

evidence of a record for some bygone event is distinct from that of our senses. We might have documentary information as to the precise year of the building of a house, or we might be satisfied by marks and appearances of which we have the immediate eyesight, that it was built within the last century. In like manner we might have evidence, if not for the precise year or century at which the present system of visible things was put together, at least for all that we are in quest of as connected with our present argument that it was put together at some time. The historical evidence for a commencement to the present order of the material world is all that we shall notice in this preliminary chapter—postponing our view of its observational evidence to the next book, when we treat of the proofs for the being of a God in the dispositions of matter.

9. There is one principle which should never be lost sight of, when investigating the Evidence of Religion, or indeed any evidence which relates to questions of fact. We mean the sound and sterling quality of that evidence which is either historical or experimental. The truth is, that the historical, when good and genuine, resolves itself into the experimental. The only difference is, that instead of our own observation, it substitutes the observation of others. We receive by our ears what we are assured by the diagnostics of credible testimony, that they have seen by their eyes. Historical evidence has thus the character; and, in proportion as it is substantiated, should have the effect of the observational. Originally, it is the evidence of