

SECTION 10

SBN 109

Of Miracles

PART 1

1 THERE is, in Dr. TILLOTSON's writings, an argument against the *real presence*, which is as concise, and elegant, and strong as any argument can possibly be supposed against a doctrine, so little worthy of a serious refutation. It is acknowledged on all hands, says that learned prelate, that the authority, either of the scripture or of tradition, is founded merely in the testimony of the apostles, who were eye-witnesses to those miracles of our Saviour, by which he proved his divine mission. Our evidence, then, for the truth of the CHRISTIAN religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses; because, even in the first authors of our religion, it was no greater; and it is evident it must diminish in passing from them to their disciples; nor can any one rest such confidence in their testimony, as in the immediate object of his senses. But a weaker evidence can never destroy a stronger; and therefore, were the doctrine of the real presence ever so clearly revealed in scripture, it were directly contrary to the rules of just reasoning to give our assent to it. It contradicts sense, though both the scripture and tradition, on which it is supposed to be built, carry not such evidence with them as sense; when they are considered merely as external evidences, and are not brought home to every one's breast, by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit. 10

2 Nothing is so convenient as a decisive argument of this kind, which must at least *silence* the most arrogant bigotry and superstition, and free us from their impertinent solicitations. I flatter myself, that I have discovered an argument of a like nature, which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures. For so long, I presume, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all history, sacred and profane. SBN 110 20

3 Though experience be our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact; it must be acknowledged, that this guide is not altogether infallible, but in some cases is apt to lead us into errors. One, who, in our climate, should expect better weather in any week of JUNE than in one of DECEMBER, would reason justly, and conformably to experience; but it is certain, that he may 30

happen, in the event, to find himself mistaken. However, we may observe, that, in such a case, he would have no cause to complain of experience; because it commonly informs us before-hand of the uncertainty, by that contrariety of events, which we may learn from a diligent observation. All effects follow not with like certainty from their supposed causes. Some events are found, in all countries and all ages, to have been constantly conjoined together: Others are found to have been more variable, and sometimes to disappoint our expectations; so that, in our reasonings concerning matter of fact, there are all imaginable degrees of assurance, from the highest certainty to the lowest species of moral evidence.

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4 A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a full *proof* of the future existence of that event. In other cases, he proceeds with more caution: He weighs the opposite experiments: He considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments: To that side he inclines, with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgment, the evidence exceeds not what we properly call *probability*. All probability, then, supposes an opposition of experiments and observations; where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence, proportioned to the superiority. A hundred instances or experiments on one side, and fifty on another, afford a doubtful expectation of any event; though a hundred uniform experiments, with only one that is contradictory, reasonably beget a pretty strong degree of assurance. In all cases, we must balance the opposite experiments, where they are opposite, and deduct the smaller number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence.

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5 To apply these principles to a particular instance; we may observe, that there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators. This species of reasoning, perhaps, one may deny to be founded on the relation of cause and effect. I shall not dispute about a word. It will be sufficient to observe, that our assurance in any argument of this kind is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses. It being a general maxim, that no objects have any discoverable connexion together, and that all the inferences, which we can draw from one to another, are founded merely on our experience of their constant and regular conjunction; it is evident, that we ought not to

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make an exception to this maxim in favour of human testimony, whose connexion with any event seems, in itself, as little necessary as any other. Were not the memory tenacious to a certain degree; had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame, when detected in a falsehood: Were not these, I say, discovered by *experience* to be qualities, inherent in human nature, we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony. A man delirious, or noted for falsehood and villany, has no manner of authority with us.

6 And as the evidence, derived from witnesses and human testimony, is founded on past experience, so it varies with the experience, and is regarded
10 either as a *proof* or a *probability*, according as the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable. There are a number of circumstances to be taken into consideration in all judgments of this kind; and the ultimate standard, by which we determine all disputes, that may arise concerning them, is always derived from experience and observation. Where this experience is not entirely uniform on any side, it is attended with an unavoidable contrariety in our judgments, and with the same opposition and mutual destruction of argument as in every other kind of evidence. We frequently hesitate concerning the reports of others. We balance the opposite circumstances, which cause
20 any doubt or uncertainty; and when we discover a superiority on any side, we incline to it; but still with a diminution of assurance, in proportion to the force of its antagonist.

7 This contrariety of evidence, in the present case, may be derived from several different causes; from the opposition of contrary testimony; from the character or number of the witnesses; from the manner of their delivering their testimony; or from the union of all these circumstances. We entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact, when the witnesses contradict each other; when they are but few, or of a doubtful character; when they have an interest in what they affirm; when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or on the contrary, with too violent asseverations. There are many other particulars of the same kind, which may diminish or destroy the force of any argument, derived from human testimony. SBN 113

8 Suppose, for instance, that the fact, which the testimony endeavours to establish, partakes of the extraordinary and the marvellous; in that case, the evidence, resulting from the testimony, admits of a diminution, greater or less, in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual. The reason, why we place any credit in witnesses and historians, is not derived from any *connexion*, which we perceive *a priori*, between testimony and reality, but because we

are accustomed to find a conformity between them. But when the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences; of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force, which remains. The very same principle of experience, which gives us a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of witnesses, gives us also, in this case, another degree of assurance against the fact, which they endeavour to establish; from which contradiction there necessarily arises a counterpoise, and mutual destruction of belief and authority.

9 *I should not believe such a story were it told me by* CATO; was a proverbial saying in ROME, even during the lifetime of that philosophical patriot.²¹ 10
The incredibility of a fact, it was allowed, might invalidate so great an authority.

10 The INDIAN prince, who refused to believe the first relations concerning the effects of frost, reasoned justly; and it naturally required very strong testimony to engage his assent to facts, that arose from a state of nature, with which he was unacquainted, and which bore so little analogy to those events, of which he had had constant and uniform experience. Though they were not contrary to his experience, they were not conformable to it.²² SBN 114

11 But in order to encrease the probability against the testimony of witnesses, 20
let us suppose, that the fact, which they affirm, instead of being only marvelous, is really miraculous; and suppose also, that the testimony, considered apart and in itself, amounts to an entire proof; in that case, there is proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force, in proportion to that of its antagonist. 25

12 A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can

²¹ PLUTARCH. in vita CATONIS.

²² No INDIAN, it is evident, could have experience that water did not freeze in cold climates. This is placing nature in a situation quite unknown to him; and it is impossible for him to tell *a priori* what will result from it. It is making a new experiment, the consequence of which is always uncertain. One may sometimes conjecture from analogy what will follow; but still this is but conjecture. And it must be confessed, that, in the present case of freezing, the event follows contrary to the rules of analogy, and is such as a rational INDIAN would not look for. The operations of cold upon water are not gradual, according to the degrees of cold; but whenever it comes to the freezing point, the water passes in a moment, from the utmost liquidity to perfect hardness. Such an event, therefore, may be denominated *extraordinary*, and requires a pretty strong testimony, to render it credible to people in a warm climate: But still it is not *miraculous*, nor contrary to uniform experience of the course of nature in cases where all the circumstances are the same. The inhabitants of SUMATRA have always seen water fluid in their own climate, and the freezing of their rivers ought to be deemed a prodigy: But they never saw water in MUSCOVY during the winter; and therefore they cannot reasonably be positive what would there be the consequence. 10

possibly be imagined. Why is it more than probable, that all men must die; that lead cannot, of itself, remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water; unless it be, that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is required a violation of these laws, or in other words, a miracle to prevent them? Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happen in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden; because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed, in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full *proof*, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.²³

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13 The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), “That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish: And even in that case, there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior.” When any one tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more

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²³ Sometimes an event may not, *in itself*, seem to be contrary to the laws of nature, and yet, if it were real, it might, by reason of some circumstances, be denominated a miracle; because, in *fact*, it is contrary to these laws. Thus if a person, claiming a divine authority, should command a sick person to be well, a healthful man to fall down dead, the clouds to pour rain, the winds to blow, in short, should order many natural events, which immediately follow upon his command; these might justly be esteemed miracles, because they are really, in this case, contrary to the laws of nature. For if any suspicion remain, that the event and command concurred by accident, there is no miracle and no transgression of the laws of nature. If this suspicion be removed, there is evidently a miracle, and a transgression of these laws; because nothing can be more contrary to nature than that the voice or command of a man should have such an influence. A miracle may be accurately defined, *a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent*. A miracle may either be discoverable by men or not. This alters not its nature and essence. The raising of a house or ship into the air is a visible miracle. The raising of a feather, when the wind wants ever so little of a force requisite for that purpose, is as real a miracle, though not so sensible with regard to us.

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miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.

PART 2

14 In the foregoing reasoning we have supposed, that the testimony, upon which a miracle is founded, may possibly amount to an entire proof, and that the falsehood of that testimony would be a real prodigy: But it is easy to show, that we have been a great deal too liberal in our concession, and that there never was a miraculous event established on so full an evidence.

15 For *first*, there is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts, performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable: All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men. 10

16 *Secondly*, We may observe in human nature a principle, which, if strictly examined, will be found to diminish extremely the assurance, which we might, from human testimony, have, in any kind of prodigy. The maxim, by which we commonly conduct ourselves in our reasonings, is, that the objects, of which we have no experience, resemble those, of which we have; that what we have found to be most usual is always most probable; and that where there is an opposition of arguments, we ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations. But though, in proceeding by this rule, we readily reject any fact which is unusual and incredible in an ordinary degree; yet in advancing farther, the mind observes not always the same rule; but when any thing is affirmed utterly absurd and miraculous, it rather the more readily admits of such a fact, upon account of that very circumstance, which ought to destroy all its authority. The passion of *surprize* and *wonder*, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of those events, from which it is derived. And this goes so far, that even those who cannot enjoy this pleasure immediately, nor can believe those miraculous events, of which they are informed, yet love to partake of the satisfaction at second- 20 30

hand or by rebound, and place a pride and delight in exciting the admiration of others.

