

# Faith and Reason, Contrasted as Habits of Mind<sup>1</sup>

by John Henry Newman

“Now Faith is the substance of things hoped for,  
the evidence of things not seen.”<sup>2</sup>

**T**HE SUBJECT OF FAITH is one especially suggested to our minds by the event which we this day commemorate, and the great act of grace of which it was the first-fruits. It was as on this day that the wise men of the East were allowed to approach and adore the infant Saviour, in anticipation of those Gentile multitudes who, when the kingdom of God was preached, were to take possession of it as if by violence, and to extend it to the ends of the earth. To them Christ was manifested as He is to us, and in the same way; not to the eyes of the flesh, but to the illuminated mind, to their Faith. As the manifestation of God accorded to the Jews was circumscribed, and addressed to their senses, so that which is vouchsafed to Christians is universal and spiritual. Whereas the gifts of the Gospel are invisible, Faith is their proper recipient; and whereas its Church is Catholic, Faith is its bond of intercommunion; things external, local, and sensible being no longer objects to dwell upon on their own account, but merely means of conveying onwards the divine gifts from the Giver to their proper home, the heart itself.

2. As, then, Catholicity is the note, so an inward manifestation is the privilege, and Faith the duty, of the Christian Church; or, in the words of the Apostle, “the *Gentiles*” receive “the promise of the *Spirit* through *Faith*.”

3. I shall not, then be stepping beyond the range of subjects to which this great Festival draws our attention, if I enter upon some inquiries into the nature of that special Gospel grace, by which Jews and Gentiles apprehend and enjoy the blessings which Christ has purchased for them, and which accordingly is spoken of in the Collect<sup>3</sup> in the service, as the peculiarity of

---

<sup>1</sup> This sermon was preached on the feast of the Epiphany, 6 January 1839, in the University Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Oxford.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 11.1.

<sup>3</sup> The “Collect” is the “Opening Prayer”: “O God, who on this day revealed your Only Begotten Son to the nations by the guidance of a star, grant in your mercy, that we, who know you already by faith, may be brought to behold the beauty of your sublime glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .”

our condition in this life, as Sight will be in the world to come. And in so doing, I shall be pursuing a subject, which is likely to be of main importance in the controversies which lie before us at this day.

4. It is scarcely necessary to prove from Scripture, the especial dignity and influence of Faith, under the Gospel Dispensation, as regards both our spiritual and moral condition. Whatever be the particular faculty or frame of mind denoted by the word, certainly Faith is regarded in Scripture as the chosen instrument connecting heaven and earth, as a novel principle of action most powerful in the influence which it exerts both on the heart and on the Divine view of us, and yet in itself of a nature to excite the contempt or ridicule of the world. These characteristics, its apparent weakness, its novelty, its special adoption, and its efficacy, are noted in such passages as the following:—"Have faith in God; for verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, 'Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea,' and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." And again: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Again: "The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Again: "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach. . . . Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." And again: "Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry; now the just shall live by faith." And then, soon after, the words of the text: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."<sup>4</sup>

5. Such is the great weapon which Christianity employs, whether viewed as a religious scheme, as a social system, or as a moral rule; and what it is described as being in the foregoing texts, it is also said to be expressly or by implication in other passages too numerous to cite. And I suppose that it will not be denied, that the first impression made upon the reader from all these is, that in the minds of the sacred writers, Faith is an instrument of knowledge and action, unknown to the world before, a principle *sui generis*, distinct from those which nature supplies, and in particular (which is the point into which I mean to inquire) independent of what is commonly

---

<sup>4</sup> Mark 11.22-24; 9.23; 1 Cor 1.18-21; Rom 10.8, 17; Heb 10.37, 38.

understood by Reason. Certainly if, after all that is said about Faith in the New Testament, as if it were what may be called a discovery of the Gospel, and a special divine method of salvation; if, after all, it turns out merely to be a believing upon evidence, or a sort of conclusion upon a process of reasoning, a resolve formed upon a calculation, the inspired text is not level to the understanding, or adapted to the instruction, of the unlearned reader. If Faith be such a principle, how is it novel and strange?

6. Other considerations may be urged in support of the same view of the case. For instance: Faith is spoken of as having its life in a certain moral temper, but argumentative exercises are not moral; Faith, then, is not the same method of proof as Reason.

7. Again: Faith is said to be one of the supernatural gifts imparted in the Gospel: "By grace have ye been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"; but investigation and proof belong to man as man, prior to the Gospel: therefore Faith is something higher than Reason.

