was first brought to the knowledge of the Gentiles, and the manner in which it was spread throughout the world.
- V. The manner in which the Christian religion was first brought to the knowledge of the Jews, and the manner in which it was spread throughout the world.
- VI. The manner in which the Christian religion was first brought to the knowledge of the Gentiles, and the manner in which it was spread throughout the world.
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- VIII. The manner in which the Christian religion was first brought to the knowledge of the Gentiles, and the manner in which it was spread throughout the world.

VOL. II. PART I.



OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

SECTION I.

- I. *General division of the following discourse, with regard to Pagan and Jewish Authors, who mention particulars relating to our Saviour.*
- II. *Not probable that any such should be mentioned by Pagan writers who lived at the same time, from the nature of such transactions.*
- III. *Especially when related by the Jews:*
- IV. *And heard at a distance by those who pretended to as great miracles as their own.*
- V. *Besides that, no Pagan writers of that age lived in Judæa or its Confiner.*
- VI. *And because many books of that age are lost.*
- VII. *An instance of one record proved to be authentick.*
- VIII. *A second record of probable, though not undoubted, authority.*

VOL. IV.

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I. THAT

I.



HAT I may lay before you a full state of the subject under our consideration, and methodize the several particulars that I touched upon in discourse with you; I shall first take notice of such *Pagan* Authors, as have given their testimony to the history of our Saviour; reduce these Authors under their respective classes, and shew what authority their testimonies carry with them. Secondly, I shall take notice of *Jewish* Authors in the same light.

II. There are many reasons, why you should not expect that matters of such a wonderful nature should be taken notice of by those eminent *Pagan* writers, who were contemporaries with *Jesus Christ*, or by those who lived before his Disciples had personally appeared among them, and ascertained the report which had gone abroad concerning a life so full of miracles.

Supposing such things had happened at this day in *Switzerland*, or among the *Grisons*, who make a greater figure in *Europe* than *Judea* did in the *Roman Empire*, would they be immediately believed by those who live at a great distance from them? or would any certain account of them be transmitted into foreign countries, within so short a space of time as that of our Saviour's publick ministry? Such kinds of news, though never so true, seldom gain credit, till some time after they are transacted and exposed to the examination of the curious, who by laying together circumstances, attestations, and characters of those who are concerned in them, either receive, or reject what at first none but eye-witnesses could absolutely believe or disbelieve. In a case of this sort, it was natural for men of sense and learning to treat the whole account as fabulous, or at farthest to suspend their belief of it, until all things stood together in their full light.

III. Besides, the *Jews* were branded not only for superstitions different from all the religions of the *Pagan* world, but in a particular manner ridiculed for being a credulous people; so that whatever reports of such a nature came out of that country, were looked upon by the heathen world as false, frivolous, and improbable.

IV. We

IV. We may further observe that the ordinary practice of Magic in those times, with the many pretended Prodigies, Divinations, Apparitions, and local Miracles among the Heathens, made them less attentive to such news from *Judæa*, till they had time to consider the nature, the occasion, and the end of our Saviour's miracles, and were awakened by many surprizing events to allow them any consideration at all.

V. We are indeed told by St. *Matthew*, that the fame of our Saviour, during his life, went throughout all *Syria*, and that there followed him great multitudes of people from *Galilee*, *Judæa*, *Decapolis*, *Idumæa*, from beyond *Jordan*, and from *Tyre* and *Sidon*. Now had there been any historians of those times and places, we might have expected to have seen in them some account of those wonderful transactions in *Judæa*; but there is not any single Author extant, in any kind, of that age, in any of those countries.

VI. How many books have perished in which possibly there might have been mention of our Saviour? Look among the *Romans*, how few of their writings are come down to our times? In the space of two hundred years from our Saviour's birth, when there was such a multitude of writers in all kinds, how small is the number of Authors that have made their way to the present age?

VII. One authentick Record, and that the most authentick heathen Record, we are pretty sure is lost. I mean the account sent by the Governor of *Judæa*, under whom our Saviour was judged, condemned, and crucified. It was the custom in the *Roman Empire*, as it is to this day in all the governments of the world, for the præfects and vice-roys of distant provinces to transmit to their Sovereign a summary relation of every thing remarkable in their administration. That *Pontius Pilate*, in his account, would have touched on so extraordinary an event in *Judæa*, is not to be doubted; and that he actually did, we learn from *Justin Martyr*, who lived about a hundred years after our Saviour's death, resided, made Converts, and suffered martyrdom at *Rome*, where he was engaged with Philosophers, and in a particular manner with *Crescens* the *Cynick*, who could easily have detected, and would not fail to have exposed him, had he quoted a Record not in being, or made any false citation out of it. Would the great Apologist have challenged *Crescens* to dispute the cause of Christianity with him before the *Roman Senate*, had he forged such an evidence? or would *Crescens* have refused the challenge, could he have triumphed over him in the detection of such a forgery? To which we must add, that the Apology, which appeals to this Record,

was presented to a learned Emperor, and to the whole body of the *Roman* Senate. This father in his apology, speaking of the death and suffering of our Saviour, refers the Emperor for the truth of what he says to the acts of *Pontius Pilate*, which I have here mentioned. *Tertullian*, who wrote his Apology about fifty years after *Justin*, doubtless referred to the same Record, when he tells the Governor of *Rome*, that the Emperor *Tiberius* having received an account out of *Palestine* in *Syria* of the Divine person, who had appeared in that country, paid him a particular regard, and threatned to punish any who should accuse the christians; nay, that the Emperor would have adopted him among the Deities whom they worshipped, had not the Senate refused to come into his proposal. *Tertullian*, who gives us this history, was not only one of the most learned men of his age, but what adds a greater weight to his authority in this case, was eminently skilful and well read in the laws of the *Roman* Empire. Nor can it be said, that *Tertullian* grounded his quotation upon the authority of *Justin Martyr*, because we find he mixes it with matters of fact which are not related by that Author. *Eusebius* mentions the same ancient Record, but as it was not extant in his time, I shall not insist upon his authority in this point. If it be objected that this particular is not mentioned in any *Roman* Historian, I shall use the same argument in a parallel case, and see whether it will carry any force with it. *Ulpian* the great *Roman* Lawyer gathered together all the Imperial Edicts that had been made against the christians. But did any one ever say that there had been no such Edicts, because they were not mentioned in the histories of those Emperors? Besides, who knows but this circumstance of *Tiberius* was mentioned in other historians that have been lost, though not to be found in any still extant? Has not *Suetonius* many particulars of this Emperor omitted by *Tacitus*, and *Herodian* many that are not so much as hinted at by either? As for the spurious *Acts* of *Pilate*, now extant, we know the occasion and time of their writing, and that had there not been a true and authentick Record of this nature, they would never have been forged.

VIII. The story of *Agbarus* King of *Edessa*, relating to the letter which he sent to our Saviour, and to that which he received from him, is a record of great authority; and though I will not insist upon it, may venture to say, that had we such an evidence for any fact in *Pagan* history, an Author would be thought very unreasonable who should reject it. I believe you will be of my opinion, if you will peruse, with other Authors, who have appeared in vindication of these letters as genuine, the additional arguments

ments which have been made use of by the late famous and learned Dr. Grabe, in the second volume of his *Spicilegium*.

SECTION II.

- I. *What facts in the history of our Saviour might be taken notice of by Pagan Authors.*
- II. *What particular facts are taken notice of, and by what Pagan Authors.*
- III. *How Celsus represented our Saviour's miracles.*
- IV. *The same representation made of them by other unbelievers, and proved unreasonable.*
- V. *What facts in our Saviour's history not to be expected from Pagan writers.*

I. **W**E now come to consider what undoubted authorities are extant among *Pagan* writers; and here we must premise, that some parts of our Saviour's history may be reasonably expected from *Pagans*. I mean such parts as might be known to those who lived at a distance from *Judaea*, as well as to those who were the followers and eye-witnesses of *Christ*.

