

## THE DEIST'S REPLY

### CHAPTER 1.

#### The Early Spread of Christianity.

There are some believers, who place little confidence in the evidence of the miracles said to have been performed by Jesus, who yet say that the establishment of such a religion as his, by such means as were employed after his death, is of itself a convincing miracle. They say it is incredible that the preachers of a religious system, the most prominent doctrine of which was the Son of God, its founder, was slain, should have met with such success, unless God had miraculously aided them. They, in short, say substantially, that the very idea of the Son of God and the Saviour of the world being put to death ignominiously and like the criminal, is on the face of it so absurd, and so repugnant to all men's notions of what is probable, and of what would consist with the proper character for such a being to assume, that unless some supernatural influence had been exerted to aid in gaining for it belief, men never would have believed it.

Now, the absurdity and improbability of this doctrine, in the abstract, being acknowledged let the question be put, whether it be any less absurd or improbable on account of its having been believed ? If not, then here is an alleged miracle to be inquired into, of a different kind from those, on the evidence of which the Bible professes mainly to rest its claims to credit a sort of incidental miracle, in fact, apparently not at all intended to furnish evidence of the truth of the Bible.

It is a little remarkable that any, professing to believe the Bible, should abandon, as insufficient, the evidence which its authors represent to have been expressly designed to convince men of its truth, and should thus seize upon an after an after circumstance of so doubtful a character as this. Yet one, who attempts to meet believers on their own grounds, must of necessity answer many arguments no more rational than this, or suffer them to believe on; for very slight and flimsy evidence is sufficient to satisfy the minds of such as are both determined to believe, and afraid to disbelieve.

But if it shall appear that this system, absurd and improbable as its main doctrine is, might have been propagated without its having been, or being aided by, any miraculous power, then the argument, against the truth of the doctrine, to be drawn from its absurdity and improbability, will be entitled to what would have been its just weight, independent of the system's having been believed at all. The only ground, that believers of the present day could then take, on this point, would be this, viz, that their astonishment, that men should ever have been so credulous as to believe so improbable and absurd a system, is so great, that they themselves will now believe it too.

Let us then inquire into the causes of the success of the Apostles, and see whether they were not natural ones.

One of the most efficient of these causes, was the manner in which they preached. That alone was calculated to make very strong impressions upon the minds of such as were too ignorant or simple, (and such the first converts will hereafter appear generally to have been,) to judge

rationally the truth of the statements they heard, and the soundness of the religious doctrines, that were taught. The manner of all the Apostles must have exhibited a great deal of sincerity and zeal, (for they were undoubtedly honest in their faith,) and nothing makes so favorable an impression upon the minds of men in general, in favor of those, who advocate new doctrines; nothing incline them so much to listen willingly to all they have to say, as an appearance, on their part, of perfect sincerity and simplicity.

Another trait in the manner of some of them, particularly of Paul, who appears to have been by far the most efficient apostle, was boldness. The exhibition of this quality was always powerfully affects the imaginations of the weak and ignorant, of whom the early converts were evidently composed.

The question, is often asked, how is the boldness and zeal of the Apostles to be accounted for, when they knew they had no worldly honors to expect, but, on the contrary, persecution, and the contempt of a large portion of the community, where ever they should go? To answer this question, it is necessary to refer to what was the condition of these men, (with the exception of Paul) when they first became the disciples of Jesus. They were obscure, illiterate, simple and superstitious men- men of no importance as citizens either in their own eyes or the eyes of others. They had never looked to the worldly honors or promotions; but evidently had expected from their youth up, to pass their days in the obscurest paths and humblest walks of life. The contempt of those above them had no terrors for such men as these- the had never aspired to be their equal, and they were willing, because, in whatever situation they might be, they had always expected, to be despised, as a matter of course, on account of their degraded conditions of mind and fortune. Still, at the same time, to be at the head of little sects and bands of those, who had once been their equals, and to be looked up by them as guides, was a distinction adapted to excite most powerfully the ambition of these men, however much they be despised by all but their followers. They, by becoming and being acknowledged as, the teachers of others, acquired an importance, of which a few years before they had never dreamed. They owed whatever of worldly consequence they possessed entirely to the fact of their being esteemed leader by their proselytes. Simple, artless, and sincere as these men were, such circumstances were calculated to attach them strongly to the cause in which they were engaged, although they might not be aware of being so influenced.

