

§ 3. The Range of the Illative Sense

GREAT as are the services of language in enabling us to extend the compass of our inferences, to test their validity, and to communicate them to others, still the mind itself is more versatile and vigorous than any of its works, of which language is one, and it is only under its penetrating and subtle action that the margin disappears, which I have described as intervening between verbal argumentation and conclusions in the concrete. It determines what science cannot determine, the limit of converging probabilities and the reasons sufficient for a proof. It is the ratiocinative mind itself, and no trick of art, however simple in its form and sure in operation, by which we are able to determine, and thereupon to be certain, that a moving body left to itself will never stop, and that no man can live without eating.

Nor, again, is it by any diagram that we are able to scrutinize, sort, and combine the many premisses which must be first run together before we answer duly a given question. It is to the living mind that we must look for the means of using correctly principles of whatever kind, facts or doctrines, experiences or testimonies, true or probable, and of discerning what conclusion {361} from these is necessary, suitable, or expedient, when they are taken for granted; and this, either by means of a natural gift, or from mental formation and practice and a long familiarity with those various starting-points. Thus, when Laud said that he did not see his way to come to terms with the Holy See, "till Rome was other than she was," no Catholic would admit the sentiment: but any Catholic may understand that this is just the judgment consistent with Laud's actual condition of thought and cast of opinions, his ecclesiastical position, and the existing state of England.

Nor, lastly, is an action of the mind itself less necessary in relation to those first elements of thought which in all reasoning are assumptions, the principles, tastes, and opinions, very often of a personal character, which are half the battle in the inference with which the reasoning is to terminate. It is the mind itself that detects them in their obscure recesses, illustrates them, establishes them, eliminates them, resolves them into simpler ideas, as the case may be. The mind contemplates them without the use of words, by a process which cannot be analyzed. Thus it was that Bacon separated the physical system of the world from the theological; thus that Butler connected together the moral system with the religious. Logical formulas could never have sustained the reasonings involved in such investigations.

Thus the Illative Sense, that is, the reasoning faculty, as exercised by gifted, or by educated or otherwise well-prepared minds, has its function in the beginning, middle, and end of all verbal discussion and inquiry, and in every step of the process. It is a rule to itself, {362} and appeals to no judgment beyond its own; and attends upon the whole course of thought from antecedents to consequents, with a minute diligence and unwearied presence, which is impossible to a cumbrous apparatus of verbal reasoning, though, in communicating with others, words are the only instrument we possess, and a serviceable, though imperfect instrument.

One function indeed there is of Logic, to which I have referred in the preceding sentence, which the Illative Sense does not and cannot perform. It supplies no common measure between mind and mind, as being nothing else than a personal gift or acquisition. Few there are, as I said above, who are good reasoners on all subject-matters. Two men, who reason well each in his own province of thought, may, one or both of them, fail and pronounce opposite judgments on a question belonging to some third province. Moreover, all reasoning being from premisses, and those premisses arising (if it so happen) in their first elements from personal characteristics, in which men are in fact in essential and irremediable variance one with another, the ratiocinative talent can do no more than point out where the difference between them lies, how far it is immaterial, when it is worth while continuing an argument between them, and when not.

Now of the three main occasions of the exercise of the Illative Sense, which I have been insisting on, and which are the measure of its range, the start, the course, and the issue of an inquiry, I have already, in treating of Informal Inference, shown the place it holds in the final resolution of concrete questions. Here then it is left to {363} me to illustrate its presence and action in relation to the elementary premisses, and, again, to the conduct of an argument. And first of the latter.

1.