II. Such particulars are most of these which follow, and which are all attested by some one or other of those heathen Authors, who lived in or near the age of our Saviour and his disciples. *That Augustus-Cæsar had ordered the whole empire to be censured or taxed, which brought our Saviour's reputed parents to Bethlehem:* This is mentioned by several *Roman* historians, as *Tacitus*, *Suetonius*, and *Dion*. *That a great light, or a new star appeared in the east, which directed the wise men to our Saviour:* This is recorded by *Chalcedius*. *That Herod, the King of Palestine, so often mentioned in the Roman history, made a great slaughter of innocent children, being so jealous of his successor, that he put to death his own sons on that account:* This character of him is given by several historians, and this cruel fact mentioned by *Macrobius*, a heathen Author, who tells it as a known thing, without any mark or doubt upon it. *That our Saviour had been in Egypt:* This *Celsus*, though he raises a monstrous story upon it, is so far from denying, that he tells us our Saviour

Saviour learned the arts of magic in that country. *That Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judæa, that our Saviour was brought in judgment before him, and by him condemned and crucified:* This is recorded by *Tacitus*. *That many miraculous cures and works out of the ordinary course of nature were wrought by him:* This is confessed by *Julian* the Apostate, *Porphyry*, and *Hierocles*, all of them not only Pagans, but professed enemies and persecutors of Christianity. *That our Saviour foretold several things which came to pass according to his predictions:* This was attested by *Phlegon* in his annals, as we are assured by the learned *Origen* against *Celsus*. *That at the time when our Saviour died, there was a miraculous darkness and a great earthquake:* This is recorded by the same *Phlegon* the Trallian, who was likewise a Pagan and Freeman to *Adrian* the Emperor. We may here observe, that a native of *Trallium*, which was not situate at so great a distance from *Palestine*, might very probably be informed of such remarkable events as had passed among the Jews in the age immediately preceding his own times, since several of his countrymen with whom he had conversed, might have received a confused report of our Saviour before his crucifixion, and probably lived within the Shake of the earthquake, and the Shadow of the eclipse, which are recorded by this Author. *That Christ was worshipped as a God among the Christians; that they would rather suffer death than blaspheme him; that they received a sacrament, and by it entered into a vow of abstaining from sin and wickedness, conformable to the advice given by St. Paul; that they had private assemblies of worship, and used to join together in Hymns:* This is the account which *Pliny* the younger gives of Christianity in his days, about seventy years after the death of *Christ*, and which agrees in all its circumstances with the accounts we have in holy writ, of the first state of Christianity after the crucifixion of our Blessed Saviour. *That St. Peter, whose miracles are many of them recorded in holy writ, did many wonderful works,* is owned by *Julian* the apostate, who therefore represents him as a great Magician, and one who had in his possession a book of magical secrets left him by our Saviour. *That the devils or evil spirits were subject to them,* we may learn from *Porphyry*, who objects to Christianity, that since *Jesus* had begun to be worshipped, *Æsculapius* and the rest of the gods did no more converse with men. Nay, *Celsus* himself affirms the same thing in effect, when he says, that the power which seemed to reside in Christians, proceeded from the use of certain names, and the invocation of certain dæmons. *Origen* remarks on this passage, that the Author doubtless hints at those Christians who put to flight

flight evil spirits, and healed those who were possessed with them; a fact which had been often seen, and which he himself had seen, as he declares in another part of his discourse against *Celsus*. But at the same time he assures us, that this miraculous power was exerted by the use of no other name but that of *Jesus*, to which were added several passages in his history, but nothing like any invocation to *Demons*.

III. *Celsus* was so hard set with the report of our Saviour's miracles, and the confident attestations concerning him, that though he often intimates he did not believe them to be true, yet knowing he might be silenced in such an answer, provides himself with another retreat, when beaten out of this; namely, that our Saviour was a magician. Thus he compares the feeding of so many thousands at two different times with a few loaves and fishes, to the magical feasts of those *Egyptian* impostors, who would present their spectators with visionary entertainments that had in them neither substance nor reality: which, by the way, is to suppose, that a hungry and fainting multitude were filled by an apparition, or strengthened and refreshed with shadows. He knew very well that there were so many witnesses and actors, if I may call them such, in these two miracles, that it was impossible to refute such multitudes, who had doubtless sufficiently spread the fame of them, and was therefore in this place forced to resort to the other solution, that it was done by magic. It was not enough to say that a miracle which appeared to so many thousand eye-witnesses was a forgery of *Christ's* disciples, and therefore supposing them to be eye-witnesses, he endeavours to shew how they might be deceived.

IV. The unconverted heathens, who were pressed by the many authorities that confirmed our Saviour's miracles, as well as the unbelieving *Jews*, who had actually seen them, were driven to account for them after the same manner: For, to work by magic in the heathen way of speaking, was in the language of the *Jews* to cast out devils by *Beelzebub* the Prince of the devils. Our Saviour, who knew that unbelievers in all ages would put this perverse interpretation on his miracles, has branded the malignity of those men, who contrary to the dictates of their own hearts started such an unreasonable objection, as a blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and declared not only the guilt, but the punishment of so black a crime. At the same time he condescended to shew the vanity and emptiness of this objection against his miracles, by representing that they evidently tended to the destruction of those powers, to whose assistance the enemies of his doctrine then ascribed them. An argument, which, if duly weighed, renders the objection so very frivolous and groundless, that

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we may venture to call it even blasphemy against common sense. Would Magic endeavour to draw off the minds of men from the worship which was paid to stocks and stones, to give them an abhorrence of those evil spirits who rejoiced in the most cruel sacrifices, and in offerings of the greatest impurity; and in short to call upon mankind to exert their whole strength in the love and adoration of that one Being, from whom they derived their existence, and on whom only they were taught to depend every moment for the happiness and continuance of it? Was it the business of magic to humanize our natures with compassion, forgiveness, and all the instances of the most extensive charity? Would evil spirits contribute to make men sober, chaste, and temperate, and in a word to produce that reformation, which was wrought in the moral world by those doctrines of our Saviour, that received their sanction from his miracles? Nor is it possible to imagine, that evil spirits would enter into a combination with our Saviour to cut off all their correspondence and intercourse with mankind, and to prevent any for the future from addicting themselves to those rites and ceremonies, which had done them so much honour. We see the early effect which Christianity had on the minds of men in this particular, by that number of books, which were filled with the secrets of magic, and made a sacrifice to Christianity by the converts mentioned in the *Acts* of the Apostles. We have likewise an eminent instance of the inconsistency of our Religion with magic, in the history of the famous *Aquila*. This person, who was a kinsman of the Emperor *Trajan*, and likewise a man of great learning, notwithstanding he had embraced Christianity, could not be brought off from the studies of magic, by the repeated admonitions of his fellow-christians: so that at length they expelled him their society, as rather chusing to lose the reputation of so considerable a Profelyte, than communicate with one who dealt in such dark and infernal practices. Besides we may observe, that all the favourers of magic were the most profest and bitter enemies to the christian religion. Not to mention *Simon Magus* and many others, I shall only take notice of those two great persecutors of christianity, the Emperors *Adrian* and *Julian* the Apostate, both of them initiated in the mysteries of divination, and skilled in all the depths of magic. I shall only add, that evil spirits cannot be supposed to have concurred in the establishment of a religion, which triumphed over them, drove them out of the places they possesed, and divested them of their influence on mankind; nor would I mention this particular, though it be unanimously reported by all the ancient christian Authors: did it not appear from the
authorities

the authorities above-cited, that this was a fact confessed by heathens themselves.