They also attached the greatest importance to a belief in the doctrines, that they preached. They esteemed themselves the agents of God, commissioned to save men's souls. They looked upon their employment as of the most momentous consequence; and their imaginations, unbalanced by reason and reflection, - were intensely excited by such views of their duty.

But there was another cause, perhaps more powerful than all these together. These simple men had been convinced that Jesus was no less a personage than the Son of God. They had been honored, as they thought, by being made his bosom friends, while he was on the earth, and his immediate and most conspicuous agents. After his death, for accomplishing a design, which to their minds, was the most magnificent that could be conceived. He had, by telling them beforehand of the dangers and difficulty, and obloquy they were to encounter from those whom they had been taught to consider the enemies of God, and by promises that he would always be with them on earth and that he would extravagantly reward them in heaven, if they should

persevere and be faithful, brought them up to a pitch of fanaticism calculated to make them look on the opposition of men as unimportant nothings “blessed are ye, said he, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven- for so persecuted they the prophets, which were before you.” Can any considerations be imagined to render these simple fanatics alike indifferent to everything worldly, whether of hardship or comfort, of prosperity, or adversity, of honor or shame ? Yes. Jesus found pictures, even more inflammatory than these, to operate upon their untutored imaginations. He said to them “Ye are they, which have continued with me in my temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom as my father hath appointed unto me, that you may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, starting the twelve tribes of Israel,” (Luke 22-28 to 30). [\*1]

It is useless to comment upon the natural effect of such language as this, upon such men as those to whom it was addressed, and who implicitly believed in the reality that was promised to them. Perhaps no other picture can be imagined, that would have so powerfully fired the imagination of these credulous men, as this, offered to them, as it was, by one whom they believed to be the SON of GOD! It all looked probable to them, notwithstanding its extravagance. They had on earth sat with him at table- why should they not also in Heaven? They knew too that there were twelve tribes of Israel, and their own number was also twelve, apparently selected with reference to the number of tribes to be ruled over. The whole prospect must have been, to them, a gorgeous reality. The effect was such as might have been expected. These men had their minds engrossed by the grandeur of their designs, and the grandeur of their promised reward. They had nothing to attach them to this world, or to make them regard the esteem of men. One great purpose forever stimulated and urged them on, and hurried them from place to place, wherever a convert could be made. It made them fearless of death, fearless of men, fearless, in fact, of all worldly consequences. It gave to them vastly more boldness, seal and perseverance, than could have been easily inspired by other means in men naturally so timid and spiritless.

Perhaps it will be said that the writings of the New Testaments display talents inconsistent with the idea that their authors were intellectually so weak as I have presented them. To this objection I answer, that from the beginning to the end of the New Testament there is displayed little wit or wisdom for the Christians to be proud of. Besides, it should be recollected that these writings were not executed until the authors had generally, for several years, been engaged in the employment of preachers- an employment adapted to call into exercise, and thus to increase, the little powers they originally possessed. And yet the benefit of this long course of education has only enabled them, with a few exceptions, to furnish narratives and epistles, which, with all the advantage which they may be supposed to have derived from translations of such learned men as would be likely to improve upon the styles and expressions of the original, come very near being the most simple, and the most destitute of thought, of any to be found in the English language. If men were but to read the New Testament with the same tone and emphasis, with which they do other books, and were to keep out of mind the idea of its being sacred, they would be disgusted with the credulity, and the want of intellect, reason and judgment, that is apparent in it. The imaginations of believers have dressed up and exaggerated the excellence of the style and matter of the New Testament generally, in the same manner in which they have the moral instructions of Jesus. They have done this in the same manner, in which we may suppose the

imaginings of the people of all nations, that have books esteemed sacred, gloss over and exaggerate the excellence of their contents.

The larger portion of the “acts of the apostles” separate from the insipidity of the narrative, contain the most extraordinary exhibition of lack of judgment and intellectual resource, that can easily be found on record.