There has been a great deal written of late years on the subject of the state of Greece and Rome during the pre-historic period; let us say before the Olympiads in Greece, and the war with Pyrrhus in the annals of Rome. Now, in a question like this, it is plain that the inquirer has first of all to decide on the point from which he is to start in the presence of the received accounts; on what side, from what quarter he is to approach them; on what principles his discussion is to be conducted; what he is to assume, what opinions or objections he is summarily to put aside as nugatory, what arguments, and when, he is to consider as apposite, what false issues are to be avoided, when the state of his arguments is ripe for a conclusion. Is he to commence with absolutely discarding all that has hitherto been received; or to retain it in outline; or to make selections from it; or to consider and interpret it as mythical, or as allegorical; or to hold so much to be trustworthy, or at least of *primâ facie* authority, as he cannot actually disprove; or never to destroy except in proportion as he can construct? Then, as to the kind of arguments suitable or admissible, how far are tradition, analogy, isolated monuments and records, ruins, vague reports, legends, the facts or sayings of later times, language, popular proverbs, to tell in the inquiry? what are marks of truth, {364} what of falsehood, what is probable, what suspicious, what promises well for discriminating facts from fictions? Then, arguments have to be balanced against each other, and then lastly the decision is to be made, whether any conclusion at all can be drawn, or whether any before certain issues are tried and settled, or whether a probable conclusion or a certain. It is plain how incessant will be the call here or there for the exercise of a definitive judgment, how little that judgment will be helped on by logic, and how intimately it will be dependent upon the intellectual complexion of the writer.

This might be illustrated at great length, were it necessary, from the writings of any of those able men, whose names are so well known in connexion with the subject I have instanced; such as Niebuhr, Mr. Clinton, Sir George Lewis, Mr. Grote, and Colonel Mure. These authors have severally views of their own on the period of history which they have selected for investigation, and they are too learned and logical not to know and to use to the utmost the testimonies by which the facts which they investigate are to be ascertained. Why then do they differ so much from each other, whether in their estimate of those testimonies or of those facts? because that estimate is simply their own, coming of their own judgment; and that judgment coming of assumptions of their own, explicit or implicit; and those assumptions spontaneously issuing out of the state of thought respectively belonging to each of them; and all these successive processes of minute reasoning superintended and directed by an intellectual instrument far too subtle and spiritual to be scientific. {365}

What was Niebuhr's idea of the office he had undertaken? I suppose it was to accept what he found in the historians of Rome, to interrogate it, to take it to pieces, to put it together again, to re-arrange and interpret it. Prescription together with internal consistency was to him the evidence of fact, and if he pulled down he felt he was bound to build up. Very different is the spirit of another school of writers, with whom prescription is nothing, and who will admit no evidence which has not first proved its right to be admitted. "We are able," says Niebuhr, "to trace the history of the Roman constitution back to the beginning of the Commonwealth, as accurately as we wish, and even more perfectly than the history of many portions of the middle ages." But, "we may rejoice," says Sir George Lewis, "that the ingenuity or learning of Niebuhr should have enabled him to advance many noble hypotheses and conjectures respecting the form of the early constitution of Rome, but, unless he can support those hypotheses by sufficient evidence, they are not entitled to our belief." "Niebuhr," says a writer nearly related to myself, "often expresses much contempt for mere incredulous criticism and negative conclusions; ... yet wisely to disbelieve is our first grand requisite in dealing with materials of mixed worth." And Sir George Lewis again, "It may be said that there is scarcely any of the leading conclusions of Niebuhr's work which has not been impugned by some subsequent writer."

Again, "It is true," says Niebuhr, "that the Trojan war belongs to the region of fable, yet undeniably it has an historical foundation." But Mr. Grote writes, "If {366} we are asked whether the Trojan war is not a legend ... raised upon a basis of truth, ... our answer must be, that, as the possibility of it cannot be denied, so neither can the reality of it be affirmed." On the other hand, Mr. Clinton lays down the general rule, "We may acknowledge as real persons, all those whom there is no reason for rejecting. The presumption is in favour of the early tradition, if no argument can be brought to overthrow it." Thus he lodges the *onus probandi* with those who impugn the received accounts; but Mr. Grote and Sir George Lewis throw it upon those who defend them. "Historical evidence," says the latter, "is founded on the testimony of credible witnesses." And again, "It is perpetually assumed in practice, that historical evidence is different in its nature from other sorts of evidence. This laxity seems to be justified by the doctrine of taking the best evidence which can be obtained. The object of [my]