V. We now see what a multitude of *Pagan* testimonies may be produced for all those remarkable passages, which might have been expected from them: and indeed of several, that, I believe, do more than answer your expectation, as they were not subjects in their own nature so exposed to publick notoriety. It cannot be expected they should mention particulars, which were transacted amongst the Disciples only, or among some few even of the Disciples themselves; such as the transfiguration, the agony in the garden, the appearance of *Christ* after his resurrection, and others of the like nature. It was impossible for a heathen Author to relate these things; because if he had believed them, he would no longer have been a heathen, and by that means his testimony would not have been thought of so much validity. Besides, his very report of facts so favourable to Christianity would have prompted men to say that he was probably tainted with their doctrine. We have a parallel case in *Hecataeus*, a famous *Greek* Historian, who had several passages in his book conformable to the history of the *Jewish* writers, which when quoted by *Josephus*, as a confirmation of the *Jewish* history, when his heathen adversaries could give no other answer to it, they would need suppose that *Hecataeus* was a *Jew* in his heart, though they had no other reason for it, but because his history gave greater authority to the *Jewish* than the *Egyptian* Records.

SECTION III.

- I. Introduction to a second list of *Pagan* Authors, who give testimony of our Saviour.
- II. A passage concerning our Saviour, from a learned Athenian.
- III. His conversion from Paganism to Christianity makes his evidence stronger than if he had continued a Pagan.
- IV. Of another Athenian Philosopher converted to Christianity.
- V. Why their conversion, instead of weakening, strengthens their evidence in defence of Christianity.
- VI. Their belief in our Saviour's history founded at first upon the principles of historical faith.

VOL. IV.

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VII. That

VII. *Their testimonies extended to all the particulars of our Saviour's history,*

VIII. *As related by the four Evangelists.*

I. **T**O this list of heathen writers, who make mention of our Saviour, or touch upon any particulars of his life, I shall add those Authors who were at first heathens, and afterwards converted to Christianity; upon which account, as I shall here shew, their testimonies are to be looked upon as the more authentick. And in this list of evidences, I shall confine my self to such learned *Pagans* as came over to Christianity in the three first centuries, because those were the times in which men had the best means of informing themselves of the truth of our Saviour's history, and because among the great number of Philosophers who came in afterwards, under the reigns of christian Emperors, there might be several who did it partly out of worldly motives.

II. Let us now suppose, that a learned heathen writer who lived within 60 years of our Saviour's crucifixion, after having shewn that false miracles were generally wrought in obscurity, and before few or no witnesses, speaking of those which were wrought by our Saviour, has the following passage. "But his works were always seen, because they were true, they were seen by those who were healed, and by those who were raised from the dead. Nay these persons who were thus healed, and raised, were seen not only at the time of there being healed, and raised, but long afterwards. Nay they were seen not only all the while our Saviour was upon earth, but survived after his departure out of this world, nay some of them were living in our days.

III. I dare say you would look upon this as a glorious attestation for the cause of Christianity, had it come from the hand of a famous *Athenian* Philosopher. These forementioned words however are actually the words of one who lived about sixty Years after our Saviour's crucifixion, and was a famous Philosopher in *Athens*: but it will be said, he was a convert to Christianity. Now consider this matter impartially, and see if his testimony is not much more valid for that reason. Had he continued a *Pagan* Philosopher, would not the world have said that he was not sincere in what he writ, or did not believe it; for, if so, would not they have told us he would have embraced Christianity? This was indeed the case of this excellent man: he had so thoroughly examined the truth of our Saviour's history, and the excellency of that religion which he taught, and

and was so entirely convinced of both, that he became a Profelyte, and di eda Martyr

IV. *Aristides* was an *Athenian* Philosopher, at the same time, famed for his learning and wisdom, but converted to Christianity. As it cannot be questioned that he perused and approved the apology of *Quadratus*, in which is the passage just now cited, he joined with him in an apology of his own, to the same Emperor, on the same subject. This apology, tho' now lost, was extant in the time of *Ado Viennensis*, A. D. 870. and highly esteemed by the most learned *Athenians*, as that Author witnesses. It must have contained great arguments for the truth of our Saviour's history, because in it he asserted the divinity of our Saviour, which could not but engage him in the proof of his miracles.

V. I do allow that, generally speaking, a man is not so acceptable and unquestioned an evidence in facts, which make for the advancement of his own party. But we must consider that, in the case before us, the persons, to whom we appeal, were of an opposite party, till they were persuaded of the truth of those very facts, which they report. They bear evidence to a history in defence of Christianity, the truth of which history was their motive to embrace Christianity. They attest facts which they had heard while they were yet heathens, and had they not found reason to believe them, they would still have continued heathens, and have made no mention of them in their writings.

VI. When a man is born under christian Parents, and trained up in the profession of that religion from a child, he generally guides himself by the rules of *Christian Faith* in believing what is delivered by the Evangelists; but the learned *Pagans* of antiquity, before they became Christians, were only guided by the common rules of *Historical Faith*: That is, they examined the nature of the evidence which was to be met with in common fame, tradition, and the writings of those persons who related them, together with the number, concurrence, veracity, and private characters of those persons; and being convinced upon all accounts that they had the same reason to believe the history of our Saviour, as that of any other person to which they themselves were not actually eye-witnesses, they were bound by all the rules of historical faith, and of right reason, to give credit to this history. This they did accordingly, and in consequence of it published the same truths themselves, suffered many afflictions, and very often death it self, in the assertion of them. When I say, that an historical belief of the acts of our Saviour induced these learned *Pagans* to embrace his doctrine, I do not deny that there were many other motives,

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which conduced to it, as the excellency of his precepts, the fulfilling of prophecies, the miracles of his Disciples, the irreproachable lives and magnanimous sufferings of their followers, with other considerations of the same nature: but whatever other collateral arguments wrought more or less with Philosophers of that age, it is certain that a belief in the history of our Saviour was one motive with every new convert, and that upon which all others turned, as being the very basis and foundation of Christianity.

VII. To this I must further add, that as we have already seen many particular facts which are recorded in holy writ, attested by particular *Pagan* Authors: the testimony of those I am now going to produce, extends to the whole history of our Saviour, and to that continued series of actions, which are related of him and his Disciples in the books of the *New Testament*.

VIII. This evidently appears from their quotations out of the Evangelists, for the confirmation of any doctrine or account of our blessed Saviour. Nay a learned man of our nation, who examined the writings of the most ancient Fathers in another view, refers to several passages in *Irenæus, Tertullian, Clemens of Alexandria, Origen, and Cyprian*, by which he plainly shows that each of these early writers ascribe to the four Evangelists by name their respective histories; so that there is not the least room for doubting of their belief in the history of our Saviour, as recorded in the Gospels. I shall only add, that three of the five Fathers here mentioned, and probably four, were *Pagans* converted to Christianity, as they were all of them very inquisitive and deep in the knowledge of heathen learning and philosophy.



SECTION

SECTION IV.

- I. Character of the times in which the Christian religion was propagated:
- II. And of many who embraced it.
- III. Three eminent and early instances.
- IV. Multitudes of learned men who came over to it.
- V. Belief in our Saviour's history, the first motive to their conversion.
- VI. The names of several Pagan Philosophers, who were Christian converts.

I T happened very providentially to the honour of the Christian religion, that it did not take its rise in the dark illiterate ages of the world, but at a time when arts and sciences were at their height, and when there were men who made it the business of their lives to search after truth, and sift the several opinions of Philosophers and wise men, concerning the duty, the end, and chief happiness of reasonable creatures.

II. Several of these therefore, when they had informed themselves of our Saviour's history, and examined with unprejudiced minds the doctrines and manners of his disciples and followers, were so struck and convinced, that they professed themselves of that sect; notwithstanding, by this profession in that juncture of time, they bid farewell to all the pleasures of this life, renounced all the views of ambition, engaged in an uninterrupted course of severities, and exposed themselves to publick hatred and contempt, to sufferings of all kinds, and to death itself.

III. Of this sort we may reckon those three early converts to Christianity, who each of them was a member of a Senate famous for its wisdom and learning. *Joseph the Arimathean* was of the *Jewish Sanhedrim*, *Dionysius* of the *Athenian Areopagus*, and *Flavius Clemens* of the *Roman Senate*; nay at the time of his death Consul of *Rome*. These three were so thoroughly satisfied of the truth of the Christian religion, that the first of them, according to all the reports of antiquity, died a martyr for it; as did the second, unless we disbelieve *Aristides*, his fellow-citizen and contemporary; and the third, as we are informed both by *Roman* and Christian Authors.

