No. 148.

On the miraculous cure of the man born blind.

6/16/1822

The same

Sure of the dumb

is prediction, the miracle,

as a striking fulfilment, it

is spoken to swell the glory of that evi-

l in language not to be misunderstood proclaims
John 9:1-3. And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man who was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, did this man sin or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, I neither charge this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.

Few miracles recorded in the gospel are more instructive, than that to which these words from the introduction. The voice of prophecy had ages before announced, that when the day of the Redeemer of Israel should be ushered in upon the world, "the eyes of the blind should be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, that the lame man should leap as an hart, & the tongue of the dumb should sing." Of a part of this prediction, the miracle, wh never claims our notice, was a striking fulfilment, & thus it bears its pattern to swell the glory of that evidence, wh in language not to be misunderstood proclaims
years to have been enucleated with great and holy design. The
admiration of sacred history likewise devolves the characteristic
feeling of the Jews of that day, better than any elaborate de-
scription could have done. We learn the true characters of
men from little incidents; or from the course of conduct
in particular cases, more directly and thoroughly than we could
from a long accounts of their passions, views, & motives. Yet
they do judge himself more exactly than what others say
about them. And thus the conduct of the Jews respecting
the cure of the blind man gives us a clear view of
how we could have of the state of feeling among them with
regard to Jews. The prevailing notion is, that from deter-
mination not to believe are firmly in the cause of this
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Let us see what instruction may be drawn from this his-
tory of this miracle.

1. We will attend to the question of the disciples: 'did
this man sin or his parents, that he was born blind?'
In order to understand this, we must advert to some opin-
ions not more prevalent among the Jews at that peri-
od. Many of them believed, what is called a preexistent
state, i.e. they believed that the souls of some had existed
in some state before the present, & that the end of
being in this world was affected by this state, & that the
character acquired at this habit formed on the preceding
state. The Jews, in some, as the time & talents of this
condition. He who had improved his time & talents on the

2. The question of the disciples: 'did this man sin, or was
he born blind?' It seems to suppose that in his preex-
istent state he must have committed some sin, of an

3. The question of the disciples: 'did this man sin, or was
he born blind?'...
this nature blindness was the penalty. If they according apply the to its satisfaction in this point. With regard to the other part of the question, "did his parents own that he was born blind?" it must be explained by referring to another opinion much received at that day. They only were of opinion that in some cases, one was not visited immediately upon the crime, but upon some one connected with them so that pertaining the offences of parents, if they themselves were punished, their children, the offspring would bear the penalty, so the parent had escaped. This opinion accounts for the disciples asking whether the parents of the man had sinned, that he was born blind. And thus this question, which might seem obscure, is easily explained by merely bringing together two matters, which prevail at the same time: one, that under the influence of sin, the enemy was probably made. But how does our Saviour answer this enquiry? Does he give the least counterbalance to the notion from what has been given? Far from it: he decidedly disapproves them neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him, that in the case of this blindness, in the restoration of his rights, there might be a display of divine power, and a turning to the Merciful of us, to service that we not to suppose that Jesus intended to assert that the man was born, because free from sin, but that sin in neither of them nor the cause of the blindness. It was merely one of these natural events, not constantly occurring in the course of His providence, but serve to enhance his glory or to promote the good of his creatures. There was no mysterious reasons between this and some previous offence, so that the man might be regarded as the cause of the others as the effect; it was simply a circumstance of which he availed himself to relieve suffering, to manifest to his own divine power.

From this question of the disciples, the necessity of love, of love to one another, to one another, so as to manifest his own divine power. From this question of the disciples, the necessity of love, of love to one another, to one another, so as to manifest his own divine power. From this question of the disciples, the necessity of love, of love to one another, to one another, so as to manifest his own divine power. From this question of the disciples, the necessity of love, of love to one another, to one another, so as to manifest his own divine power. From this question of the disciples, the necessity of love, of love to one another, to one another, so as to manifest his own divine power.
but as an arbitrary vindictive appointment of pain for some unknown & indefinite offences. Man is obligat-ed to come into the world, an heir to all the multiplied forms of suffering & evil, in consequence of a sin committed in the far remote distance of past time, after he had no knowledge, in or he had no share. We receive existence under the penalty of taking with it the consequences of what was done ages ago. We become so many mediums, though not suffering are transmitted from no cause connected with themselves. This idea has been extend-ed still farther; it has been imagined that this earth itself is blazoned & banded for the sin of man. The world, it is thought, is one great prison, a fetid place of residency only for degenerate beings, to whom every circumstance in their situation should come in the form of a punishment. All the glorious evidences of benevolent & wise design, all the proofs that God built this fair fabric with a view to the happiness of the beings whom he should place upon it, all the first steps of a good auspicious Being, laboring, as it may so seem, to accomplish, of G’s own plans of mercy, all the bright-ness in the case of His own beauty that seem to hav
as vindictive punishments of sin, committed ages since, contended as a curse upon the whole race of man. We are to regard suffering & calamity, as necessary parts of the wise & beneficent discipline of the New Faith, the means of an infinite wisdom set to use to purify & improve us. They are the steps by which we may ascend to higher & nobler states of existence, the strengthening of virtue, brightening the deeds of the good men's names. They are to be regarded as the means of God's moral government, not as arbitrary dispensations, inflicted as the consequence of sin, with which we had no concern. The very fact, that we are the subjects of God's government, would lead us to expect beforehand that the scene in which we live would be diversified with good & ill; that sweet & bitter fruits would be mingled together; that the whole course of life should not be smooth & attended with prosperous glories, but should sometimes experience adverse winds. That our endeavours, of submission, of fidelity should be tested & put to trial. How otherwise are these virtues to grow strong? Would you expect the habits of a child to become vigorous without exercise? As well might you expect characters to be healthy & vigorous without the tuition of painful & trying events. Constant sunshine would be oppressive & destructive to the powers of nature; no less would uninterrupted ease & property be to the formation of virtuous principles. If a high standard of duty were to lead us to heaven; but it must on the contrary, with all the perils of our own choosing; it must be by such means, as while we perform the journey thought, shall lift us up the rewards & gratifications of the place. What could we bear to bear, to be unprepared for its employment in