To support these assertions, let me ask those, who have been accustomed to look at the writings of the New Testament as inspired, to look at them for once as uninspired (which is the only proper way of regarding them until their inspiration be clearly proved;) to read them with no more reverence than they would read any other book; to read them as being what they really purport to be, viz, nothing but narratives, and letters of exhortation and instruction; let them, in short, for once read the books critically, discarding all idea of their being sacred, and I have little doubt their opinions will concur with those here expressed.

Paul was in some respects distinguishable from the other apostles. He had some talents, although a muddy intellect, and little judgment. He was violent, precipitate, and unreflecting. He was bigoted, superstitious, and dogmatical in his first faith, and little less so in his last. He was self-confident, boastful [\*2] and dictatorial to a disgusting degree. His forte was in teaching doctrines, the utility or reason of which, in as much as nobody else has understood, he probably did not understand himself. He was also crafty and deceitful without appearing to reflect upon the character of such conduct; and this fact shows, either that he was not a rigid moralist in principle, or that he had very obtuse moral perceptions. His readiness to practice deception is exhibited in the following instances. He circumcised Timotheus to cheat the Jews, as appears by Acts 16-3. “Him would Paul would have to go forth with him, and took and circumcised him, because of the Jews which were in those quarters, for they knew all that his father was a Greek.” When imprisoned at Phillipe, he falsified, and said he was a Roman, (Acts 16-37, 38) to alarm and impose upon those who had imprisoned him, supposing him to be, as he really was, a Jew. (Acts 16-20 and 21- Acts 22-3). He repeated the same falsehood afterwards, and declared that he was a Roman “free born,” (Acts 22-27, 28). This lie appears to have been told because some expedient of the kind seemed necessary to extricate himself from the trouble he had gotten himself into. [\*3] Moreover he was ambitious, and appears to have been disposed in some cases to turn his labor to a better worldly account than the other apostles. [\*4] He was also revengeful, as appears by his second epistle to Timothy 4-14. “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil, the lord reward him according to his works.” A wish, in which superstition and a vulgar spirit of revenge are more ludicrously combined, was perhaps never recorded or even expressed.

That his pretence before alluded to, of having been called up into Heaven, was all a fabrication (instead of an account of a dream, which I suppose Christians will think it to have been, is rendered probable by the nature of the story by the fact that he would not relate what he heard there, by his own bad character for veracity, by the necessity he was in of telling a marvelous story of some kind, and the circumstance that he thought it best to preface it (2d. Cor. 11-31) with the declaration that “the God and father of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed forever more, knew that he was not lying.” “

Let us now look at the character of the people who became converts. In the first place, the people, in general, among whom the apostles preached, are proved to have been a simple, spiritless race of beings, from the facts that they appeared to have had no laws, but to have been governed by the will of a single deputy of the roman power, who ruled over them merely for the purpose of sponging from them as large a share, as he could, of their property, for the purpose of the grandeur of the Roman nation. It is probable, too that few could read, since but in the most enlightened parts of the world could at that time read. Printing not then known, the books that existed must have been in manuscript, and of course must have been few and but little circulated. The people generally having no concern in the management of the affairs of government, and considering themselves as they really were, the despised subjects or slaves of the Romans, they had no national or individual spirit to keep them from sinking into the most contemptible intellectual degradation. It is probable that few people are now to be found on the earth more destitute of every thing like character, than were the great portion of those, among whom the apostles preached. We see, by the accounts in the Acts of the Apostles, that they were addicted to the most petty and contemptible vices, and the most ludicrous and disgusting superstitions- believing in ghosts, and devils, and visions, and dreams, and evil spirits, and sorceries, in prophetesses ! (Acts 21-9) in the power of speaking with tongues, in miracles, in witchcraft, and apparently in all the other absurdities that superstition ever gave rise to. They were always agog for something new and marvelous in religious matters- indeed they appeared to care for little else. These credulous beings were continually imposed by men, "boasting themselves to be somebody," as for example, one Judas and one Theudas, who got sects after them, (Acts 5-36 and 37). Their readiness to believe in everything, that appeared to them to be miraculous, cannot be more plainly or perhaps more ludicrously shown, than it is in Acts 5-15 and 16 where it appears that they brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds so that "at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them." It appears also by Acts 9-12, that sick persons were cured, and evil spirits cast out by the efficacy of the handkerchiefs and aprons that had been about the person of Paul! What sort of "evil spirits" were probably cast out by the sight of Paul's handkerchiefs ? Or how bad was the "sickness" that could be cured by those means ? Can anyone doubt, that if the handkerchiefs of another person had been used, and had been called Paul's, so as to deceive the diseased person the same miracles would have been wrought ? Or can a man of common sense want any further proof that this affair of being possessed of devils, of which there are so many stories in the New Testament, and the supposed miraculous cures of diseases, were all shams- the mere work of imaginations of those who were of the number of the veriest simpletons that ever bore the name of men.

