





*Ferdinand. M. M. Veagh*



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A  
V I E W

OF THE PRINCIPAL

DEISTICAL WRITERS

THAT HAVE APPEARED IN ENGLAND IN THE LAST  
AND PRESENT CENTURY :

WITH

OBSERVATIONS UPON THEM,

AND SOME

ACCOUNT OF THE ANSWERS THAT HAVE BEEN PUB-  
LISHED AGAINST THEM ;

IN SEVERAL

*LETTERS TO A FRIEND.*

BY JOHN LELAND, D. D.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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THE GREAT ANTIQUARIAN SURVEY OF AMERICA

AND MONUMENTS SERVICE

1907

OFFICE OF THE SUPERVISOR

WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE SUPERVISOR

FOR THE YEAR 1907

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A  
V I E W  
OF THE  
DEISTICAL WRITERS, &c.  
IN SEVERAL  
LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

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L E T T E R   X X V .

*Favourable Declarations of Lord Bolingbroke concerning the Immortality of the Soul, and a future State—He represents it as having been believed from the earliest Antiquity, and acknowledges the great Usefulness of that Doctrine—Yet it appears from many Passages in his Works, that he himself was not for admitting it—He treats it as an Egyptian Invention, taken up without Reason, a vulgar Error, which was rejected when Men began to examine—He will not allow that the Soul is a spiritual Substance distinct from the Body, and pretends that all the phenomena lead us to think that the Soul dies with the Body—Reflections upon this—The Immateriality of the Soul argued from its essential Properties, which are entirely different from the Properties of Matter, and incompatible with them—The Author's Objections answered—Concerning the Moral Argument for a future State drawn from the unequal Distributions of this present State—Lord Bolingbroke's Charge against this Way of arguing, as blasphemous and injurious to divine Providence, considered—His great Inconsistency in setting up as an Advocate for the Goodness and Justice of Providence—That Maxim, Whatever is, is best, examined—If rightly understood, it is not inconsistent with the Belief of a Future State.*

SIR,

HAVING considered the attempt made by Lord Bolingbroke against God's moral attributes, and against the doctrine of

providence, as exercising a care and inspection over the individuals of the human race, I now come to another part of his scheme, and which seems to be designed to set aside the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions. I join these together, because there is a close connexion between them, and his Lordship frequently represents the one of these as the consequence of the other.

That I may make a fair representation of his sentiments, I shall first produce those passages, in which he seems to express himself very favourably with respect to the doctrine of a future state, and then shall compare them with other passages which have a contrary aspect, that we may be the better able to form a just notion of his real design.

He observes, that “the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments, began to be taught long before we have any light into antiquity; and when we begin to have any, we find it established \* : That it was strongly inculcated from time immemorial, and as early as the most ancient and learned nations appear to us.” And he expressly acknowledges the usefulness of that doctrine to mankind, as well as its great antiquity. He declares, that “the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, which supposes the immortality of the soul, is no doubt a great restraint to men †.” That “it was invented by the ancient theists, philosophers, and legislators, to give an additional strength to the sanctions of the law of nature; and that this motive, every man who believes it, may, and must apply to himself, and hope the reward; and fear the punishment, for his secret as well as public actions, nay, for his thoughts, as well as his actions ‡.” That “the greater part of the heathen philosophers did their utmost to encourage the belief of future rewards and punishments, that they might allure men to virtue, and deter them from vice the more effectually §.” He observes, that “the hypothesis of a life after this, served two purposes: The one was, that it furnished an answer to the objections of the atheists with respect to the present unequal distribution of good and evil.” This seems unnecessary to him, because he looks upon the accusation to

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 237.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 288.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 559.

§ Ibid. p. 220.

be void of any foundation. But the other purpose, he says, “ was no doubt very necessary, since the belief of future rewards and punishments could not fail to have some effect on the manners of men, to encourage virtue, and to restrain vice.” Accordingly, he calls it “ a doctrine useful to all religions, and incorporated into all the systems of paganism \*.” And he says, “ the heathen legislators might have reason to add the terrors of another life to that of the judgments of God, and the laws of men †.”

And as he owns, that this doctrine is very useful to mankind, so he does not pretend positively to deny the truth of it. He introduces a plain man of common sound sense declaring his sentiments upon this subject, and that though he could not affirm, he would not deny the immortality of the soul; and that there was nothing to tempt him to deny it; since whatever other worlds there may be, the same God still governs; and that he has no more to fear from him in one world than in another; That, like the auditor in Tully’s first Tusculan disputation, he is pleased with the prospect of immortality ‡. Again, he observes, that “ reason will neither affirm nor deny that there is a future state: and that the doctrine of rewards and punishments in it has so great a tendency to enforce the civil laws, and to restrain the vices of men, that reason, which cannot decide for it on principles of natural theology, will not decide against it on principles of good policy. Let this doctrine rest on the authority of revelation. A theist, who does not believe the revelation, can have no aversion to the doctrine §.” After having mentioned the scheme of a future state proposed in the *Analogy of Reason and Revelation*, part 1. cap. 1. he says, “ This hypothesis may be received; and that it does not so much as imply any thing repugnant to the perfections of the divine nature.” He adds, “ I receive with joy the expectations it raises in my mind.— And the ancient and modern Epicureans provoke my indignation, when they boast as a mighty acquisition their pretended certainty that the body and the soul die together. If they had this certainty, could this discovery be so very

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 238.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 558, 559.

† Ibid. p. 488.

§ Ibid. vol. v. 322, 489.

“ comfortable?—I should have no difficulty which to chuse,  
 “ if the option was proposed to me, to exist after death, or to  
 “ die whole \*.”

If we were to judge of the author's real sentiments by such passages as these, we might be apt to think, that though he was not certain of the immortality of the soul, and a future state, yet he was much inclined to favour that doctrine, as not only useful, but probable too. But there are other passages by which it appears, that, notwithstanding these fair professions, he did not really acknowledge or believe that doctrine himself, and, as far as his reasoning or authority could go, has endeavoured to weaken, if not destroy, the belief of it in the minds of others too.

He represents this doctrine as at best no more than a useful invention. He expressly says, that “ the ancient theists, poly-  
 “ theists, philosophers, and legislators, *invented* the doctrine of  
 “ future rewards and punishments, to give an additional strength  
 “ to the sanctions of the law of nature †:” and particularly, that the *invention* of it was owing to Egypt, *the mother of good policy, as well as superstition ‡.* The general prevalence of this opinion he attributes to the *predominant pride of the human heart*; and that “ every one was flattered by a system that  
 “ raised him in imagination above corporeal nature, and made  
 “ him hope to pass in immortality in the fellowship of the  
 “ gods §.” And after having said, that it cannot be demonstrated by reason, he adds, that “ it was originally an hypo-  
 “ thesis, and may therefore be a vulgar error: it was taken  
 “ upon trust by the people, till it came to be disputed and de-  
 “ nied by such as did examine ||.” So that he supposes, that those who believed it took it upon trust without reason or examination, and that they who examined, rejected it. He pronounces, that the reasonings employed by divines in proof of a future state are “ problematical and futile;” and that “ the immortality of the soul rests on moral proofs, and those  
 “ proofs are precarious, to say no worse of them \*\*.” After seeming to speak very favourably, in a passage cited above, of the hypothesis of a future state advanced in Butler's *Analogy*,

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 491, 492.—See also *ibid.* p. 506, 507.

† *Ibid.* p. 238.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 352, 489.

§ *Ibid.* p. 287.

|| *Ibid.* p. 352.

\*\* *Ibid.* p. 323, 501.

he says, "it has no foundation in reason, and is purely imaginary." He frequently supposes a connection between the immortality of the soul and a future state; that the latter is in consequence of the former: and he has endeavoured to subvert the foundation of that immortality, by denying that the soul is a distinct substance from the body. This is what he hath set himself pretty largely to shew in several parts of his *Essay concerning the Nature, Extent, and Reality of Human Knowledge*, which takes up near one half of the third volume of his works; especially in the first, eighth, and ninth sections of that Essay. He expressly asserts, "that there is not any thing, philosophically speaking, which obliges us to conclude, that we are compounded of material and immaterial substance \*:" That "immaterial spirits, considered as distinct substances, are in truth the creatures of metaphysics and theology †;" That "human pride was indulged by heathen philosophers, and Platonic Christians; and since they could not make man participant of the divine nature by his body, they thought fit to add a distinct spiritual to his corporeal substance, and to assume him to be a compound of both ‡." And that "the notions that prevail about soul, spiritual substance, and spiritual operations and things, took their rise in schools, where such doctrines were taught as men would be sent to Bedlam for teaching at this day §." He has a long marginal note, vol. iii. p. 514. *et. seq.* which is particularly designed to answer Mr Wollaston's arguments for the immortality of the soul. He there affirms, that "it neither has been, nor can be proved, that the soul is a distinct substance united to the body:" That "to suppose the soul may preserve a faculty of thinking when the body is destroyed, is assumed without any evidence from the phenomena; nay, against a strong presumption derived from them:" That "whilst we are alive, we preserve the capacity, or rather faculty of thinking, as we do of moving, and other faculties plainly corporeal. When we are dead, all these faculties are dead with us:" and, as he thinks, "it might as reasonably be said, we shall walk eternally, as think eternally." He says, "the word *soul*, in philosophical consideration, taken for a distinct

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 363, 364.

† Ibid. p. 427.

‡ Ibid. p. 480.

§ Ibid. p. 534, 535.

“substance united to the body,” may be paralleled with “the *primum mobile*, and element of fire, which were names invented to signify things which have no existence:” and adds, “that this figment of a soul, if he be a figment, received strength from the superstitious theology of the heathens\*.” He represents the hypothesis of two distinct substances in man as more “inconceivable and absurd, than that of those who say there is no such thing as material substance, or a material world †:” and yet he says, “that there is a material substance, no man can doubt—and that those who doubted it have either done it to exercise their wit, or have been transported by overheated imaginations into a philosophical delirium ‡.” He pronounces, that for philosophers to maintain that the soul is an immaterial being, is as if they should agree “that twice two makes five §.” And though, in a passage cited before, he introduces a plain man saying, That as he could not affirm, so he would not deny a future state, yet he makes him declare, that, “revelation apart, all the phænomena from our birth to our death seem repugnant to the immateriality and immortality of the soul;” so that he is forced to conclude with Lucretius,

“——*Gigni pariter cum corpore, et una  
Crescere sentimus, pariterque senescere mentem.*”

That “God had given him reason to distinguish and judge, and external and internal sense, by which to perceive and reflect; but that this very reason shewed him the absurdity of embracing an opinion, concerning body and mind, which neither of these senses supports ||.”

I believe you will be of opinion, upon considering what has been now produced, that Lord Bolingbroke has left us little room to doubt of his real sentiments in this matter. I shall now examine whether he has offered any thing that is of force sufficient to invalidate a doctrine, the belief of which he himself acknowledges to be of great use to mankind.

As to that which lies at the foundation of his scheme, *viz.* his denying that the soul is a spiritual, or immaterial substance

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 516—518.

† Ibid. p. 522.

‡ Ibid. p. 379.

§ Ibid. p. 536.

|| Ibid. p. 557.



distinct from the body, I do not find that he has produced any thing which can be called a proof that such a supposition is unreasonable. He indeed inveighs against metaphysicians and divines for talking about spiritual and immaterial essences and substances: he charges them with *fantastical ideas*, and a *pneumatical madness*. But such invectives, which he repeats on all occasions, will hardly pass for arguments.

He doth not pretend to say, as some have done, that spiritual or immaterial substance implies a contradiction. He blames Spinoza for maintaining that there is but one substance, that of matter; and asserts, "though we do not know the manner of God's being, yet we acknowledge him to be immaterial, because a thousand absurdities, and such as imply the strongest contradiction, result from the supposition, that the Supreme Being is a system of matter\*." He says indeed, that "of any other spirit, we neither have, nor can have any knowledge:" and that "all spirits are hypothetical, but the Infinite Spirit, the Father of Spirits †." But if there are other beings, whose essential properties are inconsistent with the known properties of matter, and particularly if our own souls are so, and if absurd consequences would follow from the supposing them to be material beings, may it not be reasonably argued, that they are substances of a different kind from what we call matter or body? The only way we have, by his own acknowledgment, of knowing different substances, is by their different qualities or properties. He observes, that "sensitive knowledge is not sufficient to know the inward constitution of substances, and their real essence, but is sufficient to prove to us their existence, and to distinguish them by their effects ‡." And that "the complex idea we have of every substance is nothing more than a combination of several sensible ideas, which determine the apparent nature of it to us." He declares, that "he cannot conceive a substance otherwise than relatively to its modes, as something in which those modes subsist §." and blames the philosophers for "talking of matter and spirit, as if they had a perfect idea of both; when in truth they knew nothing of either, but a few phenomena insufficient to frame any hypo-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 321, 503.

† Ibid. p. 321, 427.

‡ Ibid. p. 371.

§ Ibid. p. 324.

“thesis \*.” Yet he himself speaks of material substance, as a thing “we perfectly know and are assured of, whilst we “only assume, or guess at spiritual or immaterial substance †.” But we have as much reason to be assured of the latter as of the former, since in neither case the substance or essence itself is the object of our sense, but we certainly infer it from the properties, which we know in the one case, as well as in the other. He does not pretend to deny that the existence of spiritual substance is possible ‡. Why then should not he allow their actual existence, since there are properties or qualities, from which it may reasonably be inferred, that they actually do exist?

He finds great fault with Mr Locke for endeavouring to shew, that the notion of spirit involves no more difficulty or obscurity in it than that of body, and that we know no more of the solid than we do of the thinking substance, nor how we are extended than how we think. In opposition to this, he asserts, that we have clear ideas of the primary properties belonging to body, which are solidity and extension, but that we have not a positive idea of any one primary property of spirit: and the only proof he brings for this is, that actual thought is not the essence of spirit. But if, instead of actual thought being the essence of the soul, the faculty of thinking be supposed to be one of its primary essential qualities or properties, this is what we have as clear an idea of as we have of solidity and extension §. He himself elsewhere observes, that “our “ideas of reflection are as clear and distinct as those of sensation, and convey knowledge that may be said to be more “real || :” And that “the ideas we have of thought by reflection, and of some few modes of thinking, are as clear as “those we have of extension, and the modes of extension by “sensation \*\*.” Why then may we not from those ideas infer a thinking, as well as from the other, a solid extended substance? and that these substances are absolutely distinct, and of different natures, since their properties manifestly are so? He hath himself acknowledged enough to shew the reasonableness of this conclusion. “That we live, and move, and “think,” saith he, “and that there must be something in the

\* Bolingbroke's Works vol. iii. p. 509, 510, 512.

‡ Ibid p. 509

† Ibid. p. 509.

§ Ibid. p. 510—512:

|| Ibid p. 365.

\*\* Ibid. p. 427.

“constitution of our system of being, beyond the known properties of matter, to produce such phænomena as these, are undeniable truths.” He adds indeed, “what that something is, we know not; and surely it is high time we should be convinced that we cannot know it\*.” But though we cannot describe its intimate essence, we may know enough of it to be convinced, that it is not matter. It is to no purpose to pretend, that there may be unknown properties of matter, by which it may be rendered capable of thinking: for the properties of matter that we do know are inconsistent with the power of self-motion and consciousness. It is true, that he censures those as *proud dogmatists*, who bestow the epithets of *inert, senseless, stupid, passive*, upon matter †: but in this calmer mood, when he is not carried away by the spirit of opposition, and has not his hypothesis in view, he owns, that “matter is purely passive, and can act no otherwise than it is acted upon ‡.” It is therefore inconsistent with its nature to ascribe to it a principle of self-motion.

He expressly acknowledges, that “our idea of thought is not included in the idea of matter §.” And that intellect is certainly above the “power of motion and figure, according to all the ideas we have of them; and therefore (saith he) I embrace very readily the opinion of those who assume, that God has been pleased to superadd to several systems of matter, in such proportions as his infinite wisdom has thought fit, the power of thinking ||.” This is an hypothesis he seems fond of; he frequently refers to it, and says it is little less than blasphemy to deny it \*\*. Mr Locke, as he observes, supposed, that God might, if he pleased, give to certain systems of created senseless matter, put together as he thinks fit, some degree of sense, perception, and thought. But what Mr Locke had advanced as barely possible, for aught he knew, to Almighty Power, our author assumes as having been actually done, and as continually done in the ordinary course of things. But I think we may safely leave it to any unprejudiced judgment, whether it be not more reasonable and more philosophical, to assign different substances

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 509.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 472.

‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 35.

† Ibid. p. 25.

§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 364.

\*\* Ibid. vol. iii. p. 364.

as the subjects of properties so entirely different, than to suppose properties merely superadded by omnipotency to substances to which they do not naturally belong? Why should Lord Bolingbroke have been so backward to acknowledge a distinct substance from matter as the subject of these properties, when he himself was obliged to acknowledge, that the *idea of thought is not included in the idea of matter*, and that *intellect is above the power of motion and figure*, according to all the ideas we have of them? Is it agreeable to the divine wisdom, or to the order of things, to suppose, that God, in the general course of his providence, continually superadds preternatural, or supernatural properties and powers, to things not naturally fitted to receive them, rather than that he hath produced spiritual substances, to which, by the original constitution of their natures these properties and powers do belong? It hath been often shewn by those that have treated this subject, that the essential properties of body and spirit are not only distinct, but incompatible, and that therefore they cannot belong to the same substance, but must be the properties of different substances. Matter being a solid, figurable, divisible substance, consisting always of separable, nay of actually separate and distinct parts, it is evident, from the very nature of it, that it is not one indivisible substance, but is compounded of innumerable little substances, which are really distinct, though contiguous; so that if the intelligent substance in us were corporeal, it would be a compound of many intelligences and consciousnesses, which could not be one and the same individual intelligence and consciousness. Matter therefore is not a subject capable of an individual consciousness, which consequently must have some other subject to reside in. This argument is pursued with admirable clearness and force by the Learned Dr Clarke, in his letter to Mr Dodwell, and in his several defences of it against Mr Collins, who pushed the argument for the materiality of the soul as far as it could bear. Nor do I find that Lord Bolingbroke hath advanced any thing that can be called new upon this subject. He supposes, but does not prove, all the species of intellectual beings to be material, and talks of an *intellectual spring* common to them all; which, he says, is the same spring in all, but differently

tempered, so as to have different degrees of force and elasticity in some, from what it has in others; and he resolves the surprising variety of its effects into the apparent difference in the constitutions or organizations of animals\*. But it is justly argued on the other hand, that it is absurd to suppose, that that which is unintelligent and insensible before organization, can become intelligent and self-conscious by organization, since organization does not alter the nature and essence of things.

These observations seem to me sufficient to take off the force of what Lord Bolingbroke hath advanced, to shew that the soul is not an immaterial substance distinct from the body.—His view in it is plain: it is to destroy the proof of its immortality, and to bring in this conclusion, that since it is not a distinct substance from the body, it must die with it. He pretends, indeed, that the opinion of the soul's immateriality adds no strength to that of its immortality, and blames the metaphysical divines for *clogging the belief of the immortality* of the soul with that of its *immateriality*; and that by *resting too much* on the latter they *weaken* the former†. But the true reason of his finding fault with it is, that the immateriality of the human soul furnisheth a strong presumption in favour of its immortality, or at least that it may survive when the body is dissolved. That he himself is sensible of this, appears from what he acknowledges, that “on supposition of the soul's being a different substance from matter, philosophers argue admirably well *a priori*, and prove with great plausibility, that this mind, this soul, this spirit, is not material, and is immortal.” He urges, indeed, that “this assumption cannot stand an examination *a posteriori* ‡;” that is, as he elsewhere observes, all the phænomena from our birth to our death seem repugnant to the immateriality and immortality of the soul. But all that these phænomena prove is, not that body and soul are one and the same substance, but that there is a close union between them, which there may be, and yet they may be substances of very different natures; and that they really are so, appears, as has been already shewn, from their different essential properties. The laws of this union were appointed by the Author of the human frame: and by virtue of

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 526, 527.

† Ibid. p. 535. 639.

‡ Ibid. p. 509.

those laws, soul and body have a mutual influence upon one another whilst that union subsists. But it by no means follows, that, when this union is dissolved, both these substances, so different from one another, do alike fall into the dust. Nor can this be concluded from the phænomena.—We see, indeed, what becomes of the fleshy corruptible body; but we cannot pretend to decide, that therefore the thinking immaterial substance is dissolved too, or to determine what becomes of it.

But he urgeth, that though “ thinking and unthinking substances should be supposed ever so distinct from one another, yet as assumed souls were given to inform bodies, both are necessary to complete the human system; and that neither of them could exist or act in a state of total separation from the other \*.” And he observes, that Mr Wollaston is so sensible of this, that he supposes, that there is, besides the body which perishes, some fine vehicle that dwells with the soul in the brain, and goes off with it at death. Our author has not offered any thing to shew the absurdity of this supposition, except by calling such a vehicle the *shirt of the soul*, and talking of the soul’s *flying away in its shirt into the open fields of heaven*! which may, for aught I know, pass with some persons for witty banter, but has no argument in it. Very able philosophers, both ancient and modern, have supposed, that all created spirits are attended with material vehicles. But whatever becomes of this supposition with regard to the human soul, I do not see how it follows, that a substance which is essentially active, intellectual, and volitive, should lose all intellect, action, and volition, merely on its being separated from a material substance to which it was united, and which is naturally void of these qualities. However it might be bound by the laws of that union for a time, there is no reason to think it should be still subject to those laws, and that it should be unable to act or think at all, after this union is dissolved.

The only thing farther which hath any appearance of argument is, that “ if the philosopher asserts, that whatever thinks is a simple being, immaterial, indissoluble, and therefore immortal,”—we must be reduced, if we receive this hypothesis, “ to suppose that other animals besides have immaterial or im-

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iii. p. 517.

“ mortal souls \*.” And if it be allowed, that other animals have immaterial souls too, I do not see what absurdity follows from it; or why it may not be reasonably supposed, that there may be innumerable gradations of immaterial beings of very different capacities, and intended for different ends and uses. But our author urges against those who suppose sensitive souls in brutes, and a rational soul in man, that “ the power of “ thinking is as necessary to perception of the slightest sensation, as it is to geometrical reasoning: and that it manifestly “ implies a contradiction, to say, that a substance capable of “ thought by its nature in one degree or instance, is by its nature incapable of it in any other †.” But I see not the least absurdity in this; except it be said, that it necessarily follows, that a substance capable of thought or sense in the lowest degree, must be essentially capable of thought or sense in the highest degree. I can easily conceive, that a nature may be supposed capable of the former, and not of the latter. And must not he say so too, since he asserts that brutes think, and yet I believe will hardly affirm that they are capable, as well as men, of geometrical reasoning? There is no absurdity in supposing immaterial souls, which have sensitive perceptions, and are capable of sensitive happiness, without ever rising beyond this, or being properly capable of moral agency. And supposing the brutes to have immaterial sensitive souls which are not annihilated at death, what becomes of them after death, whether they are made use of to animate other bodies, or what is done with them, we cannot tell. Nor is our not being able to assign any use for them so much as a presumption that they answer no end at all, or that they do not exist. There may be a thousand ways which the Lord of nature may have of disposing of them, which we know nothing of.

It appears from what hath been offered, that there is a real foundation in reason for the doctrine of the soul's immortality, and that therefore there is no need to resolve it, as this writer seems willing to do, into the pride of the human heart. It is his own observation, “ that men were conscious ever since “ their race existed, that there is an active thinking principle in “ their composition.—That there are corporeal natures, we

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 528.

† Ibid. p. 531.

“ have sensitive knowledge : that there are spiritual natures distinct from all these, we have no knowledge at all. We only infer that there are such, because we know that we think, and are not able to conceive how material systems can think \*.” And this certainly is a very reasonable inference, as reasonable as it is to infer a material substance from the affections and properties of matter,

But though it is agreeable to reason to believe, that the human soul is immaterial and immortal, this doth not imply, as his lordship is pleased to insinuate, that “ it is immortal by the necessity of its nature, as God is self-existent by the necessity of his †.” Nor is it so understood by those who maintain the natural immortality of the human soul. What they intend by it is only this : That God made the soul originally of such a nature as to be fitted and designed for an immortal duration : not naturally liable, as the body is, to corruption and dissolution : but not, as if it were rendered so necessarily existent as to be independent of God himself. Still it is in his power to annihilate it, if he seeth fit to put an end to its existence, though there is no reason to think that he will ever do so : for since it was fitted for immortality by his own original constitution, this may be regarded as an indication of his will, that it shall continue in immortal being, though still in a dependence on the power and will of the Creator.

It is proper to observe here, that our author hath acknowledged several things which furnish a very reasonable presumption in favour of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. One is, the universal prevalence of that doctrine from the oldest antiquity. For this seems to shew, that it is agreeable to the natural sentiments of the human mind ; or at least, that it was derived from a primitive universal tradition received from the first ancestors of the human race, and which was originally owing to divine revelation. Both these may probably have contributed to the general spreading of this notion. This writer, according to his custom, varies on this head ; for, after having expressly asserted, that this doctrine was *inculcated from time immemorial*, and that *it began to be taught long before we have*

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 536.

† Ibid. p. 559.



any light into antiquity\*, he pretends to assign the original of it, and ascribes the invention of it to Egypt, and that it came from thence to the Greeks, to whom it was brought by Orpheus, and from the Greeks to the Romans †. But we find it was equally received among the most barbarous as well as among the most polite nations. The ancient Indians, Scythians, Gauls, Germans, Britons, as well as Greeks and Romans, believed that souls are immortal, and that men should live in another state after death. There were scarce any among the Americans, when the Europeans first arrived there, who doubted of it. It has been almost as generally believed as the existence of God; so that it may well pass for a common notion.

Another thing taken notice of by this writer, and to which he partly ascribes the belief of the soul's immortality, is what he calls *the powerful desire of continuing to exist*. He observes, that this desire was so strong, that "the multitude in the Pagan world were ready to embrace the hope of immortality, though it was accompanied with the fear of damnation ‡." This strong desire of future existence appears by his own account to be natural to the human mind. And would the Author of our beings have so constituted us, if the object of this desire was vain, and if there were no future existence to expect? Is not this powerful desire or expectation of immortality, which is implanted in the human heart, an argument that He that made us, formed and designed us, not merely for this present state and transitory life, but for a future state of existence?

Lord Bolingbroke further observes, that one great cause of the spreading of this doctrine was its being encouraged by the politicians and legislators, as well as philosophers, on the account of its great usefulness to mankind, and because they looked upon it to be necessary to enforce the sanctions of the law of nature §. Now the great usefulness and necessity of this doctrine is no small argument of its truth. For if men are so framed, that they cannot be properly governed without the hopes or fears of a future state; if these are necessary to preserve order and good government in the world, to allure

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 237. 308.

† Ibid. p. 352. 489.

‡ Ibid. p. 237.

§ Ibid. p. 281. 351.

and engage men to virtue, and deter them from vice and wickedness; this shews that the Author of their beings designed them for immortality, and a future state, and that consequently such a state there really is; except it be said, that he formed our natures so as to make it necessary to govern us by a lie, and by false motives, and imaginary hopes and fears.

It sufficiently appears from what has been already observed, that our author, by denying that the soul is an immaterial substance distinct from the body, hath done what he could to take away the force of the natural argument for a future state of existence and retributions after this life is at an end. It remains that we take notice of what he hath offered to destroy the moral arguments usually brought for it from the supposed unequal distributions of this present state. He sets himself at great length to prove, that the supposition is absolutely false and groundless; that it is highly injurious to God; and tendeth to cast the most blasphemous reflections upon his providence. In the management of this argument, he hath broke out into the most opprobrious invectives against the Christian divines and philosophers, whom he abuses and traduces without the least regard to decency. He frequently charges them as in a confederacy with the atheists; and represents them as “complaining of the uniform conduct of that providence of God which is over all his works, and censuring their Creator in the government of the world, which he has made and preserves.—That they have done nothing more than repeat what all the atheists, from Democritus and Epicurus, have said: That they have pushed their arguments on this subject so far, that the whole tribe of these writers, like Wollaston and Clarke, do in effect renounce God, as much as the rankest of the atheistical tribe:” And he undertakes to prove this, to their shame, to be true\*, That “the heathen theists defended the divine providence against the atheists who attacked it, and recommended a cheerful resignation to all the dispensations of it; whereas Christian divines have made a common cause with the atheists, to attack providence, and to murmur against the necessary submission that they pay †.” That “the Christian philosophers, far from defending the pro-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 484, 485.

† Ibid. p. 486.

“vidence of God, have joined in the clamour against it.” That “they have brought the self-existent Being to the bar of humanity,—and he has been tried, convicted, and condemned, like the governor of a province, or any other inferior magistrate \*.”

Accordingly he sets up as a zealous advocate for “the goodness and righteousness of divine providence in the present constitution of things, and with great solemnity undertakes to *plead the cause of God* against atheists and divines.” He affirms, that, “notwithstanding the human race is exposed to various evils, there is no ground for complaint, but abundant cause for thankfulness †.” That “if we are subject to many evils, physical and moral, we can shew much more good of both kinds, which God hath bestowed upon us, or put it in to our power to procure to ourselves.”—That the means to soften or prevent evils, the chief of which he reckons to be hope, are “so many instances of the positive goodness of God ‡.” That “neither the goodness nor justice of God require that we should be better, nor happier than we are §.” That man “enjoys numberless benefits by the fitness of his nature to the constitution of the world, unasked, unmerited, freely bestowed ||.” He asserts, in opposition to atheists and divines, that “the general state of mankind in the present scheme of providence is not only tolerable, but happy:—And that there is in this world so much more good than evil, and the general state of mankind is so happy in it, that there is no room for the exaggerated descriptions that have been made of human misery \*\*.” That “God has made us happy, and has put it into our power to make ourselves happier, by a due use of our reason, which leads us to the practice of moral virtue, and to all the duties of society ††.” That “good men are often unhappy, and bad men happy, has,” he says, “been a subject of invective, rather than argument, to Epicurus, Cotta, and others among the ancients, and to eminent divines among the moderns ††.” And he particularly examines the instances produced by Cotta in Cicero against

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 488.

† Ibid. p. 335, 334. ‡ Ibid. p. 336. § Ibid. p. 512. || Ibid. p. 339.