IV. Among

IV. Among those innumerable multitudes, who in most of the known nations of the world came over to Christianity at its first appearance, we may be sure there were great numbers of wise and learned men, beside those whose names are in the Christian records, who without doubt took care to examine the truth of our Saviour's history, before they would leave the religion of their country and of their forefathers, for the sake of one that would not only cut them off from the allurements of this world, but subject them to every thing terrible or disagreeable in it. *Tertullian* tells the *Roman* Governors, that their corporations, councils, armies, tribes, companies, the palace, senate, and courts of judicature were filled with Christians; as *Arnobius* asserts, that men of the finest parts and learning, Orators, Grammarians, Rhetoricians, Lawyers, Physicians, Philosophers, despising the sentiments they had been once fond of, took up their rest in the Christian religion.

V. Who can imagine that men of this character did not thoroughly inform themselves of the history of that person, whose doctrines they embraced? for however consonant to reason his precepts appeared, how good soever were the effects which they produced in the world, nothing could have tempted men to acknowledge him as their God and Saviour, but their being firmly persuaded of the miracles he wrought, and the many attestations of his divine mission, which were to be met with in the history of his life. This was the ground-work of the Christian religion, and, if this failed, the whole superstructure sunk with it. This point therefore, of the truth of our Saviour's history, as recorded by the Evangelists, is every where taken for granted in the writings of those, who from *Pagan* Philosophers became Christian Authors, and who, by reason of their conversion, are to be looked upon as of the strongest collateral testimony for the truth of what is delivered concerning our Saviour.

VI. Besides innumerable Authors that are lost, we have the undoubted names, works, or fragments of several *Pagan* Philosophers, which shew them to have been as learned as any unconverted heathen Authors of the age in which they lived. If we look into the greatest nurseries of learning in those ages of the world, we find in *Athens*, *Dionysius*, *Quadratus*, *Aristides*, *Athenagoras*; and in *Alexandria*, *Dionysius*, *Clemens*, *Ammonius*, *Arnobius*, and *Anatolius*, to whom we may add *Origen*; for though his father was a Christian martyr, he became, without all controversy, the most learned and able Philosopher of his age, by his education at *Alexandria*, in that famous seminary of arts and sciences.

SECTION

SECTION V.

- I. *The learned Pagans had means and opportunities of informing themselves of the truth of our Saviour's history;*
- II. *From the proceedings,*
- III. *The characters, sufferings,*
- IV. *And miracles of the persons who published it.*
- V. *How these first Apostles perpetuated their tradition, by ordaining persons to succeed them.*
- VI. *How their successors in the three first centuries preserved their tradition.*
- VII. *That five generations might derive this tradition from Christ, to the end of the third century.*
- VIII. *Four eminent Christians that delivered it down successively to the year of our Lord 254.*
- IX. *The faith of the four above-mentioned persons, the same with that of the Churches of the East, of the West, and of Egypt.*
- X. *Another person added to them, who brings us to the year 343, and that many other lists might be added in as direct and short a succession.*
- XI. *Why the tradition of the three first centuries, more authentick than that of any other age, proved from the conversation of the primitive Christians.*
- XII. *From the manner of initiating men into their religion.*
- XIII. *From the correspondence between the Churches.*
- XIV. *From the long lives of several of Christ's Disciples, of which two instances.*

I T now therefore only remains to consider, whether these learned men had means and opportunities of informing themselves of the truth of our Saviour's history; for unless this point can be made out, their testimonies will appear invalid, and their enquiries ineffectual.

II. As to this point, we must consider, that many thousands had seen the transactions of our Saviour in *Judæa*, and that many hundred thousands had received an account of them from the mouths of those who were actually eye-witnesses. I shall only mention among these eye-witnesses

nesses the twelve Apostles, to whom we must add St. *Paul*, who had a particular call to this high office, though many other disciples and followers of *Christ* had also their share in the publishing this wonderful history. We learn from the ancient records of Christianity, that many of the Apostles and Disciples made it the express business of their lives, travelled into the remotest parts of the world, and in all places gathered multitudes about them, to acquaint them with the history and doctrines of their crucified Master. And indeed, were all Christian records of these proceedings entirely lost, as many have been, the effect plainly evinces the truth of them; for how else during the Apostles lives could Christianity have spread itself with such an amazing progress through the several nations of the *Roman* empire? how could it fly like lightning, and carry conviction with it, from one end of the earth to the other?

III. Heathens therefore of every age, sex, and quality, born in the most different climates, and bred up under the most different institutions, when they saw men of plain sense, without the help of learning, armed with patience and courage, instead of wealth, pomp, or power, expressing in their lives those excellent doctrines of Morality, which they taught as delivered to them from our Saviour, averring that they had seen his miracles during his life, and conversed with him after his death; when, I say, they saw no suspicion of falshood, treachery, or worldly interest, in their behaviour and conversation, and that they submitted to the most ignominious and cruel deaths, rather than retract their testimony, or even be silent in matters which they were to publish by their Saviour's especial command, there was no reason to doubt of the veracity of those facts which they related, or of the Divine Mission in which they were employed.

IV. But even these motives to Faith in our Saviour would not have been sufficient to have brought about in so few years such an incredible number of conversions, had not the Apostles been able to exhibit still greater proofs of the truths which they taught. A few persons of an odious and despised country could not have filled the world with Believers, had they not shown undoubted credentials from the Divine person who sent them on such a message. Accordingly we are assured, that they were invested with the power of working miracles, which was the most short and the most convincing argument that could be produced, and the only one that was adapted to the reason of all mankind, to the capacities of the wise and ignorant, and could overcome every cavil and every prejudice. Who would not believe that our Saviour healed the sick, and rais-

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ed the dead, when it was published by those who themselves often did the same miracles, in their presence, and in his name! Could any reasonable person imagine, that God Almighty would arm men with such powers to authorize a lye, and establish a religion in the world which was displeasing to him, or that evil spirits would lend them such an effectual assistance to beat down vice and idolatry?

V. When the Apostles had formed many assemblies in several parts of the *Pagan* world, who gave credit to the glad tidings of the Gospel, that, upon their departure, the memory of what they had related might not perish, they appointed out of these new converts, men of the best sense, and of the most unblemished lives, to preside over these several assemblies, and to inculcate without ceasing what they had heard from the mouths of these eye-witnesses.

VI. Upon the death of any of those substitutes to the Apostles and Disciples of *Christ*, his place was filled up with some other person of eminence for his piety and learning, and generally a member of the same Church, who after his decease was followed by another in the same manner, by which means the succession was continued in an uninterrupted line. *Irenæus* informs us, that every church preserved a catalogue of its Bishops in the order that they succeeded one another, and (for an example) produces the catalogue of those who governed the Church of *Rome* in that character, which contains eight or nine persons, though but at a very small remove from the times of the Apostles.

Indeed the lists of Bishops, which are come down to us in other churches, are generally filled with greater numbers than one would expect. But the succession was quick in the three first centuries, because the Bishop very often ended in the Martyr: for when a persecution arose in any place, the first fury of it fell upon this Order of holy men, who abundantly testified by their Deaths and Sufferings that they did not undertake these offices out of any temporal views, that they were sincere and satisfied in the belief of what they taught, and that they firmly adhered to what they had received from the Apostles, as laying down their lives in the same hope, and upon the same principles. None can be supposed so utterly regardless of their own happiness as to expire in torment, and hazard their Eternity, to support any fables and inventions of their own, or any forgeries of their predecessors who had presided in the same church, and which might have been easily detected by the tradition of that particular church, as well as by the concurring testimony of others. To this purpose, I think it is very remarkable, that there was not a single Mar-

tyr among those many Hereticks, who disagreed with the Apostolical church, and introduced several wild and absurd notions into the doctrines of Christianity. They durst not stake their present and future happiness on their own chimerical imaginations, and did not only shun persecution, but affirmed that it was unnecessary for their followers to bear their religion through such fiery tryals.