There is another account, equally ridiculous, beginning in the 13th verse of Acts 19th, which shews what a stupid, superstitious and senseless race of beings some of those were among which Paul preached. It seems that some vagrant Jews attempted to cast out these evil spirits by uttering, over those that were supposed to be possessed of them, these magical words, "we adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." It appears that they had adopted this method with one, and that "the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" and then, instead of coming out of the man, it caused him (as the lookers-on supposed) to fly pell-mell at these impostors, and bruise, and beat, and strip them, and drive them out of the house. Now any Yankee boy, a dozen years old, would see through such an affair at once; and but when this came to be noised abroad, people looked upon it as an awful judgment from God, and upon those who had attempted, for their own benefit, or without proper authority, to use the name of Jesus as a

word of magic to exorcise devils. And the writer adds that this affair converted many, that “fear fell on them all,” “that the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified,” and he closes the account by saying, “so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed!”

It would be using the name of God profanely to introduce it into so contemptible a display of the credulity and superstition of those half-witted creatures, and of the manner in which they were imposed on by their own imaginations, were it not that it is necessary to do so, in order to expose the incredibly ridiculous absurdities, that men of the present day, without reflection, and as a matter of course, take for sacred and important truth.

In this case we have an exhibition of the amount of argument and evidence, that was necessary in the Apostles time to make a convert to Christianity. And unless the Clergy can deny this transaction, I should think it might be well for them to say no more about the difficulties of propagating the Christian religion.

The fact also, that a large portion of the early Christians believed the books now composing the “Apocryphal New Testament,” tells a tale that cannot be gainsayed for a moment. It confirms all I have said, and more than I have said, of the simplicity, credulity and superstition of those, who first embraced Christianity. It is no answer to these facts to say that there were some enlightened men in the countries where Christianity first spread. The mass were otherwise. And especially those, who first became converts, were such as I have described. And any man of common mind, who will read the “Apocryphal New Testament,” must say that men, who would swallow such stories, could easily be brought to believe any thing whatever, that fanatics or imposters could ever wish to make them believe.

With such people, the more extravagant and marvelous a doctrine or narrative was, the better. In fact it was absolutely necessary that it should be so to a great degree, else they would not have listened to it for a moment. Imagine then such it reckless, headstrong, violent man as Paul, traveling from place to place, sometimes with his head shaved, (Acts 18-18;) preaching even in the streets of cities, wherever he could get a crowd of populace around him, telling men that the son of God had been on earth in the form of a man, and had been cruelly slain; but that he had returned to life again; that he himself had been supernaturally converted, and had been appointed to preach for Jesus, to cure the sick and cast out the devils; telling them also that he was ready to cast out all the devils and heal all the sick they would bring to him; and is it strange or unnatural, anything more than might have been expected, any thing more than a matter of course, that multitudes should have been, some of them enraged, and others astonished, attracted and deluded, by such strange innovation, and such an unaccountable attempt to upturn their accustomed religious observances, by the introduction of such novel and unheard-of notions ? Such was the effect. If any one wish to form an idea of the excitement, that Paul sometimes caused, let him read the 19th chapter of the Acts, and see what a hurly-burly and uproar was occasioned at Ephesus by his having preached there, and got a sect after him.

The novel character of the doctrines taught by the Apostles, and the marvelous nature of their stories about Jesus, constituted the bait, by which the people were caught at every step. And the success of this bait was aided by that credulousness, which brought the imaginations of those who were sick, or who only imagined themselves sick, (for such an abundance of sick people has

seldom been heard of in any other case,) and the imagination of those, who supposed themselves- possessed of devils, to assist in working what they called miracles.