17 With what greediness are the miraculous accounts of travellers received, their descriptions of sea and land monsters, their relations of wonderful adventures, strange men, and uncouth manners? But if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony, in these circumstances, loses all pretensions to authority. A religionist may be an enthusiast, and imagine he sees what has no reality: He may know his narrative to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the world, for the sake of promoting so holy a cause: Or even where this delusion has no place, vanity, excited by so strong a temptation, operates on him more powerfully than on the rest of mankind in any other circumstances; and self-interest with equal force. His auditors may not have, and commonly have not, sufficient judgment to canvass his evidence: What judgment they have, they renounce by principle, in these sublime and mysterious subjects: Or if they were ever so willing to employ it, passion and a heated imagination disturb the regularity of its operations. Their credulity encreases his impudence: And his impudence overpowers their credulity. SBN 118
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18 Eloquence, when at its highest pitch, leaves little room for reason or reflection; but addressing itself entirely to the fancy or the affections, captivates the willing hearers, and subdues their understanding. Happily, this pitch it seldom attains. But what a TULLY or a DEMOSTHENES could scarcely effect over a ROMAN or ATHENIAN audience, every *Capuchin*, every itinerant or stationary teacher can perform over the generality of mankind, and in a higher degree, by touching such gross and vulgar passions. 20

19 The many instances of forged miracles, and prophecies, and supernatural events, which, in all ages, have either been detected by contrary evidence, or which detect themselves by their absurdity, prove sufficiently the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous, and ought reasonably to beget a suspicion against all relations of this kind. This is our natural way of thinking, even with regard to the most common and most credible events. For instance: There is no kind of report, which rises so easily, and spreads so quickly, especially in country places and provincial towns, as those concerning marriages; insomuch that two young persons of equal condition never see each other twice, but the whole neighbourhood immediately join them together. The pleasure of telling a piece of news so interesting, of propagating it, and of being the first reporters of it, spreads the intelligence. And this is so well known, that no man of sense gives attention to these reports, till he find them confirmed by some greater evidence. Do not the 30
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same passions, and others still stronger, incline the generality of mankind to believe and report, with the greatest vehemence and assurance, all religious miracles?

20 *Thirdly*, It forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people has ever given admission to any of them, that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors, who transmitted them with that inviolable sanction and authority, which always attend received opinions. When we peruse the first histories of all nations, we are apt to imagine ourselves transported into some new world; where the whole frame of nature is disjointed, and every element performs its operations in a different manner, from what it does at present. Battles, revolutions, pestilence, famine, and death, are never the effects of those natural causes, which we experience. Prodigies, omens, oracles, judgments, quite obscure the few natural events, that are intermingled with them. But as the former grow thinner every page, in proportion as we advance nearer the enlightened ages, we soon learn, that there is nothing mysterious or supernatural in the case, but that all proceeds from the usual propensity of mankind towards the marvellous, and that, though this inclination may at intervals receive a check from sense and learning, it can never be thoroughly extirpated from human nature. 10 20

21 *It is strange*, a judicious reader is apt to say, upon the perusal of these wonderful historians, *that such prodigious events never happen in our days*. But it is nothing strange, I hope, that men should lie in all ages. You must surely have seen instances enow of that frailty. You have yourself heard many such marvellous relations started, which, being treated with scorn by all the wise and judicious, have at last been abandoned even by the vulgar. Be assured, that those renowned lies, which have spread and flourished to such a monstrous height, arose from like beginnings; but being sown in a more proper soil, shot up at last into prodigies almost equal to those which they relate. 30

22 It was a wise policy in that false prophet, ALEXANDER, who, though now forgotten, was once so famous, to lay the first scene of his impostures in PAPHLAGONIA, where, as LUCIAN tells us, the people were extremely ignorant and stupid, and ready to swallow even the grossest delusion. People at a distance, who are weak enough to think the matter at all worth enquiry, have no opportunity of receiving better information. The stories come magnified to them by a hundred circumstances. Fools are industrious in propagating the imposture; while the wise and learned are contented, in general, to deride its absurdity, without informing themselves of the particular facts, by which it may be distinctly refuted. And thus the impostor above-mentioned was 40

enabled to proceed, from his ignorant PAPHLAGONIANS, to the enlisting of votaries, even among the GRECIAN philosophers, and men of the most eminent rank and distinction in ROME: Nay, could engage the attention of that sage emperor MARCUS AURELIUS; so far as to make him trust the success of a military expedition to his delusive prophecies.

23 The advantages are so great, of starting an imposture among an ignorant people, that, even though the delusion should be too gross to impose on the generality of them (*which, though seldom, is sometimes the case*) it has a much better chance for succeeding in remote countries, than if the first scene had been laid in a city renowned for arts and knowledge. The most ignorant and barbarous of these barbarians carry the report abroad. None of their countrymen have a large correspondence, or sufficient credit and authority to contradict and beat down the delusion. Men's inclination to the marvellous has full opportunity to display itself. And thus a story, which is universally exploded in the place where it was first started, shall pass for certain at a thousand miles distance. But had ALEXANDER fixed his residence at ATHENS, the philosophers of that renowned mart of learning had immediately spread, throughout the whole ROMAN empire, their sense of the matter; which, being supported by so great authority, and displayed by all the force of reason and eloquence, had entirely opened the eyes of mankind. It is true; LUCIAN, 20 passing by chance through PAPHLAGONIA, had an opportunity of performing this good office. But, though much to be wished, it does not always happen, that every ALEXANDER meets with a LUCIAN, ready to expose and detect his impostures.

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24 I may add as a *fourth* reason, which diminishes the authority of prodigies, that there is no testimony for any, even those which have not been expressly detected, that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of the testimony, but the testimony destroys itself. To make this the better understood, let us consider, that, in matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary; and that it is impossible 30 the religions of ancient ROME, of TURKEY, of SIAM, and of CHINA should, all of them, be established on any solid foundation. Every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions (and all of them abound in miracles), as its direct scope is to establish the particular system to which it is attributed; so has it the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system. In destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles, on which that system was established; so that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as opposite to each other. According to this method of reasoning, when we believe 40

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any miracle of MAHOMET or his successors, we have for our warrant the testimony of a few barbarous ARABIANS: And on the other hand, we are to regard the authority of TITUS LIVIUS, PLUTARCH, TACITUS, and, in short, of all the authors and witnesses, GRECIAN, CHINESE, and ROMAN CATHOLIC, who have related any miracle in their particular religion; I say, we are to regard their testimony in the same light as if they had mentioned that MAHOMETAN miracle, and had in express terms contradicted it, with the same certainty as they have for the miracle they relate. This argument may appear over subtle and refined; but is not in reality different from the reasoning of a judge, who supposes, that the credit of two witnesses, maintaining a crime against any one, is destroyed by the testimony of two others, who affirm him to have been two hundred leagues distant, at the same instant when the crime is said to have been committed. 10

25 One of the best attested miracles in all profane history, is that which TACITUS reports of VESPASIAN, who cured a blind man in ALEXANDRIA, by means of his spittle, and a lame man by the mere touch of his foot; in obedience to a vision of the god SERAPIS, who had enjoined them to have recourse to the emperor, for these miraculous cures. The story may be seen in that fine historian;²⁴ where every circumstance seems to add weight to the testimony, and might be displayed at large with all the force of argument and eloquence, if any one were now concerned to enforce the evidence of that exploded and idolatrous superstition. The gravity, solidity, age, and probity of so great an emperor, who, through the whole course of his life, conversed in a familiar manner with his friends and courtiers, and never affected those extraordinary airs of divinity assumed by ALEXANDER and DEMETRIUS. 20
The historian, a cotemporary writer, noted for candour and veracity, and withal, the greatest and most penetrating genius, perhaps, of all antiquity; and so free from any tendency to credulity, that he even lies under the contrary imputation, of atheism and profaneness: The persons, from whose authority he related the miracle, of established character for judgment and veracity, as we may well presume; eye-witnesses of the fact, and confirming their testimony, after the FLAVIAN family was despoiled of the empire, and could no longer give any reward, as the price of a lie. “Utrumque, qui inter-
fuere, nunc quoque memorant, postquam nullum mendacio pretium.” To which if we add the public nature of the facts, as related, it will appear, that no evidence can well be supposed stronger for so gross and so palpable a falsehood. 30

26 There is also a memorable story related by Cardinal DE RETZ, which may

²⁴ Hist. lib. 4. cap. 81. SUETONIUS gives nearly the same account, in vita VESP.

well deserve our consideration. When that intriguing politician fled into SPAIN, to avoid the persecution of his enemies, he passed through SARAGOSSA, the capital of ARRAGON, where he was shown, in the cathedral, a man, who had served seven years as a door-keeper, and was well known to every body in town, that had ever paid his devotions at that church. He had been seen, for so long a time, wanting a leg; but recovered that limb by the rubbing of holy oil upon the stump; and the cardinal assures us that he saw him with two legs. This miracle was vouched by all the canons of the church; and the whole company in town were appealed to for a confirmation of the fact; whom the cardinal found, by their zealous devotion, to be thorough believers of the miracle. Here the relater was also cotemporary to the supposed prodigy, of an incredulous and libertine character, as well as of great genius; the miracle of so *singular* a nature as could scarcely admit of a counterfeit, and the witnesses very numerous, and all of them, in a manner, spectators of the fact, to which they gave their testimony. And what adds mightily to the force of the evidence, and may double our surprize on this occasion, is, that the cardinal himself, who relates the story, seems not to give any credit to it, and consequently cannot be suspected of any concurrence in the holy fraud. He considered justly, that it was not requisite, in order to reject a fact of this nature, to be able accurately to disprove the testimony, and to trace its falsehood, through all the circumstances of knavery and credulity which produced it. He knew, that, as this was commonly altogether impossible at any small distance of time and place; so was it extremely difficult, even where one was immediately present, by reason of the bigotry, ignorance, cunning, and roguery of a great part of mankind. He therefore concluded, like a just reasoner, that such an evidence carried falsehood upon the very face of it, and that a miracle, supported by any human testimony, was more properly a subject of derision than of argument.

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27 There surely never was a greater number of miracles ascribed to one person, than those, which were lately said to have been wrought in FRANCE upon the tomb of Abbé PARIS, the famous JANSENIST, with whose sanctity the people were so long deluded. The curing of the sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and sight to the blind, were every where talked of as the usual effects of that holy sepulchre. But what is more extraordinary; many of the miracles were immediately proved upon the spot, before judges of unquestioned integrity, attested by witnesses of credit and distinction, in a learned age, and on the most eminent theatre that is now in the world. Nor is this all: A relation of them was published and dispersed every where; nor were the JESUITS, though a learned body, supported by the civil magistrate, and determined enemies to those opinions, in whose favour the miracles were said to have

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been wrought, ever able distinctly to refute or detect them.²⁵ Where shall we find such a number of circumstances, agreeing to the corroboration of one fact? And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events, which they relate? And this surely, in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation.