inquiry will be to apply to the early Roman history the same rules of evidence which are applied by common consent to modern history." Far less severe is the judgment of Colonel Mure: "Where no positive historical proof is affirmable, the balance of historical probability must reduce itself very much to a reasonable indulgence to the weight of national conviction, and a deference to the testimony of the earliest native authorities." "Reasonable indulgence" to popular belief, "deference" to ancient tradition, are principles of writing history abhorrent to the judicial temper of Sir George Lewis. He considers the words "reasonable indulgence" to be "ambiguous," and observes that "the very point {367} which cannot be taken for granted, and in which writers differ, is, as to the extent to which contemporary attestation may be presumed without direct and positive proof, ... the extent to which the existence of a popular belief concerning a supposed matter of fact authorizes the inference that it grew out of authentic testimony." And Mr. Grote observes to the same effect: "The word *tradition* is an equivocal word, and begs the whole question. It is tacitly understood to imply a tale descriptive of some real matter of fact, taking rise at the time when the fact happened, originally accurate, but corrupted by oral transmission." And Lewis, who quotes the passage, adds, "This *tacit understanding* is the key-stone of the whole argument."

I am not contrasting these various opinions of able men, who have given themselves to historical research, as if it were any reflection on them that they differ from each other. It is the cause of their differing on which I wish to insist. Taking the facts by themselves, probably these authors would come to no conclusion at all; it is the "tacit understandings" which Mr. Grote speaks of, the vague and impalpable notions of "reasonableness" on his own side as well as on that of others, which both make conclusions possible, and are the pledge of their being contradictory. The conclusions vary with the particular writer, for each writes from his own point of view and with his own principles, and these admit of no common measure.

This in fact is their own account of the matter: "The results of speculative historical inquiry," says {368} Colonel Mure, "can rarely amount to more than fair presumption of the reality of the events in question, as limited to their general substance, not as extending to their details. Nor can there consequently be expected in the minds of different inquirers any such unity regarding the precise degree of reality, as may frequently exist in respect to events attested by documentary evidence." Mr. Grote corroborates this decision by the striking instance of the diversity of existing opinions concerning the Homeric Poems. "Our means of knowledge," he says, "are so limited, that no one can produce arguments sufficiently cogent to contend against opposing preconceptions, and it creates a painful sensation of diffidence, when we read the expressions of equal and absolute persuasion with which the two opposite conclusions have both been advanced." And again, "There is a difference of opinion among the best critics, which is probably not destined to be adjusted, since so much depends partly upon critical feeling, partly upon the general reasonings in respect to ancient epical unity, with which a man sits down to the study." Exactly so; every one has his own "critical feeling," his antecedent "reasonings," and in consequence his own "absolute persuasion," coming in fresh and fresh at every turn of the discussion; and who,

170 whether stranger or friend, is to reach and affect what is so intimately bound up with the
171 mental constitution of each?

172 Hence the categorical contradictions between one writer and another, which abound.
173 Colonel Mure appeals in defence of an historical thesis to the "fact {369} of the Hellenic
174 confederacy combining for the adoption of a common national system of chronology in
175 776 B.C." Mr. Grote replies: "Nothing is more at variance with my conception,"—he just
176 now spoke of the preconceptions of others,—"of the state of the Hellenic world in
177 776 B.C., than the idea of a combination among all the members of the race for any
178 purpose, much more for the purpose of adopting a common national system of
179 chronology." Colonel Mure speaks of the "bigoted Athenian public;" Mr. Grote replies
180 that "no public ever less deserved the epithet of 'bigoted' than the Athenian." Colonel
181 Mure also speaks of Mr. Grote's "arbitrary hypothesis;" and again (in Mr. Grote's words),
182 of his "unreasonable scepticism." He cannot disprove by mere argument the
183 conclusions of Mr. Grote; he can but have recourse to a personal criticism. He virtually
184 says, "We differ in our personal view of things." Men become personal when logic fails;
185 it is their mode of appealing to their own primary elements of thought, and their own
186 illative sense, against the principles and the judgment of another.