When we consider that there twelve of these preachers, all in engaged in preaching the same doctrines in various places, and that these doctrines were different from all others then believed, it is natural, if each preacher made the number of converts, which he would be likely to, that in a few years this sect must have become numerous, and from being widely scattered over the country, must have attracted the notice and curiosity of all.

Such then was the manner in which this sect was *planted*—other means afterwards contributed to cultivate and rear it. The soil we have seen was adapted to the nature of the plant- it was a rich compost of ignorance, superstition and credulity. During the lives of the twelve, they, by their personal labors, accomplished much, and it appears that they authorized many of the new converts to become their fellow laborers. In process of time the gospels were written, and these writing gave Christians a decided advantage over those whom they were laboring to supplant. They thus became supplied with something, to which they could refer as authority for what they preached. They could the produce written evidence, and such evidence too as would be likely to be satisfactory to a very large number of credulous persons of that day. Since few books were then written at all, and since the greater portion of the people had probably no acquaintance with such as were written, they (if they were like those of the present day who are equally unlearned) would not presume to doubt or scrutinize the truth of any thing, which should appear in the form of a book. Not having any religious books of their own, the fact that the religious doctrines of the Christians, and that the accounts of marvelous circumstances under which those doctrines were communicated, should be written, was doubtless of itself, to them, a very wonderful affair, and was remarkably calculated to impress them with the idea that whatever the Apostles had told them must be true.

Another circumstance, which most powerfully contributed to the spread of Christianity, was that the importance, which the Christians attached to a belief in their faith, was so great as always to keep awake among them a fanatical spirit of proselytism- a circumstance, which before their time had probably never been known to exist, on an extended scale, in favor of any other system.

The natural effect of those various causes would be to build up a great and numerous sect of Christians in a few years. At length they began to be persecuted, and if persecution had the effect then, that it invariably does now, it must have powerfully aided the progress of their cause.

Another circumstance, which prevents the spread of Christianity, in the early periods of its existence, from being remarkable, is, that it had nothing like a regular system to contend with, in those places where it spread. The few heathenish notions that men had about “the Gods,” and about religion, had no foundation in any written authorities, but only in the vague and unaccountable traditional superstitions of the people of those times. The Jews had a written system of theology, and Christianity could make a few converts among them, although it pretends to have been more especially designed for them. In modern times it has made no considerable progress among any people, who have a written system of their own to appeal to—whereas if it had the least particle of miraculous power, it certainly would triumph over all other systems, whether they were written ones or not.

If any further evidence be wanted that the spread of Christianity was not supernatural, look at the spread of Mormonism, and see how, even at this day, and in this country, a miserable vagabond of a "Joe Smith," in a short space of time, can put a large community in an uproar, and raise up a numerous sect of followers, full of faith and fanaticism, eager to believe any thing marvelous in relation to the book of Mormon, and the Mormon prophet, and ready to make any effort and any sacrifice for the propagation of the momentous truths of their revelation. Look also at the success of Edward Irving's attempts to make persons "*speak with tongues*" &c. in England, and at the spread of St. Simonianism in France. Look even at the camp-meetings and revivals here in New England, and observe to how a great degree the timid and superstitious will surrender their understandings to the guidance of any ranting person, who has imprudence, hypocrisy, and coolness enough to put on a solemn cadaverous face, and talk judiciously about hell, the devil, and other kindred matters. These things illustrate the credulity of mankind in matters of this sort, and the ease with which the system might succeed in a superstitious and ignorant age, especially if the propagators had a few marvelous stories to relate and could perform works that could pass for miracles; and after it had succeeded for a time, it would become so incorporated into the institutions and customs of the people that it would thereafterwards be believed as a matter of course, and without inquiry; in the same manner, for example, as Christianity is now by the great mass of those who believe it at all.

The fact that some of the Apostles suffered martyrdom rather than renounce their faith, has been overlooked upon as evidence that they were engaged in the cause of truth. But martyrdom is evidence only of man's honesty- it is no evidence that he is not mistaken. Men have suffered martyrdom for all sorts of opinions in politics and in religion; yet they could not therefore have all been in the right; although they could give no stronger evidence that they believed themselves to be right.