²⁵ This book was writ by Mons. MONTGERON, counsellor or judge of the parliament of PARIS, a man of figure and character, who was also a martyr to the cause, and is now said to be somewhere in a dungeon on account of his book.

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There is another book in three volumes (called *Recueil des Miracles de l'Abbé PARIS*) giving an account of many of these miracles, and accompanied with prefatory discourses, which are very well written. There runs, however, through the whole of these a ridiculous comparison between the miracles of our Saviour and those of the Abbé; wherein it is asserted, that the evidence for the latter is equal to that for the former: As if the testimony of men could ever be put in the balance with that of God himself, who conducted the pen of the inspired writers. If these writers, indeed, were to be considered merely as human testimony, the FRENCH author is very moderate in his comparison; since he might, with some appearance of reason, pretend, that the JANSENIST miracles much surpass the other in evidence and authority. The following circumstances are drawn from authentic papers, inserted in the above-mentioned book.

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Many of the miracles of Abbé PARIS were proved immediately by witnesses before the officiality or bishop's court at PARIS, under the eye of Cardinal NOAILLES, whose character for integrity and capacity was never contested even by his enemies.

His successor in the archbishopric was an enemy to the JANSENISTS, and for that reason promoted to the see by the court. Yet 22 rectors or *curés* of PARIS, with infinite earnestness, press him to examine those miracles, which they assert to be known to the whole world, and undisputably certain: But he wisely forbore.

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The MOLINIST party had tried to discredit these miracles in one instance, that of Mademoiselle LE FRANC. But, besides that their proceedings were in many respects the most irregular in the world, particularly in citing only a few of the JANSENIST witnesses, whom they tampered with: Besides this, I say, they soon found themselves overwhelmed by a cloud of new witnesses, one hundred and twenty in number, most of them persons of credit and substance in PARIS, who gave oath for the miracle. This was accompanied with a solemn and earnest appeal to the parliament. But the parliament were forbid by authority to meddle in the affair. It was at last observed, that where men are heated by zeal and enthusiasm, there is no degree of human testimony so strong as may not be procured for the greatest absurdity: And those who will be so silly as to examine the affair by that medium, and seek particular flaws in the testimony, are almost sure to be confounded. It must be a miserable imposture, indeed, that does not prevail in that contest.

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All who have been in FRANCE about that time have heard of the reputation of Mons. HERAULT, the *Lieutenant de Police*, whose vigilance, penetration, activity, and extensive intelligence have been much talked of. This magistrate, who by the nature of his office is almost absolute, was invested with full powers, on purpose to suppress or discredit these miracles; and he frequently seized immediately, and examined the witnesses and subjects of them: But never could reach any thing satisfactory against them.

In the case of Mademoiselle THIBAUT he sent the famous DE SYLVA to examine her; whose evidence is very curious. The physician declares, that it was impossible she could have been so ill as was proved by witnesses; because it was impossible she could, in so short a time, have recovered so perfectly as he found her. He reasoned, like a man of sense, from natural causes; but the opposite party told him, that the whole was a miracle, and that his evidence was the very best proof of it.

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The MOLINISTS were in a sad dilemma. They durst not assert the absolute insufficiency of human evidence, to prove a miracle. They were obliged to say, that these miracles were wrought by witchcraft and the devil. But they were told, that this was the resource of the JEWS of old.

28 Is the consequence just, because some human testimony has the utmost force and authority in some cases, when it relates the battle of PHILIPPI or PHARSALIA for instance; that therefore all kinds of testimony must, in all cases, have equal force and authority? Suppose that the CÆSAREAN and POMPEIAN factions had, each of them, claimed the victory in these battles, and that the historians of each party had uniformly ascribed the advantage to their own side; how could mankind, at this distance, have been able to determine between them? The contrariety is equally strong between the miracles related by HERODOTUS or PLUTARCH, and those delivered by MARIANA, BEDE, or any monkish historian.

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29 The wise lend a very academic faith to every report which favours the passion of the reporter; whether it magnifies his country, his family, or himself, or in any other way strikes in with his natural inclinations and propensities. But what greater temptation than to appear a missionary, a prophet, an ambassador from heaven? Who would not encounter many

No Jansenist was ever embarrassed to account for the cessation of the miracles, when the church-yard was shut up by the king's edict. It was the touch of the tomb, which produced these extraordinary effects; and when no one could approach the tomb, no effects could be expected. God, indeed, could have thrown down the walls in a moment; but he is master of his own graces and works, and it belongs not to us to account for them. He did not throw down the walls of every city like those of JERICHO, on the sounding of the rams horns, nor break up the prison of every apostle, like that of St. PAUL.

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No less a man, than the Duc de CHATILLON, a duke and peer of FRANCE, of the highest rank and family, gives evidence of a miraculous cure, performed upon a servant of his, who had lived several years in his house with a visible and palpable infirmity.

I shall conclude with observing, that no clergy are more celebrated for strictness of life and manners than the secular clergy of FRANCE, particularly the rectors or *curés* of PARIS, who bear testimony to these impostures.

The learning, genius, and probity of the gentlemen, and the austerity of the nuns of PORT-ROYAL, have been much celebrated all over EUROPE. Yet they all give evidence for a miracle, wrought on the niece of the famous PASCAL, whose sanctity of life, as well as extraordinary capacity, is well known. The famous RACINE gives an account of this miracle in his famous history of PORT-ROYAL, and fortifies it with all the proofs, which a multitude of nuns, priests, physicians, and men of the world, all of them of undoubted credit, could bestow upon it. Several men of letters, particularly the bishop of TOURNAY, thought this miracle so certain, as to employ it in the refutation of atheists and free-thinkers. The queen-regent of FRANCE, who was extremely prejudiced against the PORT-ROYAL, sent her own physician to examine the miracle, who returned an absolute convert. In short, the supernatural cure was so incontestable, that it saved, for a time, that famous monastery from the ruin with which it was threatened by the JESUITS. Had it been a cheat, it had certainly been detected by such sagacious and powerful antagonists, and must have hastened the ruin of the contrivers. Our divines, who can build up a formidable castle from such despicable materials; what a prodigious fabric could they have reared from these and many other circumstances, which I have not mentioned! How often would the great names of PASCAL, RACINE, ARNAULD, NICOLE, have resounded in our ears? But if they be wise, they had better adopt the miracle, as being more worth, a thousand times, than all the rest of their collection. Besides, it may serve very much to their purpose. For that miracle was really performed by the touch of an authentic holy prickle of the holy thorn, which composed the holy crown, which, &c.

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dangers and difficulties, in order to attain so sublime a character? Or if, by the help of vanity and a heated imagination, a man has first made a convert of himself, and entered seriously into the delusion; who ever scruples to make use of pious frauds, in support of so holy and meritorious a cause?

30 The smallest spark may here kindle into the greatest flame; because the materials are always prepared for it. The *avidum genus auricularum*,²⁶ the gazing populace, receive greedily, without examination, whatever soothes superstition, and promotes wonder.

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31 How many stories of this nature have, in all ages, been detected and exploded in their infancy? How many more have been celebrated for a time, and have afterwards sunk into neglect and oblivion? Where such reports, therefore, fly about, the solution of the phænomenon is obvious; and we judge in conformity to regular experience and observation, when we account for it by the known and natural principles of credulity and delusion. And shall we, rather than have a recourse to so natural a solution, allow of a miraculous violation of the most established laws of nature? 10

32 I need not mention the difficulty of detecting a falsehood in any private or even public history, at the place, where it is said to happen; much more when the scene is removed to ever so small a distance. Even a court of judicature, with all the authority, accuracy, and judgment, which they can employ, find themselves often at a loss to distinguish between truth and falsehood in the most recent actions. But the matter never comes to any issue, if trusted to the common method of altercation and debate and flying rumours; especially when men's passions have taken part on either side. 20

33 In the infancy of new religions, the wise and learned commonly esteem the matter too inconsiderable to deserve their attention or regard. And when afterwards they would willingly detect the cheat, in order to undeceive the deluded multitude, the season is now past, and the records and witnesses, which might clear up the matter, have perished beyond recovery.

34 No means of detection remain, but those which must be drawn from the very testimony itself of the reporters: And these, though always sufficient with the judicious and knowing, are commonly too fine to fall under the comprehension of the vulgar.

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35 Upon the whole, then, it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof; and that, even supposing it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof; derived from the very nature of the fact, which it would endeavour to establish. It is experience only, which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same

²⁶ LUCRET.

experience, which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but subtract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion, either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here explained, this subtraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.

36 I beg the limitations here made may be remarked, when I say, that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. For I own, that otherwise, there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony; though, perhaps, it will be impossible to find any such in all the records of history. Thus, suppose, all authors, in all languages, agree, that, from the first of JANUARY 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days: Suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people: That all travellers, who return from foreign countries, bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction: It is evident, that our present philosophers, instead of doubting the fact, ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived. The decay, corruption, and dissolution of nature, is an event rendered probable by so many analogies, that any phænomenon, which seems to have a tendency towards that catastrophe, comes within the reach of human testimony, if that testimony be very extensive and uniform. 10 20

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37 But suppose, that all the historians, who treat of ENGLAND, should agree, that, on the first of JANUARY 1600, Queen ELIZABETH died; that both before and after her death she was seen by her physicians and the whole court, as is usual with persons of her rank; that her successor was acknowledged and proclaimed by the parliament; and that, after being interred a month, she again appeared, resumed the throne, and governed ENGLAND for three years: I must confess that I should be surprized at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances, but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event. I should not doubt of her pretended death, and of those other public circumstances that followed it: I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor possibly could be real. You would in vain object to me the difficulty, and almost impossibility of deceiving the world in an affair of such consequence; the wisdom and solid judgment of that renowned queen; with the little or no advantage which she could reap from so poor an artifice: All this might astonish me; but I would still reply, that the 30 40

knavery and folly of men are such common phænomena, that I should rather believe the most extraordinary events to arise from their concurrence, than admit of so signal a violation of the laws of nature.