\*\* Ibid. p. 392. †† Ibid. p. 384. †† Ibid. p. 394.

the providence of God, and shews what Balbus might have answered \*. - He finds great fault with Dr Clarke for saying, that “ it is certain, from the moral attributes of God, that there “ must be such a future state of existence, as that, by an ex- “ act distribution of rewards and punishments, all the present “ disorders and inequalities may be set right, and that the “ whole scheme of Providence may appear at its consumma- “ tion to be a design worthy of infinite wisdom, justice, and “ goodness.” See Clarke’s *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, Prop. IV. For this he calls him *audacious and vain sophist*: and that, “ according to these men, it appears actually “ unworthy of them at present †.” And, in opposition, as he pretends, to divines, he shews the general tendency of virtue to promote happiness, and of vice to produce misery ‡.

These things he enlarges upon in several of his Fragments and Essays in the fifth volume of his works. See particularly the forty-third, forty-fourth, forty-eighth, forty-ninth, fiftieth, fifty-first, fifty-second, fifty-third, and fifty-fourth of those Fragments.

It will be necessary here to make some observations; and a few will be sufficient.

And, 1. My reflection is this: that Lord Bolingbroke had no just pretensions to value himself upon being an advocate for the goodness and righteousness of divine providence, nor could properly attempt to vindicate it, in consistency with his scheme. He had taken pains to shew, that moral attributes are not to be ascribed to God as distinguished from his physical attributes: That there is no such thing as justice and goodness in God, according to our ideas of them, nor can we form any judgment concerning them; and that there are many phænomena in the present course of things, which are absolutely repugnant to those moral attributes. But in that part of his book where he undertakes to justify the providence of God in this present state, he not only supposes justice and goodness in God, but that they are conspicuous in the whole course of his dispensations, and that the present state of things is agreeable to our ideas of those attributes. Another considera-

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 404, et seq.

† Ibid. p. 395.

‡ Ibid. p. 399, et seq.

tion which shews his great inconsistency is, that at the same time that he sets up as an advocate for the goodness and justice of providence in this present state, he yet will not allow that providence considers men individually at all, though he himself owns that justice has necessarily a respect to individuals. I had occasion to observe in my last letter, that he asserts, that “justice requires most certainly that rewards and punishments should be measured in every particular case, in proportion to the merit and demerit of each individual\*.” With what consistency then can he undertake to demonstrate the justice of providence in this present state, when he makes it essential to justice, that regard should be had to the cases and circumstances of individuals, and yet affirms, that providence in this present state hath no regard to individuals? And he seems to make its not extending to individuals here, an argument that it shall not extend to them in a future state; for he mentions it as an absurdity in the Christian system, that “the proceedings of the future state will be the very reverse of the present; for that then every individual human creature is to be tried, whereas here they are considered only collectively, that the most secret actions, nay, the very thoughts of the heart, will be laid open, and sentence will be pronounced accordingly†:” where he seems to argue, that because individuals are not called to an account, or rewarded and punished here, according to their particular merits or demerits, therefore they shall not be so hereafter: whereas the argument seems to hold strongly the other way, supposing the justice of divine providence; that since justice necessarily requires that a regard should be had to men’s particular actions, cases, and circumstances, and since there is not an exact distribution of rewards and punishments to individuals in this present state, according to the personal merit or demerit of each individual, therefore there shall be a future state, in which this shall be done, and the righteousness of providence shall be fully manifested and vindicated. And it cannot but appear a little extraordinary, that this author should make such a mighty parade of his zeal for vindicating the justice of divine providence, when, according to his scheme

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 405.

† Ibid. p. 491.

the justice of providence cannot consistently be said to be exercised or displayed, either here or hereafter.

*2dly*, It is proper farther to observe, that what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered with so much pomp for vindicating the proceedings of divine providence in the present constitution of things, hath nothing in it that can be called new, or which had not been said as well, or better, by Christian divines and philosophers before him. They have frequently shewn, that this present world is full of the effects and instances of the divine goodness: That many of those that are called natural evils are the effects of wise general laws, which are best upon the whole: That the evils of this life are, for the most part, tolerable, and overbalanced by the blessings bestowed upon us, which, ordinarily speaking, are much superior to those evils: That in the present constitution, virtue has a manifest tendency, in the ordinary course of things, to produce happiness, and vice misery; and that this constitution is the effect of a wise and good providence; from whence it may be concluded, that the great Author and Governor of the world approves the one, and disapproves the other: So that it may be justly said in general, that good and virtuous persons enjoy more true satisfaction and happiness, even in this present life, than the bad and vicious. Divines may say much more on this head than this author could consistently do. They maintain a providence which extends even to the individuals of the human race: That good men may consider themselves as continually under God's wise and fatherly care and inspection: That they may regard the good things they enjoy as the effects of his goodness, and are provided with the properest consolations and supports under all the evils of this present life, being persuaded that God, who knoweth their circumstances, will overrule all these things for their benefit; and that they are part of the discipline appointed to prepare them for a better state; the prospects of which diffuse joy and comfort through all the gloomy scenes of adversity they may here meet with. But in his scheme there is no solid foundation for that tranquillity of mind, of which he speaks in such high terms, as the inseparable companion of virtue, and for that hope, which, he says, gives a relish to all the comforts, and takes off the bitter relish from all the misfortunes of life. If providence doth not concern itself

about individuals, the good man hath no effectual support under his calamities. And it is worthy of observation, that our author himself, in vindicating the justice and goodness of providence in this present state, is sometimes obliged to have recourse to the hypothesis of a particular providence. Some of the answers he puts in the mouth of Balbus, as what he might have opposed to Cotta's harangue against providence, proceed upon the supposition of a providence which hath a regard to the cases and circumstances of individuals\*. And with regard to public calamities, one of the ways he takes of accounting for them is this, that "they may be considered as chastisements, when there are any to be amended by partaking in them, or being spectators of them.—And that they should teach mankind to adore and fear that providence, which governs the world by *particular*, as well as *general* dispensations †."

A third reflection is this: That though it be very true in general, that, in the present constitution of things, virtue hath a manifest tendency to promote our happiness, and vice to produce misery, yet it cannot be denied, that it often happeneth in particular cases, that as to the outward dispensations of providence, there is not a constant and remarkable difference made between the righteous and the wicked here on earth: That persons of eminent virtue have frequently been overwhelmed with evils and calamities of various kinds, and have perished under them, without any recompence of that virtue, if there be no future state: And that wicked men have often been remarkably prosperous, and have met with great success in their undertakings, and have continued prosperous to the end of their lives. These things have been observed in all ages. And accordingly, he expressly owns, that "the ancient theists were persuaded, that nothing less than the existence of all mankind in a future state, and a more exact distribution of rewards and punishments, could excuse the assumed, irregular, and unjust proceedings of providence in this life, on which atheists founded their objections ‡." He frequently intimates, that this was one great reason of the philosophers

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 412.

† Ibid, p. 380, 381.

‡ Ibid: p. 308.

assuming the doctrine of future rewards and punishments : though sometimes he seems to contradict this, and to say, that the heathens did not take the hypothesis of a future state in order to vindicate the conduct of divine providence \*. But without endeavouring to reconcile this writer to himself, which it is often impossible to do, we may proceed upon it as a certain thing, that it hath been generally acknowledged in all ages, that good men have been often in a very calamitous condition in this present state, and bad men in very prosperous circumstances. It is true, that, as our author observes, we may be deceived, and think those to be good men who are not so : but in many cases we may certainly pronounce, that those who by their actions plainly shew themselves to be bad men, the unjust, the fraudulent, the cruel, and oppressive, prosper and flourish, whilst men, whom it were the height of uncharitableness not to suppose persons of great goodness, integrity, and generous honesty, suffer even by their very virtues, and are exposed to grievous oppressions and reproach, without any redress from human judicatories. It is his own observation, that “ there is room for much contin-  
 “ gency in the physical and moral world, under the govern-  
 “ ment of a general providence, and that amidst these contin-  
 “ gencies, happiness, outward happiness at least, may fall to  
 “ the lot of the wicked, and outward unhappiness to the lot of  
 “ good men †.”

Mr Hume has represented this matter with spirit and elegance in the twenty-first of his moral and political Essays ; where he observes, that “ though virtue be undoubtedly the  
 “ best choice where it can be attained, yet such is the con-  
 “ fusion and disorder of human affairs, that no perfect œco-  
 “ nomy, or regular distribution of happiness or misery, is  
 “ in this life ever to be expected. Not only are the goods of  
 “ fortune, and endowments of the body, unequally distributed  
 “ between the virtuous and the vicious ; but the most worthy  
 “ character, by the very œconomy of the passions, doth not  
 “ always enjoy the highest felicity. Though all vice is pernicious,  
 “ the disturbance or pain is not measured out by  
 “ nature with exact proportion to the degrees of vice : nor is

\* Compare vol. v. 238, 487.

† Ibid. p. 485.



“ the man of highest virtue, even abstracting from external  
 “ accidents, always the most happy. A gloomy and melan-  
 “ choly temper may be found in very worthy characters that  
 “ have a great sense of honour and integrity; and yet this  
 “ alone may embitter life, and render a person completely mi-  
 “ serable. On the other hand, a selfish villain may possess  
 “ a spring and alacrity of temper, a certain gaiety of heart,  
 “ which will compensate the uneasiness and remorse arising  
 “ from all the other vices. If a man be liable to a vice or  
 “ imperfection, it may often happen, that a good quality  
 “ which he possesses along with it, will render him more mi-  
 “ serable, than if he were completely vicious. A sense of  
 “ shame in an imperfect character is certainly a virtue, but  
 “ produces great uneasiness and remorse, from which the aban-  
 “ doned villain is entirely free \*.”

Though I lay no great stress on Mr Hume's authority, yet I believe this representation will be acknowledged to be agreeable to observation and experience. And if it be so, what can be more natural or reasonable, than the hypothesis of a future state, where the rewards of virtue, and punishments of vice, shall be more equally and regularly proportioned, than they can ordinarily be in this present state ?

It is hard to produce an instance of grosser calumny and abuse than our author is guilty of, when he advanceth it as a general charge against the Christian divines, that “ they have  
 “ made a common cause with atheists to attack providence,  
 “ and to murmur against the necessary submission that they  
 “ pay.” And he gives it as the character of the *Christian*, that  
 “ he goes murmuring and complaining through this life a-  
 “ gainst the justice of God, and therefore deserves little to  
 “ taste of his goodness in a future state †.” But this is strangely misrepresented. The Christian, instructed by the Holy Scriptures, believes, that God is perfectly just and righteous in all his ways : He is taught to regard all the good things he

\* Hume's Moral and Political Essays, p. 244, 245.

† Bolingbroke's Works vol. v. p. 486. It is in the same spirit of misrepresentation and abuse, that he thinks fit to charge Christians with assuming, that happiness consists principally in health, and the advantages of fortune, and with pretending “ to keep an account with God, and to barter so much virtue, “ and so many acts of devotion, against so many degrees of honour, power, or “ riches.” Vol. v. p. 401, 402.

enjoys as flowing from God's paternal benignity; all the evils and afflictions he endures, as ordered and governed for the most wise and righteous ends. If there be any thing in the divine dispensations at present, which he cannot well account for, or reconcile, he is far from accusing God, or entertaining a hard thought of his justice or goodness. He believes, that these things are all wisely ordered, or permitted: that they are what may be expected in a state of trial and discipline, and make a part of the scheme of divine providence, which will appear, when the whole comes to be viewed in its proper connexion and harmony, to have been ordered with the most perfect wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. This present state only makes a part of the glorious plan; and they are the persons that defame and misrepresent providence, who are for separating and disjointing the admirable scheme. What a strange perversion is it to represent the hope and expectation which Christians entertain of a future state, as arguing a bad temper of mind, and tending to render them unworthy to taste of the divine goodness hereafter! As if it were a fault and a vice, to aspire to a state where our nature shall be raised to the perfection of holiness and virtue, where true piety shall receive its proper and full reward, and the glory of the divine perfections shall be most illustriously displayed.

As to the nature and extent of those future rewards and punishments, they will come more properly to be considered, when I come to examine the objections he hath advanced against the accounts that are given of them in the gospel.

The only thing farther which I shall at present take notice of is, the use which he makes of that maxim, that *Whatsoever is, is right*. He insinuates, as if Christian divines were not for acknowledging, that whatsoever God does is right; which he looks upon to be a most certain and important principle; and that upon this principle we ought to rest satisfied, that what is done in this present state is right, without looking forward to a future state, or taking it into the account at all.

For the explaining the principle our author mentions, *Whatsoever is, is right*, it must be observed, that it is not to be applied to every particular incident considered independently, and as confined to the present moment, without any dependence on what went before, or follows after. The maxim would not

be true or just, taken in this view. The meaning therefore must be, that whatever is, considered as a part of the universal scheme of providence, and taken in its proper harmony and connexion with the past and future; as well with the present appointed course of things, is rightly and fitly ordered. Thus, *e. g.* suppose a good man reduced to the greatest misery and distress, and conflicting with the sorest evils and calamities, it is fit he should be so, because, considering that event in its connexion, and taking in the past and future, it is permitted or appointed for wise reasons, and is therefore best upon the whole: but considered independently, and as no part of the scheme of providence, or as separated from the other parts of that scheme, it is not in itself the best nor fittest. This maxim therefore, which this writer makes use of with a view to set aside a future state, is, if understood in that sense in which alone it is true, perfectly consistent with the belief of a future state, and even leadeth us to the acknowledgment of it. If we believe that God always does that which is fittest to be done, and yet meet with some things which we find it hard to reconcile to our ideas of the divine wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, our persuasion, that he always does that which is right, will put us upon endeavouring to reconcile those appearances: and if a probable hypothesis offers for reconciling them, it is perfectly consistent with the veneration we owe to the Deity to embrace that hypothesis; especially if it be not arbitrary, but hath a real foundation in the nature of things: and such is the hypothesis of a future state of retributions. There is great reason to believe, that the thinking principle in man is an immaterial substance, quite distinct from the body, and which shall not be dissolved with it: and there are many things that seem to shew, he was not designed merely for this present transitory life on earth. The strong desire of immortality, so natural to the human mind; the vast capacities and faculties of the human soul, capable of making an immortal progress in knowledge, wisdom, and virtue, compared with the small advances we have an opportunity of making in this present state; our being formed moral agents, accountable creatures, which seems plainly to shew, that it was designed by the Author of our beings, and who hath given us a law for the rule of our duty, that we should be hereafter

called to an account for our conduct; of which we have some forebodings in the judgment our own consciences naturally pass upon our actions: these, and other things that might be mentioned, seem to shew, that man was not designed merely for this present state. And since there are several reasons which lead us to look upon a future state of existence as probable, it is a most natural thought, that the seeming inequalities of this present state will be rectified; and that the consideration of that state is to be taken in, in forming a judgment concerning God's providential dispensations. And if with all this there be an express revelation from God, assuring us of a future state, the evidence is complete, and there is all the reason in the world to draw an argument from that state to solve present contrary appearances.

I am yours, &c.

## L E T T E R XXVI.

*Observations on Lord Bolingbroke's Account of the Law of Nature*

—He asserts it to be so plain and obvious to the meanest Understanding, that Men cannot be mistaken about it—The contrary shewn from his own Acknowledgment—He makes Self-love the only original Spring from which our moral Duties and Affections flow: yet supposes universal Benevolence to be the fundamental Law of our Nature—He declares that we are obliged by the Law of Nature to place our Hope and Trust in God, and address Ourselves to him—This shewn to be inconsistent with the Principles he had advanced—He asserts Polygamy to be founded in the Law of Nature—He will not allow, that there is any such Thing as natural Shame or Modesty.—The Account he gives of the Sanctions of the Law of Nature, Considered—He admits no Sanction of that Law with respect to Individuals—The ill Consequences of his Scheme to the Interests of Morality and Virtue, Represented.

SIR,

FROM the observations that have been made in the foregoing Letters, I think it sufficiently appears, that Lord Bolingbroke hath endeavoured to subvert, or at least to perplex and confound, some of the main principles of what is usually called natural religion. I shall now proceed to examine the account he hath given of the law of nature, considered as a rule of duty. He frequently speaks in the highest terms of the clearness, the sufficiency, and perfection of that law. He represents it as the only standing revelation of the will of God to mankind, and which renders every other revelation needless. Very learned and able men have treated of the law of nature: but our author seems not at all satisfied with what they have written on that subject. He says, “ they have been more intent to shew their learning and acuteness, than to set their subject in a clear and sufficient light:—That, instead of setting up a light sufficient to enlighten a large room, they go about with a small taper, and, whilst they illuminate one corner, darken the rest:—That they puzzle and perplex the plainest thing in the world, sometimes by citations little to the purpose, or

“ of little authority; sometimes by a great apparatus of abstract reasoning, and by dint of explanation.—Read Selden and Grotius, read Cumberland, read Puffendorf, if you have leisure or patience for it.—There are many curious researches, no doubt, and many excellent observations in these writers; but they seem to be great writers on this subject, by much the same right as he might be called a great traveller who should go from London to Paris by the *Cape of Good Hope* \*.” I think it is not easy to convey a more contemptible idea of any writers, than he hath here done of these great men. It is to be supposed therefore, that he proposes to lead men a more clear and direct way to the knowledge of the law of nature; especially since he hath declared, that “ all that can be said to any real or useful purpose concerning that law, is extremely plain †.”

Besides occasional passages in which he makes mention of the law of nature, this is the principal subject of several of the Fragments and Essays of which his fifth volume consists, particularly of the third, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and twenty-second, of these Fragments and Essays. But all these together are far from making up any thing that can with the least propriety be called a treatise on the law of nature; and, as his Lordship generally seems to think himself above treating things in a methodical way, we are left to collect his sentiments by comparing several parts of his works together, and forming a judgment as well as we can. He has neither distinctly explained the principles of that law, nor pursued those principles to their regular consequences, nor formed any deductions from them that can be of great use for the direction and instruction of mankind.

As to the law of nature in general, he tells us, that “ the law of nature is the law of reason. A right use of that faculty which God hath given us, collects that law from the nature of things, as they stand in the system which he has constituted ‡.” Or, as he elsewhere expresseth it, “ It is a law which God has given to all his human creatures, enacted in the constitution of their natures, and discernible by the

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 68.

† Ibid. p. 67.

‡ Ibid. p. 83.

“ use of the faculties he has given them \*.” He calls it, “ the revelation God has made of his will by his works. And what is the will of God,” saith he, “ is a question easily answered. To answer this, we need go no higher than the moral obligations that arise in our own system, and of which we have very adequate ideas. The nature of the human system is independent on man, and yet he is obliged to derive the rules of his conduct from it. By employing our reason to collect the will of God from the fund of our nature physical and moral, and by contemplating frequently and seriously the laws that are plainly and necessarily deducible from them, we may acquire not only a particular knowledge of those laws, but a general, and, in some sort, an habitual knowledge of the manner in which God is pleased to exercise his supreme power in this system, beyond which we have no concern †.”

This law he represents as absolutely certain, and obvious to all mankind. “ Natural revelation (for so,” saith he, “ I will call it) produces knowledge, a series of intuitive knowledge from the first principles to the last conclusions. The phenomena of nature are the first principles: and reason, *i. e.* a real divine illumination, leads us from one necessary truth to another, through the whole course of these demonstrations.— In all these cases we know, we do not believe ‡.” He asserts, that “ we more certainly know the will of God in this way than we can know it in any other §.” “ And that the tables of the natural law are hung up in the works of God, and are obvious to the sight of all men, so obvious that no man who is able to read the plainest characters can mistake them ||.” And accordingly he declares, that “ the will of God, signified by the law of nature, and revealed by his works, is a revelation that admits of no doubt, and shews the road to happiness to all mankind ¶.” I shall only mention one passage more, among many that might be produced to the same purpose. Having asserted, that “ natural religion is the original revelation which God has made of himself, and of his will,

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 99.

† Ibid. p. 100. 154. 178. 196. 271. ‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 276.

§ Ibid. p. 287.

|| Ibid. vol. v. p. 153.

¶ Ibid. p. 196.

“ to all mankind in the constitution of things, and in the order  
 “ of his providence ; he observes, that human reason is able to  
 “ discover in the original revelation every conceivable duty  
 “ that we owe to God as our Creator, and to man as our fel-  
 “ low-creature : That this system of duty is fully proportioned  
 “ by infinite wisdom to the human state, and to the end of its  
 “ human happiness.—Natural religion therefore is relatively  
 “ perfect : it is immutable : as long as God and man continue  
 “ to be what they are, and to stand in the same relation to one  
 “ another.” He adds, “ If it does not follow necessarily from  
 “ this, sure I am that it follows probably, that God has made  
 “ no other revelation of himself and of his will to mankind \*.”  
 This is evidently the main point our author had in view, in  
 extolling so mightily as he has done the absolute perfection,  
 certainty, and clearness of the law of nature.

From the several passages which have been produced, it ap-  
 pears, that by the law of nature he understands what we may  
 collect by our reason, concerning the will of God and our duty,  
 from the consideration of his works, but especially from the  
 constitution of the human system, or, as he expresseth it, from  
 the fund of our nature, physical and moral. Let us therefore  
 inquire what account he gives of the human system. He ob-  
 serves, that “ man has two principles of determination, affec-  
 “ tions and passions, excited by apparent good, and reason,  
 “ which is a sluggard, and cannot be so excited. Reason must  
 “ be willed into action ; and as this can rarely happen, when  
 “ the will is already determined by affections and passions, so  
 “ when it does happen, a sort of composition generally happens  
 “ between the two principles : and if the affections and passions  
 “ cannot govern absolutely, they obtain more indulgence from  
 “ reason than they deserve, or than she would shew them if  
 “ she were entirely free from their force, and free from their  
 “ conduct †.” He expressly declares, that “ the appetites,  
 “ passions, and the immediate objects of pleasure, will be al-  
 “ ways of greater force to determine us than reason ‡ ;” and  
 that “ amidst the contingencies that must arise from the con-  
 “ stitution of every individual, he needs not go about to prove

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 543, 544.

† Ibid p. 150. See also *ibid.* p. 116, 137, 227. ‡ Ibid. p. 267, 268.



“ that the odds will always be on the side of appetite ; from  
 “ which affections arise, as affections grow up afterwards into  
 “ passions, which reason cannot always subdue in the strong-  
 “ est minds, and by which she is perpetually subdued in the  
 “ weakest .” At the same time that he speaks in such strong  
 terms of the great power and prevalency of the appetites and  
 passions, he will not allow that the Creator hath implanted in  
 the human mind any thing that can be called a natural sense  
 of good and evil, of right or wrong. He treats those as en-  
 thusiasts in ethics, and as rendering natural religion ridiculous,  
 who maintain, that there is “ a moral sense or instinct, by  
 “ which men distinguish what is morally good from what is  
 “ morally evil, and perceive an agreeable or disagreeable intel-  
 “ lectual sensation accordingly †.” “ This,” he says, “ may  
 “ be acquired in some sort by long habit, and by true philoso-  
 “ phical devotion, but that it is whimsical to assume it to be  
 “ natural ‡.”

And now we may form some judgment, how far our author’s  
 declarations concerning the absolute clearness, as well as cer-  
 tainty, of the law of nature, are to be depended on, which he  
 makes with a view to shew that all extraordinary revelation is  
 entirely needless.

He tells us, that “ the law of nature has all the clearness,  
 “ all the precision that God can give, or man desire ;” which  
 he proves, because “ the nature of our system, as far as the  
 “ morality of actions is concerned, is sufficiently known to us,  
 “ and the laws of our nature consequently, since they result  
 “ from it §.” It is to be observed, that the clearness and preci-  
 sion he here attributes to the law of nature is supposed by him  
 to be of such a kind as to be obvious to all mankind. And the  
 only way he allows to any of the human race for knowing that  
 law and his own duty, is by sending him for information con-  
 cerning it to the works of God, and especially to the human  
 system, and the laws that result from it. And is this so easy  
 a task to every man, even the most illiterate ? Can it be said  
 that this is, as he affirms, “ intelligible at all times, and in all  
 “ places alike, and proportioned to the meanest understand-  
 “ ing || ?” Is every man well qualified to search into the *fund*

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 479:

† Ibid. p. 86.

‡ Ibid. p. 479.

§ Ibid. p. 26. 97.

|| Ibid. p. 94:

of his nature, *physical and moral*, and to form his conclusions accordingly, and draw up a system of religion, of laws and rules for his own conduct? How can he consistently suppose, that the human system is sufficiently known to all, when, according to him, some of the wisest men in all ages, and mankind in general, have been mistaken even in a point of such importance relating to it, as the supposing the soul to be a distinct substance from the body? Besides which, the knowledge of the human system takes in a due consideration of our senses, reason, appetites, and passions. All these must be considered, that we may know wherein consisteth the proper order and harmony of our powers, which of them are to be subordinate, and which to govern; what are the just limits of our appetites and passions; how far, and in what instances they are to be gratified, and how far restrained. And is every particular person, if left to himself, able by the mere force of his own reason to consider and compare all these, and from thence to make the proper deductions, and acquire a *particular knowledge*, as our author requires, of those laws that are deducible from this system?

He has another remarkable passage to the same purpose, which it may be proper to take some notice of. "Whether  
 " the word of God," saith he, " be his word, may be, and  
 " hath been disputed by theists: but whether the works of  
 " God be his works, neither has been nor can be disputed by  
 " any such. Natural religion therefore being founded on hu-  
 " man nature, which is the work of God, and the necessary  
 " conditions of human happiness, which are imposed by the  
 " whole system of it, every man who receives the law of na-  
 " ture receives it on his own authority, and not on the autho-  
 " rity of other men known or unknown, and in their natural  
 " state as fallible as himself. It is not communicated to him  
 " only by tradition and history: it is a perpetual standing reve-  
 " lation, always made, always making, and as present in these  
 " days as in the days of Adam to all his offspring\*." Here every man is directed, in forming a scheme of the law of nature for himself, to despise all other authority, and rely wholly on his own. It is even mentioned as an advantage, that he receives it on his own authority, *i. e.* that he has no other proof or autho-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 92.

rity for it, but the deductions he himself forms by his own reason : though that reason is, as this writer owns, for the most part influenced and overborne by the appetites and passions.— And this is cried up as a standing revelation to all the sons of Adam. But if we apply this magnificent talk concerning the divine certainty and clearness of the law of nature, to what our author plainly intends by it, the deductions drawn by every man for himself concerning his duty, and what he thinks most conducive to his happiness, the fallacy of his way of arguing will immediately appear : for though the works of God are certainly the works of God, and it will not be denied that the human nature is his work, it doth not follow that the conclusions formed by every particular person, from that nature, and from the works of God, concerning duty and moral obligation, are to be certainly depended upon. When therefore he asserts, that “ the contents of the law of nature are objects of such a certainty, as the Author of nature alone can communicate \*,” if the design be to signify, that the judgment every man forms for himself by his own reason, and upon his own authority, as he expresseth it, concerning the law of nature, hath such a divine certainty in it, it is manifestly false. He confounds the objective certainty of the law as founded in the nature of things, with the certainty of the judgment men form concerning it : which are very different things. However certain the law of nature is in itself, men may greatly mistake and misapprehend it. And it is certain, in fact, that they do stand in great need of particular instruction to enable them to acquire a right knowledge of it. And surely a divine instruction concerning it, by persons extraordinarily sent and commissioned to publish a revelation of the will of God to mankind, and who give sufficient proofs of their divine mission, must be of the highest advantage.

This writer himself, though he so often extols the absolute clearness, certainty, and perfection of the law of nature, *i. e.* of the judgment men form by reason concerning it ; yet at other times makes acknowledgments which quite destroy the argument he would draw from it against the necessity or usefulness of extraordinary revelation. He had affirmed in a passage cited above, that “ natural revelation (for so,” says he, “ I will call

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 23.

“ it) produces a series of intuitive knowledge from the first principles to the last conclusions;” where he seems to make both the great principles of the law of nature, and the conclusions that are drawn from it, to be infallibly certain: and yet he elsewhere declares, that the laws of nature are general, and intimates, that a multitude of false deductions and wrong applications have been often made of that law \*. Among several passages to this purpose, there is one that deserves particular notice. After having said, that “ it is in vain to attempt to know any thing more than God has shewed us in the actual constitution of things,” he adds, that “ even when we judge of them thus, and make particular applications of the general laws of nature, we are very liable to mistakes.—That there are things fit and unfit, right and wrong, just and unjust, in the human system, and discernible by human reason, as far as our natural imperfections admit, I acknowledge most readily. But from the difficulty we have to judge, and from the uncertainty of our judgments in a multitude of cases which lie beyond our bounds, I would demonstrate the folly of those who affect to have knowledge beyond them. They are unable on many occasions to deduce from the constitution of their own system, and the laws of their own nature, with precision and certainty, what these require of them; and what is right or wrong, just or unjust, for them to do †.” To this may be added the acknowledgment he hath made, that “ the law of nature is hid from our sight by all the variegated clouds of civil laws and customs. Some gleams of true light may be seen through them; but they render it a dubious light, and it can be no better to those who have the keenest sight, till those interpositions are removed ‡.” So that after all his boasts, as if the law of nature were so clear and obvious to all men that they cannot mistake it, he owns it to have been *hid from our sight* by the clouds of civil laws and customs, and that it is rendered a *dubious light* even to those *who have the keenest sight*. And surely none can be more proper to remove and dispel these interpositions of contrary laws and customs, than the light of divine revelation enforced by a Divine authority. He himself observes, that “ Eusebius, in

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 154. † Ibid. p. 444. ‡ Ibid. p. 105.

“ his first book of his Evangelical Preparation, gives a long catalogue of absurd laws and customs, contradictory to the law of nature in all ages and countries, for a very good purpose, to shew in several instances, how such absurd laws and customs as these have been reformed by the gospel, that is, by a law which renewed and confirmed the original law of nature \*.”

These observations may suffice with regard to what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered concerning the law of nature in general, and its absolute certainty and clearness to all mankind : I shall now proceed to make some particular reflections on the account he gives of the contents of that law, or the duties which are there prescribed : as also of the grounds of the obligation of that law, and the sanction whereby it is enforced.