The Apostles undoubtedly supposed they had seen Jesus perform miracles, and that, in circulating their accounts of him they were telling the truth. They undoubtedly believed that they themselves could perform miracles of a certain kind, such as casting out devils and healing the sick; although in reality, as I think has been shewn, the imagination must have, in many instances, and probably in all, created the malady, and as really, in all cases effected the cure, if there were any cure. But the Apostles, being simple men, understood nothing of the power of the imagination; and therefore honestly believed that all that appeared was real. They themselves were as superstitious as those to whom they preached. This fact is as much proved by circumstance as these, viz. Paul had his head shaved because he had a vow, (Acts 18-18). Paul resigned himself for bidden y the Holy Ghost to preach in particular places, (Acts 16-6&7). The apostles commanded converts to abstain from things strangled, as if there were a wickedness in eating such (Acts 15-28&29). When a young man had fallen from a window he was taken up apparently lifeless, ( as persons frequently after a fall); but on the reviving it was esteemed a miracle, as well as by Paul himself, it would seem as by the bystanders (Acts 20-9). Peter imagined himself delivered from prison by an angel, (Acts 12-5 to 11); although the conduct of the supposed was precisely such as we may reasonably suppose would have been that of a man who should have attempted to liberate him. For example, a light shone in the room, (as would have been the case if a man had gone in, for he would have undoubtedly carried a light in with him); the supposed angel touched or struck him on the side, (to wake him up evidently just as a

man would have done); “raise him up,” and said to him, “arise up quickly, gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals, cast thy garments about these, and follow me,” (precisely as man would have directed him). It is evident the guard must have been asleep, whether the being who liberated Peter, were an angel or a man; for Peter was not detected in going in or out, although he would as likely have been, being in the company of an angel, who should walk before, as this one is said to have done, as in the company of a man. Peter supposed that the gate open of its own accord; but he was liable to be mistaken as to this fact, because a man very likely would very likely like to leave it open as he went in; or if he did not leave it open, it readily and without any such effort as a person walking behind him would be likely to observe. After they had thus left the prison, and “had passed on through one street,” the supposed angel “departed from him”— probably he took one street, as a man would have done, and Peter too another.

Now although this supposed angel conducted precisely as a man would have done, and although Peter said, at the time, that the whole transaction appeared to him like a dream, yet afterwards he said he knew certainly “that the Lord had sent his ANGEL to deliver him.” This fact shews the superstition of the man, and his readiness to attribute, to the supernatural interference of the deity, occurrences that could be accounted for in a natural manner.

A paragraph, beginning in the 23d and ending at the 28th verse of the acts 28th, shews by how simple an affair Paul was led to imagine that the Lord had given up to the destruction of the Jews, whom theretofore Jesus had been supposed to be sent more especially to save; and that it was his (Paul's) duty to abandon them and preach to the Gentiles.

If any wish for the further evidence of the weakness and superstition of the Apostles, or their converts, let him read the acts throughout, and if he be an unprejudiced man, he will see evidence enough of these facts at every step.

I must now suppose that the manner in which Christianity was propagated, has been pointed out so as to make it apparent that there was nothing miraculous in it. But if any will still insist that Christianity is a revelation from God, made to man to save their souls, let him, if he can, account for the fact that God did not cause it to be spread over the whole world at once in a year, or a day. It was as important, if this system be true, that it should be spread, as that it should be revealed, and God could have miraculously spread it, as easily as he could have miraculously revealed it. There is no sense in saying that he has committed to men the business of spreading this religion; for it is manifestly absurd to suppose that he would entrust to men the completion of a design, which he had *himself commenced*, and which it was so immensely important to have completed at once; when he must have known the beggarly success that men would meet with. How happens it then that the Christian, after eighteen centuries, is a religion of such limited prevalence? How happens it that this wonder-working Revelation, which set out to revolutionize and reform society, and save the human race, has not become more generally known in the world? Why, on reason is, that it is not, after all, quite so wonder-working an affair as it has been cried up to be. And another reason probably is, that the Almighty, instead of miraculously aiding its progress, *never has* miraculously aided it.