38 But should this miracle be ascribed to any new system of religion; men, in all ages, have been so much imposed on by ridiculous stories of that kind, that this very circumstance would be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient, with all men of sense, not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without farther examination. Though the Being, to whom the miracle is ascribed, be, in this case, Almighty, it does not, upon that account, become a whit more probable; since it is impossible for us to know the attributes or
 10 actions of such a Being, otherwise than from the experience which we have of his productions, in the usual course of nature. This still reduces us to past observation, and obliges us to compare the instances of the violations of truth in the testimony of men with those of the violation of the laws of nature by miracles, in order to judge which of them is most likely and probable. As the violations of truth are more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that concerning any other matter of fact; this must diminish very much the authority of the former testimony, and make us form a general resolution, never to lend any attention to it, with whatever specious pretence it may be covered.
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39 Lord BACON seems to have embraced the same principles of reasoning. "We ought," says he, "to make a collection or particular history of all monsters and prodigious births or productions, and in a word of every thing new, rare, and extraordinary in nature. But this must be done with the most severe scrutiny, lest we depart from truth. Above all, every relation must be considered as suspicious, which depends in any degree upon religion, as the prodigies of LIVY: And no less so, every thing that is to be found in the writers of natural magic or alchimy, or such authors, who seem, all of them, to have an unconquerable appetite for falsehood and fable."²⁷

40 I am the better pleased with the method of reasoning here delivered, as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the CHRISTIAN religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on *Faith*, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it to put it to such a trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure. To make this more evident, let us examine those miracles, related in scripture; and not to lose ourselves in too wide a field, let us confine ourselves to such as we find in the *Pentateuch*, which we shall examine, according to the principles of these pretended CHRISTIANS, not as
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²⁷ Nov. Org. lib. 2. aph. 29.

the word or testimony of God himself, but as the production of a mere human writer and historian. Here then we are first to consider a book, presented to us by a barbarous and ignorant people, written in an age when they were still more barbarous, and in all probability long after the facts which it relates, corroborated by no concurring testimony, and resembling those fabulous accounts, which every nation gives of its origin. Upon reading this book, we find it full of prodigies and miracles. It gives an account of a state of the world and of human nature entirely different from the present: Of our fall from that state: Of the age of man, extended to near a thousand years: Of the destruction of the world by a deluge: Of the arbitrary choice of one 10
people, as the favourites of heaven; and that people the countrymen of the author: Of their deliverance from bondage by prodigies the most astonishing imaginable: I desire any one to lay his hand upon his heart, and after serious consideration declare, whether he thinks that the falsehood of such a book, supported by such a testimony, would be more extraordinary and miraculous than all the miracles it relates; which is, however, necessary to make it be received, according to the measures of probability above established.

41 What we have said of miracles may be applied, without any variation, to prophecies; and indeed, all prophecies are real miracles, and as such only, can be admitted as proofs of any revelation. If it did not exceed the capacity of human nature to foretel future events, it would be absurd to employ any prophecy as an argument for a divine mission or authority from heaven. So that, upon the whole, we may conclude, that the CHRISTIAN religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience. SBN 131
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SECTION 10

83.1 **TILLOTSON'S writings]** Tillotson^B inveighed against atheism and Roman Catholicism. Many arguments against transubstantiation are to be found in 'A Discourse against Transubstantiation' (*Works*, sermon 26). However, the argument that Hume attributes to Tillotson most closely approximates that found in a sermon, 'The Hazard of being Sav'd in the Church of *Rome*' (*Works*, sermon 11). Tillotson briefly discusses transubstantiation in other sermons, especially 'Of the Tryal of the Spirits' (*Works*, sermon 21). In *Letter from a Gentleman* 23 Hume favourably cites Tillotson's sermon 'The Wisdom of Being Religious' (*Works*, sermon 1) for its attention to the 'Species of Evidence' appropriate to theological argument. Like Hume, Tillotson relies on the distinction between experience and testimony, giving priority to experience.

83.1 *real presence]* The term 'real presence' refers to that into which the substance of the bread and wine of the sacrament of Holy Communion is allegedly transformed. Their accidental properties do not change, but their substance does. In his *History of England* Hume several times discusses the historical importance of this doctrine; in *NHR* 12.3 he criticizes the doctrine. Catholic theologian and philosopher St Thomas Aquinas (13th c. AD) (*Summa theologiae* 3a.75) and several Councils (Fourth Lateran Council, 1215; Council of Constance, 1415–16; Council of Florence, 1439; Council of Trent, 1562) published influential accounts, which agree that the whole substance of bread and the whole substance of wine are converted by divine power into the whole substance of the body and blood of Christ—so that the presence is real, not symbolic or metaphorical. Being imperceptible to the senses and not involving an alteration in accidental properties, transubstantiation is not a

miracle, but a *mystery* known by faith. Tillotson^B and Hume have been criticized by some scholars for failing to appreciate the true nature of the Roman Catholic position. (See the annotation immediately below.) However, the Catholic position was sometimes represented by Catholic philosophers in a manner that invited the view that Hume and Tillotson take. See the influential representation in Arnauld^B and Nicole,^B *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, first part, ch. 15, and second part, ch. 12 (Buroker, 71–2, 111–13); see also the reply to Arnauld by Descartes,^B *Objections and Replies* 4 (*Philosophical Writings*, 2: 153, 172–7).

83.15 contradicts sense] As Tillotson^B notes ('A Discourse against Transubstantiation' (*Works*, sermon 26)), Roman Catholics have traditionally held that a miracle must be an observed phenomenon that serves as a visible sign; it is an extraordinary event produced by God and perceptible to the senses. Tillotson notes that transubstantiation cannot be a miracle, because miracles must by definition be evident to sense, and transubstantiation denies what the senses teach. As the annotation immediately above indicates, there is no direct conflict between this argument and Roman Catholic teachings, and there is no clear violation of a law of nature. Tillotson did not confine his arguments to this point. He also attacked the real presence by maintaining that the doctrine of conversion in substance is not a teaching of Christ, has no authority from the Apostles, was not received by the early Church Fathers, and has not descended by uninterrupted tradition. Acceptance of the doctrine, he held, requires demonstrated premisses that one body can coexist in the same place as another, that a subject may be without quantity, that sensory experience is unreliable, and other metaphysical propositions that he considered unacceptable.

84.10 moral evidence . . . proportions his belief to the evidence] In *THN* 2.3.1.15 Hume says that moral evidence is 'nothing but a conclusion concerning the actions of men, deriv'd from the consideration of their motives, temper and situation'. (See ann. 69.5.) Moral evidence is thus to be contrasted with physical and mathematical evidence; cf. *EHU* 8.19 and Hume's example of the gaoler and prisoner.

A related notion in some writers of the period is 'moral certainty' (in which evidence does not warrant reasonable doubt), as is presupposed in *A Letter from a Gentleman* 26–7:

It is common for Philosophers to distinguish the Kinds of Evidence into *intuitive, demonstrative, sensible, and moral*; by which they intend *only* to mark a Difference betwixt them, not to denote a Superiority of one above another. *Moral Certainty* may reach as *high* a Degree of Assurance as *Mathematical*; and our Senses are surely to be comprised amongst the clearest and most convincing of all Evidences.

For various uses of these notions, see Berkeley,^B *Alciphron*, dials. 6–7; Butler, *Analogy*, introduction; Descartes,^B *Discourse* 4 and *Principles* 206; Arnauld^B and Nicole,^B *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, fourth part, ch. 13 (Buroker, 264); Leibniz,^B *New Essays* (pub. 1765), preface and 4.10; Wilkins, *Principles and Duties of Natural*

Religion 1.1.1–3, 1.3.1–5; British writer and divine William Chillingworth (1602–43), *The Religion of Protestants*, answer 1.8; and Chambers, *Cyclopædia*, ‘evidence’. See also *THN* 2.3.1.15–17, 2.3.2.8; *Abstract* 33; *EHU* 8.19, 12.21; s’ Gravesande, *Mathematical Elements of Natural Philosophy*, ‘An Oration concerning Evidence’, 1: xxxvi–liii; and Beattie (in commenting on *EHU* 4), *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* 1.2.6.

84.20 **degree of evidence**] See ann. n. 10 and *THN* 1.3.6.4 and 1.3.11.2 on knowledge, probability, and degrees of evidence. Locke^b argued that testimony in support of miracles constituted an exception to the general rule that degree of probability and evidence diminishes as the distance from eyewitnesses increases. See *Essay* 4.15–16 (especially 4.16.9–14), which contains a searching examination of testimony and the conditions of belief in it.

84.31 **eye-witnesses and spectators**] This exact language is used in a more general discussion of the historical acceptability of testimony in *THN* 1.3.4.2.

85.9 **witnesses and human testimony**] It was widely believed at the time Hume wrote that belief in miracles could be tested by assessing historical evidence in light of the quantity of witnesses and the quality of their testimony. See Dutch philosopher and legal writer Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), *Truth of the Christian Religion* 2.6, 3.7; English bishop Thomas Sherlock (1678–1761), *The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus*; British moral philosopher and theologian Peter Annet (1693–1769; pseud. Philalethes), *The Resurrection of Jesus Considered; in Answer to the Tryal of the Witnesses*; and John Jackson (1686–1763), rector of Rossington, *An Address to Deists*.

85.11 **proof or a probability**] See n. 10 to Section 6 on probability and the annotation on this note.

85.23 **force of its antagonist**] In *Theologiae Christianae Principia Mathematica* (1699), British mathematician John Craig (d. 1731), in an effort to defend Christian beliefs, attempted to compute the probability of reliable historical testimony and tradition, arguing that testimony becomes progressively less reliable over time. He treated contradictory reports and what Hume here calls the ‘number of circumstances to be taken into consideration’. Craig’s eccentric use of probability was sufficiently influential that his 1699 work was republished in 1755. Similar appeals emerged almost simultaneously with the 1699 edition. See the anonymous ‘A Calculation of the Credibility of Human Testimony’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 21 (1699), 359–65. Montmort and others expressed reservations about these attempts to use a calculus of probabilities to reinforce the faith.

85.24 **contrariety of evidence**] Some of these causes of contrary evidence—and other parallels to Hume’s theses in 10.7—are found in English free-thinker Thomas Woolston (1670–1733), the Third and Fifth of *Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour* (a 1729 edn. is in the Hume Library). Compare also Wollaston, *Religion of Nature Delineated* 3.16 (55–9).

85.35 **extraordinary and the marvellous**] In his *History of England* (2: 398–404) Hume distinguishes the miraculous, the marvellous, and the extraordinary and discusses what circumspect historians allow as evidence: although historians reject claims of the miraculous and doubt the marvellous, they can accept extraordinary reports whenever solid testimony and known facts and circumstances constitute adequate support.