8. Again:—That Faith is independent of processes of Reason, seems plain from their respective subject-matters. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." It simply accepts testimony. As then testimony is distinct from experience, so is Faith from Reason.

9. And again:—When the Apostles disparage "the wisdom of this world," "disputings," "excellency of speech," and the like, they seem to mean very much what would now be called trains of argument, discussion, investigation,—that is, exercises of Reason.

10. Once more:—Various instances are given us in Scripture of persons making an acknowledgment of Christ and His Apostles upon Faith, which would not be considered by the world as a rational conviction upon evidence. For instance: The lame man who sat at the Beautiful gate was healed on his faith, after St. Peter had but said, "Look on us." And that other lame man at Lystra saw no miracle done by St. Paul, but only heard him preach, when the Apostle, "steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, 'Stand upright on thy feet.'" Again, St. Paul at Athens did no miracle, but preached, and yet "certain men clave unto him and believed." To the same purpose are our Lord's words, when St. John Baptist sent to Him to ask if He were the Christ. He wrought miracles, indeed, to reassure him, but added, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." And when St. Thomas doubted of His resurrection, He gave him the sensible proof which he asked, but He added, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." On another occasion He

said, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."<sup>5</sup>

11. On the other hand, however, it may be urged, that it is plainly impossible that Faith should be independent of Reason, and a new mode of arriving at truth; that the Gospel does not alter the constitution of our nature, and does but elevate it and add to it; that Sight is our initial, and Reason is our ultimate informant concerning all knowledge. We are conscious that we see; we have an instinctive reliance on our Reason: how can the claims of a professed Revelation be brought home to us as Divine, except through these? Faith, then, must necessarily be resolvable at last into Sight and Reason; unless, indeed, we agree with enthusiasts in thinking that faculties altogether new are implanted in our minds, and that perceptibly, by the grace of the Gospel; faculties which, of course, are known to those who have them without proof; and, to those who have them not, cannot be made known by any. Scripture confirms this representation, as often as the Apostles appeal to their miracles, or to the Old Testament. This is an appeal to Reason; and what is recorded, in some instances, was probably or certainly (as it is presumed from the necessity of the case) made in the rest, even when not recorded.

12. Such is the question which presents itself to readers of Scripture, as to the relation of Faith to Reason: and it is usual at this day to settle it in disparagement of Faith,—to say that Faith is but a moral quality, dependent upon Reason,—that Reason judges both of the evidence on which Scripture is to be received, and of the meaning of Scripture; and then Faith follows or not, according to the state of the heart; that we make up our minds by Reason without Faith, and then we proceed to adore and to obey by Faith apart from Reason; that, though Faith rests on testimony, not on reasonings, yet that testimony, in its turn, depends on Reason for the proof of its pretensions, so that Reason is an indispensable preliminary.

13. Now, in attempting to investigate what are the distinct offices of Faith and Reason in religious matters, and the relation of the one to the other, I observe, first, that undeniable though it be, that Reason has a power of analysis and criticism in all opinion and conduct, and that nothing is true or right but what may be justified, and, in a certain sense, proved by it, and undeniable, in consequence, that, unless the doctrines received by Faith are approvable by Reason, they have no claim to be regarded as true, it does not therefore follow that Faith is actually grounded on Reason in the believing mind itself; unless, indeed, to take a parallel case, a judge can be called the origin, as well as the justifier, of the innocence or truth of those who are

---

<sup>5</sup> Acts 3.4; 14.9, 10; 17.34; Matt 11.6. John 20.29; 4.48.

brought before him. A judge does not make men honest, but acquits and vindicates them: in like manner, Reason need not be the origin of Faith, as Faith exists in the very persons believing, though it does test and verify it. This, then, is one confusion, which must be cleared up in the question,—the assumption that Reason must be the inward principle of action in religious inquiries or conduct in the case of this or that individual, because, like a spectator, it acknowledges and concurs in what goes on;—the mistake of a critical for a creative power.