1. With regard to the contents or matter of the law of nature, he observes, that “ self-love, directed by instinct to mutual pleasure, made the union between man and woman. Self-love made that of parents and children : self-love begat sociability : and reason, a principle of human nature, as well as instinct, improved it, and extended it to relations more remote, and united several families into one community, as instinct had united several individuals into one family.” See the third of his Fragments and Essays in his fifth volume. And he treats this more largely in the sixth of those Essays, where he observes, that “ there is such a thing as natural reason implanted in us by the Author of our nature : but that reason would come too slowly to regulate the conduct of human life, if the All-wise Creator had not implanted in us another principle, that of self-love ; which is the original spring of human actions, under the direction of instinct first, and reason afterwards †.”—“ That instinct and reason may be considered as distinct promulgations of the same law. Self-love directs necessarily to sociability.—Instinct leads us to it by the sense of pleasure, and reason confirms us in it by a sense of happiness ‡.”—“ Sociability is the foundation of human happiness : society cannot be maintained without benevolence, justice, and other social virtues. Those virtues therefore are the foundation of society. And thus are we led from the instinctive to the rational law of nature.—Self-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 100, 101. † Ibid. p. 79. ‡ Ibid. p. 80, 81.

“ love operates in all these stages. We love ourselves, we  
 “ love our families, we love the particular societies to which  
 “ we belong ; and our benevolence extends at last to the whole  
 “ race of mankind. Like so many different vortices, the centre  
 “ of all is self-love ; and that which is the most distant from it  
 “ is the weakest \*.”

It appears from this account of the law of nature, that he makes self-love to be the *original spring* of all human actions, the fundamental principle of the law of nature, and centre of the moral system, to which all the lines of it tend, and in which they terminate : and yet he elsewhere calls “ universal benevo-  
 “ lence, benevolence to all rational beings, the great and funda-  
 “ mental principle of the law of nature † :” and asserts, that  
 “ the first principle of the religion of nature and reason is a so-  
 “ ciability that flows from universal benevolence ‡.” In the passages above cited, he had expressly affirmed, that self-love begets sociability, and had resolved benevolence into self-love as the original principle from which it flows : but here he makes sociability to flow from universal benevolence. I do not well see how this can be made to consist upon his scheme. Those may justly regard universal benevolence as a fundamental law of our nature, who suppose a social principle, and a benevolent disposition, distinct from self-love, to be an original disposition, natural to the human heart, and implanted by the Author of our beings : but if self-love be, as he represents it, the only original spring of human actions, and the centre of the whole system, universal benevolence cannot be properly represented as the fundamental law of our nature. Upon this scheme the private interest of the individual, whenever it happens to come in competition with the public good, ought to be preferred. Lord Bolingbroke endeavours to answer Carneades’s argument against justice, who urged, that “ either there is no such thing as jus-  
 “ tice, or it would be extremely foolish, because that in provid-  
 “ ing for the good of others, the just would hurt themselves §.” This argument seems to me to be conclusive upon his lordship’s scheme. For supposing, which seems to be his sentiment, that there is no natural sense of right and wrong, of moral beauty and deformity, implanted in the human heart ; and that at the

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 82.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 282. vol. v. p. 98. ‡ Ibid. p. 196. § Ibid. p. 103

same time a man is persuaded that providence has no regard to individuals, to their actions, or the events which befall them; and that therefore he has nothing to hope or to fear from God; and that this life is the whole of his existence: and if he is also made to think, that self-love is the original spring of human actions, and the central point to which all must tend; and that a tendency to promote his own happiness; his present happiness, is what gives the law of nature its obligation, which, as shall be shewn, is what Lord Bolingbroke avows: upon these principles, if in any particular instance an unjust action may turn to his own advantage, and he knows he is safe in committing it, he is justified in doing that action, when a strict regard to justice, or fidelity, to his word and promise, would do him hurt. For his present advantage and interest in this uncertain life is what he is to have principally in view, and to which every thing else must be subordinate.

In the eleventh of his Fragments and Essays, in which he particularly treats of sociability, he observes, that "it is owing to our being determined by self-love to seek our pleasure and utility in society; and that when these ends are sufficiently answered, natural sociability declines, and natural insociability commences. The influence of self-love reaches no farther: and when men are once formed into societies, those societies become individuals, and thus self-love, which promoted union among men, promotes discord among them\*." So that, according to him, self-love first produces sociableness, and puts men upon forming societies; and when societies are once formed, this same self-love produces unsociableness and discord between those societies. And if this be the case, I cannot see how he can maintain, as he sometimes does, that universal benevolence flows from self-love, when, according to his account of it, it is only a very limited sociableness which is produced by self-love; and self-love, instead of promoting an universal benevolence, destroys it.

With regard to the particular duties included in the law of nature, there is little in these Essays that can be of use, either to shew what those duties are, or how they are deducible from

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 115.

that law. What he saith on this head is for the most part very general.

As to the duties we owe to God, he observes, that “the religion and law of nature shews us the Supreme Being manifested in all his works to be the true and only object of our adoration : and that it teaches us to worship him in spirit and in truth, that is, inwardly and sincerely.” But he seems to confine the worship prescribed in that law to inward worship. He adds, that “in the existence God has given us, and in the benefits which attach us strongly to it, this shews him to be the first and greatest object of our gratitude : and in the established order of things, subject to so many vicissitudes, and yet so constant, this religion shews him to be the reasonable, as well as necessary object of our resignation : and finally, in the wants, distresses, and dangers which those vicissitudes bring frequently upon us, to be the comfortable object of our hope—in which hope, the religion of nature will teach us no doubt to address ourselves to the Almighty, in a manner consistent with an entire resignation to his will, as some of the heathens did\*.” These are undoubtedly important duties. But it is not easy to see what plea there is for making God the comfortable object of our hope in the wants, distresses, and dangers we are exposed to, or for addressing ourselves to him in an entire resignation to his will and to his providence, if he exerciseth no care of individuals at all, nor concerneth himself about their actions, their particular cases and circumstances, in this present state, nor will ever recompense their piety and virtue in a future one. The scheme our author hath advanced on these heads appeareth to me to be absolutely inconsistent with what he himself here representeth as important duties of the law of nature.

As to other particular duties required in that law, he says, “No doubt can be entertained whether the law of nature forbids idolatry, blasphemy, murder, theft, and I think incest, at least in the highest instance of it †.” These things he only mentions ; but that which he most largely insists upon, as a precept of the law of nature, is polygamy. This is the subject of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth, of his Fragments and

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 97, 98.

† Ibid. p. 156.



Essays. The principal argument which he brings to prove that polygamy is agreeable to the law of nature, and is a duty bound upon us by that law, is, that it contributes to the increase and propagation of the human species. He owns that "monogamy, or the confinement of one husband to one wife while they both live, will unite the care of both parents in breeding up subjects of the commonwealth:" but he asserts, that "it will not serve as effectually, nor in as great numbers, to the begetting them\*." But it would not be a hard matter to shew, that polygamy, if universally allowed (and it must be so if it were a law of nature), would not tend to the increase of mankind upon the whole, but the contrary†. Seeing if one man had many wives, several men must be without any, considering that providence has ordered such an equality in numbers between the sexes; and that, as hath been observed by those who have examined this matter with the greatest accuracy, there are generally more men born into the world than women. This shews, that in the order of nature, and according to the present constitution of things, more than one woman is not ordinarily designed for one man. And I believe it will scarce be denied to be probable, that twenty men married to twenty women would have more children among them, than one man married to twenty women. The constant ordinary course of providence throughout the world with respect to the proportion between the sexes is, as Moses represents it to have been in the beginning, one man to one woman. And it is observable, that according to his account, polygamy had no place either at the first original of the human race, or at the reparation of mankind immediately after the deluge, though in both these cases the speedy multiplication of the human species seemed to be necessary. If therefore we judge, as Lord Bolingbroke would have us judge, of the law of nature by the constitution of our system, monogamy is more agreeable to that law, and a more perfect institution than polygamy. But I shall have occasion to resume this subject, when I come to consider his observations against the Christian law on this account.

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\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 163.

† See concerning this the Rev. Dean Delany's excellent Reflections on Polygamy.

I do not find that he any where represents adultery as a violation of the law of nature; he rather intimates the contrary, when he gives it as a reason why in Greece and Rome, and several other states, a plurality of wives was prohibited, and monogamy encouraged, “because, notwithstanding their entering into single marriages, nothing hindered them, nor their wives neither, except the want of opportunity, from indulging their lust with others, in spite of their sacred bonds, and the legal property they had in one another’s persons.” And he thinks it cannot be doubted that such considerations have the same effect upon Christians, who look upon those marriages to have been instituted by God himself\*. But I am persuaded, the ancient pagans would not have alledged or admitted the reason he gives for reconciling them to single marriages: as if no man or woman entered into the marriage-bond, but with a resolution to violate it as often as an opportunity offered. If that had been the case, adultery would not have been so infamous a thing, nor so severely punished, as it was in the best ages of Greece and Rome. Nor were adulteries common among them, till an universal dissoluteness and corruption of manners prevailed, which prepared things by degrees for the dissolution of their state. He plainly supposes all men and women to be unchaste; and that there is no such thing as conjugal fidelity and chastity either among heathens or Christians. Such a way of representing things is generally looked upon as a suspicious sign of a vicious and corrupt heart, which judges of the rest of mankind by its own depraved inclinations. And that his Lordship had no great notion of the virtue or obligation of chastity, farther appears from the account he gives of “the motives of that modesty, with which almost all mankind, even the most savage, conceal the parts, and remove out of sight to perform the act of generation.” He says, “the latent principle of this shame, or modesty, is a vanity inherent in our natures, which makes us fond of shewing how superior we are to other animals, and to hide how much we participate of the same nature.” As if the savage nations carried their refinements so far, which would be an argument against eating in open view, since in this we equally participate of the same

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v p. 167.

nature with other animals. He adds, that “ an uncontrouled  
 “ and undisturbed indulgence to their mutual lust, is one of the  
 “ principal reasons for the solitude wherein the two sexes af-  
 “ fect to copulate.” So that this shame and modesty, which  
 forbids public copulations of human creatures like brutes, is at  
 last resolved into an excessive prevalence of lust. He con-  
 cludes therefore, that “ this shame is artificial, and has been in-  
 “ spired by human laws, by prejudice and the like \*.” As to  
 incest, he seems to think the law of nature forbids none but  
 that of the highest kind, *viz.* “ the conjunction between fathers  
 “ and daughters, sons and mothers:” and whether this is for-  
 bidden by that law he is not very positive; but inclines to think  
 it is forbidden; not for any repugnancy or abhorrence in na-  
 ture to such copulations, which he treats as a pretence that  
 scarce deserves an answer, but because “ as parents are the  
 “ chief magistrates of families, every thing that tends to dimi-  
 “ nish a reverence for them, or to convert it into some other  
 “ sentiment, diminishes their authority, and dissolves the order  
 “ of these little commonwealths †.” He mentions nations,  
 “ among whom no regard was paid to the degrees of consan-  
 “ guinity and affinity, but brothers mixed with sisters, fathers  
 “ with their daughters, and sons with their mothers: That they  
 “ were had in abomination by the Jews, who were in return  
 “ held in contempt by them and all others: That two of these  
 “ nations, the Egyptians and Babylonians, had been masters of  
 “ the Jews in every sense, and from whom the Greeks and  
 “ Romans derived all their knowledge; and perhaps the first  
 “ use of letters ‡.” And he observes, that “ Eve was in some  
 “ sort the daughter of Adam. She was literally bone of his  
 “ bone, and flesh of his flesh §.” This seems to be mentioned  
 by him with a design to give some sort of patronage for the  
 conjunction between fathers and daughters. But Eve could  
 with no propriety be called the daughter of Adam; though  
 they might both be called the children of God: Adam did not  
 beget, or form Eve, but God formed them both ||.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 174.

† Ibid. p. 175.

‡ Ibid. p. 172, 173, 175.

§ Ibid. p. 176.

|| Though our author seems in some of the passages above cited to speak of this worst kind of incest in softening terms, which shew no great abhorrence of it, yet when he takes notice, in a sneering way, of the *edifying anecdote of Lot's*

He concludes, that “*increase and multiply* is the law of nature. The manner in which this precept shall be executed “with the greatest advantage to society, is the law of man.” So that the only law of nature that he allows in this case, is the natural instinct to increase and multiply. Fornication, adultery, incest, are all left at large to political considerations, and human laws, and to what men shall think most for their pleasure and the propagation of the species, without any divine law to restrain or regulate them: which is to open a wide door for a licentious indulgence to the carnal appetite.

The last thing I propose to consider with regard to Lord Bolingbroke’s account of the law of nature is, the ground of the obligation of that law, and the sanctions whereby it is enforced.

As to the ground of its obligation, or from whence the obliging source of that law arises, he observes, that that which makes it properly obligatory is, not its being the will and appointment of God, but its being conducive to human happiness. To this purpose he declares, that “though the Supreme Being willed “into existence this system, and by consequence all the relations of things contained in it; yet it is not this will, it is in “truth the constitution of the system alone, that imposes these “laws on mankind originally, whatever power made this system.—The morality of actions,” he thinks, “doth not consist in this, that they are prescribed by will, even by the will of God: but it is this, that they are the means, however imposed the practice of them may be, of acquiring happiness agreeable to our nature.” And he seems to find fault with those who “think there can be no law of nature, or at least “that it cannot pass for a law in the sense of obliging and “binding, without a God:” though he owns, that “it is more “fully and effectually so to the thiest, than to the athiest\*.” But though he has here expressly declared, that it is not the will of God, but it is the constitution of the human system, which

*daughters*, he calls that incest a *monstrous crime*, and intimateth as if, according to the Mosaic account, the goodness of their intention *sanctified it*, vol. v. p. 112. But Moses contented himself with relating the fact as it really happened; nor can it possibly be supposed, that he had any design to sanctify that crime, which is forbidden and condemned in his law in the strongest terms, and censured as an *abomination*.

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 283, 284.

imposes these laws originally on mankind; yet afterwards, in opposition to Grotius, he asserts the law of nature to be the *positive law of God in every sense, a law of will*, and blames that great man, and others, for distinguishing between the law of nature, and the positive law of God to man\*.

With regard to the sanctions of the law of nature, he expressly affirms, that the penalties which make the sanction of natural law, affect nations collectively, not men individually †. This is not an occasional thought, but is a fixed part of his scheme, and which he frequently repeats †. The only penalties or sanctions which he allows properly to belong to the law of nature, are the public evils which affect nations. With regard to particular persons, there are no divine sanctions to enforce that law. But the punishment of individuals is left wholly to the laws enacted by every community. And it is certain that there are many breaches of the natural law, which do not make men liable to any punishment by the civil laws. There is no punishment provided by those laws, nor any, according to our author's account, by the law of nature, for secret crimes, however enormous: nor do these laws ever punish internal bad dispositions, any vices of the heart, or irregular and corrupt affections. A man may be safely as wicked as he pleases, provided he can manage so as to escape punishment by the laws of his country, which very bad men, and those that are guilty of great vices, may easily, and frequently do evade. No other penalties has he to fear (for I do not find that he ever reckons inward remorse or stings of conscience among the sanctions of the natural law), except he happens to be involved in national calamities; among which he mentions *oppression, famine, pestilence, wars, and captivities*; and in these it often happens, that good men, as well as the wicked and vicious, are involved. So that he allows no punishments as proper divine sanctions of the law of nature, but what are common to those that keep that law, as well as to those who violate it. All that he offers to prove, that this divine sanction, as he calls it, of the natural law is sufficient, amounts to this, that the sanctions of the law of Moses, which is pretended to be a positive law given by God

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 87.

† Ibid. p. 90.

‡ See particularly vol. iv. p. 288. vol. v. p. 472, 474, 494, 495.

to his chosen people, consisted only in temporal pains and penalties, and those only such as affected the nation in general, and not individuals. This, as far as the law of Moses is concerned, will be afterwards examined. At present I shall only observe, that it is a strange way of arguing, to endeavour to prove, that the sanction of the law of nature is divine, because it is the same with the sanction of the law of Moses; which, in our author's opinion, was not divine\*.

Allow me, before I conclude this letter, to make a brief representation of that scheme of morality, or of the law of nature, which his Lordship's principles naturally lead to.

The rule he lays down for judging of the law of nature, or of moral obligation, is this: That man is to judge of it from his own nature, and the system he is in. And man, according to his account of him, is merely a superior animal, whose views are confined to this present life, and who has no reasonable prospect of existing in any other state. God has given him appetites and passions; these appetites lead him to pleasure, which is their only object. He has reason indeed: but this reason is only to enable him to provide and contrive what is most conducive to his happiness; that is, what will yield him a *continued permanent series of the most agreeable sensations, or pleasures*, which is the definition of happiness †. And if no regard be had to futurity, he must govern himself by what he thinks most conducive to his interest, or his pleasure, in his present circumstances. The constitution of his nature is his only guide: God has given him no other, and concerns himself no farther about him, nor will ever call him to an account for his actions. In this constitution his flesh or body is his all: there is no distinct immaterial principle: nor has he any moral sense or feelings naturally implanted in his heart; and therefore to please the flesh, and pursue its interest, or gratify its appetites and inclinations, must be his principal end. Only he must take care so to gratify them, as not to expose himself to the penalties of human laws, which are the only sanctions of the law of nature for particular persons. He may, without any check of conscience, debauch his neighbour's wife, when he has an opportunity of doing it safely; and needs be under

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 91.

† Ibid. p. 377, 378.

no restraint to the indulging his lusts, from shame or modesty, which is only an *artificial thing*, owing to prejudice or pride. As to the refined sentiments of subjecting the appetites to reason, or the subjecting a man's own private interest, or that of his family, to the public good of the community, this cannot be reasonably done upon his scheme. It is urged, indeed, that "the good of individuals is so closely connected with the good of society, that the means of promoting the one, cannot be separated from those of promoting the other \*." But tho' it is generally so, yet it may happen in particular cases, that these interests may be separated. It may be more for a man's private interest to break the laws of his country; and if he can find his own private advantage, or gratify his ambition, his love of power, or of riches, in doing what is prejudicial to the community, there is nothing to restrain him from it, provided he can do it safely: for self-love is the centre of the whole moral system, and the more extended the circle is, the weaker it grows. So that the love of a man's country must be far weaker than his love of himself, or regard to his own particular interest, which must be his supreme governing principle and end.

But I shall not pursue this any farther. How far such a system of morals would be for the good of mankind, it is easy to see; and it seems to me fairly deducible from Lord Bolingbroke's principles taken in their just connexion, though I do not pretend to charge his Lordship with expressly acknowledging or avowing all these consequences; and sometimes he advances what is inconsistent with them.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 103.

## L E T T E R XXVII.

*An Examination of what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered concerning Revelation in general—He asserts, that Mankind had no Need of an extraordinary Revelation—The contrary fully shewn—A divine Revelation very needful to instruct Men in the most important Principles of Religion, especially those relating to the Unity, the Perfections, and Providence of God; the Worship that is to be rendered to him; moral Duty taken in its just Extent; the chief Good and Happiness of Man; the Terms of our Acceptance with God, and the Means of Reconciliation when we have offended him; and the Rewards and Punishments of a Future State—It may be concluded from the Necessities of Mankind, that a Revelation was communicated from the Beginning—A Notion and Belief of this has very generally obtained—The wisest Men of Antiquity sensible that bare Reason alone is not sufficient to enforce Doctrines and Laws with a due Authority upon Mankind—The most celebrated Philosophers acknowledged their Want of divine Revelation—The Author's Exceptions against this examined—Under Pretence of extolling the great Effects which a true divine Revelation must have produced, he endeavours to shew, that no true divine Revelation was ever really given—His scheme tends, contrary to his own Intention, to shew the Usefulness and Necessity of divine Revelation.*

SIR,

ANY one that reads Lord Bolingbroke's Works with attention, must be convinced, that one principal design he had in view, was to destroy the authority of the divine revelation in general, and of the Jewish and Christian in particular. I shall consider what he hath offered with regard to each of these; and shall begin with what relates to divine revelation in general.

As to the possibility of an extraordinary revelation communicated from God to men, his Lordship hath no where thought fit expressly to deny it: though he hath made some attempts which seem to look that way. He frequently treats the no-



tion of communion with God, and communications from God to men, as a great absurdity, and the supposition of which is wholly owing to the pride of the human heart; and has declared, that he cannot “comprehend the metaphysical or physical influence of spirits, suggestions, silent communications, injections of ideas.—And that all such interpositions in the intellectual system cannot be conceived, without altering, in every such instance, the natural progression of the human understanding, and the freedom of the will\*.” Yet, in a long digression about inspiration, in his *Essay concerning the Nature, Extent, and Reality of Human Knowledge*, after having done what he could to expose and ridicule it, he expressly owns, that “an extraordinary action of God on the human mind, which the word inspiration is here used to denote, is not more inconceivable than the ordinary action of mind on body, or of body on mind.”—And that “it is impertinent to deny the existence of any phænomenon, merely because we cannot account for it.” But he urges, that “it would be silly to assume inspiration to be true, because God can act mysteriously, *i. e.* in ways unknown to us, on his creature man †.” Nor was any of the divines, whom he treats on all occasions with so much contempt, ever so silly, as to assume inspiration to be true, merely because it is possible. The actual truth of it must be proved by other arguments.

I shall therefore take it for granted, that an extraordinary revelation from God to men, for instructing and directing them in the knowledge of important truth, of his will and their duty, is possible: and that such a revelation might be so circumstanced, as to be of real and signal advantage, our author himself seems sometimes willing to allow. After having observed, that we cannot be obliged to believe against reason, he adds, that “when a revelation hath all the authenticity of human testimony, when it appears consistent in all its parts, and when it contains nothing inconsistent with any real knowledge we have of the supreme all-perfect Being, and of natural religion, such a revelation is to be received with the most profound reverence, with the most entire submission,

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 414, 415.—See concerning this above, Letter VII.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 468.

“and with the most unfeigned thanksgiving\*.” This goes upon a supposition that an extraordinary revelation from God is not only possible, but may be of signal benefit to mankind; and, if really communicated, ought to be received with great thankfulness. And he declares, that he does not “presume to assert, that God has made no such particular revelations of his will to mankind;” though he adds, that “the opinion that there have been such revelations, is not in any degree so agreeable to the notions of infinite knowledge and wisdom, as the contrary opinion †.”

What he principally bends himself to prove is, that mankind had no need of supernatural revelation; and that therefore it is no way probable, that God would extraordinarily interpose to give such discoveries of his will. For this purpose he mightily extols the absolute clearness and perfection of the law of nature; from whence, he thinks, it follows, “that God has made no other revelation of himself, and of his will to mankind.” Many of the Fragments and Essays in his fifth volume are particularly intended to invalidate what Dr Clarke had urged to shew the need the world stood in of a divine revelation. See particularly from the twenty-third to the twenty-eighth of his Fragments and Essays: as also the thirty-third and thirty-fourth. But if we abstract from the overbearing confidence, and assuming air, so familiar to Lord Bolingbroke, we shall find very little in those essays, which is of any consequence against what that very learned writer had advanced.

The reflections that were made in my last letter on what his Lordship had offered concerning the absolute clearness of the law, or religion of nature to all mankind, might suffice to shew, that there is no just foundation for the inference he would draw from it. But it will be proper to enter upon a more particular and distinct consideration of this matter. And to set it in a fair light, I shall mention some things of high importance to mankind, with regard to which they stand in great need of particular instruction, and of having them cleared and ascertained by a divine revelation. Such are the articles relating to the unity, the perfection, and providence of God, the worship that is to be rendered to him, moral duty taken in its just

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 279.—See also vol. v. p. 201

† Ibid. p. 544.

extent, the chief good and happiness of man, the terms of our acceptance with God, and the means of reconciliation when we have offended him, and the rewards and punishments of a future state.

1. The first and fundamental principle of all religion relates to the unity, the perfections, and providence of the one true God, the supreme original Cause of all things, the Maker and Governor of the world. This is justly represented by our author as the *angular stone* of religion. And it comes to us confirmed by so many convincing proofs, that one would have been apt to expect that all mankind in all ages should have agreed in acknowledging it: and yet, certain it is, that there is scarce any thing in which they have fallen into more pernicious errors, than in their notions relating to this great and fundamental article. This writer finds great fault with Mr Locke for asserting, in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*, that the heathens were deficient in the first article of natural religion, the knowledge of one God, the Maker of all things: and yet this is no more than what Lord Bolingbroke himself acknowledges in strong terms. He observes, that “though the first men  
“ could doubt no more, that some cause of the world, than  
“ that the world itself existed, yet a consequence of this great  
“ event, and of the surprize, ignorance, and inexperience of  
“ mankind must have been much doubt and uncertainty concerning the first Cause \*: That the variety of the phænomena which struck their sense would lead them to imagine a  
“ variety of causes.—That accordingly polytheism and idolatry  
“ prevailed almost every where, and therefore seems more  
“ conformable to human ideas abstracted from the first appearance of things, and better proportioned, by an analogy  
“ of human conceptions, to the uncultivated reason of mankind, and to understandings not sufficiently informed.” He adds, that “polytheism, and the consequence of it, idolatry,  
“ were avowed and taught by legislators and philosophers, and  
“ they prevailed more easily, because they were more conformable to the natural conceptions of the human mind, than  
“ the belief of one first intelligent Cause, the sole Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things †.” And though he

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 253.

† Ibid. p. 259, 260.

insinuates, that “ afterwards, when nations became civilized, “ and wise constitutions of government were formed, men “ could not be ignorant of this great principle,” yet he owns, that “ the vulgar among the Greeks and Romans, and all the “ learned nations of the east, acknowledged a multitude of di- “ vinities, to which they ascribed every excellence and every “ defect of their own nature \*.” He endeavours, indeed, to apologize for them, by saying, that “ the worship of this mul- “ tiplicity of gods did not interfere with the Supreme Being in “ the minds of those that worshipped them †.” But in plain contradiction to this, he elsewhere saith, that “ they lost sight “ of him, and suffered imaginary beings to intercept the wor- “ ship due to him alone ‡.” And speaking of the crowd of imaginary divinities among the heathens, supercelestial and ce- lestial gods, whole gods, and half gods, &c. he says, that “ they intercepted the worship of the Supreme Being; and “ that this monstrous assemblage made the object of vulgar “ adoration §.” And indeed nothing can be more evident than it is from all the remaining monuments of paganism, that the public worship prescribed and established by their laws was paid to a multiplicity of deities; nor was there any injunction in any of their laws, that the Supreme God, and he only, was to be adored. The legislators, by his own acknowledgment, “ thought it dangerous to cure, and useful to confirm, the po- “ pular superstition ||.”

He is pleased, indeed, to give a magnificent account of the pagan mysteries, as what were intended by the heathen legisla- tors for reforming the manners and religion of the people. He asserts as positively as if he knew it, that “ there are good “ grounds to be persuaded, that the whole system of poly- “ theism was unravelled in the greater mysteries, or that no “ more of it was retained than was consistent with monotheism, “ with the belief of one supreme self-existent Being :” and yet he ridicules those who pretend to give a minute and circum- stantial account of those mysteries, as if they had assisted at the celebration of them. “ These rites,” he says, “ were kept “ secret, under the severest penalties, above two thousand

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 199, 200.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 305. ‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 80. § Ibid. p. 461. || Ibid. p. 51.

“ years : how then can we hope to have them revealed to us  
 “ now \* ?” He owns, however, that “ the vulgar gods still kept  
 “ their places there, and the absurdities of polytheism were re-  
 “ tained, however mitigated : and that the lesser mysteries pre-  
 “ served, and the greater tolerated, the fictitious divinities  
 “ which superstition and poetry had invented, such as Jupiter,  
 “ Mercury, and Venus, as well as the rites and ceremonies in-  
 “ stituted in honour of them, which,” he says, “ were practised  
 “ even by those who were consummated in the greater myste-  
 “ ries.” And that thus it was particularly in the Eleusinian  
 mysteries, which was the most sacred of them all †. It gives  
 one no very advantageous notion of the nature and design of those  
 mysteries; that Socrates would not be initiated in them. And  
 certain it is, that, notwithstanding this boasted expedient, the  
 people, particularly the Athenians, who were remarkably strict  
 in the celebration of those mysteries, still grew more and more  
 addicted to their superstitions and idolatries, which were never  
 at a greater height than when Christianity appeared.

With regard to the philosophers, he tells us, “ they knew as  
 “ well as we know, that there is a first intelligent Cause of all  
 “ things ; and that the infinite wisdom and power of this Being  
 “ made and preserves the universe, and that his providence  
 “ governs it ‡. But it cannot be denied, that some whole  
 “ sects of them did not acknowledge the one supreme God, the  
 “ Maker and Governor of the world : others of them, as the  
 “ Sceptics and Academics, represented these things as matters  
 “ of doubtful disputation.” And as to those of them who ac-  
 knowledged the existence of the *monad*, or unity, he himself  
 tells us, that “ they neglected to worship him, and conformed  
 “ to the practice of idolatry, though not to the doctrines of  
 “ polytheism §.” And such persons were certainly very unfit  
 to instruct and reform mankind in this important article.  
 And after giving a very lively description of the prevailing po-  
 lytheism and idolatry, he adds, that “ thus the vulgar be-  
 “ lieved, and thus the priests encouraged, whilst the philoso-  
 “ phers, overborne by the torrent of polytheism, suffered them  
 “ thus to believe, in ages when true theism was reputed

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 58.

† Ibid. p. 74.

‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 217.

§ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 48.

“atheism\*.” Some of the greatest philosophers were of opinion, that God was not to be named, or discoursed of among the vulgar, because they were not capable of forming a just notion of him. Plato in his book of laws did not prescribe to the people the worship of the one Supreme God, because he looked upon him to be incomprehensible: and that what he is, or how he is to be worshipped, is not to be described or declared. But he appointed twelve solemn festivals to be observed, to the honour of the twelve principal gods, and proposed the worship of the stars, whose divinity he recommended.—See his eighth book of laws, and his *Epinomis*, or appendix to his book of laws.

There was need, therefore, of an extraordinary divine interposition to awaken the attention of mankind to this great and fundamental article of all religion. To divine revelation it was owing, that the belief, and acknowledgment, and adoration of the one true God, and of him only, was established among the Jews, whilst the learned and civilized nations all around them were immersed in the most stupid idolatry and polytheism. And this writer acknowledges, that “our Saviour found the world in a state of error concerning this first principle of natural religion: and that the spreading of Christianity has contributed to destroy polytheism and idolatry †.”

As the existence and unity of the one true God, so his attributes and perfections, and his governing providence, are of high importance to be clearly and certainly known. With regard to the divine attributes and perfections, Lord Bolingbroke observes, that “though theists will concur in ascribing all possible perfections to the Supreme Being, yet they will always differ when they descend into any detail, and pretend to be particular about them; as they have always differed in their notions of those perfections †.” A revelation from God therefore, in which he declares his own divine attributes and perfections, must be of great advantage to mankind: and it is what one should think every true theist would wish for, that God would be graciously pleased to make a discovery of him-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 200.