VII. We may fairly reckon, that this first age of Apostles and Disciples, with that second generation of many who were their immediate converts, extended it self to the middle of the second Century, and that several of the third generation from these last mentioned, which was but the fifth from *Christ*, continued to the end of the third Century. Did we know the ages and numbers of the members in every particular church, which was planted by the Apostles, I doubt not but in most of them there might be found five persons who in a continued series would reach through these three centuries of years, that is till the 265th from the death of our Saviour.

VIII. Among the accounts of those very few out of innumerable multitudes, who had embraced Christianity, I shall single out four persons eminent for their lives, their writings, and their sufferings, that were successively contemporaries, and bring us down as far as to the year of our Lord 254. *St. John*, who was the beloved Disciple, and conversed the most intimately with our Saviour, lived till *Anno Dom. 100*. *Polycarp*, who was the Disciple of *St. John*, and had conversed with others of the Apostles and Disciples of our Lord, lived till *Anno Dom. 167*, though his life was shortened by martyrdom. *Irenæus*, who was the Disciple of *Polycarp*, and had conversed with many of the immediate Disciples of the Apostles, lived, at the lowest computation of his age, till the year 202, when he was likewise cut off by martyrdom; in which year the great *Origen* was appointed Regent of the Catechetick school in *Alexandria*, and as he was the miracle of that age, for industry, learning, and philosophy, he was looked upon as the champion of Christianity, till the year 254, when, if he did not suffer martyrdom, as some think he did, he was certainly actuated by the spirit of it, as appears in the whole course of his life and writings; nay, he had often been put to the torture, and had undergone tryals worse than death. As he conversed with the most eminent Christians of his time in *Egypt*, and in the East, brought over multitudes both from heresy and heathenism, and left behind him several Disciples of great fame and learning, there is no question but there were considerable numbers of those who knew him, and had been his hearers, scholars,

cholars, or profelytes, that lived till the end of the third century, and to the reign of *Constantine* the Great.

IX. It is evident to those, who read the lives and writings of *Polycarp*, *Irenæus*, and *Origen*, that these three Fathers believed the accounts which are given of our Saviour in the four Evangelists, and had undoubted arguments that not only *St. John*, but many others of our Saviour's disciples, published the same accounts of him. To which we must subjoin this further remark, that what was believed by these Fathers on this subject, was likewise the belief of the main body of Christians in those successive ages when they flourished; since *Polycarp* cannot but be looked upon, if we consider the respect that was paid him, as the representative of the Eastern Churches in this particular, *Irenæus* of the Western upon the same account, and *Origen* of those established in *Egypt*.

X. To these I might add *Paul* the famous hermite, who retired from the *Decian* persecution five or six years before *Origen's* death, and lived till the year 343. I have only discovered one of those channels by which the history of our Saviour might be conveyed pure and unadulterated, through those several ages that produced those *Pagan* Philosophers, whose testimonies I make use of for the truth of our Saviour's history. Some or other of these Philosophers came into the Christian faith during its infancy, in the several periods of these three first centuries, when they had such means of informing themselves in all the particulars of our Saviour's history. I must further add, that though I have here only chosen this single link of martyrs, I might find out others among those names which are still extant, that delivered down this account of our Saviour in a successive tradition, till the whole *Roman* empire became Christian; as there is no question but numberless series of witnesses might follow one another in the same order, and in as short a chain, and that perhaps in every single Church, had the names and ages of the most eminent primitive Christians been transmitted to us with the like certainty.

XI. But to give this consideration more force, we must take notice, that the tradition of the first ages of Christianity had several circumstances peculiar to it, which made it more authentick than any other tradition in any other age of the world. The Christians, who carried their religion through so many general and particular persecutions, were incessantly comforting and supporting one another, with the example and history of our Saviour and his Apostles. It was the subject not only of their solemn assemblies, but of their private visits and conversations. *Our virgins*, says *Tatian*, who lived in the second century, *discourse over their distaffs*

on divine subjects. Indeed, when religion was woven into the civil government, and flourished under the protection of the Emperors, men's thoughts and discourses were, as they are now, full of secular affairs; but in the three first centuries of Christianity, men, who embraced this religion, had given up all their interests in this world, and lived in a perpetual preparation for the next, as not knowing how soon they might be called to it: so that they had little else to talk of but the life and doctrines of that divine person, which was their hope, their encouragement, and their glory. We cannot therefore imagine, that there was a single person arrived at any degree of age or consideration, who had not heard and repeated above a thousand times in his life, all the particulars of our Saviour's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

XII. Especially if we consider, that they could not then be received as Christians, till they had undergone several examinations. Persons of riper years, who flocked daily into the Church during the three first centuries, were obliged to pass through many repeated instructions, and give a strict account of their proficiency, before they were admitted to Baptism. And as for those who were born of Christian parents, and had been baptised in their infancy, they were with the like care prepared and disciplined for confirmation, which they could not arrive at, till they were found upon examination to have made a sufficient progress in the knowledge of Christianity.

XIII. We must further observe, that there was not only in those times this religious conversation among private Christians, but a constant correspondence between the Churches that were established by the Apostles or their successors, in the several parts of the world. If any new doctrine was started, or any fact reported of our Saviour, a strict enquiry was made among the Churches, especially those planted by the Apostles themselves, whether they had received any such doctrine or account of our Saviour, from the mouths of the Apostles, or the tradition of those Christians, who had preceded the present members of the Churches which were thus consulted. By this means, when any novelty was published, it was immediately detected and censured.

XIV. St. *John*, who lived so many years after our Saviour, was appealed to in these emergencies as the living Oracle of the Church; and as his oral testimony lasted the first century, many have observed that, by a particular providence of God, several of our Saviour's Disciples, and of the early converts of his religion, lived to a very great age, that they might personally convey the truth of the Gospel to those times, which were

were very remote from the first publication of it. Of these, besides St. *John*, we have a remarkable instance in *Simeon*, who was one of the seventy sent forth by our Saviour, to publish the Gospel before his crucifixion, and a near kinsman of the Lord. This venerable person, who had probably heard with his own ears our Saviour's prophecy of the destruction of *Jerusalem*, presided over the Church established in that city, during the time of its memorable siege, and drew his congregation out of those dreadful and unparallel'd calamities which beset his countrymen, by following the advice our Saviour had given, when they should see *Jerusalem* encompassed with armies, and the *Roman* standards, or abomination of desolation, set up. He lived till the year of our Lord 107, when he was martyred under the Emperor *Trajan*.

SECTION VI.

- I. *The tradition of the Apostles secured by other excellent institutions;*
- II. *But chiefly by the writings of the Evangelists.*
- III. *The diligence of the Disciples and first Christian converts, to send abroad these writings.*
- IV. *That the written account of our Saviour was the same with that delivered by tradition:*
- V. *Proved from the reception of the Gospel by those Churches which were established before it was written;*
- VI. *From the uniformity of what was believed in the several Churches;*
- VII. *From a remarkable passage in Irenæus.*
- VIII. *Records which are now lost, of use to the three first centuries, for confirming the history of our Saviour.*
- IX. *Instances of such records.*

I **T**HUS far we see how the learned *Pagans* might apprize themselves from oral information of the particulars of our Saviour's history. They could hear, in every Church planted in every distant part of the earth, the account which was there received and preserved among them, of the history of our Saviour. They could learn the names and characters of those first missionaries that brought to them these accounts, and the miracles by which God Almighty attested their reports. But the Apostles and Disciples of *Christ*, to preserve the history

history of his life, and to secure their accounts of him from error and oblivion, did not only set aside certain persons for that purpose, as has been already shewn, but appropriated certain days to the commemoration of those facts which they had related concerning him. The first day of the week was in all its returns a perpetual memorial of his resurrection, as the devotional exercises adapted to *Friday* and *Saturday*, were to denote to all ages that he was crucified on the one of those days, and that he rested in the grave on the other. You may apply the same remark to several of the annual festivals instituted by the Apostles themselves, or at furthest by their immediate Successors, in memory of the most important particulars in our Saviour's history; to which we must add the Sacraments instituted by our Lord himself, and many of those rites and ceremonies which obtained in the most early times of the Church. These are to be regarded as standing marks of such facts as were delivered by those, who were eye-witnesses to them, and which were contrived with great wisdom to last till time should be no more. These, without any other means, might have, in some measure, conveyed to posterity, the memory of several transactions in the history of our Saviour, as they were related by his Disciples. At least, the reason of these institutions, though they might be forgotten, and obscured by a long course of years, could not but be very well known by those who lived in the three first Centuries, and a means of informing the inquisitive *Pagans* in the truth of our Saviour's history, that being the view in which I am to consider them.

