

Communications.

Divine Origin of Christianity Demonstrated.

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(Conclusion.)

Our last article was mainly devoted to the task of proving from the many prophecies in the Bible that Christ was a Divine personage, that none other than those endowed with divine power could have foreseen so clearly and foretold so literally the advent, life, death and resurrection of the blessed Lord. And that coming at the exact time and manner predicted, and fulfilling every particular in the minutia spoken of in his life and death, he was the very Christ, the divine paradesus, and hence the Christian religion is of divine origin.

In the progress of these papers I think I have shown by indubitable rules of evidence that the facts upon which rest the system of Christianity are true beyond a cavil, unless we suppose those who lived and are said to have witnessed those facts, were universally deceived, or combined to impose a fraud upon after ages, either conclusion of which is impossible. I have purposely taken up some of the most difficult miracles, as that of the passage over Jordan, by the children of Israel, and shown how utterly impossible such a thing, if a fraud, could have received credit, and how securely that event was fixed as a fact by every means of testimony possible, knowing full well that if I could produce a conviction in the mind of the reader of the truth, of any one of those grand and wonderful miracles, performed by God through Moses, or Joshua, or Jesus, that a belief of every other fact stated would be easy.

And now in concluding these essays it seems appropriate that I should say a few words on the philosophy of Miracles. The following statement is true beyond controversy: Man cannot, in the present constitution of his mind, believe that religion has a divine origin, unless it be accompanied with miracles. The necessary inference of the mind is, that if an Infinite Being acts, his acts will be superhuman in their character; because the effects reason dictates will be characterized by the nature of its cause. Man has the same reason to expect that God will perform acts above human power and knowledge that he has to suppose the inferior orders of animals will, in their actions, sink below the power and wisdom which characterizes human nature. For, as it is natural for man to perform acts superior to the power and knowledge of the animal beneath him, so, reason affirms, that it is natural for God to develop his power by means, and in ways above the skill and ability of mortals. Hence, if God manifest himself at all, unless, in accommodation to the capacities of men, he should constrain his manifestations within the compass of human ability, every act of God's immediate power would, to human capacity, be a miracle. But, if God were to constrain all his acts within the limits of human means and agencies, it would be impossible for man to discriminate between the acts of the God head and the acts of manhood. And man, if he considered acts as of divine origin, which were plainly within the compass of human ability, would violate his own reason. Suppose that God desired to reveal a religion to men, and wished them to recognize his character and his benevolence in giving that revelation. Suppose, further, that God should give such a revelation, and every act, and every appearance, connected with its introduction, was characterized by nothing superior to human power, could any rational mind on earth believe that such a system of religion came from God? Impossible! As man could as easily be made to believe that his own

child, who possessed his own lineaments and his own nature, belonged to some other world, and some other order of creation. It would not be possible for God to convince men that a religion was from heaven unless it was accompanied by the marks of divine power.

Suppose again that some individual were to appear in the world, he claimed to be a teacher sent from God, yet aspired to the performance of no miracles, to do nothing superior to the wisdom and ability of other men. Such an individual could never make men believe that he had a special commission from God to establish a new religion, for the simple reason that he has no grounds more than his fellows to support his claims as an agent of the Almighty. But if he could convince a single individual that he had wrought a miracle or that he had power to do so, that moment his claims would be established, in that mind, as a commissioned agent from heaven. So certainly, and so intuitively, do the minds of men reverse and expect miracles as the credentials of the divine presence."

The apostles understood this constituent of the human character, and hence, often put the truth of what they asserted upon the performance of miracles. "They did not merely assert that they had seen miracles wrought by Jesus, but that he had endowed themselves with a variety of miraculous powers. And there they undertook to display, not in such idle and useless tricks as slight-of-hand might perform; but in such solid and important marks as appeared worthy of a divine interposition, and entirely superior to human power; restoring sight to the blind, soundness to lepers, activity to the lame, and in some instances, life to the dead. Nor was these things undertaken in a corner, in a circle of friends, or dependents; nor were they performed on such as might be suspected of being confederate in the fraud, but they were done often in the public streets, in the sight of enemies, or persons of such as were utter strangers to the apostles; but sometimes well known to neighbors and spectators as having long labored under those calamities, which, to human skill were utterly incurable."