† Ibid. p. 243.

‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 235.

self, and of his own glorious perfections, which may direct and assist men in forming just and worthy notions of them, especially of what it most nearly concerneth us to know, his moral attributes.

And as to the knowledge and belief of his governing providence, in this also the heathens were greatly deficient. He observes, speaking of some of the philosophers who acknowledged the *monad*, or first unity, that “they reduced him in some sort “to a non-entity, an abstract or notional Being, and banished “him almost entirely out of the system of his works\*.” Tacitus, having, represented it as uncertain, whether human affairs were governed by fate and immutable necessity, or by chance, observes, that the wisest of the ancients were of different sentiments about it; and that many had this opinion deeply fixed in their minds, that neither our beginning, nor our end, nor men at all, were minded by the gods.

*Mihi hæc ac talia audienti in incerto iudicium est, fatone res humanæ, et necessitate immutabili, an forte volvantur; quippe sapientissimos veterum, quique eorum sectam æmulantur, diversos reperies, at multis insitam opinionem non initia nostra, non finem, non denique homines diis curæ.*  
Tacit. Annal. lib. 6.

Some, like our author, who pretended to own a general, denied a particular providence, which extends to the individuals of the human race; and, under pretence of high thoughts of the divine Majesty, were for secluding him from any concern with human actions or affairs. This then is another matter of great importance, in which an extraordinary revelation from God would be of signal use. For if he should condescend by any well-attested revelation to assure men of his concern even for the individuals of mankind, to declare his kind and gracious intentions towards them, and his cognizance of their actions, and the events that relate to them, this would greatly contribute to remove their doubts, and would lay the foundation for an ingenuous confidence, an entire resignation, a cheerful hope, and steady dependence.

It appears, from these short hints, of how great advantage a

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 466.

well-attested revelation from God might be for instructing us in the certain knowledge of God, of his attributes, and his providence—things of the highest moment in religion, and on which the duty and happiness of mankind in a great measure depend.

*2dly*, Another thing that it is proper to observe here is, that a divine revelation is very needful to teach men not only to know and acknowledge the one true God, his attributes, and providence, but to instruct them how to worship him in an acceptable manner. Dr Clarke had urged, that “bare reason cannot discover in what manner, and with what kind of service God will be worshipped.” Lord Bolingbroke takes notice of this, and in answer to it observes, that “bare reason cannot discover how any external service that man can pay should be acceptable to the Supreme and All-perfect Being.” He acknowledges, that an inward adoration, a gratitude to God for his benefits, and resignation to his providence, is necessary\*; and that the law of nature teaches us “to worship God in spirit and in truth, that is, inwardly and sincerely †.” He seems to confine the worship required in the law of nature to inward worship, the devotion of the heart. But if it be necessary that men should worship the Supreme Being inwardly, it seems highly proper that there should be some outward acts of religious homage, openly expressive of that inward adoration, reverence, and gratitude. Without some such external acts of worship, men cannot join in social acts of devotion, or in rendering to God public worship, without which, scarce any appearance of religion can be maintained in the world. It is the voice of nature and reason, in which all mankind have generally agreed, that there should be external, as well as internal worship rendered to God; and that there should be sacred rites appointed for the better regulating and ordering that external worship. Accordingly he owns, that “the best and wisest of the heathens approved the political institutions of an external service, as far as they helped to keep up a lively sense of these duties in the minds of men, and to promote the practice of them ‡:” and he had declared before, that “there may be laws and institutions relating to such outward rites and observances, which may be proper, and even neces-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 208.

† Ibid. 98.

‡ Ibid. p. 208.



“sary mean to promote the observation of those duties.” But he will not allow, that “any such laws can be divine ordinances; they can only pass for human institutions\*.” But I cannot see upon what foundation it can be pretended, that God cannot institute ordinances relating to the external rites of divine worship, when it is owned, that such ordinances may be instituted by men, and may be useful to keep up a lively sense of the great duties of religion in the minds of men, and to promote the observance and practice of them. It is undeniably manifest, from the experience and observation of all ages, that there is nothing in which men have been more apt to err, than in what regards the external rites of religious worship; and that, when left merely to human imagination and invention, these things have often hindered, instead of promoting the main ends of all religion. This shews how needful it was, that God should himself institute that external religious service, which is so necessary, and in which yet mankind have been so prone to fall into the errors and extravagances of superstition. Our author himself takes notice of “the numberless ridiculous and cruel rites of paganism, which were held necessary to obtain the favour, and avert the anger of Heaven †.” And surely there could not be a more proper and effectual preservative against these absurd superstitions, than for God to institute the external rites of his own worship, and for men to keep close to his institutions. This was certainly one valuable end for which we may suppose it proper that God should extraordinarily interpose to reveal his will to mankind, viz. for directing them in the external worship he would have rendered to him, that it might be regulated in such a manner, as to be a fit means of promoting inward worship, and answering the main ends of religion.

*3dly*, Another thing of great importance to mankind to know, and in which a revelation from God is very needful, and of signal use, is moral duty taken in its just extent. Lord Bolingbroke himself represents it as taking in our duty towards God and man, according to the different relations in which we stand to both †. To which may be added, the duties and virtues which relate to self-government, and the conducting and regulating our own

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 98.

† Ibid. p. 208.

† Ibid. p. 154. 543, 544.

appetites and passions. Now the only way we have of being fully instructed and directed in the knowledge and practice of our duty, if all regard to extraordinary divine revelation be thrown out of the case, is either for every man to collect the whole of his duty for himself, merely by the force of his own reason and observation, or to follow the instructions and directions of philosophers and moralists, or the institutions of civil laws.

As to the first, there are many passages in our author's writings, that represent the law of nature in its whole extent, as so clear and obvious to the meanest understanding, that man cannot be mistaken in it. He frequently talks as if every man was able, without any instruction, by considering the works of God, and the constitution of the human system, to furnish out a scheme of natural religion for himself, including the main principles and duties of the law of nature. But this pretence is so contrary to matter of fact, and to the experience and observation of all ages, and has been so often exposed, that I need not take any farther pains, besides the hints given in my former Letter, to shew the absurdity of it, especially as I had occasion to consider it at large in the answer to Tindal.

The bulk of mankind, therefore, must be sent for the knowledge of their duty, either to the instructions of their teachers and wise men, or to the institutions of civil laws.

As to the former, if by teachers be meant the heathen priests, as distinguished from the philosophers (though our author says, that in the earliest ages they were the same), I believe those of his sentiments will easily allow, that they were not very proper to instruct mankind in the right knowledge of religion, and in the true doctrine of morals. But with regard to the philosophers, though he represents them as *venders of false wares*, and frequently spends whole pages in invectives against them, yet when he has a mind to shew that there was no need of a divine revelation, he thinks fit to represent them as very proper and sufficient guides and instructors to mankind. Dr Clarke, in his *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, had offered several considerations to prove that they were not so. Lord Bolingbroke endeavours to take off the force of his observations, especially in the twenty-third, twenty-fifth, and twenty-sixth of his *Fragments and Essays*. And whereas that learned writer had

asserted, that “the heathen philosophers were never able to prove clearly and distinctly enough to persons of all capacities the obligations of virtue, and the will of God in matters of morality—and that they were not able to frame to themselves any complete, and regular, and consistent scheme or system of things:” In opposition to this, his lordship affirms, that “there is no one moral virtue, which has not been taught, explained, and proved, by the heathen philosophers, both occasionally and purposely—That they all agreed, that the practice of virtue was of necessary and indispensable obligation, and that the happiness of mankind depended upon it, in general, and in particular—And that they all agreed also what was virtue, and what was vice\*.” And he again insisted upon it, that “there is no one moral precept in the whole gospel which was not taught by the philosophers—And that this is strongly and largely exemplified by Huetius, in the third book of his *Alnetanae Quaestiones*.” And he blames Dr Clarke for concealing it †.

There are two observations which I shall make upon what his lordship has here offered.

The first is this: That if it were true, that there is no moral precept enjoined in the gospel, but what may be found in the writings of some one or other of the heathen philosophers, this would not be sufficient to enforce those duties upon mankind, or to convince them of their obligations to perform them. When so many of the philosophers wrote upon moral subjects, it may be supposed, that one or other of them might, by a happy conjecture, light upon some of the most sublime precepts of the gospel-morality. But what was it to mankind what a particular philosopher, or even sect of philosophers, maintained or taught in their schools? They were not the public teachers of religion; and was it likely that their refined speculations, uninforced by any authority, and contradicted by others among themselves, should have any great influence upon mankind, and be regarded by them as divine laws, especially with regard to matters in which the gratification of their appetites and passions was concerned, and their own prevailing inclinations were to be restrained or governed?

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 204, 205. † Ibid. p. 218.

They might, after hearing the reasonings of the philosophers, think they were not obliged to govern themselves by their dictates, however plausible, and seemingly rational. Whereas a divine revelation, clearly ascertaining and determining their duty in plain and express propositions, would carry far stronger conviction, and when received and believed would leave no room to doubt of their obligation. And he himself seems to acknowledge the usefulness of the Christian revelation *to enforce the practice of morality by a superior authority* \*.

My second reflection is this: That what this writer assumes as true, is evidently false, viz. that the philosophers taught the whole of our duty in the same extent as it is taught in the Gospel. Moral duty, by his own account of it, comprehendeth the duty we owe to God, as well as to our fellow-creatures. As to the social and civil duties, on which the peace and order of political societies immediately depend, these were generally acknowledged by the several sects of philosophers; though the regard that was paid by the people to these duties, was more the effect of civil laws than of the doctrines and dictates of the philosophers. But as to that part of our duty which relates to God, with what face or consistency can it be pretended, that this was taught by the philosophers in the same extent that it is in the gospel? Our author makes the adoration of the one true God, and of him only, to be a fundamental obligation of the law of nature, and idolatry to be forbidden in that law. And certain it is, that the most celebrated philosophers, instead of instructing the people aright in this important part of their duty, fell in themselves with the common superstition and idolatry, and directed men to conform in their religious worship to the rites and laws of their several countries; by which polytheism was established, and the public worship was directed to a multiplicity of deities.

And as to that part of duty which relateth to the government of the appetites and passions, it is evident, the philosophers were far from being agreed what was virtue and what was vice. Some were for giving much greater indulgence than others to the fleshly sensual appetites and passions; and even the unna-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 294.

rural sin was not only permitted, but recommended by some of them who were of great name.

He affirms, that “ of a moral kind there were, properly speaking, no disputes among philosophers. They were disputes about insignificant speculations, and no more. For the morality of Zeno, and of Epicurus, reduced to practice, were the same \*.” As if it were a trifling dispute, whether the world was formed by a most wise, benign, and powerful Cause, and Author, or by a fortuitous jumble of atoms: whether the world and mankind are governed by a most wise and righteous Providence: or, whether there is no providence of God at all with regard to human affairs. It is evident, that submission to God, dependence upon his providence, gratitude for his benefits, and resignation to his will, concerning which some of the Stoics said excellent things, could make no part of the morality of Epicurus. Thus were the philosophers divided in the most important points of religion, and consequently in the duties resulting from it.

But what the philosophers were not qualified to do was perhaps effected by the legislators, and the institutions of civil laws. This is what our author seems to lay the principal stress upon. He observes, that “ some few particular men may discover, explain, and press upon others the moral obligations that are incumbent upon all, and our moral state will be little improved by it: but that for this purpose governments have been instituted, laws have been made, customs established, and men have been deterred from immorality, by various punishments which human justice inflicts †:” where he supposes human governments and laws to be the only effectual means for the security and improvement of virtue. But it is manifest, that, as I had occasion to observe before, the civil laws of any community are very imperfect measures of virtue, or moral obligation. A man may obey those laws, and yet be far from being truly virtuous; he may not be obnoxious to the penalties of those laws, and yet be a very vicious and bad man. Some of the most worthy and excellent affections and dispositions are unrewarded by those laws; and some of the worst affections unpunished. The heart, the proper

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 219.

† Ibid. p. 480, 481.

seat of virtue and vice, is not within the cognizance of civil laws, or human governments. And what farther shews, that civil laws and customs are not to be depended upon for direction in matters of morality, is, that it has often happened, that those laws and customs have been contrary to the rules of real religion and virtue. This writer indeed has taken upon him to assert, that “whatever violations of the law of nature may have been committed by particular men, yet none that were deemed to be such, and perhaps few that might be called strictly such, have been enacted into laws, or have grown up into established customs\*.” And that “the tables of the natural law, which are hung up in the works of God, are obvious to the sight of all men; and therefore no political society ever formed a system of laws in direct and avowed contradiction to them †.” But though no legislators ever declared in plain terms, that the laws they enacted were contrary to the law of nature, which it were absurd to suppose, yet that many laws have been enacted which were really contrary to that law, is both undeniably evident from many well-known instances of such laws, and is what he himself is obliged to acknowledge. He observes, that “the law of nature has been blended with many absurd and contradictory laws in all ages and countries, as well as with customs, which, if they arose independent on laws, have obtained the force of laws ‡.” And that “errors about the law of nature, and contradictions to it, abound, and have always abounded, in the laws and customs of society §.”

Laying all these things together, it is manifest, that men stood in great need of a divine revelation, to give them a clear and certain direction concerning moral duty taken in its just extent. The laws of nature, according to our author, are general, and men have been always very prone to make wrong deductions from them: and therefore, if God should be pleased, in a way of extraordinary revelation, to give a system of laws to mankind, plainly pointing out the particulars of their duty, and determining it by his own divine authority, whereby even the vulgar part of mankind might be certainly assured

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 151. † Ibid. p. 153. ‡ Ibid. p. 100.

§ Ibid. p. 153.—See also Ibid. p. 197, 201.

of their duty in the most important instances, and what it is that God required of them; this would both give them the best direction, and would, where really believed and received, have an influence in binding their moral obligations upon them, which could not be expected, either from the dictates of philosophers, or the force of human laws. And accordingly, some of the wisest law-givers of antiquity, in order to give their laws greater authority on the minds of men, endeavoured to make them pass upon the people for divine. And this writer himself declares, that “nothing may seem in speculation so proper to enforce moral obligation, as a true revelation, or a revelation believed to be true \*.” Mr Locke, in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*, hath fully considered this matter; where he hath shewn the insufficiency of human reason, unassisted by revelation, in its great and proper business of morality. His Lordship hath taken some notice of this. But the account he is pleased to give of Mr Locke’s argument is so poor and trifling, that though it be as fine a piece of reasoning as can be met with on this subject, it is hard to know it in his representation of it. This any man will be convinced of, that compares it as it stands in Mr Locke’s works, vol. ii. p. 573. *et seq.* edit. fol. 1740; with what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered upon it, vol. iv. p. 295, 296.

*4thly*, It is a point of great importance to mankind, to be instructed to form right notions of happiness, or wherein their chief good, and the proper felicity of the human nature, doth consist. His Lordship hath taken notice of what Dr Clarke had observed, that, according to Varro, “there were no less than two hundred and fourscore different opinions about what was the chief good, or final happiness of man.” He says, “that there were so many may be doubted; but that they must have been extremely various, is certain. The *summum bonum*, or supreme good of man, as it was understood and taught by the heathen philosophers, was a subject wherein every man had a right to pronounce for himself, and no man had a right to pronounce for another. These disputes were therefore very trifling †.” But certainly, if there be an inquiry of the utmost importance to mankind, it is that about the chief good. For to be wrong in this, will

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 368.

† *Ibid.* p. 206.

lead a man wrong in his whole course; since his chief good must be his principal governing end. His Lordship is for leaving every man to judge of this for himself, and that no man has a right to judge for another. And since he makes happiness to be what every man must pursue by the law and dictates of nature, and that the morality of actions, and the proper ground of their obligations, “ consist in this, that they “ are the means of acquiring happiness agreeable to our nature \* :” if men fix a wrong happiness to themselves, it will put them upon improper measures, and give a wrong direction to their moral conduct. And certain it is, that there is nothing in which men are more apt to be mistaken, and to form wrong judgments, than this. This author makes a distinction between pleasure and happiness, and observes, that instinct and appetite lead to the former, and reason to the latter. But he owns, that most men are apt to confound these: and he himself defines happiness to be a *continued permanent series of agreeable sensations, or pleasures* †. And must every man be left to himself, without any farther direction, to judge of his duty and happiness, from what he thinks will produce in him a series of the most agreeable sensations and pleasures; and that, abstracting (for so our author would have it) from all consideration of another life, and a future account? If the passions be brought into the consultation (and they will be apt to force themselves in, and claim being heard,) the judgment that is formed is like to be very unequal and uncertain: especially considering the influence they have, by his own account, in bringing over reason to pronounce on their side, or at least to come to a kind of composition with them. It must needs therefore be a mighty advantage to have this determined for us by a divine authority; and nothing could be more worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness, than to grant an extraordinary revelation for instructing men in what relates to the true happiness and perfection of their nature, and directing them in the way that leads to it.

5thly, Another thing which it highly concerneth men to be well informed of, relateth to the terms of their acceptance with God, and the means of reconciliation when they have offended

\* Eolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 283, 284.

† Ibid. p. 378.



him; and this is a very proper subject for a divine revelation. Dr Clarke had urged this, in his *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion* \*. But his Lordship, who had undertaken to answer him, thinks this to be of small consequence, and scarce worth enquiring about. He pronounces, that “neither reason nor experience will lead us to inquire, what propitiation God will accept, nor in what manner a reconciliation between the Supreme Being, and this worm man, is to be made †.” Indeed, upon his scheme it would be to little purpose to make such an inquiry, since he would have us believe that God doth not concern himself at all about the individuals of the human race, nor taketh any notice of their actions, so as to be pleased or displeas'd with them, or to reward or punish them on the account of those actions. I shall not repeat what hath been already offered to shew, that this scheme is contrary to reason, and, if pursued to its genuine consequences, would be subversive of all virtue and good order in the world. At present I shall only farther observe, that if men are reasonable creatures, moral agents, and if God hath given them a law, as this writer sometimes not only allows, but asserts, and which must be acknowledged, if the law of nature be God's law; then they must certainly be under indispensable obligations to obey that law; nor can it consistently be supposed; that the great Governor of the world is perfectly indifferent, whether his reasonable creatures obey his law or not. A transgression of that law, which is the will of God, must certainly have a monstrous malignity in it, as it is an offence committed by his reasonable creatures, and the subjects of his moral government, against the majesty and authority, as well as goodness, of the supreme universal Lord and Sovereign of the universe. And how can such creatures as we are, pretend positively to pronounce what punishment sin deserves, or how far it may seem fit to God in his governing wisdom and righteousness, to punish his offending creatures, or upon what terms he will pardon their transgressions, and restore them to his grace and favour, or how far that pardon is to extend? These are things which manifestly depend upon what seemeth

\* Clarke's *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, p. 293.

† Bolingbroke's *Works*, vol. v. p. 209.

most fit to his infinite wisdom, and concerning which we could not presume to form a certain judgment, if he should not declare his will concerning it.

As to what our author adds, that "repentance, as it implies amendment, is one of the doctrines of natural religion; and he does not so much as suspect, that any farther revelation is necessary to establish it;" it will be easily owned, that repentance and amendment are necessary when we have sinned against God; and that this is a doctrine of natural religion: but that this alone is sufficient to avert the penalty we have incurred by disobedience, natural reason cannot assure us. It is certain, that to establish this rule in human governments would go a great way to dissolve all order and government. And who can undertake to affirm, that in the divine government it must be an established rule, that as often as ever sinners repent, they must not only be freed from the punishment they had incurred, but be received to the divine favour, and their imperfect obedience rewarded, as if they had not offended, without any farther expedient to secure and vindicate the authority of his laws? It is evident, that in the natural course of things, as ordered by divine providence, repentance and amendment do not avert many of those evils which may be regarded as the punishments of men's crimes. They often labour under evils brought upon them by those vices of which they have heartily repented, and feel the penal effects of their evil courses, even after they have forsaken them. And since by this constitution the Author of nature hath declared, that repentance alone shall not free men in all cases from punishment, who can take upon him to determine, that our great offended Sovereign, the most wise and righteous Lord and Governor of the world, may not judge something farther necessary to shew his displeasure against sin, and to vindicate the majesty of his government, and the authority of his laws? And accordingly the natural sense of mankind hath generally led them to be anxiously solicitous, when they were sensible of their having offended God, to use some means to avert the divine displeasure. Their fears have given occasion to much superstition, and many expedients have been devised, which have been generally of such a kind, as to shew how improper judges men are of those things, if left to themselves. A di-

vine revelation would undoubtedly give the best and surest direction in matters of this nature, and the fullest satisfaction to the mind. It properly belongeth to God to determine upon what terms he will be propitiated to guilty creatures, how far his forgiveness shall extend, and what graces and favours he shall think fit to confer upon them.

The last thing I shall mention, as what shews his great need of divine revelation, relates to the rewards and punishments of a future state. That this is a doctrine of vast importance to mankind, for engaging them to virtue, and restraining their vices, appears from this writer's own express acknowledgments. Several passages were produced to this purpose in my ninth letter. At the same time he hath endeavoured to shew, that we have no assurance of it by human reason, but that it rather leadeth us to believe the contrary. And yet he does not pretend absolutely to affirm, that it is evident to reason there is no such state at all. Since therefore it is of great importance to mankind to believe a state of future retributions, and yet we have not sufficient assurance of it by human unassisted reason, it must certainly be a proper subject of divine revelation. Some of the deists indeed have in this case thought proper to take a different method. In order to avoid the argument brought from hence to shew the necessity, or the advantage of an extraordinary revelation, they have pretended, that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and a future state, is so evident to the natural reason of mankind, and hath been so generally believed in all ages and nations, that there was no need of a revelation to assure men of it. But Lord Bolingbroke hath precluded himself from this way of arguing, since he hath taken pains to prove, that this doctrine is not founded in reason. And though he sometimes declares it to have been urged and recommended by the wisest men among the ancients, he represents it as if it were what they regarded rather as an useful doctrine than a true one, and as if they did not really believe it themselves, though they thought it necessary that the people should believe it. He affirms, that "the greatest part of the philosophers did their utmost to establish the belief of rewards and punishments in a future life, that they might allure to virtue, and deter from vice, more effectually \*." Yet afterwards he tells us, that "the most

Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 222.

“ zealous asserters of a supreme Being, and warmest defenders of his providence, and they who were the most persuaded of the necessity of religion to preserve government, either rejected the doctrine of a future state, or they admitted it by halves, *i. e.* they did not admit future punishments:” and that “ this doctrine was never firmly enough established in the philosophical, whatever it was in the vulgar creed.” Yea, he asserts, that “ it was not only problematical in the opinions of theistical philosophers, but it seems in several instances to have had little hold on vulgar opinions:” as he endeavours to shew, by a remarkable quotation from Cicero, *Orat. pro A. Cluentio*; which he seems well pleased with, and refers to more than once \*.

The truth is, it would be equally wrong to affirm, that all the philosophers believed it, and that none of them did so. It is wrong on the one hand to pretend, as Lord Bolingbroke has done, that there is no foundation for it in reason; or, on the other, that it is so clear and demonstrable from human reason, that there was no need of a divine revelation farther to confirm and enforce it. The arguments for a future state in general, especially those of a moral kind, are of great weight; but yet there are several things to be opposed to them, which diminish the evidence, and will minister ground of suspicion and doubt, if considered merely on the foot of natural reason. And as to the nature, greatness, and duration, of those future rewards and punishments, it is evident that unassisted reason can give us no information concerning it which can be depended upon. We stand in great need, therefore, of an extraordinary revelation to assure us of that invisible state. This plainly follows from what his Lordship hath advanced. He represents “ the rewards and punishments of a future state as the great bands that attach men to revealed religion:” and introduces his plain man as saying, that “ it would be for the interest of these, and several other doctrines, to let them rest on the authority of revelation †.” And he directly declares, “ that this doctrine must stand on the bottom of revelation, or on none. On this bottom it would do some good most certainly, and it could do no hurt ‡.”

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 354, 355, 487.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 557.—See also vol. v. p. 322, 353.

‡ Ibid. p. 488.

The several considerations which have been offered may suffice to shew the need the world stood in of an extraordinary revelation: and that therefore it may be reasonably concluded from the wisdom and goodness of God, that mankind have not been universally, and at all times, left without the assistance of such a revelation. It is particularly probable, from the circumstances of men in the first ages of the world, that they were not left altogether destitute of means that seemed so necessary to furnish them with a right knowledge of God, and of their duty. This writer himself observes, in a passage cited above, that “a consequence of the surprise, in-  
“experience, and ignorance of the first men, must have been  
“much doubt and uncertainty concerning the first Cause.” And that “to prove the unity of the first Cause required  
“more observation, and deeper reflection, than the first men  
“could make\*.” And after having observed, that “the pre-  
“cepts of the law of nature are general, and that reason must  
“be employed to make proper and necessary deductions from  
“those precepts, and to apply them in every case that con-  
“cerns our duty to God and man,” he adds, that “human  
“reason being at best fallible, and having been little informed  
“by experience in the early ages, a multitude of false deduc-  
“tions, and wrong applications, could not fail to be made †.” It is therefore highly probable, from the goodness of God, and the necessities of mankind, that he would graciously interpose to make some discoveries of himself, and of his will, in the earliest ages, to the first parents and ancestors of the human race, to be by them communicated to their offspring, for instructing them in the main important principles of all religion, and directing them in the principal articles of moral duty. And as this may be plainly gathered from the accounts given us in Scripture, so there are several facts in the history of mankind that almost necessarily lead us to such a supposition. To this may principally be ascribed the general belief of some of the main principles of religion, which obtained before men had made any considerable improvements in philosophy, or the art of reasoning; particularly relating to the creation of the world, the immortality of the soul, and a future state, which were generally received, even among the most

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 259,

† *ibid.* vol. v. p. 154.

illiterate and barbarous nations, and were probably derived from a tradition transmitted from the first ages, and originally owing to divine revelation. And accordingly, it has been almost universally believed among mankind, that divine revelations have been communicated ; which belief may be probably ascribed to traditional accounts of such revelations, as well as to the natural sense men have generally had of their need of such assistances. There has been no such thing as mere natural religion, abstracting from all divine revelation, professed in any age, or in any nation of the world. Lord Bolingbroke, in his inquiries this way, is forced to have recourse to China, and to the fabulous ages of their history, answering pretty much to the golden age of the poets, when he supposes they were governed by mere natural religion \*. But of this he produceth no proofs. And if the ages there referred to, relate, as they probably do, to the early patriarchal times, the original revelation might have been preserved in some degree of purity, though in process of time it became greatly corrupted there, as well as in other nations.

It adds a great weight to all that has been observed, that the greatest men of antiquity seem to have been sensible, that bare reason alone was not sufficient to enforce doctrines and laws with a proper force upon mankind, without a divine authority and revelation. Our author observes, that “ the most celebrated philosophers and law-givers did enforce their doctrines and laws by a divine authority, and call in an higher principle to the assistance of philosophy than bare reason.” He instances in “ Zoroaster, Hostanes, the Magi, Minos, Pythagoras, Numa, &c. and all those who founded or formed religions and commonwealths ; who made these pretensions, and passed for persons divinely inspired and com-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 228, 239. His Lordship expresses himself on this head with a caution and modesty not usual with him. He saith, that “ among the countries with which we are better acquainted, he can find none where natural religion was established in its full extent and purity, as it *seems* to have been once in China.” It may be observed by the way, that having highly extolled the ancient Chinese sages, he takes notice of the concise manner in which they expressed themselves, whenever they spoke of the Supreme Being. And that “ their refining successors have endeavoured, in part at least, to found their atheism upon what those sages had advanced.” Vol. v. p. 228. I think, according to this account, that there must have been a great obscurity in

“missioned \*.” This shews that they built upon a principle deeply laid in the human nature, concerning the need we stand in of a divine authority and revelation, and which was probably strengthened by some remains of ancient traditions relating to such revelations. But as those philosophers and lawgivers he speaks of produced no proper and authentic credentials, it could not be expected to have a very lasting and extensive effect; and yet the very pretences to it gave their laws and institutions a force, which otherwise they would not have had. But as the several sects of philosophers in subsequent ages among the Greeks and Romans only stood on the foot of their own reasonings, and could not pretend to a divine authority, this very much hindered the effect of their instructions. And indeed the best and wisest among them confessed their sense of the want of a divine revelation, and hoped for something of that nature. This is what Dr Clarke has shewn by express testimonies: nor does Lord Bolingbroke deny it. He says, “it must be admitted that Plato insinuates in many places the want, or the necessity of a revelation, to discover the external service God requires, and the expiation for sin, and to give stronger assurances of the rewards and punishments that await men in another world †.” But he thinks it absurd and trifling to bring the opinion of Socrates, Plato, and other philosophers, concerning their want of “divine revelation, and their hopes that it would be supplied, as a proof that the want was real, and that, after it had been long complained of, it was supplied †.” He attempts to shew, that their want was not real, as if he knew better what they wanted than they themselves did, and were a more proper judge of the true state of their case than they were. He repeats what he had

their manner of expressing themselves concerning the Divinity, and that they were greatly deficient in the instructions they gave with regard to this great fundamental article of all religion. How vastly superior in this respect was Moses to all those admired sages, in whose writings, and in every part of the Holy Scriptures, the existence, the perfections, and providence of God are asserted and described in so plain and strong a manner, as is fitted to lead people of common capacities to the firm belief, obedience, and adoration of the Supreme Being, the great Creator and Governor of the world!

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 227.

† Ibid. p. 214, 215.