II. But least such a tradition, though guarded by so many expedients, should wear out by the length of time, the four Evangelists within about fifty, or, as *Theodoret* affirms, thirty years, after our Saviour's death, while the memory of his actions was fresh among them, consigned to writing that history, which for some years had been published only by the mouth of the Apostles and Disciples. The further consideration of these holy men will fall under another part of this discourse.

III. It will be sufficient to observe here, that in the age which succeeded the Apostles, many of their immediate Disciples sent or carried in person the books of the four Evangelists, which had been written by Apostles, or at least approved by them, to most of the Churches which they had planted in the different parts of the world. This was done with so much diligence, that when *Pantenus*, a man of great learning and piety, had travelled into *India* for the propagation of Christianity, about the year of our Lord 200, he found among that remote people the Gospel of St. *Matthew*, which upon his return from that country

country he brought with him to *Alexandria*. This Gospel is generally supposed to have been left in those parts by *St. Bartholomew* the Apostle of the *Indies*, who probably carried it with him before the writings of the three other Evangelists were publish'd.

IV. That the history of our Saviour, as recorded by the Evangelists, was the same with that which had been before delivered by the Apostles and Disciples, will further appear in the prosecution of this discourse, and may be gathered from the following considerations.

V. Had these writings differed from the sermons of the first planters of Christianity, either in history or doctrine, there is no question but they would have been rejected by those Churches which they had already formed. But so consistent and uniform was the relation of the Apostles, that these histories appeared to be nothing else but their tradition and oral attestations made fixt and permanent. Thus was the fame of our Saviour, which in so few years had gone through the whole earth, confirmed and perpetuated by such records, as would preserve the traditionary account of him to after-ages; and rectifie it, if at any time, by passing through several generations, it might drop any part that was material, or contract any thing that was false or fictitious.

VI. Accordingly we find the same *Jesus Christ*, who was born of a Virgin, who had wrought many miracles in *Palestine*, who was crucified, rose again, and ascended into Heaven; I say, the same *Jesus Christ* had been preached, and was worshipped, in *Germany, France, Spain, and Great-Britain, in Parthia, Media, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Phrygia, Asia and Pamphilia, in Italy, Egypt, Afric, and beyond Cyrene, India and Persia*, and, in short, in all the islands and provinces that are visited by the rising or setting sun. The same account of our Saviour's life and doctrine was delivered by thousands of Preachers, and believed in thousands of places, who all, as fast as it could be conveyed to them, received the same account in writing from the four Evangelists.

VII. *Irenæus* to this purpose very aptly remarks, that those barbarous nations, who in his time were not possess'd of the written gospels, and had only learned the history of our Saviour from those who had converted them to Christianity before the Gospels were written, had among them the same accounts of our Saviour, which are to be met with in the four Evangelists. An uncontestable proof of the harmony and concurrence between the holy scripture and the tradition of the Churches in those early times of Christianity.

VIII. Thus .

VIII. Thus we see what opportunities the learned and inquisitive heathens had of informing themselves of the truth of our Saviour's history, during the three first Centuries, especially as they lay nearer one than another to the fountain-head: beside which, there were many uncontroverted traditions, records of Christianity, and particular histories, that then threw light into these matters, but are now entirely lost, by which, at that time, any appearance of contradiction, or seeming difficulties, in the history of the Evangelists, were fully cleared up and explained: though we meet with fewer appearances of this nature in the history of our Saviour, as related by the four Evangelists, than in the accounts of any other person, published by such a number of different historians who lived at so great a distance from the present age.

IX. Among those records which are lost, and were of great use to the primitive Christians, is the letter to *Tiberius*, which I have already mentioned; that of *Marcus Aurelius*, which I shall take notice of hereafter; the writings of *Hegeſippus*, who had drawn down the history of Christianity to his own time, which was not beyond the middle of the second Century; the genuine *Sibylline* oracles, which in the first ages of the Church were easily distinguished from the spurious; the records preserved in particular Churches, with many other of the same nature.

SECTION VII.

- I. *The sight of miracles in those ages a further confirmation of Pagan Philosophers in the Christian faith.*
- II. *The credibility of such miracles.*
- III. *A particular instance.*
- IV. *Martyrdom, why considered as a standing miracle.*
- V. *Primitive Christians thought many of the Martyrs were supported by a miraculous power:*
- VI. *Proved from the nature of their sufferings.*
- VII. *How Martyrs further induced the Pagans to embrace Christianity.*

I **T**HERE were other means, which I find had a great influence on the learned of the three first Centuries, to create and confirm in them the belief of our blessed Saviour's history, which ought not to be passed over in silence. The first was, the opportunity they enjoyed

joyed of examining those miracles, which were on several occasions performed by Christians, and appeared in the Church, more or less, during these first ages of Christianity. These had great weight with the men I am now speaking of, who, from learned *Pagans*, became fathers of the Church; for they frequently boast of them in their writings, as attestations given by God himself to the truth of their religion.

II. At the same time, that these learned men declare how disingenuous, base and wicked it would be, how much beneath the dignity of Philosophy, and contrary to the precepts of Christianity, to utter falsehoods or forgeries in the support of a cause, though never so just in it self, they confidently assert this miraculous power, which then subsisted in the Church, nay tell us that they themselves had been eye-witnesses of it at several times, and in several instances; nay appeal to the heathens themselves for the truth of several facts they relate, nay challenge them to be present at their assemblies, and satisfy themselves, if they doubt of it; nay we find that *Pagan* Authors have in some instances confessed this miraculous power.

III. The letter of *Marcus Aurelius*, whose army was preserved by a refreshing shower, at the same time that his enemies were discomfited by a storm of lightning, and which the heathen historians themselves allow to have been supernatural and the effect of magic: I say, this letter, which ascribed this unexpected assistance to the prayers of the Christians, who then served in the army, would have been thought an unquestionable testimony of the miraculous power I am speaking of, had it been still preserved. It is sufficient for me in this place to take notice, that this was one of those miracles which had its influence on the learned Converts, because it is related by *Tertullian*, and the very letter appealed to. When these learned men saw sickness and frenzy cured, the dead raised, the oracles put to silence, the *Demons* and evil spirits forced to confess themselves no Gods, by persons who only made use of prayer and adjurations in the name of their crucified Saviour; how could they doubt of their Saviour's power on the like occasions, as represented to them by the traditions of the Church, and the writings of the Evangelists?

IV. Under this head, I cannot omit that which appears to me a standing miracle in the three first Centuries, I mean that amazing and supernatural courage or patience, which was shewn by innumerable multitudes of Martyrs, in those slow and painful torments that were inflicted on them. I cannot conceive a man placed in the burning iron chair at *Lyons*, amid the insults and mockeries of a crouded Amphitheatre, and still keeping his seat;

or stretched upon a grate of iron, over coals of fire, and breathing out his soul among the exquisite sufferings of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion, or blaspheme his Saviour. Such tryals seem to me above the strength of human nature, and able to over-bear duty, reason, faith, conviction, nay, and the most absolute certainty of a future state. Humanity, unassisted in an extraordinary manner, must have shaken off the present pressure, and have delivered it self out of such a dreadful distress, by any means that could have been suggested to it. We can easily imagine, that many persons, in so good a cause, might have laid down their lives at the gibbet, the stake, or the block: but to expire leisurely among the most exquisite tortures, when they might come out of them, even by a mental reservation, or an hypocrisy which was not without a possibility of being followed by repentance and forgiveness, has something in it, so far beyond the force and natural strength of mortals, that one cannot but think there was some miraculous power to support the sufferer.