187 I have already touched upon Niebuhr's method of investigation, and Sir George Lewis's
188 dislike of it: it supplies us with as apposite an instance of a difference in first principles
189 as is afforded by Mr. Grote and Colonel Mure. "The main characteristic of his history,"
190 says Lewis, "is the extent to which he relies upon internal evidence, and upon the
191 indications afforded by the narrative itself, independently of the testimony of its truth."
192 And, "Ingenuity and labour can produce {370} nothing but hypotheses and conjectures,
193 which may be supported by analogies, but can never rest upon the solid foundation of
194 proof." And it is undeniable, that, rightly or wrongly, disdaining the scepticism of the
195 mere critic, Niebuhr does consciously proceed by the high path of divination. "For my
196 own part," he says, "I *divine* that, since the censorship of Fabius and Decius falls in the
197 same year, that Cn. Flavius became mediator between his own class and the higher
198 orders." Lewis considers this to be a process of guessing; and says, "Instead of
199 employing those tests of credibility which are consistently applied to modern history,"
200 Niebuhr, and his followers, and most of his opponents, "attempt to guide their judgment
201 by the indication of internal evidence, and assume that the truth is discovered by an
202 occult faculty of historical divination." Niebuhr defends himself thus: "The real
203 geographer has a tact which determines his judgment and choice among different
204 statements. He is able from isolated statements to draw inferences respecting things
205 that are unknown, which are closely approximate to results obtained from observation of
206 facts, and may supply their place. He is able with limited data to form an image of things
207 which no eye-witness has described." He applies this to himself. The principle set forth
208 in this passage is obviously the same as I should myself advocate; but Sir George
209 Lewis, though not simply denying it as a principle, makes little account of it, when
210 applied to historical research. "It is not enough," he says, "for an historian to claim the
211 possession of a retrospective second-sight, which is denied {371} to the rest of the
212 world—of a mysterious doctrine, revealed only to the initiated." And he pronounces, that
213 "the history of Niebuhr has opened more questions than it has closed, and it has set in

214 motion a large body of combatants, whose mutual variances are not at present likely to
215 be settled by deference to a common principle." [Note 2]

216 We see from the above extracts how a controversy, such as that to which they belong,
217 is carried on from starting-points, and with collateral aids, not formally proved, but more
218 or less assumed, the process of assumption lying in the action of the Illative Sense, as
219 applied to primary elements of thought respectively congenial to the disputants. Not that
220 explicit argumentation on these minute or minor, though important, points is not
221 sometimes possible to a certain extent; but, as I have said, it is too unwieldy an
222 expedient for a constantly recurring need, even when it is tolerably exact.

2.

223 And now secondly, as to the first principles themselves. In illustration, I will mention
224 under separate heads some of those elementary contrarieties of opinion, on which the
225 Illative Sense has to act, discovering them, following them out, defending or resisting
226 them, as the case may be.

227 1. As to the statement of the case. This depends on {372} the particular aspect under
228 which we view a subject, that is, on the abstraction which forms our representative
229 notion of what it is. Sciences are only so many distinct aspects of nature; sometimes
230 suggested by nature itself, sometimes created by the mind. (1) One of the simplest and
231 broadest aspects under which to view the physical world, is that of a system of final
232 causes, or, on the other hand, of initial or effective causes. Bacon, having it in view to
233 extend our power over nature, adopted the latter. He took firm hold of the idea of
234 causation (in the common sense of the word) as contrasted with that of design, refusing
235 to mix up the two ideas in one inquiry, and denouncing such traditional interpretations of
236 facts, as did but obscure the simplicity of the aspect necessary for his purpose. He saw
237 what others before him might have seen in what they saw, but who did not see as he
238 saw it. In this achievement of intellect, which has been so fruitful in results, lie his genius
239 and his fame.

240 (2) So again, to refer to a very different subject-matter, we often hear of the exploits of
241 some great lawyer, judge or advocate, who is able in perplexed cases, when common
242 minds see nothing but a hopeless heap of facts, foreign or contrary to each other, to
243 detect the principle which rightly interprets the riddle, and, to the admiration of all
244 hearers, converts a chaos into an orderly and luminous whole. This is what is meant by
245 originality in thinking: it is the discovery of an aspect of a subject-matter, simpler, it may
246 be, and more intelligible than any hitherto taken.