‡ Ibid. p. 216.

said before, that there is no moral precept taught in the gospel which they did not teach: and that the “phænomena that discovered to them the existence of God, discovered the divine will in all the extent of moral obligation \*:” as if it were equally easy to discover the *whole extent of moral obligation*, as to discover the existence of the Deity. He adds, that “they could not know a revealed religion, nor any real want of it, before the revelation was made.” That they could not be acquainted with the revelation before it was given, will be readily granted; but it doth not follow, that they could not be sensible of their want of it. He pronounces, however, that “their complaints, and their expectations, were founded in proud curiosity, and vain presumption.” It was pride, it seems, to be sensible of their ignorance, and need of farther instruction: it was presumption to hope or to desire any farther illumination in things, concerning which they were in doubt, and which it was of great importance to them to know. He adds, that “the knowledge they had was such as the Author of nature had thought sufficient, since he had given them no more;” and concludes, that “for Dr Clarke to deduce from the supposed reasonableness of their complaints, the necessity of a farther revelation, is to weigh his own opinion and theirs against providence †.” But allowing the necessity of revelation, there is no just pretence for arraigning the conduct of divine providence: for however needful a revelation is supposed to be for giving men full assurance and information concerning things of high importance, yet those to whom that revelation never was made known, shall not be accountable for what they never had an opportunity of knowing. Besides, our author goes upon the supposition, that the world had been left all along without the assistance of divine revelation, and that the heathens had never an opportunity of knowing more of religion than they actually did know. But this is a wrong supposition. God had been pleased to make revelations and discoveries of himself, and of his will, from the beginning; which, if they had been duly improved, and carefully transmitted, as the importance of them deserved, would have been of vast advantage. Great remains of this original religion

\* Bolingbroke's Works vol. v. p. 217.

† Ibid. p. 220.



continued for a long time among the nations; and these traditions, together with their own reason, duly improved, might have preserved the main principles of religion and morals among them. And if, through the negligence and corruption of mankind, this true primitive religion was in a great measure lost and confounded in polytheism and idolatry, no blame could be cast upon divine providence: nor could the wisdom and righteousness of God have been justly arraigned, though no more had ever been done for the human race. But supposing, which was really the case, that God was graciously pleased, at that time, and in that manner which seemed fittest to his infinite wisdom, to communicate a clearer and fuller discovery and revelation of his will than had been ever yet given to mankind, for recovering them from the ignorance, idolatry, and corruption, into which they were generally fallen, this certainly ought to be acknowledged with great thankfulness, as a most signal instance of the divine goodness and love to mankind, and concern for human happiness.

There is one passage more which may deserve some notice. Having observed, that Bishop Wilkins seems to place the chief distinction of human nature, not in reason in general, but in religion, the apprehension of a Deity, and the expectation of a future state, which no creature below man doth partake of; he remarks upon it, that “they who suppose all men incapable to attain a full knowledge of natural religion and theology without revelation, take from us the very essence and form of man, according to the bishop, and deny that any of us have that degree of reason which is necessary to distinguish our species, and sufficient to lead us to the unity of the first intelligent Cause of all things\*.” But the bishop, by representing man to be a religious creature, only intended to signify, that he is naturally capable of knowing, and being instructed in it, which the brutes are not: but it is not to be understood, as if all men had naturally an actual knowledge of religion, which is contrary to fact and experience: or as if all men were capable of attaining to a full knowledge of it merely by the force of their own reason, without any instruction or assistance at all. Man’s being formed a religious creature does

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 71.

not hinder the use and necessity of instruction. It is still supposed, that all proper helps and assistances are to be taken in. And notwithstanding his natural capacities, he would never attain to such a knowledge of religion without the assistance of divine revelation, as he may attain to by that assistance. These things are perfectly consistent: man's being in his original design a religious creature, and his standing in need of divine revelation to instruct him in religion, and give him a fuller knowledge of it. Revelation supposes him a creature capable of religion, and applies to him as such.

It may not be improper to observe here, that this writer, who leaves no method unattempted which he thinks may answer his design, seems sometimes to cry up the great efficacy of a true divine revelation, and the mighty effects it must have produced, if it had actually been made, with a view to shew that never was there any revelation really given to mankind. He says, that "unexceptionable revelations, real miracles, and certain traditions, could never prove ineffectual\*." That "if the revelations that have been pretended, had not been pretended only; if the same divine wisdom that shews both the existence and will of God in his works, had prescribed any particular form of worship to mankind, and had inspired the particular application of his general laws, the necessary consequence would have been, that the system of religion and government would have been uniform through the whole world, as well as conformable to nature and reason, and the state of mankind would have arrived at human perfection †." He proceeds so far as to declare, that in a supernatural dispensation, the *divine omnipotence* should have imposed it on all mankind, so as necessarily to engage their assent ‡: And that it must have forced conviction, and taken away even the possibility of doubt §. Can any thing be more unreasonable? As if revelation could be of no use at all, except by an irresistible force it overpowered all men's understandings and wills. But surely, if God gives men clear discoveries of his will and their duty, this must be acknowledged to be a glorious instance of his wisdom and goodness, though he does not absolutely constrain

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 324.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 201.

‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 267.

§ Ibid. p. 210.

them to assent, which would be to take away their free agency, and to destroy the economy of his providence. May we not here apply in the case of revelation what he himself saith with regard to reason? "It may be truly said, that God, when he gave us reason, left us to our free-will, to make a proper or improper use of it; so that we are obliged to our Creator, for a certain rule, and sufficient means of arriving at happiness, and have none to blame but ourselves when we fail of it. It is not reason, but perverse will, that makes men fall short of attainable happiness. And we are self-condemned when we deviate from the rule \*." This holds strongly with regard to revelation. God hath been graciously pleased to reveal doctrines and laws to mankind, of great use and advantage for instructing them in the knowledge of religion, and directing them in the way to happiness. But when he has done this, and confirmed that revelation with sufficient credentials, still he thinks fit, as the wise moral Governor, to leave them to their free-will, and the exercise of their own moral powers; and thus deals with them as reasonable creatures, and moral agents. If they do not receive, and make a right use of this advantage, the divine wisdom and goodness is not to be blamed, but their own obstinacy and perverseness.

But though a revelation, if really given, cannot be supposed to come with such force as irresistibly to constrain men's assent, and though it fail of producing all those effects which might be justly expected, and which it is naturally fitted to produce, yet it may be of very great use and benefit to mankind. This writer represents the general reformation of men as an impossible thing: He observes, that neither human nor divine laws have been able to reform the manners of men effectually: yet he owns, that "this is so far from making natural or revealed religion, or any means that tend to the reformation of mankind, unnecessary, that it makes them all more necessary.—And that nothing should be neglected that tends to enforce moral obligation, and all the doctrines of natural religion. And that nothing may seem in speculation so pro-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 288.

“ per to this purpose, as a true revelation, or a revelation believed to be true \*.” And he afterwards says, that “ if the conflict between virtue and vice in the great commonwealth of mankind was not maintained by religious and civil institutions, the human state would be intolerable †.” Those therefore must be very ill employed, and can in no sense be regarded as the friends and benefactors of mankind, who take pains to destroy these institutions, to subvert the main principles of natural and revealed religion, and thereby to destroy all the influence it might have on the minds of men. If the reformation of mankind be so difficult, notwithstanding all the powers of reason, and all the force of the additional light, and powerful motives, which revelation furnishes, what could be expected, if all these were laid aside, and men were taught to have no regard to them at all ?

I shall conclude with observing, that Lord Bolingbroke's scheme, contrary to his own intention, seems to furnish arguments to prove the great usefulness and necessity of divine revelation. He has endeavoured to shew, that we can have no certainty, if we judge by the phænomena, concerning the moral attributes of God, his justice and goodness : That no argument can be brought from reason in proof of a particular providence, though he does not pretend to say it is impossible : That the immortality of the soul, and a future state, though useful to be believed, are things which we have no ground from reason to believe, and which reason will neither affirm nor deny : That the laws of nature are general, and the particulars of moral duty derived from them are very uncertain, and in which men have been always very apt to mistake, and make wrong conclusions. Now if it be of high importance, as it manifestly is, that men should be assured of the moral attributes of God ; that they should believe a particular providence, extending to the individuals of the human race, and exercising an inspection over them, and their actions and affairs ; that they should believe the immortality of the soul, and a state of future rewards and punishments ; and that they should be rightly instructed in the particulars of moral duty ;

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 267, 268.

† Ibid. p. 227.

if all these be of unquestionable importance to be believed and known by mankind (and yet we can, according to him, have no assurance of them by mere natural reason), then there is great need of an extraordinary divine revelation to give us a proper certainty in these matters; and a well-attested revelation, assuring us of these things, and furnishing us with proper instructions concerning them, ought to be received with the highest thankfulness.

## L E T T E R XXVIII.

*Lord Bolingbroke's strange Representation of the Jewish Revelation—His Attempts against the Truth of the Mosaic History—The Antiquity, Impartiality, and great Usefulness of that History shewn—The Pretence, that Moses was not a Contemporary Author, and that his History is not confirmed by Collateral Testimony, and that there is no Proof that the Pentateuch was written by Moses, examined—The Mosaic History and Laws not forged in the Time of the Judges, nor in that of the Kings, nor after the Babylonish Captivity—The Charge of Inconsistencies in the Mosaic Accounts considered—The grand Objection against the Mosaic History, drawn from the incredible Nature of the Facts themselves, examined at large—The Reason and Propriety of erecting the Mosaic Polity—No Absurdity in supposing God to have selected the Jews as a peculiar People—The great and amazing Difference between them and the Heathen Nations, as to the Acknowledgment and Adoration of the one true God, and Him only—The good Effects of the Jewish Constitution, and the valuable Ends which were answered by it—It is no just Objection against the Truth of the Scriptures, that they come to us through the Hands of the Jews.*

SIR,

HAVING considered what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered with regard to divine revelation in general, I now proceed to examine the objections he has advanced against the Jewish and Christian revelation. Of the latter he sometimes speaks with seeming respect and decency: but with regard to the former, he sets no bounds to invective and abuse. He here allows himself without reserve in all the licentiousness of reproach. Far from admitting it to be a true divine revelation, he every-where represents it as the very worst constitution that ever pretended to a divine original, and as even worse than atheism.

Besides occasional passages every-where interspersed in his writings, there are some parts of his works, where he sets himself purposely and at large to expose the Mosaic revelation. This

is the principal design of the long letter in the third volume of his works, occasioned by one of Archbishop Tillotson's sermons: as also of the second section of his third essay in the fourth volume, which is *on the Rise and Progress of Monotheism*; and of the fifteenth, twentieth, twenty-first, seventy-third, seventy-fifth, of his Fragments and Essays in the fifth volume.

In considering Lord Bolingbroke's objections against the holy scriptures of the Old Testament, and especially against the books of Moses, I shall distinctly examine what he hath offered against the truth of the scripture history, and against the divine authority of the sacred writings. This is the method he himself hath pointed out in the above-mentioned letter, occasioned by one of Archbishop Tillotson's sermons.

I shall begin with considering his objections against the truth of the history. But, first, it will not be improper to make some general observations upon the scripture history, and especially that which is contained in the Mosaic writings.

And first, it deserves our veneration and regard on the account of its great antiquity. We have no accounts that can in any degree be depended upon, or that have any pretence to be received as authentic records, prior to the Mosaic history, or indeed till some ages after it was written. But though it relateth to the most ancient times, it is observable that it doth not run up the history to a fabulous and incredible antiquity, as the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and some other nations did. Moses's account of the time of the creation of the world, the general deluge, &c. reduces the age of the world within the rules of a moderate computation, perfectly consistent with the best accounts we have of the origin of nations, the founding of cities and empires, the novelty of arts and sciences, and of the most useful inventions of human life: all which leads us to assign an age to the world which comports very well with the Mosaic history, but is no way compatible with the extravagant antiquities of other eastern nations.

Another thing which should greatly recommend the scripture history to our own esteem, is the remarkable simplicity and impartiality of it. It contains a plain narration of facts, delivered in a simple unaffected style, without art or ornament.

And never was there any history that discovered a more equal and unbiassed regard to truth. Several things are there recorded, which, if the historian had not laid it down as a rule to himself, not only not to contradict the truth, but not to conceal or disguise it, would not have been mentioned. Of this kind is what our author refers to concerning Jacob's obtaining the birth-right and blessing by a fraud\*. For though it is plain, from the prophecy that was given forth before the birth of the children, that the blessing was originally designed for Jacob the younger, in preference to Esau the elder, yet the method Jacob took, by the advice of his mother Rebekka, to engage his father Isaac to pronounce the blessing upon him, had an appearance of art and circumvention, which, considering the known jealousy and antipathy between the Edomites and the people of Israel, and the occasion it might give to the former to insult and reproach the latter, it might be expected an Israelitish historian would have endeavoured to conceal. To the same impartial regard to truth it is owing, that Reuben's incest, and that of Judah with his daughter-in-law Tamar, from which descended the principal families of the noble tribe of Judah, are recorded: as is also the cruel and perfidious act of Simeon and Levi, the latter Moses's own ancestor, and the curse pronounced upon them by Jacob on the account of it. This writer, indeed, who seems determined at all hazards, and upon every supposition, to find fault with the sacred historians, has endeavoured to turn even their impartiality to their disadvantage. Having mentioned *common sense* and *common honesty*, he says, that "the Jews, or the penmen of their traditions, had so little of either, that they represent sometimes a patriarch like Jacob, and sometimes a saint like David, by characters that belong to none but the worst of men †." This, according to our author's manner, is highly exaggerated. But I think nothing can be a stronger proof of the most unreasonable prejudice, than to produce that as an instance of the want of *common sense* and *common honesty*, in those writings, which in any other writers in the world would be regarded as the highest proof of their honesty, their candour, and impartiality; viz. their not taking pains to disguise or conceal the faults of the most eminent of their ancestors; especially when it appears, that this is

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 304.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 142.



not done from a principle of malignity, or to detract from their merits, since their good actions, and the worthy parts of their character, are also impartially represented, but merely from a regard to truth, and from an unaffected simplicity, which everywhere appears in their writings, in a manner scarce to be paralleled in any other historians, and which derives a mighty credit to all their narrations. But what above all shews the impartiality of Moses, and of the other sacred historians of the Old Testament, is, their relating without disguise, not only the faults of their great men, but the frequent revolts and infidelities of the Israelites, and the punishments which befel them on that account. Lord Bolingbroke has, indeed, discovered, what no man but himself would have been apt to suspect, that even this was intended to flatter their pride and vanity; “because, though they are represented as rebellious children, yet still as favourite children—Notwithstanding all their revolts, God’s predeliction for this chosen people still subsists.—And he renews his promises to them of future glory and triumph, —a Messiah, a kingdom that should destroy all others, and last eternally\*.”—As to the kingdom of the Messiah, which he here refers to as promised to the Jews, it was to be of a spiritual nature, and was not to be confined to the people of Israel alone, but to be of general benefit to mankind. And even the rejecting of that Messiah by the body of their nation, and the punishments and desolations to which this should expose them, were foretold. And it was certainly a most extraordinary expedient to flatter the vanity of a people, to represent them as having carried it most ungratefully towards God for all his benefits, and though not absolutely and finally rejected, yet as having frequently drawn upon themselves the most signal effects of the divine displeasure. If the view of the sacred historians had been to flatter the pride and presumption of that people, surely they might have represented them as the objects of the divine favour, without giving such an account of their conduct; from which their enemies have taken occasion bitterly to reproach them, as the most ungrateful and obstinate race of men that ever appeared upon earth. Nothing could have induced them to record facts which seemed to give such a

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iii p. 284.

disadvantageous idea of their nation, but an honest and impartial regard to truth, rarely to be found in other historians.

But that which especially distinguisheth Moses, and the other sacred historians, is the spirit of unaffected piety that every-where breathes in their writings. We may observe throughout, a profound veneration for the Deity, a zeal for the glory of his great name, a desire of promoting his true fear and worship, and the practice of righteousness, and to engage men to a dutiful obedience to his holy and excellent laws. Their history was not written merely for political ends and views, or to gratify curiosity, but for nobler purposes. The Mosaical history opens with an account of the creation of the world, which, by the author's own acknowledgment, is an article of the highest moment in religion. It gives an account of the formation of man, of his primitive state, and his fall from that state, of the universal deluge, the most remarkable event that ever happened to mankind, of the lives of some of the patriarchs, and of many most signal acts of providence, upon which depended the erection and establishment of a sacred polity, the proper design of which was to engage men to the adoration of the one living and true God, the Maker and Governor of the world, and of him only, in opposition to all idolatry and polytheism. The recording these things was not only of immediate use to the people among whom they were first published, but hath had a great effect in all ages ever since, to promote a reverence of the Supreme Being among those who have received these sacred writings; and it tended also to prepare the way for the last and most perfect revelation of the divine will that was ever given to mankind. Nothing, therefore, can be more unjust than the censure he hath been pleased to pass on a great part of the Mosaic history, that it is *fit only to amuse children with* \*.

Let us now consider the objections he hath advanced against this history.

And, *first*, he urges that Moses was not a contemporary author. This is not true with respect to a considerable part of the history recorded in the Pentateuch. Many of the things which are most objected against, especially the extraordinary facts done in Egypt, at the Red Sea, at the promulgation of

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 304.

the law at Sinai, and during the sojourning of the Israelites in the wilderness, were things to which Moses was not only contemporary, but of which he was himself an eye-witness. As to that part of the history which is contained in the book of Genesis, and which relateth to events which happened before the time of Moses, it cannot be justly objected against on that account; except it be laid down as a rule, that no history is to be believed, which was written by an author who was not contemporary to all the facts which he relates. But this has never yet been allowed as a maxim in judging of the credit of any history; and, if admitted, would discard some of the best histories now in the world. Nor does our author himself pretend to insist upon it as a general rule: but he wants to know "where Moses got his materials, when he wrote the "book of Genesis." A most unreasonable demand at this distance of time! As to the far greater part of that book, which relates to the lives of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and to the first settlement of the Israelites in Egypt, these are evidently things of which he may be supposed to have had full information. And with regard to the events which happened before the time of Abraham, the accounts given of them by Moses are generally very short; consisting for the most part of little more than the genealogies of persons and families, interspersed with a few brief anecdotes, the memory of which was easily preserved. The most remarkable event during that period, and of which Moses gives the most particular account, was the universal deluge. And this must have been then very well known. His not giving into the extravagant antiquities of some of the eastern nations, and his not attempting to fill up that period with such fabulous romantic accounts as have been invented since his time, among Jews, Christians, and Mahometans, is a strong presumption in his favour; and the plainness, simplicity, and impartial love of truth, which, as hath been already observed, appears in his history, makes it reasonable to believe, that he had the accounts he gives from memorials which he knew might be depended upon. What ways they had of transmitting the memory of things in those ancient times, we cannot at this distance distinctly explain, but that they had several ways of de-

ing this we may be well assured. And it has been often observed by learned men, through how few stages the tradition might run from Adam to Abraham, and from him to Moses, considering the long lives of the first men \*. The only thing mentioned by this writer as what Moses could not have received by history or tradition, is the circumstantial account given by him of the creation of the world : with regard to which he observes, that “ Adam himself could only have related to him some of the circumstances of the sixth day, but “ nothing that preceded this.” It will be easily allowed, that the account of this must have been originally owing to extraordinary revelation. And very worthy it was of the divine wisdom to grant such a revelation to the first parents and ancestors of the human race, since it was a matter of great importance to mankind to be well acquainted with it ; and our author himself owns, that “ it leads men to acknowledge a supreme Being, by a proof levelled to the meanest understanding †.” And it may be justly concluded, that the account of this was transmitted with great care from our first parents to their descendants, and preserved among the most religious of them : which might the better be done, if, as is very probable, the observance of the seventh day was appointed from the beginning to preserve the memorial of it. So that the preservation of this very important tradition may be accounted for, even abstracting from Moses’s divine inspiration, which, if in any thing tradition had become imperfect, might easily enable him to supply the defects of it.

Another objection, on which his Lordship seems to lay a great stress, for invalidating the authority of the Mosaic history, is, that the principal facts are not confirmed by collateral testimony : and by collateral testimony he understands, the testimony of those who had no common interest of country, religion, or profession †. But such collateral testimony as this, is no way necessary to the authenticity of history. Many histories are very reasonably believed which have no such collateral testimony

\* Mr Hume makes the great length of men’s lives, as recorded in the Mosaic history to be an objection against it. *Essay on Miracles*, p. 206. But Lord Bolingbroke allows, that the lives of men in the first ages of the world were probably much longer than ours. *Vol. iii. p. 244.*

† Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iii. p. 253.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 281, 282.

to confirm them. Such testimony is frequently not to be had, nor could reasonably be expected with relation to many of the facts recorded by Moses. As to that part of the Mosaic history, which relateth to the times of greatest antiquity, little help can be expected from collateral testimony, since there is no history of those times now extant so ancient as his own. And yet there are considerable traces of tradition which have been preserved among other nations, concerning some of the most remarkable events during that period, as hath been often shewn by learned men \*; especially with relation to that which is the

\* His Lordship frequently speaks with great contempt of the attempts made by the learned to support the history of Moses by collateral testimonies, those of Egyptians, Phœnicians, Chaldeans, and even Greeks. See particularly vol. iii. p. 280, 281. Yet he says, "The man who gives the least credit to the Mosaic history, will agree very readily, that these five books contain traditions of a very great antiquity: some of which were preserved and propagated by other nations as well as the Israelites, and by other historians as well as Moses. Many of them may be true, though they will not serve as vouchers for one another." And he farther observes, that "three or four ancient neighbouring nations, of whom we have some knowledge, seemed to have a common fund of traditions, which they varied according to their different systems of religion, philosophy, and policy." Ibid. p. 282. And since he here supposes, that the nations he refers to had different systems of religion and policy, and were evidently neither of the same country, nation, or religion, with the people of Israel, the testimonies they give to the facts recorded in the Mosaic writings may be justly regarded as *collateral testimony*, even according to the account he himself is pleased to give of it, viz. that it is the testimony of those *who had no common interest of country, religion, or profession*. So that after all his clamours against the Mosaic history for want of *collateral testimony*, he himself in effect owns, that, in several instances at least, and with regard to some of the facts there related, collateral testimonies may be produced, which therefore are very properly taken notice of by the learned. These testimonies relate to several things in the Mosaic account of the creation. The long lives of the first men—the general deluge, with some of the remarkable particulars recorded by Moses relating to it—the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah—the excellent character of Abraham, and several particulars in his life, and that of Isaac and Jacob—Joseph's being envied by his brethren, and sold into Egypt—his great advancement there, and wise administration, and preserving Egypt in a time of famine—many things relating to Moses himself—his great wisdom—his being opposed by the Egyptian magicians—his leading the Israelites out of Egypt, whilst the Egyptians who pursued them were compelled to desist—his bringing them through the deserts of Arabia to Mount Sinai—the law given by him as from God—his noble notions of the Deity, and prohibiting the representing or worshipping him by any corporeal images—many of the peculiarities of that law, different from those of other nations. The reader may see most of these

most extraordinary of them all, the universal deluge. Nor can any thing be more false and contrary to known fact, than what this writer boldly affirms, that “the tradition of Noah’s deluge is vouched by no other authority than that of Moses; and that the memory of that catastrophe was known only to one people, and preserved in one corner of the earth\*.” Not only has there been a general tradition in confirmation of it †, but there are many proofs of it all over the earth, many phænomena which plainly lead us to acknowledge that there has been such a deluge, and which cannot otherwise be reasonably accounted for.

With respect to that part of the history which relateth to the laws given to the Israelites, and the extraordinary facts whereby the authority of those laws was established, they were not only things of which Moses had certain knowledge, and in which he could not be mistaken, but they were of a most public nature, and to which the whole nation were witnesses. The facts were of such a kind, that the accounts of them could not possibly have been imposed by Moses at that time upon the people, if they had not been true, nor could they have been made to believe that they were done before their eyes, if they had not been done. And these facts having been all along from that time received by that people, together with the laws in confirmation of which they were wrought, furnisheth a proof of authenticity to this part of the Mosaic history, which can scarce be paralleled in any other.

I do not see how the force of this can be avoided, supposing Moses to be the author of the Pentateuch. But this is what Lord Bolingbroke thinks cannot be proved. He has made a kind of representation after his own way of what Mr Abbadie has offered to this purpose; and adds, that it would be hard to find an example of greater trifling ‡. But whosoever will take

things collected by *Grotius de Verit. Relig. Christ.* lib. i. sec. 16. I think any impartial person will be of opinion, that there is as much collateral testimony as could be reasonably expected concerning things of such remote antiquity, and from persons who were not of the Jewish nation or religion, and several of whom were professed enemies to both.

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iii. p. 224.

† See concerning this, *Grotius de Verit. Relig. Christ.* lib. i. sec. 16. See also *Revelation examined with Candour*, part i. dissert. 13, 14.

‡ Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iii. p. 275, 276.

pains to examine the argument, not as he is pleased to represent it, but as it stands in Mr Abbadie's own book, will find how little he has offered that can in any degree take off the force of his reasoning. Indeed it is hard to know what greater proof can reasonably be desired of Moses's being the author of the Pentateuch than is given. The whole nation, among whom those books have been always received with great veneration, as containing the most authentic accounts of their history and their laws, have constantly attributed them to Moses. All those of foreign nations that have mentioned their history or their laws, have always supposed Moses to have been the author of them. Never has it been denied till these latter ages, after so long a possession, upon some cavils and exceptions, which are really trifling, and which have been sufficiently answered. And if all this will not be allowed to be a proof, it is impossible that any thing of this nature should ever be proved. It hath all the proof which the nature of the thing can admit of; and it would be unreasonable, by Lord Bolingbroke's own acknowledgment, to demand more. "Common sense," saith he, "requires that every thing proposed to the understanding, should be accompanied with such proof as the nature of it can furnish. He who requires more, is guilty of absurdity; he who requires less, of rashness\*."

There is then all the evidence which can be desired in such a case, that the books containing the original history and laws given to the people of Israel were written by Moses, as the whole nation to whom the history belonged, and who were governed by those laws, and received them as the rule of their polity, have constantly affirmed. And of this they must be allowed to be competent witnesses. His Lordship indeed, with a view to shew how little the testimony of the Jews is to be depended upon, and how easily those laws might be imposed upon them, mentions "the little time that it took to establish the divine authority of the Alcoran among the Arabs, a people not more incapable to judge of Mahomet and his book, than we may suppose the Israelites to have been to judge of Moses and his book, if he left any, whether of law alone, or of history and law both †." But this observation is little to the purpose. The Arabians were sufficient vouchers, that the Al-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 246.

† Ibid. p. 278.

coran was the book left them by Mahomet, containing the revelations he pretended to have received from heaven. In this they are to be credited. So are the Jews, that the books containing the original history and laws of their nation were written by Moses. As to the divine authority of those laws, this must be tried by other arguments. But however stupid we may suppose the Arabians to have been, it would not have been in the power of Mahomet to have made them believe, that they themselves had heard his laws distinctly delivered with the most amazing solemnity from heaven, in the presence of above six hundred thousand men, if there had been no such thing: or that he wrought a series of stupendous miracles before their eyes, if he had not done so. And accordingly he was too wise to put the proof of his own divine mission, or of the authority of his laws, upon facts of such a nature: which would have been the most effectual way he could have taken to detect and expose his own imposture. But he pretended to have received communications and revelations from heaven, the truth of which depended upon his own credit. The same observation may be made concerning those celebrated lawgivers of antiquity, who pretended to have received their laws from the gods, as Minos, Numa, and others. None of them ever put the proof of the divine authority of their laws upon public facts of the most miraculous and extraordinary nature; done in the presence of all the people, and for the truth of which they appealed to them. They pretended to directions from oracles, or to secret communications with the deity, of which the people had no proof, and which they received solely upon their authority. But Moses put the proof of the divine authority of his laws upon sensible facts, of the most public nature, and of which the whole body of the people, to whom these laws were given, were witnesses. Appeals were made to the people, at the time when these laws were delivered; concerning those facts as done in their sight, and which they themselves could not possibly deny. The accounts of those facts are so interwoven with the laws; that they cannot be separated. Some of the principal motives to engage the people to an observance of those laws are founded on those facts. Many of the laws were peculiarly designed to preserve the remembrance of the facts; and cannot be otherwise accounted for than by supposing the truth of those



facts to which they relate. And this was the professed design of the institution of several of their sacred rites, which were appointed to be solemnly observed by the whole of the nation, in every age from the beginning of their polity, i. e. from the time when they first received these laws, and their constitution was established. There were several public monuments, which subsisted several ages, to perpetuate the memory of the most remarkable of those facts. The people were commanded, as by divine authority, frequently to consider those facts, and to take care to transmit them to their children. To which it may be added, that in all the remaining writings published at different times, and in different ages, among that nation, whether of an historical, moral, or devotional kind, there is a constant reference to those facts as of undoubted credit and authority. They are repeated on so many different occasions, so often and solemnly appealed to, that it appeareth, with the utmost evidence which the thing is capable of, that these facts have been all along universally known and acknowledged, and the remembrance of them constantly kept up among that people. And upon the truth and authority of these facts, their peculiar constitution, whereby they were so remarkably distinguished from all other nations, was plainly founded: nor can it well be conceived how it could have been established among them without those facts. It strengthens all this, when it is considered, that scarce ever was there any people so well fitted by their constitution for preserving and transmitting the remembrance of their laws and facts, as the people of Israel. Their weekly sabbath, the observance of which was bound upon them in the strictest manner, and which was a constant memorial to them of their religion and law: their sabbatical years, an institution of the most extraordinary nature, and which furnished a visible proof of the divine original and authority of that law, and in which it was ordered to be publicly read to the whole nation assembled together at their solemn festivals: the exact care that was taken to keep up the distinction of tribes, and the genealogies of the several families in their tribes, on which their legal right to their inheritances and possessions depended, and which they could trace to the time when the first division of the land was made, and their constitution established, with which the laws and facts were intimately connected: all these things laid them under

peculiar obligations, and gave them peculiar advantages for preserving the remembrance of their law, and the facts done in attestation to it. Taking these considerations together, the evidence for the laws and facts is as strong as can reasonably be desired for any facts done in past ages. And I am persuaded the evidence would never have been contested, if it had not been for the pretended incredibility of the facts themselves. But before I come to consider this, I shall take notice of some other exceptions made by Lord Bolingbroke to the credit of this history.

He mentions it as a suspicious circumstance, that “the priests in Egypt and Judea were intrusted with the public records,” and that this shews how little they are to be depended upon\*. And he asks, “With what face can we suspect the authenticity of the Egyptian accounts by Manetho and others, which were compiled and preserved by Egyptian priests, when we received the Old Testament on the faith of Jewish scribes, a most ignorant and lying race †?” But it is a great mistake, or gross misrepresentation to pretend, that the Jewish history and sacred writings, particularly those of Moses, were in the hands of the priests, or Jewish scribes alone. If, like the Egyptian laws and records, they had been wrapt up in sacred characters and hieroglyphics, which the priests only understood, and of which they alone were the authorised guardians and interpreters, and which were carefully disguised and concealed from the people, there might be some ground for this pretence. But, on the contrary, their history and laws were put into the common language: the people were commanded to make themselves thoroughly acquainted with the laws that were given them, and with the history of those facts by which their law was established. It was urged upon them in the name of God himself, to meditate upon them continually, to speak of them in their houses, and teach them diligently to their children. They were taught to believe that their interest in the favour of God, their public and private happiness depended upon it. No part of their history and laws was kept as a secret from the people: all was open and undisguised. And this was so different from the arts of impostors, or of designing politicians, as affords a strong presumption, that all was founded on truth and fact.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 225, 226.