14. This distinction we cannot fail to recognize as true in itself, and applicable to the matter in hand. It is what we all admit at once as regards the principle of Conscience. No one will say that Conscience is against Reason, or that its dictates cannot be thrown into an argumentative form; yet who will, therefore, maintain that it is not an original principle, but must depend, before it acts, upon some previous processes of Reason? Reason analyzes the grounds and motives of action: a reason is an analysis, but is not the motive itself. As, then, Conscience is a simple element in our nature, yet its operations admit of being surveyed and scrutinized by Reason; so may Faith be cognizable, and its acts be justified, by Reason, without therefore being, in matter of fact, dependent upon it; and as we reprobate, under the name of Utilitarianism, the substitution of Reason for Conscience, so perchance it is a parallel error to teach that a process of Reason is the *sine quâ non* for true religious Faith. When the Gospel is said to require a rational Faith, this need not mean more than that Faith is accordant to right Reason in the abstract, not that it results from it in the particular case.

15. A parallel and familiar instance is presented by the generally acknowledged contrast between poetical or similar powers, and the art of criticism. That art is the sovereign awarder of praise and blame, and constitutes a court of appeal in matters of taste; as then the critic ascertains what he cannot himself create, so Reason may put its sanction upon the acts of Faith, without in consequence being the source from which Faith springs.

16. On the other hand, Faith certainly does seem, in matter of fact, to exist and operate quite independently of Reason. Will any one say that a child or uneducated person may not savingly act on Faith, without being able to produce reasons why he so acts? What sufficient view has he of the Evidences of Christianity? What logical proof of its divinity? If he has none, Faith, viewed as an internal habit or act, does not depend upon inquiry and examination, but has its own special basis, whatever that is, as truly as Conscience has. We see, then, that Reason may be the judge, without being the origin, of Faith; and that Faith may be justified by Reason, without making use of it. This is what it occurs to mention at first sight.

17. Next, I observe, that, whatever be the real distinction and relation existing between Faith and Reason, which it is not to our purpose at once to determine, the contrast that would be made between them, on a popular view, is this,—that Reason requires strong evidence before it assents, and Faith is content with weaker evidence.

18. For instance: when a well-known infidel of the last century<sup>6</sup> argues, that the divinity of Christianity is founded on the testimony of the Apostles, in opposition to the experience of nature, and that the laws of nature are uniform, those of testimony variable, and scoffingly adds that Christianity is founded on Faith, not on Reason, what is this but saying that Reason is severer in its demands of evidence than Faith?

19. Again, the founder of the recent Utilitarian School<sup>7</sup> insists, that all evidence for miracles, before it can be received, should be brought into a court of law, and subjected to its searching forms:—this too is to imply that Reason demands exact proofs, but that Faith accepts inaccurate ones.

20. The same thing is implied in the notion which men of the world entertain, that Faith is but credulity, superstition, or fanaticism; these principles being notoriously such as are contented with insufficient evidence concerning their objects. On the other hand, scepticism, which shows itself in a dissatisfaction with evidence of whatever kind, is often called by the name of Reason. What Faith, then, and Reason are, when compared together, may be determined from their counterfeits,—from the mutual relation of credulity and scepticism, which no one can doubt about.

21. In like manner, when mathematics are said to incline the mind towards doubt and latitudinarianism, this arises, according to the statement of one who felt this influence of the study, from its indisposing us for arguments drawn from mere probabilities.

22. Or, to take particular instances:—When the proof of Infant Baptism is rested by its defenders on such texts as, “Suffer little children to come unto Me,”<sup>8</sup> a man of a reasoning turn will object to such an argument as not sufficient to prove the point in hand. He will say that it does not follow that infants ought to be baptized, because they ought to be brought and dedicated to Christ; and that he waits for more decisive evidence.

23. Again, when the religious observance of a Christian Sabbath is defended from the Apostles’ observance of it, it may be captiously argued that, considering St. Paul’s express declaration, that the Sabbath, as such, is

---

<sup>6</sup> The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-76).

<sup>7</sup> John Stuart Mill (1806-73).

<sup>8</sup> Matt 19.14.

abolished, a mere practice, which happens to be recorded in the Acts, and which, for what we know, was temporary and accidental, cannot restore what was once done away, and introduce a Jewish rite into the Gospel. Religious persons, who cannot answer this objection, are often tempted to impute it to “man’s wisdom,” “the logic of the schools,” “the pride of reason,” and the like, and to insist on the necessity of the teachable study of Scripture as the means of overcoming it. We are not concerned to defend the language they use; but it is plain that they corroborate what has been laid down, as implying that Reason requires more evidence for conviction than Faith.

24. When, then, Reason and Faith are contrasted together, Faith means easiness, Reason, difficulty of conviction. Reason is called either strong sense or scepticism, according to the bias of the speaker; and Faith, either teachableness or credulity.