247 (3) On the other hand, such aspects are often unreal, {373} as being mere exhibitions of
248 ingenuity, not of true originality of mind. This is especially the case in what are called
249 philosophical views of history. Such seems to me the theory advocated in a work of
250 great learning, vigour, and acuteness, Warburton's "Divine Legation of Moses." I do not
251 call Gibbon merely ingenious; still his account of the rise of Christianity is the mere
252 subjective view of one who could not enter into its depth and power.

253 (4) The aspect under which we view things is often intensely personal; nay, even awfully
254 so, considering that, from the nature of the case, it does not bring home its idiosyncrasy
255 either to ourselves or to others. Each of us looks at the world in his own way, and does
256 not know that perhaps it is characteristically his own. This is the case even as regards
257 the senses. Some men have little perception of colours; some recognize one or two; to
258 some men two contrary colours, as red and green, are one and the same. How poorly
259 can we appreciate the beauties of nature, if our eyes discern, on the face of things, only
260 an Indian-ink or a drab creation!

261 (5) So again, as regards form: each of us abstracts the relation of line to line in his own
262 personal way,—as one man might apprehend a curve as convex, another as concave.
263 Of course, as in the case of a curve, there may be a limit to possible aspects; but still,
264 even when we agree together, it is not perhaps that we learn one from another, or fall
265 under any law of agreement, but that our separate idiosyncrasies happen to concur. I
266 fear I may seem trifling, if I allude to an illustration which has ever had a great force with
267 me, and that {374} for the very reason it is so trivial and minute. Children, learning to
268 read, are sometimes presented with the letters of the alphabet turned into the figures of
269 men in various attitudes. It is curious to observe from such representations, how
270 differently the shape of the letters strikes different minds. In consequence I have
271 continually asked the question in a chance company, which way certain of the great
272 letters look, to the right or the left; and whereas nearly every one present had his own
273 clear view, so clear that he could not endure the opposite view, still I have generally
274 found that one half of the party considered the letters in question to look to the left, while
275 the other half thought they looked to the right.

276 (6) This variety of interpretation in the very elements of outlines seems to throw light
277 upon other cognate differences between one man and another. If they look at the mere
278 letters of the alphabet so differently, we may understand how it is they form such distinct
279 judgments upon handwriting; nay, how some men may have a talent for deciphering
280 from it the intellectual and moral character of the writer, which others have not. Another
281 thought that occurs is, that perhaps here lies the explanation why it is that family
282 likenesses are so variously recognized, and how mistakes in identity may be
283 dangerously frequent.

284 (7) If we so variously apprehend the familiar objects of sense, still more various, we may
285 suppose, are the aspects and associations attached by us, one with another, to
286 intellectual objects. I do not say we differ in the objects themselves, but that we may
287 have interminable {375} differences as to their relations and circumstances. I have
288 heard say (again to take a trifling matter) that at the beginning of this century, it was a
289 subject of serious, nay, of angry controversy, whether it began with January 1800, or
290 January 1801. Argument, which ought, if in any case, to have easily brought the
291 question to a decision, was but sprinkling water upon a flame. I am not clear that, if it
292 could be fairly started now, it would not lead to similar results; certainly I know those
293 who studiously withdraw from giving an opinion on the subject, when it is accidentally
294 mooted, from their experience of the eager feeling which it is sure to excite in some one

295 or other who is present. This eagerness can only arise from an overpowering sense that
296 the truth of the matter lies in the one alternative, and not in the other.

297 These instances, because they are so casual, suggest how it comes to pass, that men
298 differ so widely from each other in religious and moral perceptions. Here, I say again, it
299 does not prove that there is no objective truth, because not all men are in possession of
300 it; or that we are not responsible for the associations which we attach, and the relations
301 which we assign, to the objects of the intellect. But this it does suggest to us, that there
302 is something deeper in our differences than the accident of external circumstances; and
303 that we need the interposition of a Power, greater than human teaching and human
304 argument, to make our beliefs true and our minds one.

