

turies after Christ—such, for example, as the true cross, the cradle in which the infant Jesus lay, the clothes in which he was wrapped up, and the table on which the last Supper was laid? The Puritans also believed, as do their descendants, that they were suffering in the cause of religious truth, and this feeling may have imparted additional sanctity to all memorials of their exile and adventures; yet how incomparably greater must have been the veneration felt by the early Christians for all that belonged to their divine teacher!" These observations led me to dwell on the relative authenticity of the relics in the two cases—the clearness of the historical evidence in the one, its worthlessness in the other. It has been truly said that the strength of every chain of historical testimony, like that of a chain of brass or iron, must be measured by the force of its weakest link. The earliest links in every traditional tale are usually the weakest; but in the case of the sacred objects said to have been obtained by Queen Helena, there are more links absolutely wanting, or a greater chasm of years without any records whatever, than the whole period which separates our times from those of the Pilgrim Fathers. The credulity of Helena, the notorious impostures of the monks of her age, the fact that three centuries elapsed before it was pretended that the true cross had been preserved, and another century before it was proved to be genuine by miracles, and a still further lapse of time before all doubt was set at rest by the resuscitation of a dead person—the extravagance of supposing that the Christians, when they escaped with difficulty from Jerusalem, just before the siege, should have carried with them in their flight so cumbersome a piece of furniture as the table, have all been well exposed.* But in regard to the genuineness of all the Pilgrim treasures shown me at Plymouth and elsewhere I indulged entire faith, until one day my confidence was disturbed in the Museum at Salem. A piece of furniture which came over in the Mayflower was pointed out to me, and the antiquary who was my guide remarked, that as the wood of the true cross, scattered over Christendom, has been said to be plentiful enough to build a man-of-war, so it might be doubted whether a ship of the line would

* *Second Travels of an Irish Gentleman*, 1833, vol. ii. p. 186.