

DAVID DALRYMPLE
1726-1793

An Inquiry into the Secondary Causes which Mr Gibbon has assigned for the Rapid Growth of Christianity. Edinburgh and London 1786. 4°.

Library of Trinity College, Cambridge: Crewe Bequest

C's signature on [front flyleaf](#) followed by the address "71, Berner's Street", and by a comment in another hand, "The MSS Notes by M^r Coleridge". Scribble in pencil on p 101, apparently unrelated to C's notes.

DATE: Between Apr 1812 and Dec 1813, when C lived with the Morgans at this address; in Dec 1813, they moved to Ashley in Wiltshire. During this time, C gave two series of lectures in London, on drama and on Shakespeare (among other topics) respectively, and another series in the west country—Bristol and Clifton. He also published the revised *Friend* and saw his play *Remorse* performed at Drury Lane.

There appears to be no other reference to David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, or to this work elsewhere in C's writings; the *Inquiry* will have been absorbed into C's extensive reading on the controversies surrounding Gibbon, the evidence for miracles, and the canonicity of the Book of Revelation—practically lifetime concerns for C. Dalrymple's work is a point-by-point refutation of arguments made in the notorious Chapters 15-16 of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, on the character of the early Christians and the rapid diffusion of their religion.

[1 p 9 | Ch 1](#)

This, however, is not all. The Jews could not associate "the elegant mythology of the Greeks with the institutions of Moses;" for the Greeks were Polytheists, and the Jews professed pure Theism. Now, I should wish to know, how the belief and worship of *many* gods could be harmoniously united with belief and worship of the *One* God? It is hard then to accuse that unfortunate people of sullenness and obstinacy, for not endeavouring to accomplish impossibilities.

Certainly not, when the Devotees, as in the case of the Papists, etc attribute (practically, at least) omnipresence to the minor Deities; but very easily, when, as among the ancients, the separate Gods were prayed to in separate places, & Venus believed to travel from the Top of Olympus to Cyprus in order to be present to the prayers of an expected assemblage. In this, as in most things, the Greek Mythology is more rational, than modern Romanism. S.T.C.

Had the Protestants, in contradiction to evidence, suffered themselves to be guided by their chief leaders, Luther and Calvin, they would not have shown any eagerness to seize “the advantage of turning the prophecies of that mysterious book [Rev] against the see of Rome.”

Luther at first rejected the authority of the Apocalypse, which the church of Rome herself acknowledged *. [Footnote:] * . . . By the favour of a worthy and eminent person, whom I am not at liberty to name, I have obtained from the Divinity Professor at Helmstadt the following accurate version of what Luther says of the Apocalypse in his first edition, 1522.

Praefatio Lutheri in Apocalypsin Johannis. Anno 1522.

“De hoc libro pariter suum cuique salvum relinquo iudicium, nec meam cuique sententiam aut opinionem obtrudere cupio. Tantùm declaro quid mihi videatur. Equidem plura desidero, cur neque Apostolicum censeam, neque Propheticum.* Primum, idque maximum, dubio inde oritur, quod Apostoli non visis inhaerere, sed perspicuis ac disertis verbis vaticinari solent, quemadmodum etiam Petrus, Paulus, Christus in evangelio; atque ita munus apostolicum decebat, perspicuè et citra imagines aut visa, de Christo et gestis ejus loqui.

[About this book . . . I leave everyone free to hold his own opinions. I would not have anyone bound to my opinion or judgment. I say what I feel. I miss more than one thing in this book, and it makes me consider it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic.*

First and foremost, the apostles do not deal with visions, but prophesy in clear and plain words, as do Peter and Paul, and Christ in the gospel. For it befits the apostolic office to speak clearly of Christ and his deeds . . .] [Translation from the Philadelphia edition of *Luther's Works* in 55 vols, Vol 35 (1960), ed. E. Theodore Bachmann.]

