

**THE VERACITY OF THE GOSPELS & ACTS
OF THE APOSTLES, ARGUED FROM THE
UNDESIGNED
COINCIDENCES TO BE FOUND IN THEM,
WHEN COMPARED; 1. WITH EACH
OTHER,-AND, 2. WITH JOSEPHUS**

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PREFACE.

THE following pages consist, in part, of the substance of two Sermons which I had last year occasion to deliver from the University Pulpit in Cambridge, the one in English, the other in Latin, exhibiting *Undesigned Coincidences* between the several writings of the Evangelists, or between those writings and Josephus. The materials, which might be considered supplementary to Lardner and Paley, I had collected, from time to time, as independent arguments for the Veracity of the Gospels and Acts, without any determinate purpose in so doing, beyond my own immediate satisfaction. Thoughts which have been thus progressively accumulating, I cannot now always trace to their beginnings, however I may desire it. But an attentive perusal of the New Testament, and of the Jewish Historian, has furnished me with nearly all of them. At the same time, it is possible that a hint from a commentator may have suggested one; that another I may have met with, originally applied to a different purpose, though here made subservient to the Evidences; that a third may, without my recollecting it, have been already urged under a similar form, and for the same object. Yet much which was strictly my own, I have carefully suppressed, where I found that I had been anticipated; and what I have retained, I believe to be, in the

main, new, and I trust that it will not be thought unimportant. Of any great profit or praise to accrue to myself from a work so brief and unpretending, I have little hope or expectation; abundantly shall I be satisfied if it should chance to give pause (of which I do not altogether despair) to the scoffer or unbeliever, though it be only to one—if it should lead him to reconsider a subject, of all others, the most weighty that can occupy the thoughts of a reasonable being—if it should induce him to make himself better acquainted with such works as the “Credibility of the Gospel History,” the “*Horæ Paulinæ*,” or (what is indeed of another and more profound character) the “Analogy” of Bishop Butler—before he comes to a final conclusion on a point which the grave may convince him he had never examined with the attention it deserved, or in any other spirit than such as would have frustrated the effect of all testimony whatever.

FIRST SECTION.

CONTAINING UNDESIGNED COINCIDENCES BETWEEN THE SEVERAL WRITINGS OF THE EVANGELISTS.

By a comparison of the several writings of the Evangelists with one another, I think *coincidence without design* may be discovered in so many instances, as to go very far indeed towards fixing the truth of those writings on a foundation that cannot be shaken. On the nature of this argument I shall not much enlarge, but refer my readers for a general view of it to the short dissertation prefixed to the *Horæ Paulinæ* of Paley, a work where it is employed as a test of the veracity of St. Paul's Epistles with singular felicity and force, and for which suitable incidents were certainly much more abundant than those which my present subject provides; still, however, if the instances which I can offer are so numerous and of such a kind as to preclude the possibility of their being the effect

of accident, it is enough. It does not require many circumstantial coincidences to determine the mind of a jury as to the credibility of a witness in our courts, even where the life of a fellow-creature is at stake. I say this, not as a matter of charge, but as a matter of fact, indicating the authority which attaches to this species of evidence, and the confidence universally entertained that it cannot deceive. Neither should it be forgotten, that an argument thus popular, thus applicable to the affairs of common life as a test of truth, derives no small value, when enlisted in the cause of Christianity, from the readiness with which it is apprehended and admitted by mankind at large.

2. Nor is this all. The argument derived from coincidence without design has further claims, because, if well made out, it establishes the Evangelists as *independent* witnesses to the facts they relate; and this, whether they consulted each other's writings, as some maintain, or not; for the coincidences, if good for any thing, are such as *could not* result from combination, mutual understanding, or arrangement. If any which I may bring forward may seem to be such as might have so arisen, they are only to be reckoned ill chosen, and dismissed. *Undesignedness* must be

apparent in them, or they are not to the purpose. In our argument we defy four men to sit down together, to transmit their writings from one to another, and produce the like. Truths known independently of each of them, must be at the bottom of documents having such discrepancies and such agreements as these in question. The point, therefore, whether the Evangelists have or have not copied from one another, which has been so much labored, is thus rendered a matter of comparative indifference. Let them have so done, as the adversaries of Christianity might be disposed to insist, still by our argument would their independence be secured, and the nature of their testimony be shown to be such as could only result from their separate knowledge of substantial facts.

3. I will add another consideration which seems to me to deserve serious attention:— that in *several instances the probable truth of a miracle is involved in the coincidence*. This is a point which we should distinguish from the general drift of the argument itself. The general drift of our argument is this, that when we see the writers of the Gospels clearly telling the truth in those cases where we have the means of *checking* their accounts,—

when we see that they are artless, consistent, veracious writers, where we have the opportunity of examining the fact, it is reasonable to believe that they are telling the truth in those cases where we have not the means of checking them,—that they are veracious where we have not the means of putting them to the proof. But the argument I am now pressing is distinct from this. We are hereby called upon, not merely to assent that St. Matthew and St. Luke (for example) speak the truth when they record a miracle, because we know them to speak the truth in many other matters, (though this would be only reasonable, where there is no impeachment of their veracity whatever,) but we are called upon to believe a *particular* miracle, *because the very circumstances which attend it furnish the coincidence*. I look upon this as a point of very great importance, and I am therefore pleased that my first coincidence in order, happens to be one of this description.

I.

IN the fourth chapter of St. Matthew we read thus :—“ And Jesus walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon call-