V. We find the Church of *Smyrna*, in that admirable letter which gives an account of the death of *Polycarp* their beloved Bishop, mentioning the cruel torments of other early Martyrs for Christianity, are of opinion, that our Saviour stood by them in a vision, and personally conversed with them, to give them strength and comfort during the bitterness of their long continued agonies; and we have the story of a young man, who, having suffered many tortures, escaped with life, and told his fellow-christians, that the pain of them had been rendered tolerable, by the presence of an Angel who stood by him, and wiped off the tears and sweat, which ran down his face whilst he lay under his sufferings. We are assured at least that the first Martyr for Christianity was encouraged in his last moments, by a vision of that divine person, for whom he suffered, and into whose presence he was then hastening.

VI. Let any man calmly lay his hand upon his heart, and after reading these terrible conflicts in which the ancient Martyrs and Confessors were engaged, when they passed through such new inventions and varieties of pain, as tired their tormentors; and ask himself, however zealous and sincere he is in his religion, whether under such acute and lingering tortures he could still have held fast his integrity, and have professed his faith to the last, without a supernatural assistance of some kind or other. For my part, when I consider that it was not an unaccountable obstinacy in a single man, or in any particular set of men, in some extraordinary juncture; but that there were multitudes of each sex, of every age, of different

rent countries and conditions, who for near 300 years together made this glorious confession of their faith, in the midst of tortures, and in the hour of death: I must conclude, that they were either of another make than men are at present, or that they had such miraculous supports as were peculiar to those times of Christianity, when without them perhaps the very name of it might have been extinguished.

VII. It is certain, that the deaths and sufferings of the primitive Christians had a great share in the conversion of those learned Pagans, who lived in the ages of Persecution, which with some intervals and abatements lasted near 300 years after our Saviour. *Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Lactantius, Arnobius*, and others, tell us, that this first of all alarmed their curiosity, roused their attention, and made them seriously inquisitive into the nature of that religion, which could endue the mind with so much strength, and overcome the fear of death, nay raise an earnest desire of it, though it appeared in all its terrors. This they found had not been effected by all the doctrines of those Philosophers, whom they had thoroughly studied, and who had been labouring at this great point. The sight of these dying and tormented Martyrs engaged them to search into the history and doctrines of him for whom they suffered. The more they searched, the more they were convinced; till their conviction grew so strong, that they themselves embraced the same truths, and either actually laid down their lives, or were always in a readiness to do it, rather than depart from them.

SECTION VIII.

- I. *The completion of our Saviour's prophecies confirmed Pagans in their belief of the Gospel.*
- II. *Origen's observation on that of his Disciples being brought before Kings and Governours;*
- III. *On their being persecuted for their religion;*
- IV. *On their preaching the Gospel to all nations;*
- V. *On the destruction of Jerufalem, and ruin of the Jewish oeconomy.*
- VI. *These arguments strengthened by what has happened since Origen's time.*

I. **T**HE second of those extraordinary means, of great use to the learned and inquisitive *Pagans* of the three first Centuries, for evincing the truth of the history of our Saviour, was the completion of such prophecies as are recorded of him in the Evangelists. They could not indeed form any arguments from what he foretold, and was fulfilled during his life, because both the prophecy and the completion were over before they were published by the Evangelists; though, as *Origen* observes, what end could there be in forging some of these predictions, as that of *St. Peter's* denying his master, and all his Disciples forsaking him in the greatest extremity, which reflects so much shame on the great Apostle, and on all his companions? Nothing but a strict adherence to truth, and to matters of fact, could have prompted the Evangelists to relate a circumstance so disadvantageous to their own reputation; as that Father has well observed.

II. But to pursue his reflections on this subject. There are predictions of our Saviour recorded by the Evangelists, which were not completed till after their deaths, and had no likelihood of being so, when they were pronounced by our blessed Saviour. Such was that wonderful notice he gave them, that they should be brought before Governours and Kings for his sake, for a testimony against them and the *Gentiles*, *Mat. 10. 28.* with the other like prophecies, by which he foretold that his Disciples were to be persecuted. Is there any other doctrine in the world, says this Father, whose followers are punished? Can the enemies of *Christ* say, that he knew his opinions were false and impious, and that therefore he might well conjecture and foretell what would be the treatment of those persons who should embrace them? Supposing his doctrines were really such, why should this be the consequence? what likelihood that men should be brought before Kings and Governours for opinions and tenets of any kind, when this never happened even to the *Epicureans*, who absolutely denied a Providence; nor to the *Peripateticks* themselves, who laughed at the prayers and sacrifices which were made to the Divinity? Are there any but the Christians who, according to this prediction of our Saviour, being brought before Kings and Governours for his sake, are pressed to their latest gasp of breath, by their respective judges, to renounce Christianity, and to procure their liberty and rest, by offering the same sacrifices, and taking the same oaths that others did?

III. Consider the time when our Saviour pronounced those words, *Matt. 10. 32. Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny me before*

before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Had you heard him speak after this manner, when as yet his Disciples were under no such tryals, you would certainly have said within your self, If these speeches of *Jesus* are true, and if, according to his prediction, Governors and Kings undertake to ruin and destroy those who shall profess themselves his Disciples, we will believe (not only that he is a Prophet) but that he has received power from God sufficient to preserve, and propagate his religion; and that he would never talk in such a pe-remptory and discouraging manner, were he not assured that he was able to subdue the most powerful opposition, that could be made against the faith and doctrine which he taught.

IV. Who is not struck with admiration, when he represents to himself our Saviour at that time foretelling, that his Gospel should be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, or as St. *Origen* (who rather quotes the sense than the words) to serve for a conviction to Kings and people, when at the same time he finds that his Gospel has accordingly been preached to *Greeks* and *Barbarians*, to the learned and to the ignorant, and that there is no quality or condition of life able to exempt men from submitting to the doctrine of *Christ*? As for us, says this great Author, in another part of his book against *Celsus*, "When we see every day those events exactly accomplished which our Saviour foretold at so great a distance: That his Gospel is preached in all the world, *Matthew* 24. 14. That his Disciples go and teach all nations, *Matthew* 28. 19. And that those, who have received his doctrine, are brought for his sake before Governors, and before Kings, *Matthew* 10. 18. we are filled with admiration, and our faith in him is confirmed more and more. What clearer and stronger proofs can *Celsus* ask for the truth of what he spoke?"

V. *Origen* insists likewise with great strength on that wonderful prediction of our Saviour, concerning the destruction of *Jerusalem*, pronounced at a time, as he observes, when there was no likelihood nor appearance of it. This has been taken notice of and inculcated by so many others, that I shall refer you to what this Father has said on the subject in the first book against *Celsus*. And as to the accomplishment of this remarkable prophecy, shall only observe, that whoever reads the account given us by *Josephus*, without knowing his character, and compares it with what our Saviour foretold, would think the historian had been a Christian, and that he had nothing else in view but to adjust the event to the prediction.

VI. I cannot quit this head without taking notice, that *Origen* would still have triumphed more in the foregoing arguments, had he lived an age longer, to have seen the *Roman* Emperors, and all their Governors and provinces, submitting themselves to the Christian religion, and glorying in its profession, as so many Kings and Sovereigns still place their relation to *Christ* at the head of their titles.