* an argument from Feeling, or Taste: i.e. A sensation of difference from what we know to be right. Thus, a right-hearted & sensible Woman, who has been in the habit of hearing exquisite Music, or of seeing the Pictures of the Great Masters, will (tho' she is quite ignorant of the Science & Art) instantly feel bad music, bad Painting, as bad—simply from the difference of or rather opposition of the impressions produced by the one & the other.¹—I can truly say, that my Doubts of the Apocalypse commenced in the same way—it was “primum”, tho' I should perhaps call it “maximum”²/ the strongest arguments in my opinion are—1. The uncertainty of the Date, from which the Prophet reckons (it being a Prophecy of years) & 2. The fact, that all Commentators agree that part of the Prophecy has been fulfilled—yet // opinions are as much divided with regard to the Past, as with regard to the Future. S.T.C.

² C was always ready to ascribe instinctive good taste (though not reasoned judgment) to women in general, as in his lecture of Nov 1813

(*LLects—CC—1* 594-5).

² “First”, perhaps “foremost”—from *textus*.

3 p 47, pencil | footnote

[Dalrymple quotes Luther:] “If the Scriptures ought always to be read with humility, modesty, and reverence, such a frame of mind is peculiarly requisite for the perusal of this book, that we may not sink into an abyss of vile dreams and fancies, as many inquisitive men have lately done, who imagine that they have searched out all those secrets which God hath reserved to himself, until he shall gradually disclose their meaning, so far as his own glory and our welfare require.”

idle, worthless, vilis = of small or no value: Teutonicè, “nichtswürdigen Träumen”¹

4 p 48, pencil

We may now conclude, from the evidence produced, that neither Luther nor Calvin ever used *this ally against the see of Rome*; and therefore Mr Gibbon will allow us to add some words to his proposition, and then it will run thus: “The advantage of turning those mysterious prophecies against the see of Rome, *was rejected or disregarded by Luther and Calvin, the chief leaders among the Protestants*; but it inspired the other Protestants with uncommon veneration for so useful an ally.”

not so! not “the other”; but some other Protestants—¹

5 p 48, pencil

The short matter is this: the Protestants in general, notwithstanding the doubts and reserve of their leaders, admitted the authority of the Apocalypse, as they found it fully and unambiguously established; and ^ it would have been the height of absurdity for them to have attempted to expel from the sacred canon, a book, whose prophecies seemed to justify their secession from the church of Rome.

^(this being the case)—i.e. the Truth being determined, what would have commanded their admission, even tho’ it had a semblance of opposition to their cause, it would have been absurd to have rejected it, when it was not only true authentic, but likewise most favourable to their cause.—This is what the author meant—he thought more logically, than he wrote. S.T.C.

6 p 57 | Ch 3, footnote

The only passage, with respect to the speaking with tongues, that occurs in any of the ancient Christian writers, is this of Irenaeus. Καθὼς καὶ πολλῶν ἀκουόμεν ἀδελφῶν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ προφητικὰ χαρίσματα ἐχόντων, καὶ παντοπαδαῖς

³ “In German, worthless dreams”.

⁴ Cf 2 textus.

λαλούντων διὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος γλώσσαις. . . . [Just as also we hear many brethren in the church who have the gifts of prophecy, and who speak through the Spirit with all manner of tongues (LCL)] ap. *Euseb. Hist. Eccles.* v 7. Supposing Irenaeus to have meant “that he himself had heard many of the brethren in the church speaking with tongues through the Spirit,” we must acknowledge his evidence to be in point, but still it would be single

May we dare hazard a conjecture, (which seems aided by “εχοντων &c” preceding “λαλουντων”) that “περι” is understood?¹ We hear of many Brethren having prophetic graces, & speaking &c”.—?—S.T.C.

7 p 67 | Ch 3

[Gibbon dismisses some of the reports of exorcism by the early Christians. Dalrymple concedes that those affected may have been insane rather than possessed, but maintains that such cures were nonetheless miraculous.] For it is no less a miracle to cure lunacy, at once, and by no other means but prayer, than it is to expel evil spirits. So . . . the primitive Christians more rarely expelled evil spirits, and more frequently cured natural diseases, than they are reported to have done.

