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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Section VI.

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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.*

THUS 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