2. We come to consider the peculiar manner, in which this miracle was performed. It was not, as usual, by the mere utterance of a command, or by a touch, that this superhuman act was accomplished. The miracles of nature generally perform instantaneously without the intervention of means; but in this case, means were used to effect the purpose, which might have been effected at once by a sudden outburst of supernatural power. He announced the days of the blind man with days so short to him, as in the field of Elisha: he went his way, therefore, as washed by some unseen. It is evident that miraculous power needs no means to accomplish its object. Once suppose the power to exist, & even very as well suffice it to operate instantaneously without preparation, as by
a long course of steps, by a gradual process. The same powers, as said, but there be light of there was light, might have divided this act of creation into parts, I have performed each sep-
arrowly; it might have used means I have dispensed with them.
Caele Sii., in the instance before us seems to have sent the bliss
man to the food, in order that the miracle being performed
in detail might be more permanently impressive. I open
the scrutiny of examination of this process. At the same
time, the mind of the fair observer could not but draw from
this extraordinary act, the conclusion, that though means
were used, they were too poor to have effects? the purpose
a natural view would have been oddly unimportant
onto the side of divine power. Apparitions set in motion,
but it was evident by nothing but the hand of God, that
could render that process efficacious.
The thought to which we are led by this part of the history
is, that the government of the world is carried on by the
intervention, preparation of means, which are arranged by
Almighty power. In order then continually depends for their exis-
tence of success. In the eye of miracles, the casual operation
of causes of effects might be in many cases dispensed with.
The path of the divine proceedings was then high or beyond
the laws by which Providence usually chooses to exercise
might. But in the usual course of things, we
must expect no such interpositions. God appears only in
the agency of the instruments with he uses. Herself
in the sunshine, he comes forth in the storm; he speaks
the rolling thunder; he smiles in the beautiful generation
of spring; in the heavy abundance of the harvest. Let the
returns behind the veil of his mists. He passes by us on
every side, but we cannot behold him. continually descends
with wonder on the right hand? or on the left, but we
do not perceive him. All that man has to do is to dis-
cover the human nature? the laws of nature are nothing
else but the manners in which God pleases to carry on the
government of the world. All nature is a system on
intercourse between man and God? if we should it fill
us with the deepest humility to reflect, that the hus-
et effects of the human mind, the utmost reach of the
human intellect, the greatest talents, these investigations
which we regard as the
praise of our common nature, yet have given standing
the names of philosophers? and sages, all these amount
to nothing more, than simply an observation of the going
on of God; nature? beyond. This are know nothing venitian
nothing. It is the means only, not the hand that sets.
the means in motion, that we can see. With all the helps of
reasoning, man, in his highest reach of attainments, can
very much exceed a humble acquaintance with facts of
the nature of causes and effects he has no knowledge of.
In the moral world, as well as in the natural, God works by
means. He works in the heart of man: but it is through
the agency of instruction, of exhortation, of hopes, fears.
Thus it has been, and since the world began, with the
exception of miracles, events, by this it will continue to be.
The old and the new dispensation are in their gradual
developments of an idea of a track of light in the
domain of time, as nothing else but
the institution and application of means to a moral
agent. All the discoveries of God has made of himself
to his creatures: all the lights, which has been poured
forth from the pales of heaven to guide us to this:
all the
abundant precepts, instructions of virtue, and all
the everlasting obligations of divine truth, the
doctrines of a final judgment, of a retribution of pun-
ishment, of happiness and vice in store, - these, and all
the other forms of moral truth, are conveyed to the
ministry impressed upon the heart, are the means by
which God desires to conduct us to purity of holiness, of
the moral world has
its definite laws as much as the natural.

