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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Section I.

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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 surprising 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