And the apostles were so successful under the performance of these miracles, backed up as they were by the Holy Scriptures and their unanswerable arguments "that Pliny in the next age after the apostles testifies, "He found the heathen temples in Achaia almost deserted." And Tertullian afterward boasted "that all places except those temples were filled with Christians; so that were they only to withdraw, the cities and provinces should be depopulated." And Justin Martyr, who wrote not much above an hundred years after Christ's death, declares: "That there were no nation of men, whether Greeks, or Barbarians, not excepting those savages that wandered in clans from one region to another, and had no fixed habitation, who had not learned to offer prayers, and thanksgivings to the Father and Maker of all, in the name of Jesus, who was crucified." But as the forcible and chaste Fleetwood remarks: "Had this new religion been formed to sooth men's vices, to countenance their errors, to defend their superstitions, or to promote their secular interests, we might easily have accounted for its prevalence in the world. Had its preachers been profound philosophers, or polite and fashionable orators, many might have been charmed, at least for a while, to follow them; or had the princes and potentates of the earth declared themselves its patrons, and armed their legions for its defence and propagation, multitudes might have been terrified into the profession, though not a soul could by such means have been rationally persuaded to the use of it. But every one knows that the very reverse of

this was the cause of Christianity. It is abundantly evident from the constitution of the religion of Jesus, that the lusts and errors, the superstitions and interests of carnal men would immediately rise up against it as a most irreconcilable enemy. It is known that the learning and wit of the Greeks and Romans were early employed to ridicule and obstruct its progress. It is known that all those priests who subsisted by the superstitious worship paid them, must in interest find themselves obliged to oppose it. It is known that the princes of the earth drew the sword against it, and armed torments and death for the destruction of its followers. And yet it triumphed over all, though published in ages and places celebrated for learning and elegance; and proposed not in an ornamental and artificial manner, but with the utmost plainness, the doctrines of the Cross being always advanced as its grand foundation a stumbling-block both to the Jews and to the Gentiles."

But to add no more, as to miracles and the early progress of the Christian religion, as an evidence of its divine origin, let us from the light of nature itself draw a few reflections as another proof of divine revelation. All the lower animals are governed by natural laws so called, as unerringly as effect follows cause. The horse, for instance, is controlled by a law of his being which is most consistent with its organism, and is calculated for its general good and perfect contentment. And what will apply to one horse will apply to all horses. All horses have the same habits. Feed on the same kind of food, procreate and have their young at the same time, lay down and get up at the same time, etc., etc. And what may be said of the horse may be stated of all other animals, fishes and reptiles; they are governed by unalterable laws. The horse neighs, the cow lows, the dog barks, the beaver makes his dam, birds make their nests in the spring and lay their certain number of eggs and hatch their young in a certain length of time, feed their young till they can fly for themselves and then the parent ceases to further supply it. All moves on with the precision of a piece of machinery from year to year and from century to century, without variation or shadow of difference. Thus, has God given to the lower orders of creation a law. But if man has not a revealed law for his guidance, God has made an exception in his case. He alone is left without a knowledge of God's will regarding him. But it is evident that this is the case if the Bible does not furnish that revealed law. For, of all the animals that move on the earth, man when left to his natural inclination is the one who knows no law, and is controlled by none. A dozen men will set out on the journey of life, but will pursue that journey by dozen different directions. But man, being an intelligent being endowed with reasoning powers, it would seem by his own efforts discover a law that would supply the place of the law of instinct. Yet, the whole history of the human race from its infancy to the present, shows, beyond controversy, the fact that man, left alone to his own resources without the aid of revelation is utterly unable to rise above himself, so to speak, in the scale of virtue and morality. That no people however learned in letters, arts and sciences, destitute of a true knowledge of God, and their relation to him, their responsibilities to him and to one another, the law of nature rewards and punishment, as revealed in the Bible, has ever been able to ascend above a state of heathen idolatry, the social substratum of which is made up of legalized crime, as murder, debauchery, lewdness and superstition.

But the Christian world are not so ignorant, ungrateful and blasphemous, as to adopt the idea that the great

Creator, who shows benevolence in all his works, has given to all organized beings of his hands, excepting man alone, a law to guide them; and which followed leads them unerringly along the way which conduces to their greatest good, and permanent happiness. The Christian believes that God has revealed a law for man also, which followed, will likewise, result in the general good of the human family here, and in his eternal happiness and immortality beyond the grave. And we think that law is revealed in the Bible. We think that law has been put to the practical test for many, many ages, and has never failed of answering in the fullest sense of the word, all that is claimed for it. We know it stands to-day a living witness, the best evidence of its own divine origin. We know that the brightest, happiest, and best people on this earth to-day are those who stand closest to the Christian religion, and obey best the precepts of its illustrious founder, while the darkest plans, and most miserable people are those who are farthest removed from the influence of the Christian religion. Besides all this, we know that if the Christian religion is not of divine origin, but a fraud, its founders were bad men, liars, stupendous villains, monsters of wickedness. But then, we challenge the world to produce a like number of men, as Christ and his apostles, bad men, wicked imposters, who has produced, or can produce such a system of moral ethics, inculcating universal goodness, and forbidding the least appearance of vice, as that brought out by them, as shown in the New Testament. Do this and we'll give up the case. But until you do, we must sing:

"Hear the royal proclamation:
The glad tidings of salvation,
Publishing to every creature,
To the ruined sons of nature,
Jesus reigns—He reigns victorious,
O ye! heaven and earth most glorious,
Jesus reigns."