305 2. Next I come to the implicit assumption of definite propositions in the first start of a
306 course of reasoning, and the arbitrary exclusion of others, of whatever kind. {376}
307 Unless we had the right, when we pleased, of ruling that propositions were irrelevant or
308 absurd, I do not see how we could conduct an argument at all; our way would be simply
309 blocked up by extravagant principles and theories, gratuitous hypotheses, false issues,
310 unsupported statements, and incredible facts. There are those who have treated the
311 history of Abraham as an astronomical record, and have spoken of our Adorable
312 Saviour as the sun in *Aries*. Arabian Mythology has changed Solomon into a mighty
313 wizard. Noah has been considered the patriarch of the Chinese people. The ten tribes
314 have been pronounced still to live in their descendants, the Red Indians; or to be the
315 ancestors of the Goths and Vandals, and thereby of the present European races. Some
316 have conjectured that the Apollos of the Acts of the Apostles was Apollonius Tyaneus.
317 Able men have reasoned out, almost against their will, that Adam was a negro. These
318 propositions, and many others of various kinds, we should think ourselves justified in
319 passing over, if we were engaged in a work on sacred history; and there are others, on
320 the contrary, which we should assume as true by our own right and without notice, and
321 without which we could not set about or carry on our work.

322 (1) However, the right of making assumptions has been disputed; but, when the
323 objections are examined, I think they only go to show that we have no right in argument
324 to make any assumption we please. Thus, in the historical researches which just now
325 came before us, it seems fair to say that no testimony should be received, except such
326 as comes from competent witnesses, while it is not unfair to urge, on the other side, that
327 {377} tradition, though unauthenticated, being (what is called) in possession, has a
328 prescription in its favour, and may, *primâ facie*, or provisionally, be received. Here are
329 the materials of a fair dispute; but there are writers who seem to have gone far beyond
330 this reasonable scepticism, laying down as a general proposition that we have no right
331 in philosophy to make any assumption whatever, and that we ought to begin with a
332 universal doubt. This, however, is of all assumptions the greatest, and to forbid
333 assumptions universally is to forbid this one in particular. Doubt itself is a positive state,
334 and implies a definite habit of mind, and thereby necessarily involves a system of
335 principles and doctrines all its own. Again, if nothing is to be assumed, what is our very
336 method of reasoning but an assumption? and what our nature itself? The very sense of

337 pleasure and pain, which is one of the most intimate portions of ourselves, inevitably
338 translates itself into intellectual assumptions.

339 Of the two, I would rather have to maintain that we ought to begin with believing
340 everything that is offered to our acceptance, than that it is our duty to doubt of
341 everything. The former, indeed, seems the true way of learning. In that case, we soon
342 discover and discard what is contradictory to itself; and error having always some
343 portion of truth in it, and the truth having a reality which error has not, we may expect,
344 that when there is an honest purpose and fair talents, we shall somehow make our way
345 forward, the error falling off from the mind, and the truth developing and occupying it.
346 Thus it is that the Catholic religion is {378} reached, as we see, by inquirers from all
347 points of the compass, as if it mattered not where a man began, so that he had an eye
348 and a heart for the truth.

349 (2) An argument has been often put forward by unbelievers, I think by Paine, to this
350 effect, that "a revelation, which is to be received as true, ought to be written on the sun."
351 This appeals to the common-sense of the many with great force, and implies the
352 assumption of a principle which Butler, indeed, would not grant, and would consider
353 unphilosophical, and yet I think something may be said in its favour. Whether
354 abstractedly defensible or not, Catholic populations would not be averse, *mutatis*
355 *mutandis*, to admitting it. Till these last centuries, the Visible Church was, at least to her
356 children, the light of the world, as conspicuous as the sun in the heavens; and the
357 Creed was written on her forehead, and proclaimed through her voice, by a teaching as
358 precise as it was emphatical; in accordance with the text, "Who is she that looketh forth
359 at the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?" It was
360 not, strictly speaking, a miracle, doubtless; but in its effect, nay, in its circumstances, it
361 was little less. Of course I would not allow that the Church fails in this manifestation of
362 the truth now, any more than in former times, though the clouds have come over the
363 sun; for what she has lost in her appeal to the imagination, she has gained in
364 philosophical cogency, by the evidence of her persistent vitality. So far is clear, that if
365 Paine's aphorism has a *primâ facie* force against Christianity, it owes this advantage to
366 the miserable deeds of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. {379}