85.38 **credit in witnesses and historians**] French author Robert Challe (1659–1720) used comparable arguments about the reliability and unreliability of forms of testimony about miracles in *Difficultés sur la religion*, 84–5. This work was written before 1712, though not published until 1767 (under the title *Le Militaire philosophe*, authorship disputed; see Deloffre, *Autour de Robert Challe*, 275). It is not known whether Hume knew the manuscript, though it circulated among French intellectuals prior to Hume's work on *EHU*. Related theses about the strength and credit of testimony are found in Boyle, *The Christian Virtuoso* (*Works*, 5: 529–33). However, unlike Challe and Hume, Boyle is contrasting human testimony and divine testimony, while defending Christian belief.

n. 21 CATONIS] Footnote reference: Plutarch,^B *Lives*, 'Cato the Younger' 19.4, 768B–C. Plutarch depicts Cato^B the Younger as a person of virtue and high repute. According to Plutarch, many people, 'when speaking of matters that were strange and incredible, would say, as though using a proverb, "This is not to be believed even though Cato says it"'. Hume discusses 'the virtue and good intentions of Cato' in his essay 'That Politics may be reduced to a Science' 19. A similar theme is found in *EPM* ('A Dialogue' 40), in a discussion of Labeo and Cato. (Note: At n. 9 above the quoted passage refers to Cato the Elder.)

86.14 **INDIAN prince**] A version of this tale appears in Locke,^B *Essay* 4.15.5, where a Dutch ambassador tells the king of Siam about frozen water possessing the strength to bear the weight of an elephant. In the introduction to his *Analogy* Butler provides a brief account of this story, attributing it to Locke. Hume's version is closer to Butler's restatement than to Locke's report, but only Hume makes India the location. Locke tells another story about an Indian philosopher involving reference to elephants in *Essay* 2.13.19, 2.23.2. Hume may have inadvertently combined facts of Locke's two different stories. A brief version of the example is also found in Sherlock, *The Trial of the Witnesses*, 62–3, 66, and then repeated in Annet, *The Resurrection of Jesus Considered; in Answer to the Tryal of the Witnesses*, 73. For another variant of the anecdote, see Challe, *Difficultés sur la religion*, 221, which gives the example of the effect of snow on 'the savages of Mexico'.

The example of the Indian prince was added in the second edition of *EHU* (1750). Philip Skelton (1707–87) mentioned the example of frozen water (though the location and other features in his story are different) in *Ophiomaches: or, Deism Revealed*, which was published just prior to Hume's revised manuscript for the second edition. Dialogue 5 of this work (2: 23–4) discusses the first edition of *EHU*.

In the commentary regarding Hume on miracles discussed in the Introduction to

this volume, the Indian prince is the most widely discussed of Hume's several examples of extraordinary events.

n. 22 **MUSCOVY**] the region of Moscow, possibly extended here to include all of Russia.

86.26 **violation of the laws of nature**] Cf. Hume's additional definition of 'miracle' in n. 23. For discussions of the nature of miracles and the word 'miracle' that may inform Hume's definition, see Hobbes, *Leviathan* 37.1–9; Locke,^B *A Discourse of Miracles* (*Works*, 9: 256–7, 264); Woolston, *Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour*, Third Discourse, 53; Butler, *Analogy* 2.2.2–4; Clarke,^B *Discourse* (*Works*, 2: 697–702); Tillotson,^B 'A Discourse against Transubstantiation' (*Works*, sermon 26); Boyle, *Reconcilableness of Reason and Religion* (*Works*, 4: 162–3); Bayle,^B *Dictionary*, 'Spinoza' [R].

The definition of miracle had been debated for centuries. Roman Catholic philosophers St Augustine (4th–5th c. AD) and St Thomas Aquinas denied that miracles are violations of laws of nature, although they acknowledged that miracles violate the ordinary course of nature as humans experience it. See Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 6.13–14, 18; 9.17–18 and *City of God* 21.8; St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1a. 110, 4 (Blackfriars, 15: 15–17) and *Summa contra gentiles* 3.2.99–102. See, similarly, Jackson, *An Address to Deists*, 14–21.

87.13 **proof . . . against . . . miracle**] Hume wrote to Blair (*Letters*, 1: 350) about his meaning: 'The proof against a miracle, as it is founded on invariable experience, is of that *species* of *kind* of proof, which is full and certain when taken alone, because it implies no doubt, as is the case with all probabilities; but there are degrees of this species, and when a weaker proof is opposed to a stronger, it is overcome.' Hume's thesis had been expressed in similar ways in Wollaston, *Religion of Nature Delineated* 3.16 (55–9); and Annet, *The Resurrection of Jesus Considered; in Answer to the Tryal of the Witnesses*, 75–8.

87.15 **miracle rendered credible**] Criticisms of the reasonableness and credibility of various reports of miracles had appeared in Woolston, *Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour*; the *Examen critique* (esp. 189–91), of French secretary of the Académie des Belles-Lettres Nicolas Fréret (1688–1749), and *An Introductory Discourse to a Larger Work . . . concerning the Miraculous Powers* by English controversialist and clergyman Conyers Middleton (1683–1750). Prominent accounts of credible testimony for miracles appeared in Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines sacrae* 2.3, 6, 9–10; Arnould^B and Nicole,^B *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, fourth part, ch. 14; Wilkins, *The Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* 1.1.3, 1.7.2; and Charles Wolseley, *The Reasonableness of Scripture-Belief*, 48, 83–4, 241–63. Hume may be countering arguments in Butler, *Analogy* 2.2–4 and Berkeley,^B *Alciphron* 6.30–2.

n. 23 **miracle may be accurately defined**] See ann. 86.26 above.

87.17 **maxim worthy of our attention**] Hume's position seems opposed to that of Arnould^B and Nicole,^B *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, fourth part, chs. 7, 13–14

(Buroker, 251, 262–9). Using the language of ‘axioms’ and ‘maxims’, they give priority to the testimony of good persons by comparison to reasons given by others against this testimony. They also formulate the issue about miracles as one of how to weigh apparently reliable human testimony in favour of miracles against the improbability of the miracle’s occurrence.

89.7 religionist may be an enthusiast] The proposals here resemble theses in Fréret, *Examen critique* 2–3 (especially 1: 41–5). Butler develops this argument and responds to it in *Analogy* 2.7.1.3.

89.17 credulity] In *THN* 1.3.9.12–15 Hume defines ‘credulity’ as ‘a too easy faith in the testimony of others’.

89.19 Eloquence] See ann. 5.9 above. The art of oratory was widely discussed in the 18th century, as various of Hume’s allusions to Demosthenes^B indicate (see immediately below). Eloquence was regarded as a constructive way to guide a community by moving the passions. See Hume’s essay, ‘Of Eloquence’, and his comment at *DIS* 6.16.

89.22 TULLY . . . DEMOSTHENES^B] Cicero^B made his reputation as a prosecutor and consul. Demosthenes was praised for his lucidity and honesty. Hume compares and discusses the oratory of both figures in ‘Of Eloquence’; see also *EPM* 5.11; 7.12; Appx. 4.5; Dial. 45.

89.23 Capuchin] Capuchins are friars of an austere branch of the order of St Francis dedicated to missionary work. See, further, *NHR* 12.6.

89.25 vulgar passions] Dennis discussed the distinction between ‘vulgar passion’ (that is, ‘ordinary passion’) and ‘enthusiasm’ in both *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* 5–6 and *The Grounds of Criticism* 4. He linked ‘Religious Subjects’ to ‘stronger Enthusiasms’. (*Critical Works*, 1: 215–18, 338–9.)

89.26 forged miracles . . . been detected] Because of the power of enthusiasm and the problem of forgery, claims of the miraculous had for centuries been placed under clerical and judicial inspection in the Roman Catholic Church. Standards in canon law determined authenticity, and few claims of reported miracles withstood official scrutiny. On the origins of the practice, see Michael E. Goodich, *Violence and Miracle*, 4–14.

90.5 ignorant and barbarous nations] Similar arguments are found in Hobbes, *Leviathan* 37.5, 10–13; Fréret, *Examen critique* 12 (especially 1: 189–91); Sherlock, *The Trial of the Witnesses*, 44 ff., 56 ff.

90.17 nothing mysterious or supernatural in the case] Polybius,^B an author Hume commonly mentions, pursued a general strategy of finding natural causes of proclaimed ‘miracles’. Dryden, another author mentioned by Hume, reflected on this strategy in ‘Character of Polybius’ (p. 27).

90.26 scorn by all the wise and judicious] Many writers manifested an interest in wonders that are either marvellous or miraculous. An informative list of these

writers and of the 'wise and judicious' who scorned the reports is found in the text, notes, and index of Middleton's *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers*. Hume was aware of this book, which was published late in the year of the first edition of *EHU* (with a 1749 date). See 'My Own Life' 8, in *Letters*, 1: 3; and letter of 20 June 1758, to Andrew Millar, *Letters*, 1: 282.

90.31 ALEXANDER^B . . . LUCIAN^B tells] Lucian tells how Alexander of Abonuteichos, or Alexander the False Prophet, became celebrated as an oracle. Alexander and a friend perpetrated a hoax to deceive gullible citizens of his home region of Paphlagonia. Using magic, they created an illusion in which Asclepias, the god of healing, emerged from a goose egg in the figure of a snake with a human head. According to Lucian, the crowd followed Alexander 'full of religious fervour and crazed with expectations' (*Alexander, or the False Prophet* 1–61, especially 13–14).

91.4 MARCUS AURELIUS^B] As Roman emperor, the Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius ruled over Paphlagonia. In one battle Alexander delivered a prophecy to Marcus that victory would be assured if two lions and other offerings were cast into the Danube. After Marcus cast the offerings and the lions into the river, the barbarians killed the lions and administered a crushing defeat to the Romans. Alexander coyly explained that the oracle had not revealed to whom the victory would go (*Alexander, or the False Prophet* 47–8).

91.6 imposture among an ignorant people] This theme had been discussed in caustic terms in 1746 by French encyclopaedist and man of letters Denis Diderot (1713–84), *Pensées philosophiques* 53–4 (40–1).