25. The next question, beyond which I shall not proceed today, is this:—If this be so, how is it conformable to Reason to accept evidence less than Reason requires? If Faith be what has been described, it opposes itself to Reason, as being satisfied with the less where Reason demands the more. If, then, Reason be the healthy action of the mind, then Faith must be its weakness. The answer to this question will advance us one step farther in our investigation into the relation existing between Faith and Reason.

26. Faith, then, as I have said, does not demand evidence so strong as is necessary for what is commonly considered a rational conviction, or belief on the ground of Reason; and why? For this reason, because it is mainly swayed by antecedent considerations. In this way it is, that the two principles are opposed to one another: Faith is influenced by previous notices, prepossessions, and (in a good sense of the word) prejudices; but Reason, by direct and definite proof. The mind that believes is acted upon by its own hopes, fears, and existing opinions; whereas it is supposed to reason severely, when it rejects antecedent proof of a fact,—rejects every thing but the actual evidence producible in its favour. This will appear from a very few words.

27. Faith is a principle of action, and action does not allow time for minute and finished investigations. We may (if we will) think that such investigations are of high value; though, in truth, they have a tendency to blunt the practical energy of the mind, while they improve its scientific exactness; but, whatever be their character and consequences, they do not answer the needs of daily life. Diligent collection of evidence, sifting of arguments, and balancing of rival testimonies, may be suited to persons who have leisure and opportunity to act when and how they will; they are not

suited to the multitude. Faith, then, as being a principle for the multitude and for conduct, is influenced more by what (in language familiar to us of this place) are called *eikota* than by *semeia*,—less by evidence, more by previously-entertained principles, views, and wishes.

28. This is the case with all Faith, and not merely religious. We hear a report in the streets, or read it in the public journals. We know nothing of the evidence; we do not know the witnesses, or any thing about them: yet sometimes we believe implicitly, sometimes not; sometimes we believe without asking for evidence, sometimes we disbelieve till we receive it. Did a rumour circulate of a destructive earthquake in Syria or the south of Europe, we should readily credit it; both because it might easily be true, and because it was nothing to us though it were. Did the report relate to countries nearer home, we should try to trace and authenticate it. We do not call for evidence till antecedent probabilities fail.

29. Again, it is scarcely necessary to point out how much our inclinations have to do with our belief. It is almost a proverb, that persons believe what they wish to be true. They will with difficulty admit the failure of any cherished project, or listen to a messenger of ill tidings. It may be objected, indeed, that great desire of an object sometimes makes us incredulous that we have attained it. Certainly; but this is only when we consider its attainment improbable, as well as desirable. Thus St. Thomas doubted of the Resurrection; and thus Jacob, especially as having already been deceived by his children, believed not the news of Joseph's being governor of Egypt. "Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not . . . but when he saw the waggons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived."

30. The case is the same as regards preconceived opinions. Men readily believe reports unfavourable to persons they dislike, or confirmations of theories of their own. "Trifles light as air" are all that the predisposed mind requires for belief and action.

31. Such are the inducements to belief which prevail with all of us, by a law of our nature, and whether they are in the particular case reasonable or not. When the probabilities we assume do not really exist, or our wishes are inordinate, or our opinions are wrong, our Faith degenerates into weakness, extravagance, superstition, enthusiasm, bigotry, prejudice, as the case may be; but when our prepossessions are unexceptionable, then we are right in believing or not believing, not indeed without, but upon slender evidence.

32. Whereas Reason then (as the word is commonly used) rests on the evidence, Faith is influenced by presumptions; and hence, while Reason requires rigid proofs, Faith is satisfied with vague or defective ones.

33. It will serve to bring out this doctrine into a more tangible form, to set down some inferences and reflections to which it leads, themselves not unimportant.

34. (1.) First, then, I would draw attention to the coincidence, for such it would seem to be, of what has been said, with St. Paul's definition of Faith in the text. He might have defined it "reliance on the word of another," or "acceptance of a divine message," or "submission of the intellect to mysteries," or in other ways equally true and more theological; but instead of such accounts of it, he adopts a definition bearing upon its nature, and singularly justifying the view which has been here taken of it. "Faith," he says, "is the substance" or realizing "of things hoped for." It is the reckoning that to be, which it hopes or wishes to be; not "the realizing of things proved by evidence." Its desire is its main evidence; or, as the Apostle expressly goes on to say, it makes its own evidence, "being the *evidence* of things not seen." And this is the cause, as is natural, why Faith seems to the world so irrational, as St. Paul says in other Epistles. Not that it has no grounds in Reason, that is, in evidence; but because it is satisfied with so much less than would be necessary, were it not for the bias of the mind, that to the world its evidence seems like nothing.