Mighty things are said of *the power of imagination*; but that it should instantaneously restore lunatics to a sound mind, is something so very incredible . . . that he who can persuade himself to believe it, will have small cause for insulting the Christians on account of their easy faith!

This is the constant Sophism of the Θαυματαπιστων.¹ Suggest a natural Solution of any very unusual appearance (ex. gr. the spectre of a Troop of Cavalry, & Infantry that was seen by Hundreds at different places passing over Saddle-back in Cumberland at the very time that the Troops of the Pretender were crossing actually the breast of the Scotch Mountain) suggest the possibility of a series of reflections from Clouds & media of the densities, & the reply is, it is so very improbable!²—Verily, so it may be! but is not the event to be explained equally improbable, in this sense of the word? And is the solution by Spirits, & by the suspension or subversion of the Laws of Nature, more probable, (i.e. accordant with common experience) than an unusual co-existence & Co-action of natural Powers & operations?

⁶ “Having [gifts of prophecy]” preceding “speaking” (in textus), with “of” or “about” understood, C suggests.

⁷ “Those who believe in wonders”.

⁷ A notebook entry of 1818 includes this event as “One of 10,000 instances of the manner, in which the extraordinary grows by superaccretion into the inexplicable Miraculous”: *CN* III 4390.

[On pp 69-79, Dalrymple surveys the views of several commentators on a cure, recorded by Tertullian, worked by the Christian Proculus in the reign of the Emperor Severus: Severus “sought after Proculus . . . steward of Euhoda (or Euhodus)”, who had . . . cured him by oil” (69) and thereafter treated the Christians more leniently.] Notwithstanding the authority of Dr Middleton, Mr Gibbon, and many other writers, I incline to think that the cure was wrought, or supposed to have been wrought, on Euhodus, and not on Severus; and that Severus having heard of the relief which his favourite had obtained, sought after Proculus, and kept him about his person.

The words in Tertullian may as well imply, that Proculus cured Euhodus, as that he cured Severus.

When the phrase “Proculum requisivit” is considered, it seems inconsistent with the notion of Proculus having cured Severus himself. The Emperor, had he been cured by oil which Proculus administered, would have had no occasion to seek after or inquire for his physician.

“requisivit” means what the revolutionists in France called “put in requisition”.¹ He demanded him of his Master, desired that Proculus should be transferred to him. Who but a Scotchman would have rendered the word by “sought after him?” And who, but a Scotch Classic, could have ventured to refer “eum” to Euhodus, instead of Severus?--the modesty of obtruding “dus” for “da” without mss authority, out of the question. S.T.C.²

And what does this miracle amount to? A certain Christian Domestic had once on a time cured Severus of some complaint or other by means of Oil (as you or I might cure a Duke of a fit of the Colic by a dose of Castor Oil) & Severus was so much pleased that he desired his former Master to give him up, in order that he might keep him about his own Person. That is all!—Had Severus turned Christian in consequence, it might then be deduced, that the cure was, or at least appeared to Severus, miraculous. But no! He persecuted Christianity, in general, tho’ he interfered in favour of certain noble Persons of both sexes (clarissimis)³ tho’ he knew that they were Christians.—Exactly so, did James the I. & so did Charles the I. with

⁸ Parentheses replace square brackets of the original

⁸ The phrase (in textus) appears in a long note changed to “Euhodus”.
pp 69-70, translated as “sought after”.

⁸ “Very distinguished”: see following note.

⁸ For “eum” to refer to anyone other than Severus, the feminine “Euhoda” had to be

regard to Papists—“clarissimas foeminas et clarissimos viros, sciens huius sectae esse, non modo non laesit, sed populo furenti palam restitit.”⁴

9 p 76

* If Tertullian, who lived at the time when the cure was performed, *made no mention at all of a miracle*, it would be preposterous for us, in the eighteenth century, to discover more in the story than this, that Proculus cured Euhodus or Severus by oil.