91.23 detect his impostures] In all editions of *EHU* prior to 1770 Hume placed a footnote to his discussion of Alexander^B and Lucian^B (a note apparently added in 1747). The note reads as follows in the first (1748) edition:

It may here, perhaps, be objected, that I proceed rashly, and form my Notions of *Alexander* merely from the Account, given of him by *Lucian*, a profess'd Enemy. It were indeed to be wish'd, that some of the Accounts publish'd by his Followers and Accomplices had remain'd. The Opposition and Contrast betwixt the Character and Conduct of the same Man, as drawn by a Friend or an Enemy is as strong, even in common Life, much more in these religious Matters, as that betwixt any two Men in the World, betwixt *Alexander* and *St. Paul*, for Instance. See a Letter to *Gilbert West* Esq; on the Conversion and Apostleship of *St. Paul*.

First published anonymously, this letter is entitled *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, in a Letter to Gilbert West, Esq.* (1747). The author was English politician and man of letters George Lyttelton (1709–73), under whose name the treatise was later published. Lyttelton argued that 'nothing can better point out the difference between imposture and truth, than to observe the different conduct of [Alexander] and St. Paul' (*Works*, 2: 53–7, 63–7, especially 54). Inclusion

of this note (and later its exclusion), as well as the lengthy note on the French miracles in the 1750 edition, provide evidence that Hume continued to revise his essay on miracles long after the draft that had been written prior to the publication of the *Treatise*.

91.36 **destroying a rival system**] Challe used similar arguments about rival systems and contrary miracles in *Difficultés sur la religion*, 84–5, 218 (see ann. 85.38). He argued from conflicting truth claims that result in a lack of conclusive evidence. See, similarly, Diderot, *Pensées philosophiques* 61 (45).

92.1 **miracle of MAHOMET**] A widely disseminated work by Humphrey Prideaux (1648–1724), *The True Nature of Imposture fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet*, attempted to vindicate Christianity of the charge of imposture over claims of miracles while convicting Islam of the same charge. On the other side, Woolston argued (*Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour*, First Discourse, 38; Third Discourse, 11–12; Fifth Discourse, 11) that if various alleged miracles of Jesus had instead been reported to have been miracles of Muhammad, Christian apologists would have turned the account into a 'confutation' of Islam in which Muhammad is judged a wizard, enchanter, slave to the devil, and the like. For similar remarks, see Fréret (*Examen critique* 13, especially 1: 210–11); Sherlock, *The Trial of the Witnesses*, 11–12; and English deist Matthew Tindal (1655–1733), *Christianity as Old as the Creation* 12 (especially 192, 202–3), 13 (especially 234).

92.2 **barbarous ARABIANS**] Hume is perhaps reflecting a then-typical European view that Islam is a ruthless, vengeful, tyrannical, fraudulent, and intolerant religion. For writings that reflect this estimate, see Wolseley, *The Reasonableness of Scripture-Belief*, 167–71; Grotius, *Truth of the Christian Religion* 6.2, 5–8; Pascal,^B *Pensées* 241–2 (Levi nos.); Jackson, *An Address to Deists*, 80–5. Hume intimates this thesis in *NHR* 9.3 and 'Of the Standard of Taste' 4.

92.3 **TITUS LIVIUS**^B] Livy's level of scepticism in reporting on claims of miracles, marvels, and prodigies is a subject of scholarly disagreement. See his *History* 21.62, 24.3.4–8, 26.19.3–10.

n. 24 **cured a blind man . . . Serapis**] Footnote references: Tacitus,^B *Histories* 4.81; Suetonius,^B *Lives of the Caesars* 8, 'Vespasian' 7.2–3. Vespasian^B is 'the emperor'. The sources in n. 24 relate stories of Vespasian's healing of both a blind man and a crippled man; the healing was allegedly inspired by a divine admonition from Serapis, an Egyptian god worshipped during the time of Ptolemaic Egypt and believed to be capable of performing miraculous cures. Both the example and the sources Hume invokes had been repeatedly mentioned in modern literature on miracles and imposture. See e.g. Grotius, *Truth of the Christian Religion* 4.8; Middleton, *Free Inquiry*, 169–70; Woolston, *Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour*, First Discourse, 61, and Fourth Discourse, 6; Wolseley, *The Reasonableness of Scripture-Belief*, 249–50; Pascal,^B *Pensées* 257 (Levi nos.); and English deist Charles Blount (1654–93), *Great is Diana of the Ephesians*, 11.

92.25 **ALEXANDER**^B] There are indications, though no conclusive evidence, that Alexander the Great^B requested that city-states honour him as a god. Prevailing religious practices permitted the deification of humans. A possible source of Hume's information is *Anabasis of Alexander* 7.23.2 by Greek historian Arrian (2nd c. AD).

92.25 **DEMETRIUS**^B] Demetrius I of Macedonia pursued the policy of his father (Antigonus I) to reunite Alexander's empire. He was victorious in Cyprus and the Hellenic city-states. Plutarch^B reported that the Athenians paid extravagant honours to Demetrius, including assigning to him the appellation of 'saviour-god', preparing receptions for him suitable for the gods, and acknowledging his capacity to deliver oracles (*Lives*, 'Demetrius' 10–13, 24–6).

92.32 **FLAVIAN** . . . "**Utrumque, qui . . . pretium**"^B] From AD 69 to 96 the Roman empire was ruled by the Flavian family, which included Vespasian^B and his two sons Titus and Domitian. Tacitus^B (*Histories* 4.81) concludes his account with the Latin quoted by Hume ('*Utrumque, qui . . .*'), which may be translated, 'Those who were present recount both incidents even now, when there is nothing to gain from deceit.'

92.36 **Cardinal DE RETZ**^B] De Retz relates in his *Mémoires* (a 1731 edn. of which is in the Hume Library) the story of the doorkeeper of the cathedral (*Œuvres*, 974):

I was shown a man employed to light the lamps, which are vast in number. I was told that he had been seen, at the door of the church, for seven years with only one leg; whereas I saw him there with two legs. The dean and all the prebends assured me that the whole town had seen it just as they had; and that if I would stay only two days longer, I could speak to more than 20,000 persons from the neighbourhood who had seen him, as well as to people from the town. He had recovered his leg, according to what they said, by anointing himself with some oil from his lamps. Every year they celebrate a holiday in honour of this miracle, with an incredible show of people.

De Retz's comments on the miracle suggest, but do not clearly express, the view that Hume attributed to him.

93.31 **tomb of Abbé PARIS**^B] The deacon François de Pâris was known for his sanctity and charitableness. After his death numerous followers maintained that miraculous cures occurred at his tomb in the cemetery of the Église Saint-Médard. These cures were sometimes accompanied by violent convulsions, allegedly signifying a struggle between life and death for the sick person.

93.31 **famous Jansenist**^B] Pâris^B was a Jansenist, that is, a follower of the doctrinal system of Bishop Cornelius Jansen^B (Cornelius Jansenius). In his major work, *Augustinus* (pub. posthumously, 1640), Jansen promoted Augustinian teachings about original sin, divine grace, gratuitous predestination, and moral austerity. His views had been criticized by leading Jesuits, including Luis de Molina^B (see below,

ann. n. 25, p. 180), on grounds that they divested free will and individual merit of all significance. A series of papal condemnations of Jansenism culminated in the papal bull *Unigenitus* (1713), which became French law in 1730 and caused a sharp decline in the strength of the Jansenist movement.

Despite this opposition, Jansenism enjoyed popular support, including that of Arnould,^B author of *De la fréquente communion* (*On Frequent Communion*, 1643), which infuriated Jesuits and boosted him into position as a leading Jansenist; Pascal^B (whose *Provincial Letters* vigorously attacked Jesuit casuistry and Molinism); and Nicole.^B See, further, ann. n. 25.

93.34 **holy sepulchre]** Crowds appeared daily at the tomb of Pâris,^B with many people engaging in acts of religious enthusiasm and ecstasy. So extraordinary were the 'convulsionnaires de Saint-Médard' that the cemetery was closed in 1732. The practices continued none the less. Although the proclaimed miracles were among the most widely examined and witnessed in modern times, Jesuits and Protestants alike rejected both the testimonials and the surrounding practices.

94.1 **refute or detect them.**^{25]} Note 25 was added in the second, 1750 edition. Between the first and second editions Middleton published *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers*, which contained (223–6) an account of the French miracles and supportive testimony that is relevantly similar to the account in Hume's note. Middleton mentioned similar sources. These events in France occurred approximately two years prior to Hume's visit to La Flèche, where he wrote his essay on miracles. He could have become aware of these events during this visit and could also have drawn inspiration from Middleton's presentation.

n. 25 **Mons. MONTGERON**^{B]} Footnote reference: Louis-Basile Carré de Montgeron, *La Vérité des miracles opérés par l'intercession de m. de Pâris, démontrée contre m. l'archevêque de Sens*. This book provides detailed discussions of several cures, each supported by a body of testimonial evidence and medical documentation. Montgeron regarded these 'demonstrations' as adequate to support the claim of miraculous cures. The book also provides responses to critics. The particular case of Marguerite Thibault^B is discussed eight entries below.

n. 25 **martyr to the cause]** In his zeal for the Jansenist cause, Montgeron^B went unannounced to the court of Louis XV at Versailles on 29 July 1737 to hand-deliver a copy of his work. He found his way to the royal dining-room, offered the copy of his book to the king, and issued a warning that Rome and the Jesuits posed a threat to the king's power. For this act he was later arrested by agents of the lieutenant of police, Hérault^B (see below), and imprisoned. Montgeron placed in the front matter to the book a separate 'Epistre au roy' that explains why he 'took the liberty' of going to Versailles (*La Vérité des miracles*, pp. i–ix).

Three years later Antoine Vinchon Des Voeux published a detailed reply to Montgeron, under the title *Critique generale du livre de Mr. de Montgeron, sur les miracles de Mr. l'Abbé Pâris*. Des Voeux tried to 'reveal by the very materials that M. de Montgeron produces, that the facts he publishes are not true' ('Table des lettres',

let. 8). Middleton (*Free Inquiry*, 223–6) and other British authors wrote on this controversy.

Hume's friend the Revd Robert Wallace (1679–1771) wrote a manuscript entitled 'Observations on the Account of the Miracles of the Abbé Paris'. Wallace characterized Montgeron as a bigot bewitched by the cause and the party of the Jansenists ('Observations on the Account', p. iii).

n. 25 *Recueil . . . l'Abbé PARIS*] Footnote reference: *Recueil des miracles opérés au tombeau de m. de Paris Diacre. . . .* pub. with: *Second recueil des miracles opérés par l'intercession de m. de Paris; Réflexions sur les miracles opérés au tombeau de m. de Paris Diacre*; and *Acte passé pardevant notaires, contenant plusieurs pièces au sujet du miracle opéré en la personne de mademoiselle Hardouin*.