35. (2.) Next it is plain in what sense Faith is a moral principle. It is created in the mind, not so much by facts, as by probabilities; and since probabilities have no definite ascertained value, and are reducible to no scientific standard, what are such to each individual, depends on his moral temperament. A good and a bad man will think very different things probable. In the judgment of a rightly disposed mind, objects are desirable and attainable which irreligious men will consider to be but fancies. Such a correct moral judgment and view of things is the very medium in which the argument for Christianity has its constraining influence; a faint proof under circumstances being more availing than a strong one, apart from those circumstances.

36. This holds good as regards the matter as well as the evidence of the Gospel. It is difficult to say where the evidence, whether for Scripture or the Creed, would be found, if it were deprived of those adventitious illustrations which it extracts and absorbs from the mind of the inquirer, and which a merciful Providence places there for that very purpose. Texts have their illuminating power, from the atmosphere of habit, opinion, usage, tradition, through which we see them. On the other hand, irreligious men are adequate judges of the value of mere evidence, when the decision turns upon it; for evidence is addressed to the Reason, compels the Reason to assent so far as it is strong, and allows the Reason to doubt or disbelieve so far as it is weak.

The blood on Joseph's coat of many colours was as perceptible to enemy as to friend; miracles appeal to the senses of all men, good and bad; and, while their supernatural character is learned from that experience of nature which is common to the just and to the unjust, the fact of their occurrence depends on considerations about testimony, enthusiasm, imposture, and the like, in which there is nothing inward, nothing personal. It is a sort of proof which a man does not make for himself; but which is made for him. It exists independently of him, and is apprehended from its own clear and objective character. It is its very boast that it does but require a candid hearing; nay, it especially addresses itself to the unbeliever, and engages to convert him as if against his will. There is no room for choice; there is no merit, no praise or blame, in believing or disbelieving; no test of character in the one or the other. But a man *is* responsible for his faith, because he is responsible for his likings and dislikings, his hopes and his opinions, on all of which his faith depends. And whereas unbelievers do not see this distinction, they persist in saying that a man is as little responsible for his faith as for his bodily functions; that both are from nature; that the will cannot make a weak proof a strong one; that if a person thinks a certain reason goes only a certain way, he is dishonest in attempting to make it go farther; that if he is after all wrong in his judgment, it is only his misfortune, not his fault; that he is acted on by certain principles from without, and must obey the laws of evidence, which are necessary and constant. But in truth, though a given evidence does not vary in force, the antecedent probability attending it does vary without limit, according to the temper of the mind surveying it.

37. (3.) Again: it is plain from what has been said, why our great divines, Bull and Taylor<sup>9</sup>, not to mention others, have maintained that justifying faith is *fides formata charitate*, or in St. Paul's words, *pistis di' agapes energoumene*.<sup>10</sup> For as that faith, which is not moral, but depends upon evidence, is *fides formata ratione*,<sup>11</sup>—dead faith, which an infidel may have; so that which justifies or is acceptable in God's sight, lives in, and from, a desire after those things which it accepts and confesses.

38. (4.) And here, again, we see what is meant by saying that Faith is a supernatural principle. The laws of evidence are the same in regard to the Gospel as to profane matters. If they were the sole arbiters of Faith, of course Faith could have nothing supernatural in it. But love of the great

---

<sup>9</sup> A "divine" is a theologian. Newman is referring here to George Bull (1634-1710) and Jeremy Taylor (1612-67), two Anglican bishops whose writings were important for the development of his own religious thought.

<sup>10</sup> i.e., "Faith working through love": Gal 5.6.

<sup>11</sup> i.e., "Faith working through reason."

Object of Faith, watchful attention to Him, readiness to believe Him near, easiness to believe Him interposing in human affairs, fear of the risk of slighting or missing what may really come from Him; these are feelings not natural to fallen man, and they come only of supernatural grace; and these are the feelings which make us think evidence sufficient, which falls short of a proof in itself. The natural man has no heart for the promises of the Gospel, and dissects its evidence without reverence, without hope, without suspense, without misgivings; and, while he analyzes that evidence perhaps more philosophically than another, and treats it more luminously, and sums up its result with the precision and propriety of a legal tribunal, he rests in it as an end, and neither attains the farther truths at which it points, nor inhales the spirit which it breathes.