How much greater confirmation of his faith would he have received, had he seen our Saviour's prophecy stand good in the destruction of the temple, and the dissolution of the *Jewish* œconomy, when *Jews* and *Pagans* united all their endeavours under *Julian* the Apostate, to baffle and falsify the prediction? The great preparations that were made for re-building the temple, with the hurricane, earthquake, and eruptions of fire, that destroyed the work, and terrified those employed in the attempt from proceeding in it, are related by many historians of the same age, and the substance of the story testified both by *Pagan* and *Jewish* writers, as *Ammianus Marcellinus* and *Zemath-David*. The learned *Chrysostome*, in a sermon against the *Jews*, tells them this fact was then fresh in the memories even of their young men, that it happened but twenty years ago, and that it was attested by all the inhabitants of *Jerusalem*, where they might still see the marks of it in the rubbish of that work, from which the *Jews* desisted in so great a fright, and which even *Julian* had not the courage to carry on. This fact, which is in it self so miraculous, and so indisputable, brought over many of the *Jews* to Christianity; and shows us, that after our Saviour's prophecy against it, the temple could not be preserved from the plough passing over it, by all the care of *Titus*, who would fain have prevented its destruction, and that instead of being re-edified by *Julian*, all his endeavours towards it did but still more literally accomplish our Saviour's prediction, that not one stone should be left upon another.

The ancient Christians were so entirely persuaded of the force of our Saviour's prophecies, and of the punishment which the *Jews* had drawn upon themselves, and upon their children, for the treatment which the *Messiah* had received at their hands, that they did not doubt but they would always remain an abandoned and dispersed people, an hissing and an astonishment among the nations, as they are to this day. In short, that they had lost their peculiarity of being God's people, which was now transferred to the body of Christians, and which preserved the Church of *Christ* among all the conflicts, difficulties and persecutions, in which it was engaged, as it had preserved the *Jewish* government and œconomy

oeconomy for so many ages, whilst it had the same truth and vital principle in it, notwithstanding it was so frequently in danger of being utterly abolished and destroyed. *Origen*, in his fourth book against *Celsus*, mentioning their being cast out of *Jerusalem*, the place to which their worship was annexed, deprived of their temple and sacrifice, their religious rites and solemnities, and scattered over the face of the earth, ventures to assure them with a face of confidence, that they would never be re-established, since they had committed that horrid crime against the Saviour of the world. This was a bold assertion in the good man, who knew how this people had been so wonderfully re-established in former times, when they were almost swallowed up, and in the most desperate state of desolation, as in their deliverance out of the *Babylonish* captivity, and the oppressions of *Antiochus Epiphanes*. Nay, he knew that within less than a hundred years before his own time, the *Jews* had made such a powerful effort for their re-establishment under *Barchocab*, in the reign of *Adrian*, as shook the whole *Roman* empire. But he founded his opinion on a sure word of prophecy, and on the punishment they had so justly incurred; and we find, by a long experience of 1500 years, that he was not mistaken, nay that his opinion gathers strength daily, since the *Jews* are now at a greater distance from any probability of such a re-establishment, than they were when *Origen* wrote.

SECTION IX.

- I. *The lives of primitive Christians, another means of bringing learned Pagans into their religion.*
- II. *The change and reformation of their manners.*
- III. *This looked upon as supernatural by the learned Pagans,*
- IV. *And strengthened the accounts given of our Saviour's life and history.*
- V. *The Jewish prophecies of our Saviour, an argument for the heathens belief.*
- VI. *Pursued :*
- VII. *Pursued.*

I. **T**HERE was one other means enjoyed by the learned *Pagans* of the three first centuries, for satisfying them in the truth of our Saviour's history, which I might have flung under one of the foregoing heads; but as it is so shining a particular, and does

so

so much honour to our religion, I shall make a distinct article of it, and only consider it with regard to the subject I am upon: I mean the lives and manners of those holy men, who believed in *Christ* during the first ages of Christianity. I should be thought to advance a paradox, should I affirm that there were More Christians in the world during those times of persecution, than there are at present in these which we call the flourishing times of Christianity. But this will be found an indisputable truth, if we form our calculation upon the opinions which prevailed in those days, that every one who lives in the habitual practice of any voluntary sin, actually cuts himself off from the benefits and profession of Christianity, and whatever he may call himself, is in reality no Christian, nor ought to be esteemed as such.

II. In the times we are now surveying, the Christian religion showed its full force and efficacy on the minds of men, and by many examples demonstrated what great and generous souls it was capable of producing. It exalted and refined its profelytes to a very high degree of perfection, and set them far above the pleasures, and even the pains, of this life. It strengthened the infirmity, and broke the fierceness of human nature. It lifted up the minds of the ignorant to the knowledge and worship of him that made them, and inspired the vicious with a rational devotion, a strict purity of heart, and an unbounded love to their fellow-creatures. In proportion as it spread through the world, it seemed to change mankind into another species of Beings. No sooner was a convert initiated into it, but by an easy figure he became a New Man, and both acted and looked upon himself as one regenerated and born a second time into another state of existence.

III. It is not my business to be more particular in the accounts of primitive Christianity, which have been exhibited so well by others, but rather to observe, that the *Pagan* converts, of whom I am now speaking, mention this great reformation of those who had been the greatest sinners, with that sudden and surprising change which it made in the lives of the most profligate, as having something in it supernatural, miraculous, and more than human. *Origen* represents this power in the Christian religion, as no less wonderful than that of curing the lame and blind, or cleansing the leper. Many others represent it in the same light, and looked upon it as an argument that there was a certain divinity in that religion, which showed it self in such strange and glorious effects.

IV. This therefore was a great means not only of recommending Christianity to honest and learned heathens, but of confirming them in the belief

belief of our Saviour's history, when they saw multitudes of virtuous men daily forming themselves upon his example, animated by his precepts, and actuated by that Spirit which he had promised to send among his Disciples.

V. But I find no argument made a stronger impresson on the minds of these eminent *Pagan* converts, for strengthening their faith in the history of our Saviour, than the predictions relating to him in those old prophetick writings, which were deposited among the hands of the greatest enemies to Christianity, and owned by them to have been extant many ages before his appearance. The learned heathen converts were astonished to see the whole history of their Saviour's life published before he was born, and to find that the Evangelists and Prophets, in their accounts of the *Messiah*, differed only in point of time, the one foretelling what should happen to him, and the other describing those very particulars as what had actually happened. This our Saviour himself was pleased to make use of as the strongest argument of his being the promised *Messiah*, and without it would hardly have reconciled his Disciples to the ignominy of his death, as in that remarkable passage which mentions his conversation with the two Disciples, on the day of his resurrection. St. *Luke*, chap. 24. verse 13 to the end.

VI. The heathen converts, after having travelled through all human learning, and fortified their minds with the knowledge of arts and sciences, were particularly qualified to examine these prophecies with great care and impartiality, and without prejudice or prepossession. If the *Jews* on the one side put an unnatural interpretation on these prophecies, to evade the force of them in their controversies with the Christians; or if the Christians on the other side over-strained several passages in their applications of them, as it often happens among men of the best understanding, when their minds are heated with any consideration that bears a more than an ordinary weight with it: the learned Heathens may be looked upon as neuters in the matter, when all these prophecies were new to them, and their education had left the interpretation of them free and indifferent. Besides, these learned men among the primitive Christians, knew how the *Jews*, who had preceded our Saviour, interpreted these predictions, and the several marks by which they acknowledged the *Messiah* would be discovered, and how those of the *Jewish* Doctors who succeeded him, had deviated from the interpretations and doctrines of their forefathers, on purpose to stifle their own conviction.

VII. This set of arguments had therefore an invincible force with those *Pagan* Philosophers who became Christians, as we find in most of their writings. They could not disbelieve our Saviour's history, which so exactly agreed with every thing that had been written of him many ages before his birth, nor doubt of those circumstances being fulfilled in him, which could not be true of any person that lived in the world besides himself. This wrought the greatest confusion in the unbelieving *Jews*, and the greatest conviction in the *Gentiles*, who every where speak with astonishment of these truths they met with in this new magazine of learning which was opened to them, and carry the point so far as to think whatever excellent doctrine they had met with among *Pagan* writers, had been stole from their conversation with the *Jews*, or from the perusal of these writings which they had in their custody.

F I N I S.



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