† Ibid. p. 205.

Our author is very willing to have it believed, that these writings were forged after the time of Moses; and the time he seems to fix upon as the likeliest for such a forgery is that of the Judges \*. But there is not the least foundation for such a supposition. To suppose them to have been forged in the time of Joshua, or the elders that immediately succeeded him, is the same thing as to suppose them to have been forged in the days of Moses himself. It must then have been very well known, whether these were the laws that were given by Moses, and whether the facts there referred to as things of public notoriety, and known to the whole nation, were really done or not; since great numbers must have been able to contradict or detect them, if they had been false: and after the death of Joshua, and the elders that had lived in the time of Moses, and seen those mighty acts, who could have had authority enough to have imposed those laws and facts upon the people? The deliverance out of Egypt, the sojourning of the Israelites in the wilderness, the laws and constitutions appointed by Moses in the name of God, the extraordinary facts said to have been wrought by him, their introduction into Canaan, and the manner of their settle-

\* His Lordship is pleased to observe, that “the four centuries the Israelites passed under their Judges, may well be compared to the heroical” (by which he understands the fabulous) “ages of the Greeks.” The reason he gives for this is pretty extraordinary. He says, “those of the Greeks were generally bastards of some god or other; and those of the Jews were always appointed by God to defend his people, and destroy their enemies.” As if the being a bastard of some god or other, and the being appointed by God for delivering and defending his people, were of the same significancy, and equally absurd and fabulous: though under such a polity as the Mosaical was, their having their judges and deliverers extraordinarily raised and appointed by God, had nothing in it but what was perfectly agreeable to the nature of their constitution. And whereas he mentions it to the disadvantage of the Jewish history under that period, that we there read of Ehud an *assassin*, and Jephthah a *robber*, and David a *captain of banditti*, it may be observed, that this last does not properly belong to the times of the Judges, and is only thrown in out of his great good will to the memory of that illustrious prince: and as to the two former, without entering into a particular consideration of the accounts which are given of them \*, it may justly be affirmed, that these instances do not afford a shadow of a proof, that the history is fabulous, and doth not contain a true account of facts.

\* See concerning Ehud, *Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation* Vol. ii. p. 334. 2d edit.

ment there, must have been comparatively fresh in their remembrance. It appears by Jephthah's answer to the king of the Ammonites, that the people of Israel were in his time very well acquainted with their own history, and with what had happened to them in the time of Moses, Judges xi. 12, &c. The same thing appears from the Song of Deborah, ch. v. 4, 5. and from the answer of Gideon, ch. vi. 13. And it cannot without great absurdity be supposed, that they could at that time have had a body of laws imposed upon them as the laws of Moses, and laws by which their nation had been governed ever since his time, though they had not known those laws before: or, that they could have been made to believe, that the facts referred to in those books were facts of which their whole nation had been witnesses, and which they themselves had received from their ancestors, and the memory of which had been constantly preserved among them, though they had never heard of these facts: or, that such and such sacred rites and ordinances had been instituted, and constantly observed and solemnized in their nation, in remembrance of those facts, if till then they had been utter strangers to the observance of those rites. And what renders this still more improbable is, that during that period there was for the most part no general governor who had authority over the whole, as the kings had afterwards. The several tribes seem to have been very much in a state of independency, and to have had the government within themselves. Few of their judges exercised an authority over all the tribes: nor were any of them priests till the time of Eli. In such a state of things, how was it possible to have imposed a new body of laws and history upon the whole nation, especially laws so different from the laws and customs of all other countries, and which enacted the severest penalties against the idolatries to which the neighbouring nations were so strongly addicted, and which the Israelites were so prone to imitate? If some of the tribes had received them, what likelihood is there that all would have done so, or would have regarded them as the laws of Moses, and as obligatory on the whole community, when they were so contrary to their own inclinations, and had never been imposed upon their nation before? Nothing less than such an authority as that which Moses claimed in the name of God himself, and which was

enforced by such illustrious divine attestations, could have prevailed with them to have submitted to those laws, or to have received those facts. To which it may be added, that it is manifest from the account given in the book of Judges, which is the only account of that time that we have to depend upon, that the general state of things during that period was this : The people frequently fell into a compliance with the idolatrous rites of the neighbouring countries : but when public calamities befel them, and which they regarded as punishments upon them for their transgressions of their law, they were made sensible of their guilt, and again returned to the observance of it, and to the adoration of the only true God as there prescribed ; and they were encouraged by the great things God had formerly done for their nation, to apply to him for deliverance from their oppressors. So that every thing during that period shews, that the law of Moses, and the worship of God and of him alone, free from idolatry and polytheism, was then the established constitution, which they themselves regarded as of divine authority, notwithstanding they too often suffered themselves to be seduced into deviations from it.

After the æra of the Judges, followed that of the Kings. King David lived very early in that period : and it appears with the utmost evidence, from the history and writings of that great prince, that the law of Moses was then held in the highest veneration, as of divine authority, and that the facts there recorded were universally believed and acknowledged ; and though some of the succeeding Kings deviated from that law into the idolatries of the neighbouring nations, yet that law never lost its authority, and the observance of it was soon restored. The design of the prophets, of whom there was a succession during that period, was to keep the people close to the observance of that law : and the extraordinary facts by which the authority of it was established, were still had in remembrance : and on the credit of that law, and of those extraordinary facts, they still looked upon themselves to be God's peculiar people. This writer indeed takes upon him to assert, that " there were times when they had actually no body of law among them, particularly in the reign of Josiah, when it had been long lost \*." But there is no ground to suppose,

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 276.

that ever there was a time under any of their kings, when they had actually no body of law among them, or that the book of the law of Moſes had been ever entirely loſt. This cannot be juſtly concluded from the ſurpriſe expreſſed at Hilkiab's the High Prieſt's finding the book of the law of the Lord in the temple, when they repaired it in Joſiah's reign : for this is juſtly ſuppoſed to be either the original book of the law written by Moſes himſelf, and ordered to be lodged in a coffer at the ſide of the ark, and which was found when the ark was removed, on occaſion of the temple and holy of holies being repaired ; or at leaſt an authentic copy of great antiquity and authority, kept in the temple, and which might have been neglected, or thought to have been loſt. But it would be abſurd to imagine, that there was no copy of the law at all remaining in any private hands, or in the hands of any of the prieſts or prophets. And it may very reaſonably be conceived, that upon finding an authentic book of the law of ſuch venerable antiquity, the attention of the king and great men might be more thoroughly awakened to the things contained there, and they might make a much ſtronger impreſſion upon them, than they had ever done before, even ſuppoſing they had read or heard the ſame things out of ſome other copy of the law, of leſs authority, and which was not ſo much to be depended upon. There is not one word in the account that is given us of this matter, of what our author mentions, concerning the little time the reading of the book in the preſence of the king took up ; from whence he concludes, that it contained nothing but the law ſtrictly ſo called, or the recapitulation of it in the book of Deuteronomy : though if that copy had contained no more than the book of Deuteronomy, this is a collection not only of the principal laws given by Moſes, but of the extraordinary and miraculous facts whereby the divine authority of the law was atteſted. As to what he inſinuates, that all the ſacred writings of the Jews were compoſed after the captivity, and that Eſdras and his ſucceſſors compiled the written law \*, I ſhall not add any thing here to what I have elſewhere offered to demonſtrate the palpable falſhood and abſurdity of ſuch a

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 339. vol. v. p. 229.

supposition \*. I shall only at present observe, that the preserving of the Pentateuch among the Samaritans, between whom, from the time of their first settling in that country, and the Jews, there was a fixed antipathy and opposition, affordeth a plain proof, that the code of the Mosaic history and laws was not the invention or composition of Esdras, but had been preserved among the Israelites of the ten tribes, in place of whom the Samaritans came. And the remarkable conformity there is between the Samaritan and Jewish code of the Pentateuch, both in the laws and in the facts, gives a signal confirmation of the antiquity and integrity of the Mosaic history and laws, and how far the Hebrew code is to be depended upon.

But to proceed to Lord Bolingbroke's farther objections. In order to destroy the credit of the Mosaic history, he hath taken all occasions to charge it with inconsistencies and contradictions. Thus he tells us, that the Mosaic account is plainly inconsistent with itself, in supposing that the unity of God was the original tradition derived from Adam, and yet that it was lost, and polytheism established in its stead in the days of Serah: or at least of Terah and Abraham, four hundred years after the deluge. He thinks it absurd to suppose, "that the knowledge of the existence of that God who had destroyed and restored the world, just before, could be wholly lost in the memory of mankind, and his worship entirely forgot, whilst the eye-witnesses of the deluge were yet alive †." The whole force of this objection depends upon his own absurd way of stating the case, as if the knowledge of the only true God were supposed to be then entirely lost and forgotten among mankind. True religion and the true worship of God might have been considerably corrupted in that time, and idolatry might have made a great progress, though the knowledge of the true God was not entirely lost and forgotten among men: as our author himself, when it is for his purpose, thinks fit to own.

With the same view of proving inconsistencies on the Mosaic history, he observes, that "it is repugnant to human nature to suppose, that the Israelites should, in the course of so few

\* See "Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History," p. 51. & seq.

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 19, 20, 217, 218.

“generations, become confirmed and hardened idolaters in Egypt, and should in so short a time not only forget the traditions of their fathers, and the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, but that they should have been as much wedded to idolatry as the Egyptians themselves were\*.” He himself furnisheth an answer to this, when he observes, that “polytheism and idolatry have a close connexion with the ideas and affections of rude and ignorant men.” And that “the vulgar embrace polytheism and idolatry very easily, even after the true doctrine of a divine unity has been taught and received †.” It may well be conceived, that during their abode in Egypt the Israelites might have contracted a great fondness for the Egyptian customs. They might be allured by the power and splendor of the Egyptians, to entertain a good opinion of their religion: and the extreme misery and distress to which they were reduced by their servitude, might lead many of them to question the promises made to Abraham and their ancestors, and make them more ready to deviate from the religion derived to them from their fathers: though there is no reason to think they entirely forgot it, but mixed idolatrous rites with it. And even after their deliverance from Egypt, the idolatrous habits and customs many of them had so deeply imbibed, were not soon laid aside. It may easily be supposed, that they would endeavour to reconcile and unite them with the religion Moses taught them. And this seems particularly to have been the case with regard to the worship of the golden calf. He mentions it as an incredible thing, that “they forgot the true God even when he conducted them through the desert: They revolted from him even whilst the peals of thunder that proclaimed his descent on the mountain rattled in their ears, and whilst he dictated his laws to them †.” He adds, that “if the miracles recorded to have been wrought had been really wrought, nothing less than the greatest of all miracles could have made these real miracles ineffectual.” “I know farther,” says he, “most intuitively, that no creature of the same nature as I am of, and I presume the Israelites were human creatures, could resist the evidence of such revelations, such miracles, and such traditions, as are recorded in the bible: That they must have

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 222, 223. † Ibid. p. 21, 22. ‡ Ibid. p. 223.



“terrified the most audacious, and have convinced the most incredulous\*.” Thus, with a view to destroy the credit of Mosaic history, he cries up the irresistible force of the revelations and miracles wrought among the Israelites. But perhaps he could not be so sure, as he pretends, what he himself might have done in those circumstances. There is scarce any answering for the extravagances and inconsistencies which human nature may fall into. But he goes all along upon a wrong supposition, as he had done before, as if the Israelites had entirely forgotten God, or intended absolutely to abandon his worship. This was not their intention in the instance he seems to have had particularly in his view, their worshipping the golden calf. For it is evident, they did not design to renounce the one true God, the God of Israel, and to discard his worship. This appears from Aaron’s proclaiming on that occasion a feast to the Lord, *Jehovah*; and from the people’s declaring, *These be thy Gods, O Israel*; or, as it is elsewhere rendered, *This is thy God, that brought thee out of the land of Egypt*, Exod. xxxii. 4, 5. compared with Nehem. ix. 18. Nothing can be plainer than that they intended by it to worship the God of Israel, who they knew had so lately brought them out of the land of Egypt; and that the worship they rendered to the calf was not designed to terminate there, but was done with a reference to the Lord *Jehovah*, whom they were for worshipping by that symbol. They might therefore flatter themselves, that this was consistent with their acknowledging no other God but one, which had been so solemnly enjoined them: and that the prohibition of bowing down before any image, was designed only to forbid the worshipping false gods, not the true God by such a symbol. This indeed was an inexcusable contravention of the law, which had been just promulgated with great solemnity, and which was intended to forbid their worshipping and bowing down before any image of the Deity, under any pretence whatsoever. But it was what minds, so strongly prepossessed with the notions and prejudices they had imbibed in Egypt, might be supposed capable of falling into. I would observe, by the way, that the recording this story affords a signal proof of the impartiality of the sacred historian. No-

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 225.

thing but the strictest regard to truth could have prevailed with him to have inserted a thing which has been so often mentioned to the dishonour of that people, even by their own writers, and by others ever since. And it is very probable, that if the people in after-times durst have made any alteration in the original sacred records, they would have struck it out for the same reason for which Josephus has omitted it, as he has done some other things which he thought would turn to the discredit of his nation.

Another attempt this writer makes against the credit of the Mosaic history, relates to the account given of their exode. He thinks it incredible, that “the Israelites should bear the oppressions of the Egyptians, when they were become so vastly numerous, and could bring six hundred thousand fighting men into the field, which was an army sufficient to have conquered Egypt\*.” But what could be expected from an undisciplined and unarmed multitude, however numerous, against the force of a powerful kingdom? especially when their spirits had been depressed by a long slavery, and a series of grievous oppressions; in which cases vast multitudes have been kept in subjection by a very few, of which there are many instances in history. In what follows he lets us know, that he thinks the accounts given by pagan authors of their exode not wholly fabulous, and that “an epidemical infectious distemper in the Lower Egypt, might make Pharaoh desirous to drive the inhabitants of that part of his kingdom into the neighbouring deserts.—That many of the inhabitants of the Lower Egypt were included with the Israelites in that transmigration; and that a common distemper, rather than a common religion, united them in it.” And again, he mentions it as a reason of the Israelites staying forty years in the wilderness, that “it was a sufficient time to wear out the leprosy, with which profane history assures us they were infected †.” Thus he is for reviving a false and scandalous story, the absurdity of which has been so often exposed. The different accounts given by the Pagan authors relating to that matter will naturally lead every intelligent reader to conclude, that the Egyptians endeavoured to conceal and disguise the

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 151.

† Ibid. p. 142, 144, 145.

truth. They could not deny the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt, and that it was in a manner, and with circumstances very disagreeable to them; yet they did not think it consistent with the honour of their own nation, to relate the fact with all its circumstances as it really happened. But of all the stories they trumped up on that occasion, that of the Israelites being expelled on the account of their being generally infected with the leprosy, is the most foolish and ridiculous. It appears, indeed, by the laws and constitutions of Moses, that there were leprosy, and other cutaneous distempers, among the Israelites, as well as among the neighbouring nations in that part of the world; but it also appears, with invincible evidence, that the body of that people were not infected with those distempers, and that there were comparatively very few who were so; since the infected were ordered to be put out of the camp, and were treated in such a way as they could not have been treated, if a great part of the people had been leprous. But any story is catched at, however void of all appearance of truth, that tends to cast disgrace upon the Jews, and the Holy Scriptures.

The only remaining objection against the Mosaic history, and which indeed seems to be what he layeth the principal stress upon, is, that it is repugnant to the experience of mankind. That "incredible anecdotes are not mentioned seldom or occasionally in them, as in Livy or other historians, but the whole history is founded on such, and consists of little else." He compares those that speak of the Pentateuch as an authentic history to Don Quixote, and represents them as *not much less mad than he was*. "When I sit down (says he) to read this history, I am ready to think myself transported into a sort of fairy land, where every thing is done by magic and enchantment; where a system of nature very different from ours prevails; and all I meet with is repugnant to my experience, and to the clearest and most distinct ideas I have. Almost every event in it is incredible in its causes or consequences, and I must accept or reject the whole \*." What his Lordship says amounts in other words to this: that this history gives an account of a series of miraculous facts and events, which were not according to the usual and ordinary

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 280.

course of things. This will be easily acknowledged. But it is denied, that this is a just or sufficient objection against the truth or authenticity of the history, or a valid reason why it should be rejected. On the contrary, if the facts there related had been only of the ordinary kind, they would not have answered the end which the divine wisdom had in view. It was necessary, as the case was circumstanced, that they should be miraculous, and therefore their being miraculous, is not a proof of their being false: and, considered in their causes and consequences, they are so far from being incredible, that, taking in their causes and consequences, they claim our belief and veneration. The way of arguing made use of by our author, and others of the deistical writers in such cases, deserves to be remarked. If the facts advanced in proof of a divine revelation may possibly be accounted for in a natural way, then they are no miracles at all, and cannot give a sufficient attestation to the truth and authority of a supernatural revelation: and if they are of an extraordinary nature, and out of the common course of our experience, and manifestly transcend all human power, then the very extraordinariness of the facts, and their being miraculous, though it is proper in such circumstances they should be so, is made a reason for rejecting them.

But that we may consider this matter more distinctly, it is to be observed, that it cannot be pretended, that the facts recorded in the books of Moses are absolutely impossible, or beyond the power of God to effect. If any reason therefore can be assigned to shew, that it was proper they should be wrought, and that it was worthy of the divine wisdom to interpose in so extraordinary a way, those facts, however miraculous they are supposed to be, become credible. And if to this it be added, that we have all the proofs that these facts were actually done, which the nature of the thing can admit of, or which could be reasonably desired, supposing those things to have really happened, this is all that can be justly expected, and it would be unreasonable to insist on more.

The case that is here supposed is this: That when the nations had fallen from the worship and adoration of the one true God, and him only, and became involved in superstition, polytheism, and idolatry, which was still growing and spread-

ing, and in danger of becoming universal, it pleased God, in his great wisdom and goodness, in order to put a check to the spreading idolatry, and to preserve his knowledge and worship among men, to interpose in an extraordinary way, by establishing among a people chosen for that purpose a constitution of a peculiar kind, the fundamental principle of which was the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, in opposition to all idolatry and polytheism. And, in order to give weight to this constitution, it was so ordered, that its divine authority was confirmed by a series of wonderful acts, which exhibited the most illustrious displays of his divine power and glory. And this constitution was designed farther to prepare the way for another dispensation, which was intended to be of a more general extent, and in which religion was in due season to be published to the world in its most perfect form.

This is a general view of the case: let us now examine it more distinctly.

And first, that at the time when the law of Moses and the Israelitish constitution were first established, idolatry and polytheism were generally spread through the nations, is a fact that can scarce be contested. This appears from all the remaining monuments of those times, as far as we can carry our inquiries. Nor could Lord Bolingbroke deny it. On the contrary he acknowledges, as shall be more particularly observed afterwards, that so great and general was the attachment of the people to idolatry and polytheism, that the most celebrated legislators of antiquity were every where obliged to fall in with it. And he himself asserts, that "polytheism and idolatry have so close a connexion with the ideas and affections of rude and ignorant men, that one of them could not fail to be their first religious principle, nor the other their first religious practice \*." This may be thought to be carrying it too far; but it is certain, that if we judge from fact and experience, there would have been little hope or expectation of recovering mankind from the idolatry and corruption into which they were fallen, without some extraordinary expedient, above what either the legislators or philosophers were able to effect.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv: p. 21.

If therefore it pleased God to interpose in an extraordinary manner for this purpose, it ought to be acknowledged to have been a signal instance, both of his wisdom and of his goodness. Our author himself represents it as a fundamental article of the religion of nature, that “the Supreme Being is the true, “and only true object of our adoration\*.” He calls this *that first and great principle of natural theology*, and the *angular stone of true theism*. If ever therefore it was worthy of God to interpose at all, or to concern himself with the affairs of men, here was a proper occasion for it, for maintaining and preserving that fundamental principle of all religion, which was become so greatly corrupted and perverted among men, and overwhelmed under an amazing load of superstitions and idolatries.

This accordingly was the excellent design of the Mosaic constitution, and of all the extraordinary attestations whereby the divine authority of it was established. It is undeniably manifest, that the chief aim of that whole dispensation, and the principal point to which all its laws were directed, was to establish the worship and adoration of the one true God, the Maker and Preserver of all things, the Supreme Lord and Governor of the world, and of Him alone; and to forbid and suppress, as far as its influence reached, that idolatry and superstition, which the wise men of other nations humoured and encouraged, and thought it impossible to subdue. If we compare the Mosaic institution with theirs, we shall find a vast difference between them. Lord Bolingbroke, speaking of the mighty degree of wealth and power to which the ancient priests, who were also the ancient philosophers and wise men, arrived in Egypt, Ethiopia, and the great eastern kingdoms, tells us, that “the general scheme of their policy seems to have been “this: They built their whole system of philosophy on the “superstitious opinions and practices that had prevailed in “days of the greatest ignorance. They had other expedients “which they employed artfully and successfully. Most of their “doctrines were wrapped up in the sacred veil of allegory. “Most of them were propagated in the mysterious cypher of “sacred dialects, of sacerdotal letters, and of hieroglyphical “characters; and the useful distinction of an outward and in-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 58.

“ward doctrine was invented, one for the vulgar, and one for the initiated \* . He afterwards observes, that “the worship of one God, and the simplicity of natural religion, would not serve their turn. Gods were multiplied; that devotions, and all the profitable rites and ceremonies that belong to them, might be so too. The invisible Mithras, without the visible, would have been of little value to the Magi †.” It ought therefore to give us a very advantageous notion of the divinity of the law of Moses, and the truth of his pretensions, that the method he took was entirely different; and that he was far from making use of those arts and expedients, which the ancient priests and sages of the east thought necessary. He did not found his theology on false popular opinions: on the contrary, the fundamental principle of his system was subversive of that polytheism, which his Lordship represents as the natural belief of men in the first uncultivated ages, and to which a great part of mankind in every age have been undeniably very prone. No variety or multiplicity of gods was allowed in his constitution: no false or idolatrous devotions, in order to bring a greater revenue to the priests. - He did not conceal his doctrines and laws in the cypher of sacred dialects, and sacerdotal letters, and hieroglyphical characters. His laws and doctrines were all designed for public universal use: and there was no such thing in his system as secret doctrines, to be communicated only to a few, and concealed from the vulgar. On the contrary, it was a maxim that lay at the foundation of that constitution, that all the people were to be instructed in the knowledge and worship of the one true God, free from idolatry, and to be made acquainted with his laws, and the duties there required. And though our author speaks of the allegories in the Old Testament, as if *allegory passed for a literal relation of facts* among them, it is certain, that in the historical parts of the Bible, particularly in the Mosaic history, the facts are generally delivered in a plain, simple, narrative stile, obvious to the capacities of the people.

His Lordship speaks with high approbation of the celebrated legislators of antiquity, whom he represents as *the first*, and he supposes *the best missionaries that have been seen in the world* ‡.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 42—44.

† *Ib.*, p. 49.

‡ *Ib.* p. 25

He instances in Mercury, Zoroaster, Zamolxis, Minos, Charondas, Numa : and having told us, that they all, to give the greater sanction to their religious and civil institutions, pretended to communications with their gods, or to revelations from them, he declares, that “ he believes it probable, that “ many of the reformers of mankind had discovered the existence of the one Supreme Being; but this knowledge might seem to them not sufficiently adapted to the character of the people with whom they had to do.” He adds, that “ it was necessary in their opinion to suit their doctrine to the gross conceptions of the people, and to raise such affections and passions by human images, and by objects that made strong impressions on sense, as might be opposed with success to such as were raised by sensible images and objects too, and were destructive of order, and pernicious to society. “ They employed, for reforming the manners of the half-savage people they civilized, the dread of superior powers, maintained and cultivated by superstition, and applied by policy \*.” Thus Lord Bolingbroke, notwithstanding the zeal he professes for true theism, is pleased mightily to admire and applaud the ancient legislators, who, by his own account, countenanced and encouraged polytheism and idolatry; whilst he abuses and vilifies Moses, the main design of whose law was to forbid and suppress it. Indeed the method he took was such as shewed that his law had an higher original than human policy. He established the worship of the one true God, the Creator and Governor of the universe, and of him only, as the foundation and central point of his whole system. Nor did he, in order to *suit his doctrine to the gross conceptions of the people*, indulge them in that idolatry and polytheism to which the nations were so generally and strongly addicted. All worship of inferior deities was prohibited : and he expressly forbade the Hebrews to represent the pure essence of the Deity by any corporeal form, that he might accustom them to a more spiritual adoration of the Supreme Being : and if, as our author alleges, he adopted some of the Egyptian rites and customs in accommodation to the weakness and prejudices of the people †, though this is far from being so certain as he pre-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 26, 27.

† Ibid. p. 31, 44.



tends\*, we maybe sure they were only such as might be innocently used, and not such as had a tendency to lead the people into idolatry, or out of which idolatry arose: for all things of this kind he strongly and most expressly prohibited: and therefore commanded the people *not to do after the doings of the land of Egypt, or to walk after their ordinances*, Lev. xviii. 3. The other legislators pretended, as well as he, to communications with the Divinity; yet whatever their private opinion might be, they durst not so much as attempt to take the people off from the superstition and idolatry they were so fond of. The reason was, they were sensible that their communication with the

\* It appears indeed, from the accounts of the Egyptian rites and customs given by some ancient writers, that there is a resemblance between some of those rites and customs, and those that were instituted in the Mosaic law; but there is no proof that the latter was derived from the former; nor indeed is there any proof which can be depended on, that those particular rites were in use among the Egyptians so early as the time of Moses, since the authors who mention them are of a much later date. And notwithstanding all that hath been said of the improbability of the Egyptians borrowing them from the Israelites, yet the very high opinion the Egyptians of his time had conceived of Moses, as appeareth from Exod. xi. 3. and the great impressions which we may well suppose to have been made upon them by the extraordinary divine interpositions, in favour of the Israelites, at their departure out of Egypt, and during their abode in the wilderness as well as at their entrance into the land of Canaan, of which the Egyptians could scarce be ignorant, might give occasion to their copying after some of the Mosaic institutions. They might possibly apprehend, that this would tend to draw down divine blessings upon them, or to avert judgments and calamities. These observations they might afterwards retain, though in succeeding ages, when the first impressions were over, they were too proud to acknowledge from whence they had originally derived them. Besides, it should be considered, that several of the rites and customs common to the Israelites and Egyptians, might be derived to both from the patriarchal times. The famous M. le Clerc, notwithstanding the zeal he frequently expresseth for the hypothesis, that many of the Mosaic rites were instituted in imitation of the Egyptians, yet in his notes on Levit. xxiii. 10. speaking of the offering up of the first-fruits to God, observes, that this was neither derived from the Egyptians to the Hebrews, nor from the Hebrews to the Egyptians, but was derived to both from the earliest ages, and probably was originally of divine appointment. The same he thinks of the oblation of sacrifices; and adds, that there were perhaps many other things which both people derived from the same source. *Et alia forte multæ ex aquo indidem traxit uterque populus.* So that many of those Jewish observances which some learned men, and M. le Clerc among the rest, have been fond of deriving from Egyptians, had probably been in use in the times of the ancient patriarchs, and were retained, and farther confirmed, as well as other additional rites instituted, in the law of Moses.

Deity was only pretended; and therefore they could not depend upon any extraordinary assistance to carry their designs into execution; but Moses not only pretended to have received his laws from God, but knew that it really was so, and was able to give the most convincing proofs of his divine mission. He was sure of a supernatural assistance, and this enabled him to accomplish what the ablest legislators of antiquity did not dare to attempt. His Lordship observes, that the Israelites “had the most singular establishment, ecclesiastical and civil, that ever was formed \*.” And it must be acknowledged to have been in many respects very different from that which obtained in other nations. And it can hardly be conceived, how, as things were circumstanced, it could have been established among the Israelites, but in an extraordinary and miraculous way. The very nature of the constitution furnishes a strong presumption of the truth of the miraculous facts by which the authority of it was attested and confirmed, and rendereth the whole account consistent and credible.

The chief objection which is urged against this, is drawn from the absurdity of supposing, that God should select a people to himself, among whom he would erect a peculiar constitution for preserving his knowledge and worship, apart from the rest of mankind. Or, however, “if he had thought fit, that the “sacred deposit should be trusted to a people chosen to pre- “serve it till the coming of the Messiah, no people was less “fit than the Israelites to be chosen for this great trust, on “every account. They broke the trust continually. The “revelations made to them were, as Mr Locke observes, shut “up in a little corner of the world, amongst a people, by that “very law which they received with it, excluded from a com- “merce and communication with the rest of mankind. A “people so little known, and contemned by those that knew “them, were very unfit and unable to propagate the doctrine “of one God in the world.” He asks, “Wherefore then was “this deposit made to them? It was of no use to other na- “tions before the coming of Christ, nor served to prepare “them for the reception of the gospel. And after his coming, “it was in this great respect of little use, if of any, to the Jews “themselves †.”

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 144.

† Ibid. p. 242, 243.