I know not how men can expect virtue or piety to be
found in the heart, without the use of these means of the
discernment of these laws, any more than you can expect to
see the harvest growing on a field, in which you have
produced, but which has been marred by no rain and
refreshed by no dew. But it ever in remembrance, that you
are not to expect miracles to be wrought in the minds of
men, any more than in the natural course of events. Let not the
inner man, be self-upon the delusive imagination, that by
an act of power, or a sudden access from his thirst of
innocence, rescue him, or deliver him all the trouble
and
all diligence. Let him remember, God has given him means
by which he can act these means, he will as much as
the

3. The remaining of that which is to be known in the
account of this miracle is to be drawn from the minute exa-
mination of it, which follows the incident. None was an
examination of the more rigorous or doubting careness.
There is the utmost unwillingness to believe; every effort to
escape the necessity of believing. The person.
knows that to admit the fact would be to acknowledge the divine authority of Jesus; and therefore, they endeavor by every means in their power to find something in the circumstances or to extract something from the man which might prove that the miracle was a fraud or its effect unlawful act of force. It would have been impossible for the most anxious and determined skepticism, to have instituted a more minute inspection into any event; yet the result was, that not a shadow of suspicion could be fastened upon the credibility of the miracle, nor any possible way of accounting for it discovered, except by acknowledging it to have been from God. They began with doubting whether this were in reality the man whom they had known while he was a blind beggar; or whether they could no longer doubt as to this fact, they ask eagerly how it came to be thus wrought. After seeing the wonderful act accredited to Jesus, they endeavor at first to distract from the merit of it, as representing it as a violation of the Sabbath. They then apply to the parents of the blind, to know what the son was really born blind; or, when after repeated trials, their incredulity could no longer hold out, in a fit of rage they excommunicated the innocent man on whom the miracle had been performed. They cast him out: ‘No! Jack! mark: what better evidence we could have of the truth and reality of such events, than we have of this miracle?’ The most refined ingenuity could find nothing against it; and after undergoing severe examination as rigorous as could be conducted in a court of justice, it came out free from all suspicion or reproach. Human testimony can furnish no formal foundation for our faith to rest upon, than as here afforded. It is for us at that age with all his prejudices and errors and opposition, nothing to hang a doubt upon, what shall we think of that skepticism, which at the present day would attempt to dissipate and destroy the evidence, whose doubt was sharpened by malice, whose interest was to detect any falsehood or deception, could not but acknowledge to be base.

But there is another doctrine general one to be made of this portion of the history. It shows the difficulty with which men believe what they are unwilling to believe; the resistance of passion and prejudice makes the admission of the evidence of truth. It is with mankind in all ages, as it was with the Jews at the time of Jesus; into their interest to doubt and reject, their will cannot
have never suffered our faith to be disturbed by considering the opposite side of the question. When all men learn to treat the opinions and reasons of an adversary with candour and respect? When shall we learn to extend towards others the same fairness of mind, which we claim from them? There is no state of mind, against which we should more vigilantly guard. That is that, which makes us act as if we suppose that all the truth must be on one side, and all the error on the side of our opponents. That we are standing in the full beams of light, while they are groping in darkness. That all our ideas are of course contemptible, while all that we have to say for ourselves is of course conclusive and irresistible. Let us endeavour, itself, to be impartial, that our frame of mind, in which we treat the opinions of an adversary with the same fairness, may consider his arguments with the same impartiality as we should if we had no interest in the result. Let it be ours to welcome the light, from whatever quarter it comes, and not to be of the number of those who, under the supposition that it came not first in at their casements. Such a mark is some of the instinct afforded us by the account of this miracle. It is good to dwell on

voices at the strongest evidence of their eyes against the nearest full light. Who has not remarked the influence of this sinister disposition, with regard to the opinions and actions of others? Every circumstance, whether to their wishing or distrust, is the evidence is eagerly sought for; while we omit to seize nothing, however unimportant or insipid, which may confirm or support what we ourselves believe. This tendency of the human mind is strikingly manifested with regard to religious opinions. We shut ourselves behind a favorite set of doctrines, and as we have received from education or accident, we refuse to lend an ear to what may be said in favor of different and opposite doctrines; or, if we do listen, it is with a mind prepared beforehand to find no force in the arguments which may be urged in their defence. It would be surprising, and we do not know the peculiarity of the human mind, to see what influence passion and prejudice have on our estimate of the value of evidence. The same argument, as it were applied to the support of our own cause, is deemed valid and satisfactory, loses all its weight of force when addressed by an opponent. We are constantly playing the game of self-deception, I imagine we have the best reason in the world for our opinions, because we
in such portions of sacred history, because it is refresh-
ing & animating to have our confidence in the scrip-
tures founded on the authority of our holy religion thus strengthened & in-
vigilated. Let it be our care, that while we believe in
its divine original, we do not disregard the divine
instructing, that while we believe its evidences, we do
not neglect its duties; that while we believe that
Jesus of G. believing we may have life through this
name.

June, 1822.

Other, from whom came all wisdom & truth, with-
out whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, we bless
him, in whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, we are able to
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At home, Dec. 5, 1830—afternoon.

At home, June 16th, 1822—forenoon.