367 (3) Another conflict of first principles or assumptions, which have often been implicit on
368 either side, has been carried through in our day, and relates to the end and scope of
369 civil society, that is, whether government and legislation ought to be of a religious
370 character, or not; whether the state has a conscience; whether Christianity is the law of
371 the land; whether the magistrate, in punishing offenders, exercises a retributive office or
372 a corrective; or whether the whole structure of society is raised upon the basis of
373 secular expediency. The relation of philosophy and the sciences to theology comes into
374 the question. The old time-honoured theory has, during the last forty years, been
375 vigorously contending with the new; and the new is in the ascendant.

376 (4) There is another great conflict of first principles, and that among Christians, which
377 has occupied a large space in our domestic history, during the last thirty or forty years,
378 and that is the controversy about the Rule of Faith. I notice it as affording an instance of

an assumption so deeply sunk into the popular mind, that it is a work of great difficulty to obtain from its maintainers an acknowledgment that it is an assumption. That Scripture is the Rule of Faith is in fact an assumption so congenial to the state of mind and course of thought usual among Protestants, that it seems to them rather a truism than a truth. If they are in controversy with Catholics on any point of faith, they at once ask, "Where do you find it in Scripture?" and if Catholics reply, as they must do, that it is not necessarily in Scripture in order to be true, nothing can persuade them that such an answer is not an evasion, and a triumph to themselves. Yet it is by no means self-evident {380} that all religious truth is to be found in a number of works, however sacred, which were written at different times, and did not always form one book; and in fact it is a doctrine very hard to prove. So much so, that years ago, when I was considering it from a Protestant point of view, and wished to defend it to the best of my power, I was unable to give any better account of it than the following, which I here quote from its appositeness to my present subject.

"It matters not," I said, speaking of the first Protestants, "whether or not they only happened to come right on what, in a logical point of view, are faulty premisses. They had no time for theories of any kind; and to require theories at their hand argues an ignorance of human nature, and of the ways in which truth is struck out in the course of life. Common sense, chance, moral perception, genius, the great discoverers of principles do not reason. They have no arguments, no grounds, they see the truth, but they do not know how they see it; and if at any time they attempt to prove it, it is as much a matter of experiment with them, as if they had to find a road to a distant mountain, which they see with the eye; and they get entangled, embarrassed, and perchance overthrown in the superfluous endeavour. It is the second-rate men, though most useful in their place, who prove, reconcile, finish, and explain. Probably, the popular feeling of the sixteenth century saw the Bible to be the Word of God, so as nothing else is His Word, by the power of a strong sense, by a sort of moral instinct, or by a happy augury." [Note 3]

That is, I considered the assumption an act of the {381} Illative Sense;—I should now add, the Illative Sense, acting on mistaken elements of thought.

3. After the aspects in which a question is to be viewed, and the principles on which it is to be considered, come the arguments by which it is decided; among these are antecedent reasons, which are especially in point here, because they are in great measure made by ourselves and belong to our personal character, and to them I shall confine myself.

Antecedent reasoning, when negative, is safe. Thus no one would say that, because Alexander's rash heroism is one of the leading characteristics of his history, therefore we are justified, except in writing a romance, in asserting that at a particular time and place, he distinguished himself by a certain exploit about which history is altogether silent; but, on the other hand, his notorious bravery would be almost decisive against any charge against him of having on a particular occasion acted as a coward.