*Who doubts that Tertullian thought it a miracle? What <cure> would he not think a miracle, if effected by a Christian per medicinam benedictam?¹ It is ever thus with the Methodists of the present Day—Wesley warns them not to attribute the Cure to the Drug, but to the Prayer of a the holy Physician, who blest & administered it—& in consequence, warns his followers to not to call any Physician, however celebrated, who was not one of the Saints²

10 p 81, pencil

[Dalrymple quotes Origen on the miracles of the Apostles, which brought them converts:] “. . . and *still* the vestiges of that Holy Spirit, which appeared in the likeness of a dove, are preserved among Christians; for they expel* demons” [foot-note:]* The word expel is used, although not a proper translation of ἐξεπάρδουσι. The verb ἐξεπάρδειν, however uncommon, is classical. Origen, on this occasion, has been more studious of the purity of his Greek, than of correctness in theological language. He ought not to^a have spoken of *charms*, or, rather, if the word may be admitted, of *decantations*.

* literally, “they disenchant = ἐξεπάρδειν.¹

10^a Error for “ought to”?

8⁴ C again quotes var from the Latin passage given in a footnote pp 69-70, translated thus on p 69: Severus “instead of doing harm to very distinguished persons of both sexes, whom he knew to be of that religion, gave a favourable testimony to them, and even openly set himself against the multitude, when raging against us”.

9¹ “With oil that has been blessed”: C takes the phrase (originally Jerome’s) from a long footnote pp 74-5 in which Dalrymple responds to an argument by Middleton and disputes Middleton’s translation, “consecrated oil”.

9² C is exaggerating Wesley’s position, at least as it was expressed in published works, but he

might have had in mind a passage in Wesley’s journal entry for 12 May, 1759, in which Wesley writes about disorders that appear to be caused or aggravated by states of mind, and suggests that in such cases, most physicians are out of their depth “[b]ecause they know not God. It follows, no man can be a thorough physician without being an experienced Christian.” *The Journal of John Wesley* (London 1906 repr 1922) II 448-9. “Extracts” from the *Journal* had been published piecemeal, mainly in Bristol, starting in 1739.

10¹ The verb means “charm away” or “soften by charms”: Dalrymple and C try to find a better English equivalent than that in textus.

11 p 89, pencil | footnote

. . . it may be fit to observe, that St Matthew asserts, that “he himself possessed the gift of miracles;” for he thus speaks: “And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, *he gave them power* over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease;” chap. x. i.

True! if Matthew wrote that Gospel & that Passage. But who does not know, that this is is a controverted point, however little doubtful I or You may think it? Neither can I consider it as altogether incontrovertible, that St Paul understood miracles of his own performance by “signs, & wonders, & mighty Deeds.”¹ Why not, the fates & providential aids, graces, & deliverances of the Corinthian Church founded & established by him & under his Apostolate? Is it not strange, that he should refer to particular acts, or if to them generally, yet oftner & less ambiguously?—that he should no one found any argument upon them? as, ex. gr. in the 15th Ch.²

12 p 173 | Ch 4

The quotation from the *Apology* of Tertullian is very obscure; or, to speak more properly, it is unintelligible*. [Footnote:] * “Christianus ad sexum nec foeminae mutat.” *Apol.* c. 46. Here some words have been either omitted or incorrectly copied by transcribers.

The barbarous Style of Tertullian may, perhaps, allow us to suppose that in this sentence, 1. the emphasis was layed on “us” in Christianus, and 2. that “ae” is a blunder of the copyist for “a”.¹ This admitted, the sense would be: A Christian is not affected by Sex, neither the Male = “us,” nor the female = foemina. So interpreted, the sentence would only amount to the common assertion, Souls have no Sex! an assertion, which I deny imo de pectore.² S.T.C.

P.S. God created man male & female, & hence Christ says, Marriage was in the Beginning.³

11¹ 2 Cor 12.12, “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.”

11² I.e. Matt 15, which recounts several of the miracles of Christ, including the cure of a woman possessed by a devil. In the last sentence, for “no one” read “not”?

12¹ The received reading is “Sexum nec femineum mutat Christianus”, tr Alex Smith (LCL) “Nor

does the Christian change the female sex [i.e. the natural use of the woman]”—square brackets in Smith. Tertullian echoes Paul in Rom 1.26.