In concluding I here repeat that I have written most of these articles under much disadvantage, sickness (and one instance death) coming into our family soon after I commenced the series, and continuing until the present, so that I have been unable to do the subject justice, and have often had to write interruptedly, and in great haste, not even some times taking time to review my manuscript before sending it to the office. Hence, I have doubtless committed many errors in composition, as in punctuation, spelling, and grammar, and have I fear caused the patient compositors and our beloved Bro. Stanley, of the MESSENGER, much trouble, and mayhap vexation, and I here award them my thanks for their many courtesies and Christian forbearance throughout our labors.

To the reader I have to say that a simple desire to defend the cause of Christianity and in response to a request from Bro. Stanley for some of his scribes to write a series of articles on the "Divine origin of Christianity," must be my apology for troubling you. I could have wished an abler hand to undertake the task, but no one responding to the request for months, and being confident of the correctness of the Christian religion I stand ready now as I hope always to be ready, to give a reason for the faith that is in me. And now giving credit to the authors of "Life's short method with Infidels," "The Philosophy of the Plan of Salvation," Fleetwood's "Life of Christ," and Watson's "Apology," for most of the thoughts, and in some instances, whole paragraphs contained in this series, I close.

WHAT IS PRAYER.—Bowed knees and beautiful words cannot make prayer; but earnest desire from a heart bowed by love, inspired by God's Holy Spirit, and thirsting for God—the living God—will do it, any where, or in any place, at any time.—Dr. Channing.

The Contest Progressing.

BY S. H. REDDICK.

NUMBER I.

The contest between truth and error is as old as the history of men, and though often changing its form, yet in principle it is always the same. The preponderance of one is called a period of light, and of the other, a period of darkness, and the history of more than eighteen hundred years presents a mighty contest in which society has struggled on, till to-day the attitude of contending parties is one peculiar to itself, perhaps a little different from what it ever was before, or ever will be again; because each generation has its battle, each age makes its progress, and the quantity of truth or error standing out upon the service reflects the character of that period to all succeeding generations.

However, these old maxims of "history repeating itself," "judge the future by the past," and that "one extreme follows another," &c., are doubtless true in general, and are verified in not a few instances in the past. The Jews' religion was perhaps never more corrupt than in the days that John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles, announced the kingdom of heaven at hand. The contest that followed between Christianity and Jewish and Pagan traditions was fierce and long. Many a Jew driven from his own position by the searching evidence of apostles and prophets, would doubtless go over to paganism, rather than accept the truth, as offered by those who had broken through his bulwarks of error; so a weak faith often chooses the harder side.

Christianity while advocated in its purity was detrimental to the religion of pagan Rome, and always came out conqueror. But a defeated enemy does not always make a good citizen. So, though paganism could not stand the contest, she found it easier to compromise than to surrender, and the friends of Christianity never could make a greater blunder than to compromise. To compromise or contaminate the true worship of God with the worship invented by man, always has been detrimental to the age in which it is accomplished, and future generations recover from it very slowly. Israel was a captive after her experiment and finally lost her city and nation. The advocate of Christianity in the third and fourth centuries compromised the true worship of the Gospel of Christ, or rather endeavored to substitute for its truths and means of guidance the superstitions of Jews and Pagans, and thereby a cloud of sackcloth hovers over the world for over twelve centuries. This dark night of vice and misery became like Pharaoh's yoke, too heavy to be borne, and the first dawn of light of the fifteenth century was a fit opportunity for the rush for freedom. And while Luther began the march toward reform in 1517, translating the Bible in 1522, gathering strength day by day as the battle grew heavier, and Roman Catholicism sees her ranks thinned out by desertion in large numbers every day; forming the mighty army of heretics, who, disgusted with the corruptions of Rome, and supposing it to be the essence of all religion, sought for nothing short of rationalism, thereby exemplifying how one extreme begets another. So long without any other than this "mother of harlots" to exemplify the truth that many in fleeing from Jericho ran past Jerusalem; so many, leaving Catholicism, ran beyond Luther, and thus three parties soon came forth in the contest. Catholicism stood as the representative of a false religion; many of the men who rebelled against it, took up the other extreme of rationalism; while thousands with Luther and Melancthon, as the Reformers, sought for the Bible truth, and a return to the apostolic order of things.

How natural that Rome should