

## **THOMAS GAGE (1597–1656)**

### **A NEW SURVEY OF THE WEST INDIES (1648)**

The Spaniards that live about that Country (especially farmers of the valley of Mixco . . .) allege that all their trading, and farming, is for the good of the Commonwealth, and therefore whereas there are not Spaniards enough for so ample and large a Country to do all their work, and all are not able to buy slaves . . . they stand in need of the Indians help to serve them for their pay and hire; whereupon it hath been considered, that a partition of Indian labourers be made every Monday, or Sunday in the afternoon to the Spaniards, according to the farms they occupy, or according to their several employments, calling, and trading with Mules, or any other way. So that for such and such a district there is named an officer who is called *Juez Repartidor*, who according to a List made of every farm, house, and person, is to give so many Indians by the week. And here is a door opened to the President of Guatemala, and to the Judges to provide well for their menial servants, whom they commonly appoint for this office, which is thus performed by them. They name the Town and place of their meeting upon Sunday or Monday, to which themselves and the Spaniards of that district do resort. The Indians of the several Towns are to have in a readiness so many labourers as the Court of Guatemala hath appointed to be weekly taken out of such a Town, who are conducted by an Indian officer to the Town of general meeting; and when they come thither with their tools, their spades, shovels, bills, or axes, with their provision of victuals for a week (which are commonly some dry cakes of Maiz, puddings of frijoles, or French beans, and a little Chile or biting long pepper, or a bit of cold meat for the first day or two) and with beds on their backs (which is only a coarse woollen mantle to wrap about them when they lie on the bare ground) then are they shut-up in the Town-house, some with blows, some with spurnings, some with boxes on the ear, if presently they go not in. Now all being gathered together, and the house filled with them, the *Juez Repartidor* or officer, calls by the order of the List such and such a Spaniard, and also calls out of the house to many Indians as by the Court are commanded to be given him (some are allowed three, some four, some ten, some fifteen, some twenty, according to their employments) and deliverth unto the Spaniard his Indians, and so to all the rest, till they be all served; who when they receive their Indians, take from them a tool, or their mantles, to secure them that they run not away, and for every Indian delivered unto them, they give unto the *Juez Repartidor* or officer half a Real, which is three pence an Indian for his fees . . . The wages appointed them will scarce find them meat and drink, for they are not allowed a Real a day, which is but sixpence, and with that they are to find themselves, but for six days work and diet they are to have five Reals, which is half a Crown. This same order is observed in the City of Guatemala, and Towns of Spaniards, where to every family that wants the service of an Indian or Indians, though it be but to fetch water and wood on their backs, or to go of errants, is allowed the like service from the nearest Indian Towns.

Take from Thomas Gage, *A New Survey of the West Indies* (London: A. Clark, 1677): 312–314.

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## **EDWARD GIBBON (1737–1794)**

### ***DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE (1776–1788)***

The miracles of the primitive church, after obtaining the sanction of ages, have been lately attacked in a very free and ingenious inquiry; which, though it has met with the most favorable reception from the Public, appears to have excited a general scandal among the divines of our own as well as of the other Protestant churches of Europe. Our different sentiments on this subject will be much less influenced by any particular arguments than by our habits of study and reflection; and, above all, by the degree of the evidence which we have accustomed ourselves to require for the proof of a miraculous event. The duty of an historian does not call upon him to interpose his private judgement in this nice and important controversy; but he ought not to dissemble the difficulty of adopting such a theory as may reconcile the interest of religion with that of reason, of making a proper application of that theory, and of defining with precision the limits of that happy period, exempt from error and from deceit, to which we might be disposed to extend the gift of supernatural powers.

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Whatever opinion may be entertained of the miracles of the primitive church since the time of the apostles, this unresisting softness of temper, so conspicuous among the believers of the second and third centuries, proved of some accidental benefit to the cause of truth and religion. In modern times, a latent, and even involuntary, skepticism adheres to the most pious dispositions. Their admission of supernatural truths is much less an active consent than a cold and passive acquiescence. Accustomed long since to observe and to respect the invariable order of Nature, our reason, or at least our imagination, is not sufficiently prepared to sustain the visible action of the Deity. But, in the first ages of Christianity, the situation of mankind was extremely different. The most curious, or the most credulous, among the Pagans were often persuaded to enter into a society which asserted an actual claim of miraculous powers. The primitive Christians perpetually trod on mystic ground, and their minds were exercised by the habits of believing the most extraordinary events. They felt, or they fancied, that on every side they were incessantly assaulted by daemons, comforted by visions, instructed by prophecy, and surprisingly delivered from danger, sickness, and from death itself, by the supplications of the church. The real or imaginary prodigies, of which they so frequently conceived themselves to be the objects, the instruments, or the spectators, very happily disposed them to adopt, with the same ease, but with far greater justice, the authentic wonders of the evangelic history; and thus miracles that exceeded not the measure of their own experience inspired them with the most lively assurance of mysteries which were acknowledged to surpass the limits of their understanding.

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The decline of ancient prejudice exposed a very numerous portion of human kind to the danger of a painful and comfortless situation. A state of skepticism and suspense may amuse a few inquisitive minds. But the practice of superstition is so congenial to the

multitude that, if they are forcibly awakened, they still regret the loss of their pleasing vision. Their love of the marvelous and supernatural, their curiosity with regard to future events, and their strong propensity to extend their hopes and fears beyond the limits of the visible world, were the principal causes which favored the establishment of Polytheism. So urgent on the vulgar is the necessity of believing that the fall of any system of mythology will most probably be succeeded by the introduction of some other mode of superstition.

**Taken from Edward Gibbon, "The Progress of Superstition," in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 150–152, 154.**