12² “From the bottom of my heart.” C always did oppose the view that there is no sex in souls, for example in a letter of 1811, *CL* III 305; in *Friend* (CC) II 209; and in *BL* (CC) II 174.

12³ Matt 16.1-9.

[On pp 173-4, Dalrymple considers Tertullian's condemnation of second marriages:] The very first words of his treatise *de Monogamia* are, "The *heretics* take away marriage, the *carnal men* reiterate it; the former do not marry at all, the latter marry more than once."

By "the heretics," he is understood to mean the followers of Marcion; and there can be no doubt that the phrase "*carnal men*," describes those whom, in common language, we should call "orthodox Christians," that is, those who remained within the pale of the church, instead of following Tertullian, who held that Montanus was the Comforter (Paracletus)^a promised by our Lord.* [Footnote:] * It was bold in Tertullian thus to apply a phrase ["carnal men"], which St Paul uses to describe those who have no right to the name of Christians . . . i. Cor. ii. 14.

It would be amusing at least, and perhaps instructive, to reduce the Chaos of Opinions or Heresies, into distinct Classes: & then to note their apparent Death, or Suspended Animation, and their after resuscitation under different Circumstances, & therefore with different modifications.¹ Mahomet projected himself beyond the attraction of the Center, & became a temporary Center of himself—but Montanus, Swedenborg, Priestley &c &c are all Repetitions, Da Capos with variations ad libitum.² Montanus was to be the Comforter promised, Swedenborg the Elias of the actual Coming of the God-man, each having received a new revelation completing and enriching the preceding, while Priestley by a revelation of his Reasoning turns the whole topsy-turvy—or rather verifies (if Blasphemy can be verified) the old Song, "The King of France with 50,000 men walked march'd up the Hill, and then march'd down again."³ S.T.C.—

13^a Parentheses replace square brackets of the original

13¹ For C's general definition of "heresy" as "wilful error" with a calculated risk of schism, see SHERLOCK 10 and n 4.

13² I.e., as though following the musical direction "repeat from the beginning", Montanus, Swedenborg, and Priestley, for all their doctrinal differences, alike present themselves as precursors and prophets of the coming Messiah. Mohammed, on the other hand, presented himself as the last in a series of prophets—the culmination of a tradition and the one the others had been waiting for. C maintained, against some of the sects of the day, that Rev provided no "sanction" for "the fiction of the Millennium": FLEURY 31 and n 1.

13³ After his own Unitarian phase, C consistently rejected what he saw as the narrow rationalism of Priestley and his followers: CHILLINGWORTH COPY A 2 and n. Here he ridicules the inconsistency of Priestley's denying the divinity of Christ while accepting his Messiahship by invoking an "old Song"—or rather conflating two versions of it. The *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* ed I. A. and P. Opie describes "The King of France went up the hill/ With forty thousand men" as "a popular song in Charles I's time"; the more familiar figure of the Grand Old Duke of York, who "march'd" his men up and down, appears to be an 18th-century offshoot.

* This [“blends in eloquent confusion”] is an expression which Mr Gibbon employs in speaking of Burnet, the author of *the Theory of the Earth*, i. 565. and not without cause; for, in flowery language and bad reasoning, *that* work can hardly be paralleled.

not true! Burnet’s Discourse Diction is highly, energetic, picturesque, but always on a level with the Thoughts. Or if there are exceptions, it is when the words sink under the grandeur of his Conceptions.—As to his Reasoning, all wise men regard the work as a Poem, and for the Logic of Poetry, i.e. the generally plausible, his reasoning is excellent.¹ S.T.C.

[Dalrymple rejects Gibbon’s speculation that the early Christians, being barred from public office, found an outlet for their energies by “inventing ecclesiastical government.”] Experience does not lead us to the conclusion which Mr Gibbon has formed. The Menonites, for instance, and the people called *Quakers*, are debarred, by their principles, from civil offices; and they hold all war, defensive as well as offensive, to be unlawful; yet their love of action never excited them to undertake what the primitive Christians, in circumstances supposed to be similar, are said to have accomplished.