39. (5.) And this remark bears upon a fact which has sometimes perplexed Christians,—that those philosophers, ancient and modern, who have been eminent in physical science, have not unfrequently shown a tendency to infidelity. The system of physical causes is so much more tangible and satisfying than that of final, that unless there be a pre-existent and independent interest in the inquirer's mind, leading him to dwell on the phenomena which betoken an Intelligent Creator, he will certainly follow out those which terminate in the hypothesis of a settled order of nature and self-sustained laws. It is indeed a great question whether Atheism is not as philosophically consistent with the phenomena of the physical world, taken by themselves, as the doctrine of a creative and governing Power. But, however this be, the practical safeguard against Atheism in the case of scientific inquirers is the inward need and desire, the inward experience of that Power, existing in the mind before and independently of their examination of His material world.

40. (6.) And in this lies the main fallacy of the celebrated argument against miracles, already alluded to, of a Scotch philosopher, whose depth and subtlety all must acknowledge. Let us grant (at least for argument's sake) that judging from the experience of life, it is more likely that witnesses should deceive, than that the laws of nature should be suspended. Still there may be considerations distinct from this view of the question which turn the main probability the other way,—viz. the likelihood, *à priori*, that a Revelation should be given. Here, then, we see how Faith is and is not according to Reason; taken together with the antecedent probability that Providence will reveal Himself to mankind, such evidence of the fact, as is otherwise deficient, may be enough for conviction, even in the judgment of Reason. But enough need not be enough, apart from that probability. That is, Reason, weighing evidence only, or arguing from external experience, is

counter to Faith; but, admitting the legitimate influence and logical import of the moral feelings, it concurs with it.

41. (7.) Hence it would seem as though Paley<sup>12</sup> had hardly asked enough in the Introduction to his work on the Evidences, when he says of the doctrine of a future state and of a revelation relating to it, “that it is not necessary for our purpose that these propositions be capable of proof, or even that, by arguments drawn from the light of nature, they can be made out to be probable; it is enough that we are able to say concerning them, that they are not so violently improbable,” that the propositions or the facts connected with them ought to be rejected at first sight. This acute and ingenious writer here asks leave to do only what the Utilitarian writer mentioned in a former place demands should be done, namely, to bring his case (as it were) into court; as if trusting to the strength of his evidence, dispensing with moral and religious considerations on one side or the other, and arguing from the mere phenomena of the human mind, that is, the inducements, motives, and habits according to which man acts. I will not say more of such a procedure than that it seems to me dangerous. As miracles, according to the common saying, are not wrought to convince Atheists, and, when they claim to be evidence of a Revelation, presuppose the being of an Intelligent Agent to whom they may be referred, so Evidences in general are grounded on the admission that the doctrine they are brought to prove is, not merely not inconsistent, but actually accordant with the laws of His moral governance. Miracles, though they contravene the physical laws of the universe, tend to the due fulfilment of its moral laws. And in matter of fact, when they were wrought, they addressed persons who were already believers, not in the mere probability, but even in the truth of supernatural revelations. This appears from the preaching of our Lord and His Apostles, who are accustomed to appeal to the religious feelings of their hearers; and who, though they might fail with the many, did thus persuade those who were persuaded—not, indeed, the sophists of Athens or the politicians of Rome, yet men of very different states of mind one from another, the pious, the superstitious, and the dissolute, different, indeed, but all agreeing in this, in the acknowledgment of truths beyond this world, whether or not their knowledge was clear, or their lives consistent,—the devout Jew, the proselyte of the gate, the untaught fisherman, the outcast Publican, and the pagan idolater.