The *Recueil* is an anthology of investigatory evidence about four miraculous cures allegedly performed at the tomb of Pâris.^B Political pressure caused a delay in publication. On 13 August 1731 twenty-three curés (priests) addressed a formal request to the archbishop of Paris to investigate further the alleged cures. The *Recueil* materials were among the documents accompanying this petition, which called for the archbishop to publish and promote them as records of 'true miracles' (*Recueil* 1). Without waiting for a reply, the curés had the formal request and the *Recueil* published (anonymously). Enraged, the archbishop decided not to reply. On 4 October 1731 twenty-two curés sent another formal request for an investigation (Kreiser, *Miracles*, 93–6, 131–5).

In final published form the first *Recueil* is adjoined to the second *Recueil*. There follows a section *Réflexions sur les miracles*, which provides a distinct perspective on the data about miracles provided in the two anthologies. A defence is mounted of the miracles of Pâris and his followers: They 'claim the old truth of faith against a decision of the Pope' (1, 4–5). A fourth part of the book, *Acte passé pardevant notaires*, is a first-person retelling of the miracle of Louise Hardouin.

n. 25 **Cardinal NOAILLES^B**] Cardinal Louis Antoine Noailles attempted to thwart the French government's efforts to have Jansenism condemned by clerical authorities in France and Rome. A series of papal condemnations of Jansenism culminated in the papal bull *Unigenitus* (1713). Noailles and various bishops refused to accept the bull without an explanation from Rome. When the papacy rebuffed Noailles, there ensued a major social and political battle, with hundreds of pamphlets and books published by each side. Cardinal André-Hercule de Fleury (1653–1743) attempted to convert Noailles to the papal position. Feeble, ill, aged, and under pressure from Church officials and friends alike, Noailles retracted his opposition on 11 October 1728. He died in 1729.

The *Réflexions sur les miracles* bears the (here translated) subtitle *Collection of information . . . drawn up by order of the Cardinal de Noailles, &c.* This collection of 'information' includes prepared responses to questions that might be asked of a person called before the lieutenant of police to testify on matters such as the movement's views on the bull *Unigenitus*. The reflections do not appear to have been

written by Noailles, but the introduction to the first *Recueil* states that Noailles ordered the investigation into the miracles collected in the *Recueil*.

n. 25 **successor in the archbishopric**] The successor to Noailles^B was Archbishop Vintimille of Aix,^B who supported the bull *Unigenitus*. Vintimille collaborated with his friend Fleury and with Hérault^B (see below), and their influence spread to religious orders, congregations, and seminaries.

n. 25 **MOLINIST party**] The reference is to a sectarian division between Jansenists and Jesuits. Molina^B published an influential theological system in 1588, subsequently known as Molinism. His book divided Spanish and French theologians: the Jesuits supported it, while Thomists and Jansenists opposed it.

Molinists became politically active, and 'Molinistes' became a party that clashed with the Jansenists. Molinism was often treated in France as a virtual synonym for 'Jesuit perspective'. Hume critically discusses Jansenists and Molinists in 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm' 10. (See also ann. n. 25 below on Hérault.^B)

n. 25 **Mademoiselle LE FRANC**^B] A confrontation occurred over the allegedly miraculous cure of Anne Le Franc (also Lefranc). She visited Saint-Médard, requesting a miracle. Within a few days her symptoms were relieved. Her blindness, paralysis, and other infirmities allegedly disappeared. Anonymous pro-Jansenists assembled detailed supporting information, including testimony from 120 witnesses, and circulated it publicly. The Jesuits worked to discredit it, and Vintimille^B sent his own investigators. His actions infuriated the Jansenists, who appealed to parliament. (Kreiser, *Miracles*, 120–6, 136–8.)

n. 25 **Mons. HERAULT**^B] The lieutenant of police, René Hérault, attempted to suppress the Jansenists. His collaboration with Fleury and Vintimille^B gave him special authority. He employed undercover informers and intimidated and arrested Jansenists. He also hired established physicians to discredit Jansenist claims of miracles. None the less, he was unable to stem the growth of the Jansenist movement until he was given authority in 1732 to close the Église Saint-Médard, where Abbé Pâris^B was buried.

n. 25 **THIBAUT**^B] Hérault^B attempted to discredit the cure of Marguerite Thibault, whose 'documented' miraculous healing is presented in Montgeron^B and in the *Second Recueil* (17–41). Thibault was an elderly apoplectic who had been declared incurable. Her left side was completely paralysed; various areas of her body were covered with festering ulcers; and her torso was disfigured from excessive swelling. She was carried to the tomb of Pâris^B on 19 June 1731. Approximately fifteen minutes after her arrival she felt a warmth run along the entire left side of her body, and noticed movement. She summoned three eminent doctors familiar with her case to be witnesses. Each testified that it was impossible to deny the evidence of the miracle, and her servant witnessed that the sores were healed and that fresh new skin had taken their place. See especially Montgeron, *La Vérité des miracles*, 'Miracle opéré sur Marguerite Thibault', 1–8.

n. 25 **DE SYLVA^B**] News of the miracle of Marguerite Thibault^B spread quickly through Paris, to the dismay of Hérault,^B who engaged the physician Jean-Baptiste Silva to examine the case. Montgeron^B criticized this intervention:

The famous M. Silva is requested on his [Hérault's] behalf to see the miraculously cured [woman]. . . . We leave it to speculation whether the wish to repay the favours of M. Hérault obliged him [Silva] to adjust his report to the views and inclinations of the magistrate. . . .

M. Silva, doctor of the court summoned by M. Hérault on the 27th of June, eight days after the miracle, who, despite all investigations, did not know how to find any trace of either the hydrops [dropsy] or the paralysis and is tempted to believe that Miss Thibault never had either. (Montgeron, *La Vérité des miracles*, 'Miracle opéré sur Marguerite Thibault', 8, 10.)

n. 25 **JERICO . . . rams horns**] a reference to the collapse of the walls of Jericho at the sounding of trumpets (shofars, or ram's-horn trumpets). These trumpets signalled attacks; the trumpet was also associated with God's judgement of the world. See Josh. 6: 5–20. The ram's horn had its own exalted place; see Exod. 19: 13 and Pss. 81: 3; 98: 6.

n. 25 **prison of every apostle**] Several of Jesus's apostles were imprisoned. In a dramatic case involving Paul, an earthquake shook the prison. See Acts 16: 23–6; also Acts 5: 19; 12: 4–7; 21: 33.

n. 25 **Duc de CHATILLON**] The duc de Châtillon is Paul Sigismond de Montmorency.^B He is identified in the *Second Recueil* (107–16) in the presentation of the miracle of Blaise Neret, an 8-year-old boy. The duc learned that since birth the boy had been paralysed on the entire left side of his body. A servant of the duc's grandson suggested that Neret might go to the tomb of the Abbé Paris.^B In July 1731 Neret went and two days later felt pains on his paralysed side. Within two additional days he was allegedly cured. Upon seeing Neret and his improved condition, the duc became convinced of the authenticity of the miracle.

n. 25 **PORT-ROYAL**] This Jansenist monastery near Paris exerted an impressive influence on French intellectuals in the late 17th century. At Port-Royal Arnauld,^B Nicole,^B and Pascal^B wrote treatises for the Jansenists, and Arnauld and Nicole there wrote *Logic or the Art of Thinking*.

n. 25 **threatened by the JESUITS**] Port-Royal represented a challenge to the Jesuit monopoly on education and spiritual doctrine. Arnauld,^B in particular, responded vigorously to the Jesuits and other critics of the doctrines of Jansen.^B Despite his efforts (and those of others), the Jesuits prevailed politically. A papal bull in 1708 abolished Port-Royal, and its buildings were razed in 1710.

n. 25 **RACINE^B gives an account**] Footnote reference: Jean Racine, *Abrégé de l'histoire de Port-Royal*. In a narrative of the 'miracle of the holy thorn', Racine (a student at the monastery) explains how Pascal's niece Marguerite Périet was cured of what

physicians believed an incurable problem: a painful, inflamed ulcer that penetrated the bony structure around the corner of her left eye. Pus drained from a hole in the centre, creating a nauseating stench. On 24 March 1656 Monsieur de la Potherie, a collector of relics, had brought to the nuns of Port-Royal what he claimed to be a thorn from the crown worn by Christ at his crucifixion. A nun was inspired to apply the thorn to Marguerite's eye, and that evening the inflammation disappeared and the pain ceased. Many witnessed this miracle of the holy thorn, which was subsequently declared a verified miracle by cardinal de Retz^B and the physician who had declared the ulcer incurable, M. Dalencé (Racine, *Abrégé*, 77–85; Cat. 1742 edn. of *Abrégé*, 97–105). Racine's son Louis devoted a few passages in his *Mémoires sur la vie de Jean Racine* to his father's religious belief, but mentions nothing about miracles (81, 179–80).

n. 25 **famous PASCAL^B**] Jansenists were committed to forms of moral austerity. Pâris^B and Pascal were devoted to these ideals. Pascal gave up serious work in mathematics after an intense religious conversion and devoted himself almost exclusively to Jansenist ideals, including the goal of living humbly and plainly while serving the poor. In *EPM* (Dial. 54–6) Hume refers to Pascal's obdurate commitments, including his self-effacement and view of himself as helpless and sinful, as 'ridiculous superstitions'.