In like manner, good character goes far in destroying the force of even plausible charges. There is indeed a degree of evidence in support of an allegation, against which reputation is no defence; but it must be singularly strong to overcome an established antecedent probability which stands opposed to it. Thus historical personages or great authors, men of high and pure character, have had imputations cast upon them, easy to make, difficult or impossible to meet, which are indignantly trodden under foot by all just and sensible men, as being as anti-social as they are inhuman. I need not add what a cruel and despicable part a husband or a son would play, who readily {382} listened to a charge against his wife or his father. Yet all this being admitted, a great number of cases remain which are perplexing, and on which we cannot adjust the claims of conflicting and heterogeneous arguments except by the keen and subtle operation of the Illative Sense.

Butler's argument in his *Analogy* is such a presumption used negatively. Objection being brought against certain characteristics of Christianity, he meets it by the presumption in their favour derived from their parallels as discoverable in the order of nature, arguing that they do not tell against the Divine origin of Christianity, unless they tell against the Divine origin of the natural system also. But he could not adduce it as a positive and direct proof of the Divine origin of the Christian doctrines that they had their parallels in nature, or at the utmost as more than a recommendation of them to the religious inquirer.

Unbelievers use the antecedent argument from the order of nature against our belief in miracles. Here, if they only mean that the fact of that system of laws, by which physical nature is governed, makes it antecedently improbable that an exception should occur in it, there is no objection to the argument; but if, as is not uncommon, they mean that the fact of an established order is absolutely fatal to the very notion of an exception, they are using a presumption as if it were a proof. They are saying,—What has happened 999 times one way cannot possibly happen on the 1000th time another way, because what has happened 999 times one way is likely to happen in the same way on the 1000th. But unlikely things do happen sometimes. If, however, they mean that the existing order {383} of nature constitutes a physical necessity, and that a law is an unalterable fact, this is to assume the very point in debate, and is much more than asserting its antecedent probability.

Facts cannot be proved by presumptions, yet it is remarkable that in cases where nothing stronger than presumption was even professed, scientific men have sometimes acted as if they thought this kind of argument, taken by itself, decisive of a fact which was in debate. Thus in the controversy about the Plurality of worlds, it has been considered, on purely antecedent grounds, as far as I see, to be so necessary that the Creator should have filled with living beings the luminaries which we see in the sky, and the other cosmical bodies which we imagine there, that it almost amounts to a blasphemy to doubt it.

Theological conclusions, it is true, have often been made on antecedent reasonings; but then it must be recollected that theological reasoning professes to be sustained by a

462 more than human power, and to be guaranteed by a more than human authority. It may
463 be true, also, that conversions to Christianity have often been made on antecedent
464 reasons; yet, even admitting the fact, which is not quite clear, a number of antecedent
465 probabilities, confirming each other, may make it a duty in the judgment of a prudent
466 man, not only to act as if a statement were true, but actually to accept and believe it.
467 This is not unfrequently instanced in our dealings with others, when we feel it right, in
468 spite of our misgivings, to oblige ourselves to believe their honesty. And in all these
469 delicate questions there is constant call for the exercise of the Illative Sense.

470 1. Though Aristotle, in his Nicomachean Ethics, speaks of [*phronesis*] as the virtue of
471 the [*doxastikon*] generally, and as being concerned generally with contingent matter (vi.
472 4), or what I have called the concrete, and of its function being, as regards that matter,
473 [*aletheuein toi kataphanai e apophanai*] (*ibid.* 3), he does not treat of it in that work in its
474 general relation to truth and the affirmation of truth, but only as it bears upon [*ta prakta*].

475 2. Niebuhr, "Roman History," vol. i. p. 177; vol. iii. pp. 262, 318, 322. "Lectures," vol. iii.
476 App. p. xxii. Lewis, "Roman History," vol. i. pp. 11-17; vol. ii. pp. 489-492. F. W.
477 Newman, "Regal Rome," p. v. Grote, "Greece," vol. ii. pp. 67, 68, 218, 630-639. Mure,
478 "Greece," vol. iii. p. 503; vol. iv. p. 318. Clinton, ap. Grote, *suprà*.
479 Return to text

480 3. "Prophetical Office of the Church," pp. 347, 348, ed. 1837.