There is scarce any thing that has been more the subject of ridicule, than the Jews being a chosen race, distinguished from all other nations of the earth. And yet that the Jews were remarkably distinguished above other nations, for the knowledge and worship of the one true God, is a matter of fact which cannot possibly be denied. Whosoever reads the monuments of heathen antiquity, of which there are very large remains extant, the constitution of their laws, and system of their policy, and the writings of their historians, poets, and philosophers, and compares them with the Jewish, will find an astonishing difference, that cannot but strike every man who considers it. It must be acknowledged, that many of the heathen nations, particularly those of Greece and Rome, were renowned for learning and politeness, peculiarly eminent for their knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences, and for the fineness of their taste in works of genius and literature, which has rendered them the admiration of all succeeding ages. But in matters of religion, we meet every where with the most unquestionable proofs of the grossest idolatry and polytheism, in which not only were the vulgar universally involved, but it was countenanced and practised by the wisest and greatest men. That public worship which was instituted by their most celebrated legislators, and a conformity to which was recommended by the philosophers, was directed to a multiplicity of deities. On the other hand, if we turn our views to the Jews, a people no way eminent for their knowledge in the arts and sciences, we shall find that monotheism, the first and great principle, as he calls it, of natural theology, the acknowledgment and worship of the one true God, the Maker and Lord of the universe, and of Him only, was the fundamental principle of their constitution and of their state; all worship of inferior deities, and of the true God by images, was most expressly prohibited in their laws \*. If we examine their writings, we may observe, that they every where discover the pro-

\* Lord Bolingbroke takes notice, that Moses had made the destruction of idolatrous worship a principal object of his laws: and the zeal against images was great among the Jews. But he pretends, that it was only carved or embossed images that was held in horror: but a flat figure, either painted or embroidered, was allowed; as, he thinks, is very clear from a passage which he has read, quoted from Maimonides. And he intimates, that "picture-worship came from the Jews to the Christians, as did that of carved images from the Pagans." See vol. iv. p. 308. If that were the *casuistry*, as he calls it, of the Jews, it is

foundest veneration for the Deity; they abound with the sublimest sentiments of his divine Majesty, his incomparable perfections, his supreme dominion, and all-disposing providence, and every where express an utter detestation of all idolatry and polytheism. Nor is this the spirit of their moral and devotional writings only, but of their historical too; the principal design of which is to promote the great ends of religion, by representing the happy state of their nation, when they adhered to the worship of God, and persisted in obedience to his laws, and the calamities and miseries that befel them as a punishment for their defections and revolts. Their very poetry was vastly different from that of the heathen nations; not designed, like theirs, to celebrate the praises, the amours, the exploits of their fictitious deities, but fitted to inspire the noblest ideas of God, and containing the most elevated descriptions of his glory and perfections.

It is natural therefore to inquire, whence comes this amazing difference between the Jews and the most learned and civilized heathen nations in the knowledge and worship of the Deity? It is his Lordship's own observation, that "without revelation, the belief of the unity of God could not be the faith of any one people, till observation and meditation, till a full and vi-

certainly not chargeable on their law, which most expressly prohibited the worshipping, not only of *graven images*, but *the likenesses* of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath. But this is one instance, among many which might be produced, of the wrong use his Lordship has made of his too superficial reading. He was ready to take up with the slightest appearances in favour of any darling point he had in view. He has here confounded the making or drawing pictures or images with the worshipping them. Neither Maimonides, nor any other Jewish author, ever pretended that it was lawful for them to worship painted, any more than carved images. But as to the lawfulness of making images, or of painting and embroidering them, there were different opinions. Some carried it so far, that they were not for allowing any figures at all, either painted or carved, not so much as for ornament, for fear of giving occasion to idolatry. Others thought it lawful to have the figures of animals either painted or carved, except those of men, which were not allowed to be carved or embossed, though they might be painted, or drawn upon a plain: but neither the one nor the other were to be worshipped. If his Lordship had consulted Mr Selden, whom he hath sometimes quoted, he would have found all this distinctly represented. *De jure nat. et gent. apud Hebr.* lib. xi. cap. 6—9. There is no foundation, therefore, for his new discovery, that picture-worship came from the Jews to the Christians.

“gorous exercise of reason, made it such \*.” And again, he tells us, that “the rational, the orthodox belief, was not established, nor could be so, till the manhood of philosophy †.” How comes it then, that the public acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, free from polytheism and idolatry, was the established religion of the Jews only? Were they the only people who had reason in a full and vigorous exercise, and among whom philosophy was arrived at its manhood? If so, it is wrong to represent them, as the deistical writers have frequently done, as the most stupid of the human race, a people *ignorant and barbarous*, as he and Mr Hume calls them. Nor had he a right to laugh at Mr Abbadie, who, he says, has represented them as a *nation of sages and philosophers ‡*. It will be readily allowed, that the Jews were not of themselves more wise and knowing, or better philosophers than other nations, or that they had made deeper observations and reflections; on the contrary, they were inferior to some in several branches of science. We have all the reason therefore in the world to conclude, that, if left to themselves, they would have been involved in the common polytheism and idolatry, as well as the nations round them: and that it was owing only to their having had the advantage of an extraordinary revelation, and to their peculiar constitution, which was of divine original, and which had been confirmed by the most illustrious attestations, that they became so remarkably distinguished.

Lord Bolingbroke was very sensible how unfavourable this is to his cause, and therefore finds great fault with Mr Locke for assuming, that the belief and worship of the one true God was the national religion of the Israelites alone, and that it was their particular privilege and advantage to know the true God, and his true worship, whilst the heathen nations were in a state of darkness and ignorance. To take off the force of this, seems to be the principal design of his third Essay, which is of *the rise and progress of monotheism §*. But what he offers to this purpose is extremely trifling. He is forced quite to alter the true state of the question, and supposes Mr Locke and the

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 20.

† Ibid. p. 22, 23.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 283.

§ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 187, et seq.

Christian divines to assert, that there was not any knowledge or worship of the true God in the world at all before the erection of the Israelitish polity; and that all the nations, except the Israelites, had been ignorant of the true God from the beginning. And then he argues, that “this implies that the Israelites were a nation from the beginning;” and gravely asks, “Were they so, if we reckon from Adam, or even from Noah, or even from the vocation of their father Abraham \*?” Thus he frames a ridiculous hypothesis for his adversaries, and then endeavours to expose it; whereas they maintain, what he thinks fit to deny, that the knowledge and worship of the true God was the original primitive religion of mankind, derived from the first parents and ancestors of the human race: but that before the time of Moses, the nations were generally lapsed into polytheism and idolatry, which appears from his own acknowledgment to have been the case.

He affirms indeed, “it is plain that the knowledge of the one true God would have been preserved in the world, if no such people as the Jews had ever been. And nothing can be more impertinent than the hypothesis, that this people, the least fit perhaps on many accounts that could have been chosen, was chosen to preserve this knowledge. It was acquired, and it was preserved independently of them, among the heathen philosophers. And it might have become, and probably did become, the national belief in countries unknown to us, or even in those who were fallen back into ignorance, before they appear in the traditions we have †.” What an extraordinary way of talking is this! He argues from the supposed national belief of countries unknown to us, and of which he confesses we have no traditions extant, to shew that religion would have been preserved in the world, if no such people as the Jews had ever been. As to the heathen philosophers, among whom, he says, the knowledge of the true God was preserved, it is certain, and he himself frequently owns it, that whatever knowledge some of them had this way, it was of little use to hinder the polytheism and idolatry of the people; and that, instead of reclaiming them from

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 233.

† Ibid. p. 79.

it, they fell in with it themselves, and even encouraged and advised the people to a compliance with the public laws and customs, by which polytheism was established.

Thus it appears, that after all the outcry and ridicule against the Jews as the unfittest people in the world to have the sacred deposit of the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God committed to them, they were the only people concerning whom we have any proofs that they made a public national acknowledgment of this great principle, and among whom it was established as the fundamental law of their state \*. It is urged, indeed, that their constitution had little effect upon them: that “their history is little else than a relation of their rebelling and repenting; and these rebellions, not those of particular men, surprized and hurried into disobedience by their passions, but national deliberate violations of the law, in defiance of the Supreme Being †.” But if we compare the history of the Jews with that of the heathen nations, we shall find a very remarkable difference between them.

\* His Lordship shews a strange unwillingness, that the Jews should have the honour of having had the knowledge and worship of the true God among them, in a degree far superior to other nations. Sometimes he insinuateth, as some others of the deistical writers have done, that the Israelites borrowed it from the Egyptians (though according to his own representation of the case, this was among the Egyptians part of their secret doctrine, not communicated to the vulgar,) or from the Babylonians. And then the wonder will be, how it came to pass, that the knowledge and worship of the one true God was preserved among the Jews, whilst the Egyptians and Babylonians were immersed in the most absurd and stupid idolatries. He thinks he might *venture to affirm*, that Abraham *himself learned the orthodox faith, viz.* relating to the knowledge and worship of the one true God, in Egypt and *the neighbouring countries* §. And he had said the same thing before ||. There cannot be a greater proof of unreasonable prejudice than this. It is surmised not only without evidence, but against it, since nothing can be plainer from the account given us of Abraham, than that he knew and worshipped the one true God before he came into Canaan at all, and therefore long before he went into Egypt. Nor did he learn it from the Chaldeans, among whom idolatry had then made a considerable progress, as appears from Josh. xxiv. 2. And agreeably to this, is the universal tradition of the East; that he was the great restorer of the ancient true religion, which had been corrupted with idolatry.

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol v. p. 136.

§ Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 203.

|| Ibid. vol. iii. p. 299.

Notwithstanding all the faults and defections of the former, and though they too often fell into idolatries and vicious practices, in a conformity to the customs of the neighbouring countries, they again recovered from them, and returned to the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, and him only, and often continued for a considerable number of years together in the profession and practice of the true religion, free from idolatry; of which there are many proofs in all the ages of their nation, from the days of Moses to the Babylonish captivity; during the time of their Judges, Kings, &c. as every one knows that is at all acquainted with their history. This was owing to the revelation they enjoyed: they still had recourse to their law, and by that reformed themselves, and returned to the pure worship of God according to that law; to which, after the Babylonish captivity, in which they had suffered so much for their defections and revolts, they adhered more closely than ever. But among the heathen nations, even those of them that were most learned and civilized, such as the Grecians and Romans, all was one continued course of polytheism, and the most absurd idolatries; nor can we name any period of their history, in which they laid aside the public polytheism, and returned to the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, and of him only. It must be said, therefore, that the Jewish history doth indeed furnish plain proofs of what the author observes, the proneuess of mankind in all ages to polytheism and idolatry; but it shews at the same time, that, by virtue of their peculiar constitution, the worship of God was maintained among them in a manner in which it was not in any other nation: and this affordeth a signal proof of the benefit of revelation, and how far superior it is to the efforts of the wisest lawgivers and philosophers.

It appears then, that the Mosaic constitution did answer very valuable ends. By this there was a people preserved, among whom the knowledge and adoration of the one living and true God was maintained, in a world over-run with superstition and idolatry, and to whom an admirable system of laws was given. And, notwithstanding all that is said about the people of Israel being shut up in a corner of the earth, they were placed in an advantageous situation, in the centre of the then known world,



between Egypt and Arabia on the one hand, and Syria, Chaldea, and Assyria on the other, among whom the first great empires were erected, and from whence knowledge and learning seem to have been derived to the western parts of the world. And they were also in the neighbourhood of Sidon and Tyre, the greatest emporiums in the world, from whence ships went to all parts, even the most distant countries. Their peculiar constitution, whereby they were so remarkably distinguished from other nations, together with the extraordinary things God had done for them, had a natural tendency to put the neighbouring people upon inquiring into the design of all this, which would be apt to lead them to the adoration of the one true God, and into the knowledge of the true religion in its most necessary and important principles, and to discover to them the folly and unreasonableness of their own superstition and idolatry. That this was really part of the design which the divine wisdom had in view in this constitution, and that therefore it was intended to be of use to other nations besides the people of Israel, plainly appears from many passages of Scripture \*. They were indeed kept distinct from other people, and it was necessary for wise ends they should be so: but they were always ready to receive among them those of other nations that worshipped the one true God, though they did not conform to the peculiar rites of their polity: and in the most flourishing times of their state, particularly in the reigns of David and Solomon, they had an extensive dominion and correspondence; and afterwards they had frequent intercourse with Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Chaldea, and Persia. If we consider what is related concerning the Queen of Sheba, and Hiram, King of Tyre, as well as the memorable decrees of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, Darius the Mede, Cyrus, Darius Hystaspes, and Artaxerxes, Kings of Persia, the greatest monarchs then upon earth, and who published to the world the regard and veneration they had for the Lord Jehovah, the God whom the Jews worshipped; it is very probable that the fame of their laws, and the remarkable interpositions of providence on their behalf, spread far and wide among the nations, and

\* See particularly, Exod. vii. 15. ix. 16. xiv. 4. Numb. xiv. 13, 14, 21. Deut. iv. 6. 1 Kings viii. 41—43. Psal. xxvi. 3.

contributed, in more instances than is commonly imagined, to keep up some knowledge of the true God, the Maker and Lord of the universe, and to give some check to the prevailing idolatry, and to preserve the ancient patriarchal religion from being utterly extinguished. To which it may be added, that, in the latter times of their state, vast numbers of the Jews were dispersed through Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and other parts of the east; and afterwards through the lesser Asia, and the several parts of the Roman empire: and they every where turned many of the Gentiles from the common idolatry and polytheism; which the philosophers were scarce able to effect in a single instance. It appears then, that the setting apart that people in so extraordinary a manner, the revelation that was given them, and the marvellous acts of divine providence towards them, were fitted for having an extensive effect for the advantage of other nations, as well as their own, and actually had that effect in multitudes of instances. By this constitution, there was a light set up, shining in a dark place, to which other nations might have recourse. And if, instead of making use of it as they ought to have done, they generally neglected it, and even hated and despised the Jews for having a religion so opposite to their own, and condemning their superstitions and idolatries; the fault is to be charged upon themselves, who neglected those means and helps, as they had done before the discoveries made to them by ancient tradition, and which had been originally derived from revelation, and by the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence. Besides this, what farther shews the great propriety and usefulness of this peculiar constitution, and the revelation given to the people of Israel, is, that it had a great tendency to prepare the world for receiving that more perfect dispensation which was to succeed it, and which was to be of a more general extent, and to be more universally diffused. The first harvest of converts to Christianity was among the Jews and their proselytes, of whom great numbers were brought over to the Christian faith. The Jewish Scriptures were generally dispersed, and had spread the knowledge of God, and had raised an expectation of a glorious and divine person, by whom a new and most excellent dispensation was to be introduced, and the Gentiles were to be brought over, more generally than

had hitherto been done, from their superstitions and idolatries, from their abominable vices and corruptions, to the pure worship of God, and the knowledge and practice of true religion. This glorious person was foretold and described in the Jewish prophecies by many remarkable characters, which being accomplished in our Saviour, gave a most illustrious attestation to his divine mission. And these prophecies were kept more clear and distinct, by being in the hands of a peculiar people as the depositaries of them; whereas, if they had been, like other traditions, left merely at large among the nations, they would probably, in process of time, have been corrupted and lost, and the testimony arising from them must have fallen.

Taking all these considerations together, it appears, that the peculiar Jewish œconomy answered many valuable and important ends: and that therefore, it was no way unworthy of the divine wisdom to interpose in an extraordinary manner to give a divine attestation to it. And that the miraculous facts, if really done, were every way sufficient for this purpose, our author himself does not deny. On the contrary, he looks upon them to have been so strong and convincing, that it would have been impossible to resist them; and he thinks they must have been sufficient, if they had been really done, to have brought over all mankind to the belief and acknowledgment of the one true God, not only in that age, but in all succeeding ages. His manner of expressing himself is remarkable. He says, that “the reviving and continuing the primitive faith and worship by such a series of revelations and miracles among one people, would have made any revival of them unnecessary among any other; because they would have been more than sufficient to continue them uncorrupted over the whole world; not only till the vocation of Abraham, four hundred years after the deluge; not only till the coming of the Messiah, two thousand years after that, but even to this hour, and to the consummation of all things\*.” Not to insist upon the great absurdity of his supposing, that the miracles wrought among the Israelites so long after the vocation of Abraham, would have been sufficient to have kept the true religion uncorrupted till the vocation of Abraham, a blunder which could only have been owing to the most inexcusable negligence

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 214

in writing ; I think it follows from his own concessions, that the miracles and other extraordinary methods made use of for the establishment of the Mosaic œconomy, were of such a nature as to be well fitted to the end for which they were designed, the revival and establishment of the worship of the one true God, in opposition to idolatry and polytheism. And though it be wrong to suppose, as he most absurdly does, that they must have established it among all mankind, and have prevented all deviations from it in all ages and nations ; yet it will be acknowledged, that those facts were of such a kind as to have been sufficient to convince all those to whom they were known, that the laws, in attestation to which they were wrought, were of a divine original. Accordingly, the people of Israel, notwithstanding their proneness to idolatry, and their obstinate prejudices, were brought to submit to those laws, as of divine authority, and to receive them as the rule of their polity. And though they fell off on several occasions to a compliance with the idolatries of the neighbouring nations, which they mixed with their own rites, yet the remembrance and belief of those facts, which always continued among them, had mighty effects, in every age of their state, to bring them back to the true worship of God, and to an obedience to their laws. And they have had a great effect ever since, wherever they have been believed, to fill men with a holy fear of God, and with the most adoring thoughts of his divine unequalled majesty and glory. This effect they continue to have among Christians, and are like to have to the end of the world.

It is no just objection against the truth of the facts, that they come to us through the hands of the Jews : for what other testimony can be reasonably desired, or can the nature of the thing admit of, than the concurrent testimony of that people, to whom the laws were given, and among whom the facts were done ? A testimony continued throughout all the ages of their nation, and appearing in all their records and monuments. The facts were done among themselves, and therefore, in the nature of things, could only be witnessed by themselves. If those of any other nation had recorded them, they must have had their accounts from the people of Israel : and if they had declared their belief of those facts, and of the divine authority of those laws, there would have been an equal pretence for re-

jecting their testimony, as for rejecting that of the Jews. But it is in truth very absurd to make it an objection, that the accounts of these facts are transmitted to us by those who were the only proper persons to give an account of those facts, and by whom alone those accounts could have been originally given, if they had been true. If it be pretended, that the facts were feigned by them to do honour to their nation, it must be considered, that, as it was before hinted, they are so circumstanced, and mixed with such disadvantageous accounts of the temper and conduct of that people, as no man would have feigned who had their honour in view, or who had not a greater regard to the truth of the facts, than to the humouring and flattering that people. For it is plain, that the facts might have been so contrived, if they had been fictitious, as to have saved the honour of their nation, and not to have given occasion to the severe censures and reproaches which have been cast upon them in all ages on that account. And what farther derives great credit to the relations of those extraordinary and miraculous facts, is, that the books in which they are contained, not only appear to have been written with an unaffected simplicity, and a sincere impartial regard to truth, mixed with a profound veneration for the Deity, but they contain the most remarkable predictions of future events, which it was impossible for any human sagacity to foresee; particularly relating to the future fates of that nation; the surprising revolutions they should undergo; the calamities, captivities, and desolations, that should befall them; their being scattered and dispersed all over the face of the earth, and every where exposed to hatred, contempt, and reproach, and yet still wonderfully preserved as a distinct people, as we see they are at this day; notwithstanding they have for so many ages lost their genealogies, and been deprived of their most valued privileges, and rendered incapable of exercising their most solemn sacred rites as prescribed in their law, and without any prophets raised up among them, and acknowledged by themselves as such, to support their hopes. These are things for which no parallel can be found in any other nation upon earth. So that the present state of that people, in all respects so extraordinary, is a living proof of the truth and divinity of those writings which contain an account of the laws that were originally given them, and of th

wonderful facts by which those laws were enforced and established. This is a proof still stronger to us, than it could have been in the ages soon after those books were written, and affordeth one instance in which the evidence of those facts, instead of being diminished by time, has acquired new strength and force.

You will forgive the length of this letter, as I was willing to lay together in one view all that I thought necessary for clearing and establishing the truth of the Mosaic history against our author's objections; and which, if it be well supported, the divinity of those laws, and of that constitution, follows with invincible evidence.

## L E T T E R XXIX.

*The excellent Nature and Tendency of the Mosaic Writings, and the Scriptures of the Old Testament—Lord Bolingbroke treats it as Blasphemy to say that they are divinely inspired—A Summary of his Objections against their divine Original and Authority—His Charge against the Scriptures, as giving mean and unworthy Ideas of God, considered at large—The Representations he himself gives of God, and of his Providence, shewn to be unworthy, and of the worst Consequence—Concerning God's being represented in Scripture as entering into Covenant with man—The Pretence of his being described as a tutelary God to Abraham, and to the People of Israel, and of his being degraded to the meanest Offices and Employments, distinctly examined—The Passages in which bodily Parts seem to be ascribed to God, not designed to be taken in a literal Sense—The Scripture itself sufficiently guards against a wrong Interpretation of those Passages—In what Sense human Passions and Affections are attributed to the Supreme Being—A remarkable Passage of Mr Collins to this Purpose.*

SIR,

THE design of my last letter was to vindicate the truth and credit of the Mosaic history, and of the extraordinary facts there related. And if that history be admitted as true, the divine original and authority of the Mosaic constitution is established. But besides the external proofs arising from the extraordinary and miraculous facts, whosoever with an unprejudiced mind looks into the revelation itself as contained in the sacred writings of the Old Testament, may observe remarkable internal characters, which demonstrate its excellent nature and tendency. At present I shall observe, that we are there taught to form the worthiest notions of God, of his incomparable perfections, and of his governing providence, as extending over all his works, particularly towards mankind. We are at the same time instructed in the true state of our own case, as we are weak, dependent, guilty creatures, and are directed to place our whole hope and trust in God alone, and to refer all to him, as

our chiefest good, and highest end; to be thankful to him for all the good things we enjoy, and to be patient and resigned to his will under all the afflictive events that befall us. Our moral duty is there set before us in its just extent. The particulars of it are laid down in plain and express precepts, enforced upon us in the name, and by the authority of God himself, whose love of righteousness, goodness, and purity, and just detestation of vice and wickedness, are represented in the strongest manner. Those sacred writings every where abound with the most encouraging declarations of his grace and mercy towards the truly penitent, and with the most awful denunciations of his just displeasure against obstinate presumptuous transgressors. And the important lesson which runs through the whole is this, that we are to make the pleasing and serving God the chief business of our lives; and that our happiness consisteth in his favour, which is only to be obtained in the uniform practice of piety and virtue.

Such evidently is the nature and tendency of the sacred writings of the Old Testament. But very different is the representation made of them by Lord Bolingbroke. Not content with endeavouring to destroy the credit of the history, he hath, by arguments drawn from the nature of the revelation itself contained in the Jewish Scriptures, used his utmost efforts to shew, that it is absolutely unworthy of God: That "there are marks of an human original in those books, which point out plainly the fraud and the imposture \*." And that "it is no less than blasphemy to assert them to be divinely inspired †."

The objections he has advanced against the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and especially against the Mosaic writings, are principally these that follow:

1. That they give the most unworthy ideas of the Supreme Being: they degrade him to the meanest offices and employments, and attribute to Him human passions, and even the worst of human imperfections.

2. Some of the laws there given are absolutely contrary to the law of nature, which is the law of God, and therefore cannot be of divine original. He instanceth particularly in the com-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 288.

† Ibid. p. 299.



mand for extirpating the Canaanites, and for punishing idolaters with death.

3. The first principle of the law of Moses is insociability and it took the Jews out of all moral obligations to the rest of mankind.

4. There are several passages in the Mosaic writings, which are false, absurd, and unphilosophical: as particularly the account there given of the creation of the world, and the fall of man.

5. The sanctions of the law of Moses were wholly of a temporal nature, and were contrived and fitted to humour and gratify the appetites and passions; without any regard to a future state of rewards and punishments.

These are the principal objections urged by Lord Bolingbroke against the divine authority of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and particularly of the books of Moses. There are some other smaller exceptions, which I shall take notice of as they come in my way.

1. The first class of objections relateth to the mean and unworthy representations that are made to us in Scripture of the Supreme Being. It hath always been accounted one of the distinguishing excellencies of the sacred writings, that they abound with the most just and sublime descriptions of the Deity, which have a manifest tendency to raise our minds to the most worthy and exalted conceptions of his divine majesty, and his incomparable excellencies and perfections. Our author himself thinks fit to acknowledge, that "there are many passages in Scripture, which give most sublime ideas of the majesty of the Supreme Being:" And that "the conceptions which the Jews entertained of the Supreme Being were very orthodox in the eye of reason; and their psalmists, and their prophets, strained their imaginations to express the most elevated sentiments of God, and of his works, and of the methods of his providence\*." If therefore there be any passages which, literally taken, seem to be unworthy of God, they ought, by all the rules of candour and fair criticism, to be interpreted in a consistency with these; since it cannot be reasonably supposed, that those who entertained such noble and sublime sentiments of the Divinity, should at the same time,

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 99. vol. iv. p. 463.

as he would persuade us they did, form the meanest and unworthiest conceptions of him.

But let us consider the particulars of his charge ; and it amounts in effect to this : That the Scriptures degrade the Supreme Being, by representing him as descending to the meanest offices and employments : and that they attribute to him human passions, and even the worst of human imperfections.

As to the first part of the charge, the degrading the Divine Majesty to the meanest, the unworthiest, offices and employments ; he observes, that, according to the Mosaic account, “ the Supreme Being condescended to be the tutelary God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and under this character he acted a part which a sensible heathen, not transported by presumptuous notions of his own importance, nor by the impudence of enthusiasm, would have thought too mean and too low for any of his inferior gods or demons \*.” This objection he frequently repeats in various forms. He introduces one of the heathen sages as alleging, that “ among the Mosaic superstitions there was one, which could be charged neither on the Egyptians, nor any other heathen nation, and which surpassed the most extravagant of theirs ; and this was, that the Supreme Being is represented as having taken upon him a name, which was a very magnificent one indeed, and such as might denote the Supreme Being, but still a name by which he might be distinguished as the tutelary God of one family first, and then of one nation particularly, and almost exclusively of all others †.” But there is no passage where he pushes this objection more strongly, than in p. 463. of vol. iv. where he observes, that “ the eternal and infinite Being is represented in the Jewish histories, and in the whole system of their religion, as a local tutelary deity, carried about in a trunk, or residing in a temple ; as an ally, who had entered into covenant with their fathers ; as a king, who had actually held the reins of their government ; and as an industrious magistrate, who descended into all the particulars of religious and civil administration, even into the most minute and meanest. Thus were the Jews accustomed to familiarize themselves with the Supreme Being, and to imagine that he familiarized with them, and to figure him to themselves re-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 304.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 31.

“ceiving their sacrifices, and listening to their prayers, sometimes at least, as grossly as Lucian represents Jupiter.” He seems to think the heathens were in the right, when they blamed the Jews for “bringing the first and only God too near to man, and making him an actor immediately, and personally, as it were, in the creation and government of the world\*.” And he had before observed, that, according to the Scripture, “the correspondence between God and man was often immediate, and even intimate and familiar with his elect, and with such purified souls as were prepared for it. And that the whole tenor of the sacred writings represented the Supreme Being in frequent conferences with his creatures : God covenanting and making bargains with man, and man with God : God holding the language of man, reasoning, arguing, expostulating, in a very human manner, animated by human affections, and appealing to human knowledge †.”

Before I enter on a particular discussion of what his Lordship hath here offered, it is proper to observe, that though, in a passage just now cited, the Jews seem to be blamed for bringing the Supreme Being *too near to man*, and supposing him to be *an actor immediately, and as it were personally, in the government of the world*, yet he elsewhere finds fault with the heathen philosophers for excluding the Monad, or supreme unity, from the creation and government of the world, and *banishing him almost intirely from the system of his works*, whereby he became in some sort a non-entity, an abstract or notional being ‡. And he censures them for “imagining a divine monarchy, on a human plan, the administration of which was not carried on by the immediate agency of God himself, but mediately, as in terrestrial monarchies, by that of inferior agents, according to the ranks and provinces allotted them §.” And to this notion, he thinks, a considerable “part of the heathen idolatry is to be ascribed.” It is hard to know what idea this writer would have us form of the divine government. On the one hand, he seems to think it a demeaning the majesty of the Supreme Being to suppose him to *act immediately, and personally, as it were*, in the government of the world : and, on the other

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 464.

† Ibid, p. 466.

‡ Ibid. p. 155.

§ Ibid. p. 73.

hand, he will not allow, that the divine administration is carried on *mediately* by the ministry of inferior agents. And if God does not govern the world, either by his own personal immediate agency, or by that of subordinate agents and instruments, it cannot easily be conceived in what sense he can be said to govern the world at all.

Indeed any one that impartially considers the several passages above mentioned, relating to the Jewish Scriptures, and many others of the like kind, which occur in Lord Bolingbroke's writings, and compares them with the scheme which he himself hath advanced, and of which an account was given in the eighth letter, will be apt to think that the real original ground of his prejudices against the sacred writings is this, That they every where represent God as interesting himself in the affairs of men: whereas he looks upon it to be unworthy of the divine majesty to suppose that he now concerneth himself about them, or exerciseth any care with respect to the individuals of the human race. And since he asserts, that "the most elevated of finite intelligent beings, are not a jot nearer to the Supreme Intelligence than the lowest \*," he must, upon his scheme, think it as unbecoming the majesty of God to exercise any special care towards the highest of angelical beings, or whatever inhabitants there may be in any part of this vast universe, as towards the individuals of mankind. This scheme is not only, as was shewn before, of a most pernicious tendency, and manifestly subversive of all religion and the fear of God, but at the bottom argueth, notwithstanding all its glorious pretences, very dishonourable and unworthy conceptions of the Supreme Being. For either it supposeth him not to be present to the creatures he hath made, which is to deny the immensity of his essence, or that, if he be present, he hath not a certain knowledge of them, and of their actions and affairs, and consequently is not omniscient: though our author himself says, "It may be demonstrated, that the All-perfect Being must be omniscient, as well as self-existent †." Or that, if he hath a perfect knowledge of the actions and affairs of his reasonable creatures, yet he is absolutely indifferent about them, whether they obey his laws or not; whether good or evil, virtue or vice,

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 183.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 36.

happiness or misery, prevail in the moral world. This must be owned to be very well suited to the character of an Epicurean deity, whose happiness consisteth in an eternal indolence, and who is supposed to be of a nice and delicate constitution, unable to bear the noise, the clamours, and confusion, of this lower world, but is no way consistent with the idea of the infinitely-perfect Being. How much nobler is the idea that is given us of the Deity in the Holy Scriptures! where he is represented as filling heaven and earth with his presence, and exercising a constant inspection over all his creatures, and all their actions, as disposing and ordering all events, without distraction or confusion, in such a manner, as in the final issue of things to provide for the happiness of those that sincerely obey him, and go on in the practice of righteousness and virtue, and to manifest a just displeasure against those who obstinately persist in an impertinent course of vice and wickedness; and, in a word, as governing the world, and all the orders of beings in it, with infinite wisdom, righteousness, and equity, and with the same almighty facility with which he created them! Such an idea of God is not only of the greatest consequence to the interests of religion and virtue in the world, but is infinitely more august and noble in itself, and more conformable to the highest notions we can form of infinite perfection, than that which this writer would substitute in its stead.