Hume's statement in this paragraph about 'the famous PASCAL, whose sanctity of life . . . is well known' was expressed in a different form, together with a reference, in the 1750 edition of *EHU*. In this edition only, Hume maintained that Pascal 'was a Believer, in that and in many other Miracles, which he had less Opportunity of being inform'd of. See his Life' (*EHU*, 1750: 499 n.). Hume's reference is to *La Vie de m. Pascal*, written by Pascal's elder sister, Gilberte Périer. She reported that Pascal judged the miracle of the holy thorn (and other miracles) to count as a vindication of Christianity (47–53). Some of his thoughts about miracles became passages in his *Pensées* 200, 211, 410–11, 421–50 (Levi nos.). Several of the relevant fragments on miracles in this work are in Gilberte's handwriting, dictated by her brother.

n. 25 **bishop of Tournay^B**] The 'bishop of Tournay', Gilbert de Choiseul du Plessis-Praslin (Gilbert de Choyseul du Plessy-Praslain on the title page of his book *Mémoires touchant la religion*), took part in negotiations to restore peace to the Church, at that time split over Jansenism. These negotiations were unsuccessful. In his *Abrégé* Racine^B maintains that the bishop used the story of the miracle of the holy thorn to present a brilliant proof of the truth of religion. However, Racine also indicates that the majority who knew of this report of the miracle received it with indifference (77–8).

n. 25 **free-thinkers**] those who weigh the evidence and judge for themselves in matters of religion. Bayle's *Dictionary* was often viewed as a resource for free-thinkers, but the term gained notoriety from Collins's *Discourse of Free-Thinking* (1713). Subsequently it was applied to deists and atheists. Collins and others were

attacked for free-thinking by Bentley, in *Remarks Upon a Discourse of Free-Thinking*; Irish writer and Anglican clergyman Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), *Mr. C——ns's Discourse of Free-Thinking* (especially 3–19); English mathematician William Whiston (1667–1752), *Reflections on an Anonymous Pamphlet, intituled, A Discourse of Free-Thinking*; and English bishop and pamphleteer Benjamin Hoadly (1676–1761), *Queries Recommended to the Authors of the late Discourse of Free-Thinking*. Berkeley,^B who disapproved of Collins, attacked free-thinking in contributions to the *Guardian* and in *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*; later he used these materials as a basis for a criticism of free-thinking in *Alciphron* 1. Similar exchanges were occurring in France; see John S. Spink, *French Free-Thought from Gassendi to Voltaire*.

n. 25 **queen-regent of FRANCE**] This queen regent was Anne of Austria,^B daughter of Philip III of Spain. She married and separated from Louis XIII of France. While acting as queen regent for her son Louis XIV, she chose Jesuit-educated Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–61) as prime minister. Mazarin (and Louis XIV after him) viewed Jansenism as opposed to monarchical government and endeavoured to demolish it.

The deeply religious queen regent was embarrassed by the controversy over the miracle of the holy thorn. She sent her personal physician, M. Félix, to investigate the reports of physicians concerning the healing. He became convinced that a miracle had occurred. Racine^B maintains that 'the piety of the Queen Mother was touched by the visible protection of God over these nuns' (*Abrégé*, 84–7). However, the queen issued no public statement and avoided the theological controversy between Jansenists and Jesuits.

95.2 **PHILIPPI or PHARSALIA**] Philippi was a town in Macedonia in which the army of Mark Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius in 42 BC. Pharsala or Pharsalus was a city in Thessaly, now northern Greece, near where Julius Caesar in 48 BC conquered Pompey in the battle called *Pharsalia*; see ann. 22.25.

95.9 **HERODOTUS^B]** Marvels prominent in fifth-century Greece appear in Herodotus' stories. He gives oracles, portents, dreams, omens, wonders, and divinations a role in the explanation of human behaviour and the formation of national policies. Herodotus sometimes assesses them piously, at other times sceptically. For an example, see *History* 8.135.

95.9 **PLUTARCH^B]** In his *Lives* Plutarch joins sceptical philosophical commentary with historical reports. He mentions divine marvels, signs, and miracles in which a deity contributes to an outcome; see 'Camillus' 6.1–3; 'Gaius Marcius Coriolanus' 37–8; 'Dion' 24.4–5; 'Themistocles' 30; and 'Brutus' 36–7. In *Moralia*, 'The Oracles at Delphi', prophecy occasionally involves divine providence. An example of an apparent miracle is found in 'Dion': 'The water of the sea which washed the base of the acropolis was sweet and potable for a whole day, as all who tasted it could see.' Plutarch's reports are centred on oracles, portents, divination, and dreams rather than miracles, but some do involve violations of laws of nature.

95.9 **MARIANA^B**] Juan de Mariana reports several miracles in his *General History of Spain*. An example is:

The Infidels attack'd the mouth of the Cave, powring in a Shower of Stones and Darts. Here the Hand of God appeared in defence of the Christians; for all the Weapons cast against them, flew back upon the *Moors*, with great slaughter of them. At this Miracle the Infidels stood astonished, and the Christians taking heart, rusht out upon them, the Fight was Disorderly, but the Enemy amazed at what they had seen, turned their Backs and fled. 20,000 were killed in the Battle and Pursuit, the rest . . . fled to [a] Field. . . . There another Miracle was wrought, which was, that near a Farm, called *Causegadia*, part of a Mountain, with all that were upon it, fell into the River, by which a great number of *Barbarians* perished. (p. 103)

95.9 **BEDE^B**] Bede or the Venerable Bede had a reputation for reliability. In 'The Life and Miracles of Saint Cuthbert' Bede reports numerous miracles. In his best-known work, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, he occasionally reports miracles and cites authorities or evidence in support of them. One example, which resembles the miracle of the holy thorn mentioned by Hume above, is this:

Germanus, full of the Holy Ghost, invoked the Trinity, and—taking into his hands a little bag filled with relics of the saints, which hung about his neck—applied it to the girl's eyes, which were immediately delivered from darkness and filled with the light of truth. The parents rejoiced, and the people were amazed at the miracle; and after that day wicked opinions were so fully displaced from the minds of all that they ardently embraced the doctrine of the religious authorities. (*Ecclesiastical History* 1.18 (1: 84–5))

Bede is forthright in citing his authorities or evidence, but he did not personally witness the marvels and miracles that he reported.

In a spirit resembling Hume's, Woolston mentions Bede's reports of miracles in *Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour*, Fourth Discourse (66–7); Fifth Discourse (60).

96.4 **pious frauds**] a widely used expression. In reporting on fantastic stories and miracles, Wollaston discusses 'frauds pious and impious' in *Religion of Nature Delimited* 3.16. Collins (*Discourse of Free-Thinking*, 92–3) and Bentley (*Remarks Upon a Late Discourse of Free-Thinking* 35–6) debated pious and impious frauds in biblical translations. Woolston's *Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour* contains suggestions that many miracles are pious frauds; these issues of fraud and Woolston's views are taken up in Sherlock, *The Trial of the Witnesses*, 32 ff., 51–3.

96.6 **avidum genus auricularum**] Footnote reference: Lucretius,^B *De rerum natura* 4.594 (598 in older editions). The expression in Lucretius is 'humanum genus est avidum nimis auricularum', which means 'the human species is too eager for gossipy ears'. Hume's shortened version, *avidum genus auricularum*, means 'the tribe with an

eager ear for gossip'. Lucretius uses the full expression while discussing how miraculous tales are exchanged and spread. Hume applies to a section of the population a phrase which Lucretius had originally applied to all humanity.

96.25 infancy of new religions . . . perished beyond recovery] This paragraph appears to be a direct denial of claims by Butler (*Analogy* 2.6–7) that a higher standard of evidence was required for claims of miracles in the infancy of religions than in the 18th century. See related discussions in French literary figure Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757), *History of Oracles* 9–11; Locke,^B *Third Letter for Toleration* 10; Christian scholar and early Church Father Origen (2nd–3rd c. AD), *Contra Celsum* 1.27, 2.46, 7.7–8.

97.8 foundation . . . system of religion] Biblical miracles are regarded as among the main proofs of Christianity in Tillotson,^B 'Of the Tryal of the Spirits' (*Works*, sermon 21); Clarke,^B *Discourse* (*Works*, 2: 695–7, 701) and *Sermons* (*Works*, 2: 81–2); Butler (*Analogy* 2.7); and Jackson (*An Address to Deists*, 25–8). Berkeley^B seems to support a claim to proof in *Alciphron* 6.3, 30, as does Locke^B in *A Discourse of Miracles* (*Works*, 9: 256–65). See also claims of proof in Grotius, *Truth of the Christian Religion* 1.18, 2.6–7, 5.2; Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines sacræ* 2.3, 6, 8–10; and Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious* 2.3.19, 3.4.69–76. Hume comments on miracles as intended to establish points of religion in a letter to Blair (*Letters*, 1: 350).

Fréret (*Examen critique*, especially 1: 13, 189–92) raised questions similar to Hume's about whether the very biblical reports of miracles invoked by several of the above writers constitute 'sufficient' proofs of religious belief.

98.21 BACON^B] Footnote reference: Francis Bacon, *Novum organum* 2.29. Bacon first published this passage in Latin. Hume quoted the passage in all editions of *EHU* from 1756 to 1768, always in a note and exclusively in Latin. The Latin was carried into the text in the 1770 edition. In the 1772 edition Hume replaced the Latin with the translation found in the present text.

98.33 Faith, not on reason] Theologians and philosophers had debated issues of 'faith to the exclusion of reason' for centuries. Montaigne and Bayle^B were prominent figures. Montaigne commented on the inability of reason to establish truths that could be known by faith, whereas Bayle found religious tenets of faith to be in opposition to reason. Various formulations of St Augustine and Pascal^B were often mentioned in literature on the subject. In *Dialogues* I Hume suggests that Locke^B was the first Christian openly to assert that 'faith was nothing but a species of reason'; see Locke, *Essay* 4.17.23–4.18.11. In *Christianity Not Mysterious* Toland attempted to defend the Christian religion by appeal to reason (rather than miracles, revelation, or tradition), insisting that the sharp contrast often drawn between faith and reason is untenable.

98.37 Pentateuch] The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, or the five books of Moses, report numerous miracles, some listed by Hume later in this paragraph.

99.2 **writer and historian]** Prior to Hume prominent writers, including Stillingfleet, had defended the soundness of biblical history. They incorporated accounts of miracles and the history related in the Pentateuch, often using appeals to common sense and historiographical standards. See Stillingfleet, *Origines sacrae* 2.1–4, 7–10.

99.18 **applied . . . to prophecies]** As with miracles, there was a large literature on prophecies (understood as divinely inspired instruction as well as the prediction of what is to come). Stillingfleet associated miracles and prophecies (*Origines sacrae* 2.6–10), and Hobbes regarded miracles as a mark of a true prophet—albeit not a solely sufficient mark because ‘false prophets may have the power of miracles’ (*Leviathan* 32.7). Influential free-thinkers who made connections between prophecies and miracles are Dutch philosopher Baruch de Spinoza (1632–77), *Theologico-Political Treatise* 1–3, 6, and Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* 1.6–11.

99.21 **foretel future events]** In *Analogy* 2.1.1 Butler discusses the importance of foretelling events in order to add credibility to Christian religious teachings about miracles.