But, above all, how comes it to pass that such a sovereign cure for souls has not been more universally adopted *where it is known*? One reason may have been that men have often doubted

whether souls have any mortal diseases; and another has been, that this alleged specific has ground somewhat of an obstacle in the common sense and reason of mankind. Sensible men, particularly in modern times, have generally had *doubts*, or some thing more than doubts, whether this pretended revelation was after all any thing more than the offspring of superstition, delusion, or imposture. In short, they have *not believed* it. A considerable portion of the *male adults, who pretend to be Christians*, do not believe it. They wish to believe it; they have a sort of lingering reverence for it—they perhaps persuade themselves that, on the whole, they do believe it—yet they do not in reality. They have a *prejudice* in its favor—not a conviction of its truth founded on evidence. They cannot help suspecting that it is a thing not to be inquired into; that it is neither reasonable in itself, nor founded on reasonable evidence. One proof of this is found in the fact that they are afraid to have the community inquire into the evidences against it, or to have these evidences propagated, and this at a time too when it is the established policy of society to encourage discussions on other matters as being the surest means of eliciting the truth. The Clergy especially would shut out every thing like light, and stifle every thing like inquiry on the subject, and the miserable rant and declamation, to which, instead of arguments, they resort to effect these objects, shew that they are aware that Christianity will not bear an examination. Although they know that a large portion of the male part of the community are unbelievers, they choose to let them remain such, if they will but keep silent, rather than to run the risk of a more general overthrow of Christianity by a discussion, which they might awaken for the purpose of establishing it. When they are pressed with arguments against the *truth* of Christianity, they attempt to divert the public mind to the question of its utility, as if its truth was not the first thing to be settled. Why this mean unmanly practice of subterfuge and shuffling? [T]his refusal to meet argument? This shrinking from the responsibilities of their station? It is, as I believe, because that, like other hired troops, they have no principles which require them to put at hazard their interests. It is because their cowardice, selfishness or prejudices are too strong for their consciences and reason. It is because they are but too certain that if a free discussion of this subject be permitted, truth, operating on their own minds, or the minds of the people, will require them to abandon their calling, and surrender their consequence in society. It is, in short, because that, at the bottom of all their other opinions and feelings on this subject there is a lurking apprehension, (I dare almost say *conviction*,) that their disgusting system is but chaff. [\*5]

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[\*1] This promise was probably understood, at the time it was made, as referring to temporal thrones; but after the departure of Jesus, was applied by the apostles to heavenly ones.

[\*2] See his ridiculous boast (2 Cor. 12-1 to 5) that he was the man who had been caught up into the *third* heaven, (query—how many heavens are there in all?) and had there heard certain sounds, which he declined repeating, on the pretence that it would be *unlawful* for him to do so. This journey to paradise, therefore, was labor lost, unless the story of it, united with his declarations (2 Cor. 11-5-2 Cor. 12-11) that “he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the Apostles,” and his other boastful pretences, of which the last named chapters are full, served some purpose in gaining him credit among these, whose backwardness to regard him, he virtually says (2 Cor. 12-11) “*compelled* him” to brag a little; although, modest man! He would not for the world be thought “to glory of himself, but in his infirmities.” (2 Cor. 12-5.)

[\*3] Perhaps some explanation may be given to this declaration of Paul; I here state only what appears on the face of the matter.

[\*4] 2d. Cor. 11-8. “I *robbed* other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service.” It may well be doubted, one would think, whether the last clause of this verse gives his real reason for an act, which he seems to admit, in the first clause, to be unjust.

[\*5] I trust the time is not far distant, when the moral courage of the more intelligent and independent portion of the community will be sufficiently aroused to expose, without reserve, the dishonest and cowardly practices of these men; when their attempts to dissuade weak and timid minds from the examination of evidence; to keep the reasons and arguments of their opponents out of sight; and to so fill the minds of their dupes with vulgar and superstitious fears and prejudices as to deprive them of all mental liberty on this subject, will receive their merited condemnation; and when the efforts, which, instead of meeting the arguments of men, they are now so zealously making, by Sabbath-schools and otherwise, to forestall the judgements and permanently rivet the faith of the *young*, by impressing and deluding their imaginations, before they are capable of reasoning, will be regarded as a nefarious artifice for perpetuating their own influence by depriving the human mind of its rights, and truth and reason of their power.