42. (8.) And last of all, we here see what divines mean, who have been

---

<sup>12</sup> William Paley (1743-1805), author of *Evidences of Christianity*, exaggerated the role of reason in demonstrating the validity of Christianity.

led to depreciate what are called the Evidences of Religion. The last century, a time when love was cold, is noted as being especially the Age of Evidences; and now, when more devout and zealous feelings have been excited, there is, I need scarcely say, a disposition manifested in various quarters, to think lightly, as of the eighteenth century, so of its boasted demonstrations. I have not here to make any formal comparison of the last century with the present, or to say whether they are nearer the truth, who in these matters advance with the present age, or who loiter behind with the preceding. I will only state what seems to me meant when persons disparage the Evidences,—viz. they consider that, as a general rule, religious minds embrace the Gospel mainly on the great antecedent probability of a Revelation, and the suitableness of the Gospel to their needs; on the other hand, that on men of irreligious minds Evidences are thrown away. Further, they perhaps would say, that to insist much on matters which are for the most part so useless for any practical purpose, draws men away from the true view of Christianity, and leads them to think that Faith is mainly the result of argument, that religious Truth is a legitimate matter of disputation, and that they who reject it rather err in judgment than commit sin. They think they see in the study in question a tendency to betray the sacredness and dignity of Religion, when those who profess themselves its champions allow themselves to stand on the same ground as philosophers of the world, admit the same principles, and only aim at drawing different conclusions.

43. For is not this the error, the common and fatal error, of the world, to think itself a judge of Religious Truth without preparation of heart? “I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine.” “He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.” “The pure in heart shall see God:” “to the meek mysteries are revealed; ““he that is spiritual judgeth all things.” “The darkness comprehendeth it not.” Gross eyes see not; heavy ears hear not. But in the schools of the world the ways towards Truth are considered high roads open to all men, however disposed, at all times. Truth is to be approached without homage. Every one is considered on a level with his neighbour; or rather the powers of the intellect, acuteness, sagacity, subtlety, and depth, are thought the guides into Truth. Men consider that they have as full a right to discuss religious subjects, as if they were themselves religious. They will enter upon the most sacred points of Faith at the moment, at their pleasure,—if it so happen, in a careless frame of mind, in their hours of recreation, over the wine cup. Is it wonderful that they so frequently end in becoming indifferentists, and conclude that Religious Truth is but a name, that all men are right and all wrong, from witnessing externally the multitude of sects and parties, and

from the clear consciousness they possess within, that their own inquiries end in darkness?

44. Yet, serious as these dangers may be, it does not therefore follow that the Evidences may not be of great service to persons in particular frames of mind. Careless persons may be startled by them as they might be startled by a miracle, which is no necessary condition of believing, notwithstanding. Again, they often serve as a test of honesty of mind; their rejection being the condemnation of unbelievers. Again, religious persons sometimes get perplexed and lose their way; are harassed by objections; see difficulties which they cannot surmount; are a prey to subtlety of mind or over-anxiety. Under these circumstances the varied proofs of Christianity will be a stay, a refuge, an encouragement, a rallying point for Faith, a gracious economy; and even in the case of the most established Christian they are a source of gratitude and reverent admiration, and a means of confirming faith and hope. Nothing need be detracted from the use of the Evidences on this score; much less can any sober mind run into the wild notion that actually no proof at all is implied in the maintenance, or may be exacted for the profession of Christianity. I would only maintain that that proof need not be the subject of analysis, or take a methodical form, or be complete and symmetrical, in the believing mind; and that probability is its life. I do but say that it is antecedent probability that gives meaning to those arguments from facts which are commonly called the Evidences of Revelation; that, whereas mere probability proves nothing, mere facts persuade no one; that probability is to fact, as the soul to the body; that mere presumptions may have no force, but that mere facts have no warmth. A mutilated and defective evidence suffices for persuasion where the heart is alive; but dead evidences, however perfect, can but create a dead faith.

45. To conclude: It will be observed, I have not yet said what Reason really is, or what is its relation to Faith, but have merely contrasted the two together, taking Reason in the sense popularly ascribed to the word. Nor do I aim at more than ascertaining the sense in which the words Faith and Reason are used by Christian and Catholic writers. If I shall succeed in this, I shall be content, without attempting to defend it. Half the controversies in the world are verbal ones; and could they be brought to a plain issue, they would be brought to a prompt termination. Parties engaged in them would then perceive, either that in substance they agreed together, or that their difference was one of first principles. This is the great object to be aimed at in the present age, though confessedly a very arduous one. We need not dispute, we need not prove,—we need but define. At all events, let us, if we can, do this first of all; and then see who are left for us to dispute with, what

is left for us to prove. Controversy, at least in this age, does not lie between the hosts of heaven, Michael and his Angels on the one side, and the powers of evil on the other; but it is a sort of night battle, where each fights for himself, and friend and foe stand together. When men understand each other's meaning, they see, for the most part, that controversy is either superfluous or hopeless. ❧