Much, very much, may be urged against this proof-by-example by Dalrymple. It seems to me almost demonstrable, that the admirable Imperium in Imperio¹ of the Quakers, must have before this time rendered them the supreme Power, if various contradictory effects of their Habits and Disciple^a had not each neutralized its opposite. Now among the Primitive Christians a similar Discipline prevailed, without the contradictions.²

15^a For “Discipline”, as in the following sentence

14¹ C thought so highly of the style of the Latin original of Burnet’s work (and so much disliked Burnet’s own translation into English) that in 1795 he planned to make a blank-verse translation: *CN* I 61. Cf *BL (CC)* II 14: “The writings of PLATO, and Bishop TAYLOR, and the *Theoria Sacra* of BURNET, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contradistinguishing objects of a poem.”

15¹ “An empire within an empire”.

15² C’s respect for the Quaker tradition was especially strong about the time of these notes, witness the *Friend* of 1809-10 and the revised version of 1812, where he maintains that if the population were as virtuous as the early Christians and as disciplined as the Society of Friends, “we should all be Quakers”: *Friend (CC)* I 244, II 169. Cf *MORE Theological Works* 17 n 1.

16 p 193 | Ch 5, footnote

This work of Mosheim [*De rebus christianorum ante Constantinum magnum commentarii*] is little known with us; and, therefore, it was judged proper to print the original passage at large, that it might be compared with the translation. It is no very easy task to render the verbose language of Mosheim into tolerable English.

a strange Censure from a verbose & dull Scotchman! I can see nothing verbose in the language of Mosheim here printed—& I believe, D. himself would be puzzled if called on to express the same thoughts in fewer words with equal clearness, & without the affectation of a the epigrammatic memorandum Style of Tacitus, Montesquieu, &c.—S.T.C.

17 p 199 | Ch 5

But Mr Gibbon, however zealous he may be to point out the completion of ancient prophecies, ought not to take it for granted, that they were literally fulfilled as to all particulars described in the figurative language of the Prophet Joel, who says, in the name of the Almighty, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions*.” [Footnote:] * *Joel*, ii. 28. The meaning of the prophecy, as explained by St Peter, is, “That the operations of the Holy Spirit shall be made manifest.”

There is a psychological Beauty in this Text of Joel’s which is not unworthy of Remark—the Meaning appears to be thus, that on the Efflux of the Spirit all the Faculties of good men shall be consecrated, & used to holy & spiritual Purposes. Your old men (whose Powers are in recollection & in words) shall dream dreams—(the characteristic of Old Age in all ages & Countries) and your young men (whose appropriate faculty is sensuous Imagination) shall see visions—but all to the furtherance of Truth & Edification. Even so do the great Masters in Painting & Statuary—old age is expressed but at the same time idealized & made beautiful—&c &c—Every thing is retained, yet all things glorified & rendered, as it were, unchangeable & eternal.

18 p 205

One circumstance, of which he [Gibbon] speaks, deserves more particular attention. It is thus expressed: “A generous intercourse of charity united the most distant provinces, and the smaller congregations were cheerfully assisted by the alms of their more opulent brethren. Such an institution, which paid less regard to the merit than to the distress of the object, very materially conduced to the progress of Christianity.” i.595. So far he says well. It was reasonable for humane Pagans, when they

saw the pious liberality of believers, to enquire into the nature and evidences of THE RELIGION OF LOVE. Such inquiries can never hurt the cause of Christianity, and, in general, are favourable to it. If, in this way, any Pagans were converted, their conversion might be said to have been owing to the virtues of the Christians.

D. should not have pass'd this sentence uncensured, which implies that merit was utterly out of the view of Christian Charity. No! Herein Christianity marked itself, that full of Mercy it took in the possible Future, as well as the unhappy Past—that it dared hope all things of human Nature if it were treated with human Love & Affection/ it heaped Coals of Fire on the Drossy Metal, in order to melt it down ~~in~~ to Purity that, which Hammering could only have broken to pieces. S.T.C.