I shall not add any thing here to what was offered in my eighth Letter, concerning a particular providence, as extending even to the individuals of the human race. If providence doth not interpose in human affairs at all, it cannot be expected that God should at any time communicate extraordinary discoveries and revelations of his will to mankind. But if, as hath been shewn, providence doth concern itself even for individuals, and for promoting human happiness, in a way consistent with moral agency; it is very reasonable to suppose, that it may please God to make discoveries and revelations of his will, for promoting the knowledge and practice of religion and virtue in the world, and that he may communicate such discoveries to particular persons, or to larger communities, in such a way as may best answer the intentions of his wise and holy providence, of which he must be allowed to be the properest judge. And if he seeth fit to make such revelations of his will, they must be

communicated in such a manner as is accommodated to human understandings, and fitted to work upon human affections: and therefore, if they be addressed to men in a way of *reasoning, arguing, and expostulating*, it would be absurd to make this an objection, as this writer seems to do, since there is nothing in this, but what is wisely suited to the end we may suppose the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness to have had in view in giving such revelations.

He represents it as altogether unworthy of the Supreme Being to suppose him to enter into covenant with man: and in order to expose this, he is pleased to represent it under the mean idea of God's *making bargains with man, or man with God*. But if we consider what is really intended by it, we shall find, that a covenant in this case is properly to be understood of a conditional promise, whereby blessings and benefits are promised on God's part, and duties required on ours: it is a law of God enjoining obedience, with a promise or promises annexed to it, by which God condescendeth to oblige himself to confer certain benefits upon his creatures, the subjects of his moral government, if they fulfil and obey the injunctions he hath laid upon them, and comply with the terms which he hath appointed. And, considered in this view, it is so far from being a just objection against the sacred writings, that it may be regarded as their great excellence, and what should mightily recommend them to our esteem, that God is there represented as dealing with man in a way of covenant; that is, in a way admirably suited to us as we are reasonable creatures, moral agents. By this God doth not divest himself of his character and authority as our supreme universal Lord. He hath an undoubted right to give laws to his creatures, and lay what commands or injunctions upon them he seeth fit, in a way of absolute sovereignty, without bringing himself under any promises and engagements; but he condescendeth, in his marvellous wisdom and goodness, to encourage and animate our obedience by express promises and assurances of his grace and favour; and we on our parts bring ourselves under the most solemn engagements, which bind us more strictly to our duty, by our own express consent; than which no way of dealing with us can have a greater tendency to promote our comfort, and the interests of religion and virtue in the world.

As to the particular covenant made with Abraham, and God's engaging, as he loves to express it, to be a *tutelary God* to him; this put into other words, signifies no more than this, that it pleased God to grant to this excellent person express promises of his special grace and favour, upon condition of his faith and obedience; and particularly, that he promised to give the land of Canaan to his descendants; and that from him should proceed that glorious person, who had been promised from the beginning, and who was actually to come into the world in the fulness of time, and in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. This covenant made with Abraham was not only proper, as it was a distinguishing mark of the divine favour and goodness to a person, who was an eminent example of piety and virtue, and the fame of whose excellent qualities is spread all over the east, even to this day, but as it made a part of a glorious scheme which the divine Wisdom had in view, and which was to be accomplished in the fittest season, and to be of extensive benefit to mankind. So that this particular covenant was really intended in a subserviency to the general good.

With regard to the covenant made with the people of Israel at Horeb, the design of it was to erect a sacred polity, the fundamental article of which was the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, the Maker and Governor of the world, free from all idolatry and polytheism. This transaction was carried on with a majesty and solemnity becoming the great Lord of the universe, and which tended to inspire the profoundest veneration for him, and for the laws he was pleased to promulgate. And, at the same time, it was wisely ordered, that the people should bind themselves by their own express consent, and solemn stipulation, to receive that constitution, and obey those laws. The moral laws given to that people were excellent: the judicial laws just and equitable: the ceremonial laws were instituted for wise reasons, some of which we are able to assign at this distance; and there is no doubt to be made, that if we were well acquainted with the circumstances of that time and people, we should be convinced of the great propriety of many of those ceremonious injunctions, which now we are not able particularly to account for. Our author talks of the priest's *wearing a ridiculous cap and breast-plate, fringes, and bells,* and

thinks it absurd to suppose, that *such trifles as these were the institutions of divine Wisdom* \*. But it was wisely ordered under that institution, that nothing relating to divine worship should be left to their own invention. It was judged proper to give them rules descending even to minute particulars, and to confine them to those rules, the more effectually to hinder them from deviating into endless superstitions. The particulars referred to, contributed to promote order and decency in the externals of religious service; nor was there any thing in the Jewish instituted rites absurd, indecent, ridiculous, or impure, as were many of the rites in use among the Pagan nations.

As to God's being a tutelary Deity to the people of Israel, this, if stripped of the form of expression which he has chosen in order to ridicule it, only signifies, that God was pleased to make special revelations and discoveries of his will to that people, and to give them holy and excellent laws; at the same time promising, if they obeyed those laws, to grant them his special protection, to honour them with great privileges and advantages, and to make them happy in the effects of his grace and favour; and threatening, if they proved obstinate and disobedient, to inflict upon them awful punishments, the tokens of his righteous displeasure. And that there is any thing in this unbecoming the wise and righteous Lord and Governor of the world, supposing him to concern himself in human affairs, this writer has not proved, except confident assertions must pass for proofs. And as to his being the King of Israel, this is not to be understood as if he did not still continue to be the universal Sovereign and Lord of all mankind. He was never regarded as having divested himself of that character. No where is his universal dominion and governing providence, as extending to all his creatures, and especially to the whole human race, more strongly asserted, or more nobly described, than in the Jewish Scriptures. But it pleased him, for wise purposes, to erect a peculiar constitution among the people of Israel, according to which he condescended to be, in a special sense, their King and Sovereign. And what we are to understand by it is properly this: that he gave them laws at the first establishment of their polity, which were to be the rule of their state, and by which they were to be governed; and upon their observance of

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 98.



which, the preservation of their national privileges depended; and that he raised up judges and governors, who were to rule them in his name, and as by his authority, and to be the leaders and generals of their armies, for delivering them from their enemies and oppressors: and he was pleased also to give them direction in matters of great and public moment, by the oracle of Urim and Thummim, which was by his appointment established among them for that purpose. There was nothing in all this but what was wisely suited to the nature and design of that particular constitution, and tended to confirm and establish that people in the belief and adoration of the one true God, and to exhibit a glorious sensible proof of his governing providence among them. But the theocracy was never designed to supersede the office and authority of the ordinary magistrates, as this writer seems to insinuate, by telling us, that under that constitution, God “acted as an industrious magistrate, who descended into all the particulars of religious and civil administration, even into the most minute and meanest.” For tho’ the laws were originally given by God, the execution of those laws was ordinarily vested in the magistrates appointed for that purpose, and chosen by the people in their several tribes. So they were in the days of Moses, and under the judges, when the people were more properly and immediately under the administration of the theocracy.

But it is farther urged, that God is represented in the Jewish Scriptures as a *local Deity, residing and dwelling in a temple, or carried about by the Levites in a wooden chest, or trunk.* The author seems fond of this observation, for he has it over three or four times on different occasions. But by this reflection he has exposed himself rather than the Jews. That people, instructed by their Scriptures, had nobler notions of the Deity than to be capable of imagining, that the Lord of the universe, who, they were taught to believe, made and governeth the world, and filleth heaven and earth, was shut up and confined in a wooden chest. It is true, that the more effectually to preserve that people from idolatry, and to impress and affect their minds with a lively sense of God’s special presence among them, there was one sacred place appointed, the tabernacle first, and the temple afterwards, which was peculiarly dedicated to his solemn worship and service. There their most solemn acts of devotion

were to be performed: and there was the ark, or sacred chest he speaks of, in which were deposited the tables of the original covenant between God and them: there also was a cloud of glory, the majestic symbol of God's immediate presence. It cannot be reasonably denied, that God may, if he thinks fit, give illustrious exhibitions of his divine presence and majesty by a visible external glory and splendour, in certain places, or on certain occasions. But it doth not follow, that he is therefore a limited Being, or that his essence is circumscribed, or confined to that particular place, where it pleaseth him thus peculiarly to manifest his special presence. How far the Israelites were from forming such mean notions of the Divinity as this writer is pleased to insinuate, we have an authentic proof in the admirable prayer offered up by Solomon at the dedication of the temple, in the name and presence of all the people; in which he addresseth himself to God in that noble manner: *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee! how much less this house which I have builded?* 1 Kings viii. 27. See also Isa. lxvi. 1.

It has often given me great pleasure to reflect upon what every one that impartially considers the Scriptures of the Old Testament must be sensible of, that the Jews, if they governed themselves by their sacred writings, were instructed, in their ideas of God, to unite the most incomprehensible greatness and majesty, and the most marvellous grace and condescension: to regard him as filling heaven and earth with the immensity of his presence, and yet as vouchsafing to grant visible tokens and symbols of his special presence among them by his ark and temple: as humbling himself even in beholding the things that are done in heaven, and yet as regarding the things that are done in the earth. They acknowledged the glorious hosts of angels as the attendants of the divine Majesty, the blessed ministers of his power and wisdom: but still as infinitely inferior, and even *chargeable with folly* before him: and instead of erecting them into deities, and adoring them as the heathens did, they called upon them to join with them in worshipping and adoring the supreme universal Lord. They were ready to cry out, with a devout admiration in the contemplation of God's unequalled dignity and glory, *Who in the heavens can*

*be compared unto the Lord? What is man, that thou art mindful of him?* But they did not under this pretence represent him as taking no notice of men, or their concernments. They considered him as infinitely raised above the highest of his creatures, yet not neglecting or despising the meanest: That *his name is exalted above all blessing and praise*, and yet he hath a gracious regard to our prayers and praises, if offered up from sincere and upright hearts. Thus they were taught in Scripture to celebrate and adore his matchless grace and condescending goodness, without impairing the splendour and glory of his infinite majesty. And accordingly, in the patterns of devotion that are set before us in Scripture, we may observe the most adoring thoughts, the most sublime conceptions, of God's unsearchable greatness, and supreme dominion, and spotless purity; and the most humbling sense of human weakness, guilt, and unworthiness, mixed with an ingenuous confidence in his infinite grace and sovereignty.

Thus I have considered pretty largely that part of the objection, which chargeth the Scriptures with degrading the Deity to mean and unworthy offices and employments, and shall now take some notice of the other part of the charge, *viz.* that the Scriptures ascribe to him bodily parts, and human passions and affections, and even those of the worst kind.

With respect to the former, he observeth, that the Jewish Scriptures ascribe to God "not only corporeal appearances, but corporeal action, and all the instruments of it, eyes, ears, mouth, hands, and feet.—And that they are apt in many places to make those who read them represent the Supreme Being to themselves like an old man looking out of the clouds\*." He says, "the literal signification of such expressions is abominable." And he ridicules those who throw what he calls a *flimsy allegorical veil* over them, as having *stolen it from the wardrobe of Epicurus*. But the ridicule lights upon himself, who, I believe, was the first man that would have thought of having recourse to Epicurus to interpret the sense of Moses. There needs no more than common attention, and a comparing the Scripture with itself, to be convinced that it is incapable of the absurd representation he would

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 520.

put upon those passages. He observes, indeed, that “images  
 “taken from corporeal substance, from corporeal action, and  
 “from the instruments of it, cannot give us notions in any de-  
 “gree proper, of God’s manner of being, nor of that divine  
 “inconceivable energy in which the action of God consists.”  
 Nor are those expressions of hands, feet, eyes, and ears, when  
 ascribed to God in Scripture, designed to signify either the  
 manner of his being, or of his divine energy, concerning which  
 there are many noble expressions in the sacred writings, which  
 have an admirable sublimity in them; but by an easy metaphor,  
 understood by all the world, hands signify power, eyes and ears  
 signify knowledge. And whereas he adds, that “they cannot  
 “exalt, they must debase our conceptions, and accustom  
 “the mind insensibly to confound divine with human ideas  
 “and notions, God with man:” the answer is obvious: That  
 sufficient care is taken in the holy Scriptures to prevent this,  
 by furnishing us with the most sublime ideas of the Divinity  
 that can possibly enter into the human mind. God’s incom-  
 prehensible majesty, his immense greatness, his almighty power,  
 the infiniteness of his understanding, his omnipresence, are fre-  
 quently represented and described in so admirable a manner, as  
 shews, with the last degree of evidence, that the expressions  
 which seem to ascribe bodily parts and members to him cannot  
 be understood in a gross literal sense. Our author himself, as-  
 cribing motives to God, observes, that “we must speak of  
 “God after the manner of men\*.” And indeed we must either  
 not speak of God at all, or we must speak of him in ways of  
 expression, originally derived from something relating to our  
 own bodies or minds. This writer elsewhere insinuates, that  
 we resemble God no more in our souls than we do in our bo-  
 dies; and that to say his intellect is like ours, is as bad as the  
 anthropomorphites †. So that, according to him, expressions  
 drawn from the faculties of the soul, are as improper as those  
 drawn from the members of the body. Thus, under pretence  
 of a profound veneration for the Deity, we must not speak of  
 God at all, as some of the ancient philosophers thought it un-  
 lawful to name him, or to worship him, except in silence.  
 Yea, we must not so much as think of him; for our ideas of

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 468.

† Ibid. p. 35.

God fall, no doubt, infinitely short of his real majesty and glory, as well as our expressions. But it may be observed, that this forward censurer falls into that way of talking himself which he finds fault with in the holy Scriptures. He represents God as *speaking to men* by the law of nature: he calls it the *voice of God*, and the *word of God*. He speaks of the *hands of God*\*, and of his *seeing* all things. And though he represents the ascribing ideas to God as no less improper, and even profane, than the ascribing hands and feet to him, yet, on several occasions, he talks of the *divine ideas*.

But he farther urges, that the Scriptures attribute to God human affections and passions, and even those of the worst kind: that “they impute such things to the Divinity as would “be a disgrace to humanity †.” That “the Jewish system “contained such instances of partiality in love and hatred, of “furious anger, and unrelenting vengeance, in a long series of “arbitrary judgments, as no people on earth but this would “have ascribed, I do not say to God, but to the worst of those “monsters, who are suffered or sent by God, for a short time; “to punish the iniquities of men ‡.” To the same purpose he afterwards observes, that according to the representations made in Scripture, God “loves with partiality, his mercy is arbitrary, “and depends on mere will—And towards mankind his anger “is often furious, his hatred inveterate, his vengeance unrelenting: but when the wicked repent of their sins, he repents “sometimes of his severity.” And then he asks, “What a “description is this of the All-perfect Being?” But this description is his own, and is founded on a gross misrepresentation of the true intention and design of the sacred writings. As to loving with partiality, if by that be meant his favouring and distinguishing some with greater privileges and advantages, and giving them more valuable means of improvement than others; nothing can be more evident, than that this has been often, and still is done in the course of his providence. Nor is this any more to be found fault with, than his making different species of beings, some vastly transcending others in their faculties, and capacities for happiness. He is the absolute Lord and dispenser of his own gifts, and his goodness is that of a free

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 395. † Ibid. vol. iii. p. 299.

‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 515.

and sovereign Benefactor; and it would be the height of absurdity and profaneness to pretend to tie him down to give to all men precisely the same capacities, the same advantages and opportunities, and to limit him so, that he shall not dispense his gifts in such measures and proportions as he thinks fit, nor shall have it in his power to do any thing for any one person or people, but what he does precisely for every person and for all people. But if by *partiality* be meant partiality in judgment, and in the distribution of rewards and punishments, it is very unjust to charge the holy Scriptures as attributing such partiality to the Supreme Being. There is nothing more strongly and expressly asserted there, than that God *accepteth not the persons of men*, and that he *judgeth without respect of persons*. It is evident, not merely from a single passage, but from the whole tenor of the sacred writings, that the righteous Lord loveth righteousness: that he extendeth his favour to all those of the human race, of whatever family or nation, who sincerely love and obey him, and go on in a course of real piety and virtue; that such persons alone can hope for an interest in his favour, and to obtain the divine acceptance and approbation: and that all wicked and presumptuous sinners, of whatsoever nation or profession, shall be exposed to his just displeasure. Nor are there any such things ascribed to God in Scripture as *arbitrary judgments*. And whereas this author charges it as unworthy of God to represent him as *repenting of his severity* when the wicked repent of their sins; the thing really intended by this must be acknowledged to be agreeable to the best ideas we can form of his governing wisdom, righteousness, and goodness: for it only signifies, that when sinners forsake their evil ways, God is graciously pleased to change the methods of his dealings towards them, and is willing to receive them to his grace and favour. But in reality there is no change in the divine purposes or counsels. The change that is wrought is in the mind and temper of the sinner: God acts uniformly according to the stated rules of his administrations; and nothing has happened but what he perfectly foreknew\*. But repenting, in a

\* His lordship seems to think it an unanswerable objection against the Mosaic writings, that in the account there given of the flood, God is represented as having "repented that he made man."

But it is manifest, that this is only an emphatical way of expression, to signify

strict and proper sense, as it is a mark of human imperfection and mutability, is expressly denied of God in the holy Scriptures; where we are assured, that *God is not as the son of man that he should repent.*

As to the expressions of anger, wrath, fury, hatred, vengeance, as ascribed to God in the sacred writings, it is a thing so obvious that it can scarce be mistaken, that these are only strong expressions, designed to impress the hearts of men with a more lively sense of God's righteous displeasure against sin and wickedness, and resolution to punish it; which it is of the highest importance to mankind to consider and believe: Any one that allows himself to think impartially, must be sensible, that such ways of representing things are absolutely necessary in a revelation designed for common use; and that it is far more for the good of the world in general, and for promoting the interests of virtue, and restraining vice and wickedness, that men should conceive of God as loving, and taking pleasure in the good and righteous, and as full of just resentment against evil-doers, than as utterly unconcerned about the actions and affairs of men, or alike affected towards the righteous and the wicked. Yea, the former notions are not only more useful, and of better influence, but more just and rational in themselves, and more worthy of the All-perfect Being. For

God's just displeasure at the great and universal wickedness of mankind, and at their having so far fallen from the noble end of their creation; and that therefore, after having tried the methods of indulgence towards them, he saw fit to send a destructive deluge for exterminating that incorrigible race. And it is plain, that according to the doctrine of the sacred writings, which every-where represent God as foreknowing the actions of men, this corruption of mankind was what he foresaw from the beginning; and the punishing them in this manner made a part of the original scheme of divine providence, though it did not actually take effect till the proper time came for executing it. As to what he mentions in a sneering way, concerning God's *smelling the sweet savour of Noah's burnt-offering*, it is sufficient to observe, that the design of the expression is plain and easily intelligible, viz. to signify God's gracious acceptance of the act of devotion performed by that good man, to acknowledge his gratitude, and implore the divine mercy; and that, on that occasion, God was pleased, after having made so signal a display of his justice, to allay and dissipate the fears which might be apt to arise in the hearts of men, and to assure them of his merciful intentions towards them, and that he would not any more send an universal deluge upon the earth; of which the rainbow in the clouds should be a constant memorial.

what idea is this of God, to represent him as neither delighting in order and virtue, nor displeas'd with vice and wickedness, but solacing himself in an eternal indolence, and no way concern'd about the good or ill behaviour, the happiness or misery of his reasonable creatures! A God destitute of all affections, or of any thing correspondent to them, would not be the most perfect Being. There are spiritual affections, which have nothing to do with body, and which as properly belong to spirits or minds, as intellect or will; and I can as easily suppose them destitute of the latter as of the former. Our affections, indeed, have usually a great mixture of bodily passions, and consequently of imperfection: but there are affections of a nobler kind, and which we may conceive in pure spirits; yea, they cannot be conceived without them; nor can we avoid ascribing some affections, or what is analagous or equivalent to them, to God, provided we remove from them all those imperfections and defects with which they are attend'd in us. A love of order, goodness, purity, virtue, and a just detestation of moral evil, is absolutely inseparable from the idea of the Infinitely-perfect Being, the most wise and righteous Governor of the world.

I shall conclude my observations on this part of Lord Bolingbroke's book, with a passage from an author whom no man will suppose to have been prejudic'd in favour of the Scriptures: it is Mr Anthony Collins, in an *Essay*, which he published in 1707, *concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, the Evidence whereof depends upon Human Testimony*. After having observ'd, that "one use of reason in things which by the testimony of men are supposed to come from God, is to endeavour to find out such a sense of a supposed divine revelation as is agreeable to the discoveries of our reason, if the words under any kind of construction will bear it, though at first view they may seem repugnant to reason, and to one another;" he adds, "this is certainly a great piece of justice, and what is due to words that upon the least evidence can be supposed to come from God, especially since expressions that do literally quadrate with the maxims of reason and philosophy, are necessary to make a revelation have any effect upon common people's minds. For was not God to be represented by ex-



“passions, which, literally understood, attribute to him human  
“passions and actions, they who by their occupations in the  
“world are incapable of those more just ideas which men of  
“thought know to belong to that Being, would perhaps think  
“him incapable of taking cognizance of their actions: and  
“therefore to make a revelation *useful* and *credible in itself*, it  
“must consist of words, whose *literal* meaning is false, but  
“whose *real* meaning is consistent with the justest notions of  
“reason and philosophy. And therefore we ought to examine  
“whether the words under any construction will bear a rea-  
“sonable sense,” p. 17, 18. Mr Collins then applies this ob-  
servation to the revelation which we acknowledge, and considers  
those passages of Scripture where God is said to *rest*, *repent*, *be*  
*angry*, &c. It must be owned, that this gentleman judges  
much more reasonably and equitably in this matter than Lord  
Bolingbroke has done.

This may suffice at present. In my next I shall consider the  
other objections which his Lordship hath urged against the  
divine authority of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, espe-  
cially of the Mosaic writings.

## L E T T E R   X X X .

*Farther Objections against the Mosaic Writings and the Scriptures of the Old Testament considered—The Laws of Moses not contrary to the Law of Nature—This particularly shewn with regard to the Command for exterminating the Canaanites, and the Law for punishing those among the Israelites that should revolt to Idolatry with Death—The Law of Moses not accountable for the Fury of the Zealots—The Instances of Phineas and Mattathias considered—Insociability not the first Principle of the Law of Moses, nor did that Law take the Jews out of all Moral Obligations to the rest of Mankind—There is nothing false or absurd in the Mosaical Account of the Creation of the World and the Fall of Man—Concerning the Sanctions of the Law of Moses—The not making express Mention of future Rewards and Punishments in that Law, no Argument against its divine Original—Some other Objections against the Scriptures obviated.*

SIR,

I NOW proceed to another set of objections, which are designed to shew, that some of the laws of Moses are absolutely contrary to the law of nature, which is the law of God, and therefore cannot come from him. He instances particularly in the command for exterminating the Canaanites, and the law for punishing idolaters among the Israelites with death. “In both “which,” he says, “it is supposed impiously, against principles as self-evident as any of those necessary truths which “are such of all knowledge, that the Supreme Being commands “by one law what he forbids by another \* :” and that “he “approved and commanded on particular occasions the most “abominable violations of the general laws of nature †.” I shall consider what he has offered with regard to each of these.

As to the command for exterminating the Canaanites, it is what he frequently inveighs against, as the greatest piece of in-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 180.

† Ibid. p. 181.

justice and cruelty that ever was committed \*. And he has pronounced, that “the men who justify such cruelties upon any hypothesis whatsoever, must have very ill hearts, as well as heads:” And that “he who imputes them to the Supreme Being is worse than an athiest, though he pass for a saint †.” I shall venture however to examine what this rigid censorer has offered on this subject.

He first layeth it down as a principle, that “God cannot command in particular what he forbids in general. He who has made benevolence to all rational beings the fundamental law of our nature, can never command some to rob or to murder others; to usurp on the rights of their fellow-creatures, and to exterminate whole nations ‡.” The force of his argument here lies wholly in the words *rob* and *murder*, both which carry the idea of depriving others of their lives and properties, without a just cause, and without lawful authority. But though God has forbidden us, both in the law of nature and in the decalogue, to murder, he can command some to put others to death for just causes, in which case it is not murder. He never, by giving this law to mankind, divested himself of the dominion he hath over the lives of his creatures. He can also commission, for wise ends, some to deprive others of their properties. For the law of nature is always to be understood with this limitation, except in cases where God himself shall otherwise appoint. It is no principle of that law, that God can never, without injustice, exterminate nations. That he can do it in a way of immediate judgment, by sending destructive calamities, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, deluges, and the like, cannot be denied by any theist who believes a providence governing mankind, and interposing in the affairs of men. And if he can do it immediately himself, he can commission men to do it, provided he gives sufficient credentials of that commission: and such the Israelites had, according to the accounts given in the books of Moses. And, in judging of the case, how far it is justifiable, we must take it in all its circumstances as there represented. Our author himself supposes the miracles done among them, if really done, to be sufficient to convince

\* See particularly vol. iii. p. 305. vol. v. p. 99. 146.

† Vol. iii. p. 306.

‡ Vol. v. p. 99.

all mankind, not only at that time, but in all succeeding generations to the end of the world, of the divine authority of that law and constitution; and therefore sufficient to convince the people of Israel. All therefore that remained was, that they should be satisfied of the truth of the facts, and of this they could not doubt, as they were done before their eyes. And the same books which give an account of the facts, give an account of the divine commission to the Israelites, and the reasons and ends of it. And whereas it is urged, that “the Canaanites were obnoxious to the divine vengeance in no other respect than that which was common to them with all the heathen nations, viz. their idolatry \*,” this is not true, according to the account given by Moses, Lev. xviii. 24, 25, 27. whereby it appears, that it was not merely for their idolatry, but for their monstrous vices and wickedness of all kinds, that they were ordered to be exterminated; and that never was there upon earth a more profligate and abandoned race of men. And supposing this to be true, and that God had determined to signalize his righteous vengeance against them in the severest manner, he might, without any pretence for arraigning the justice of his proceedings, have consumed them by fire from heaven, as he did part of them at Sodom and Gomorrah, or have overwhelmed them with an inundation, or have swallowed them up by an earthquake, and thereby utterly destroyed that people, their little ones as well as the adult. Nor could it have been said in such a case, that this was contrary to the law of nature. But then it would not have been so apparent, that this calamity was inflicted in a way of punishment for their idolatry and detestable wickedness. It might have been possibly attributed to some natural cause, or have been regarded as an unaccountable and fortuitous event: but when they were ordered to be exterminated for their abominable crimes by an express command of God, attested by a series of the most amazing miracles and divine interpositions, and this appointed to be executed by another nation, who were peculiarly set apart by their original constitution to the acknowledgment and adoration of the one true God, and of him only, and to whom God had given the most holy and excellent laws; at the same time threatening

\* Eplingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 184.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 148.

them with the like punishments if they committed the like crimes: in this case the reason of the judgment was as apparent, as when a malefactor is put to death by an officer of justice for a crime, in execution of the sentence of a just magistrate. Nor is there any thing in such a procedure that can be proved to be inconsistent with the wisdom and righteousness of the Supreme Being, or contradictory to his own laws; since there is no law of nature that debars God from executing judgments on particular persons, or guilty nations, for their crimes and vices, even to extermination, or from employing, if he thinks fit, one or more nations to execute his judgments upon others. Nor has this confident and assuming writer brought any proof that it is so. As to his comparing the invasion of Canaan by the Israelites, and what they did there, to the cruelties exercised by the Spaniards in America \*, and to the ravages of the Huns under Attila, who, he says, were much more merciful than they †, there is this vast difference between the cases, that the latter had no motive or pretence, but their own ambition, avarice and cruelty; whereas the former did it in execution of the express command of God, and by a commission from him, the truth of which was confirmed by a series of the most extraordinary divine attestations that ever the world saw. This therefore can be no precedent to any other nation to do the like, except they can produce the same, or equal proofs of a divine commission; which no other since have been able to do, and probably never will. This may suffice with regard to the command for the extermination of the Canaanites: which I have elsewhere considered more largely. See *Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation*, vol. ii. p. 429. 437. and the *Answer to Morgan*, vol. ii. p. 97. *et seq.*

The other command produced by this author to prove that the law of Moses is contrary to the law of nature, and therefore cannot be of divine original, is the law for putting a false prophet to death that should attempt to seduce the people to idolatry, and for the inflicting a capital punishment upon any particular person among the Israelites that should revolt to idolatry, and even destroying a city that should do so. Concerning this he very dogmatically pronounces—"I say, that

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 205.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 148.

“ the law of nature is the law of God. Of this I have the same  
 “ demonstrative knowledge that I have of the existence of God,  
 “ the all-perfect Being. I say, that the all-perfect Being can-  
 “ not contradict himself: that he would contradict himself, if  
 “ the laws contained in the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy  
 “ were his laws, since they contradict those of nature: and  
 “ therefore that they are not his laws. Of all this I have as  
 “ certain, as intuitive a knowledge, as I have that two and two  
 “ are equal to four, or that the whole is bigger than a part \*.”  
 A very short and decisive determination of the controversy!  
 but we are by this time too well acquainted with his Lordship’s  
 manner, to lay any great stress on his positive assertions,  
 though delivered with the most assuming air.

The argument he makes use of here is the same that he had  
 used before, viz. that the law of nature forbids murder. This  
 will be easily allowed. But it is not inconsistent with that  
 law which forbids murder, to put persons to death who are  
 guilty of crimes that by the fundamental laws of the commu-  
 nity deserve death. If God should have enacted a general law  
 obligatory on all mankind, that whosoever should commit ido-  
 latri, or worship any other god, should be put to death, as  
 well as that any man that should shed the blood of another  
 without cause should be put to death; this author might be  
 challenged with all his confidence to prove, that such a divine  
 law would be contradictory to the law of nature. Idolatry, by  
 his own acknowledgment, is forbidden in the law of nature,  
 and is a breach of the first and great article of that law; and  
 he represents it as *one of the greatest of crimes* †. But God has  
 not thought fit to enact a general law obligatory on all mankind  
 for punishing idolaters with death, and without his appoint-  
 ment it ought not to be executed. But when it pleased him  
 for wise ends to select a particular nation, and among them to  
 erect a peculiar sacred polity, and to appoint that the adoration  
 of the one true God, and of him only, should be the very basis  
 of their constitution, on which all their privileges, their national  
 properties, and their right to their country, depended, it is evi-  
 dent, that under such a constitution to revolt to idolatry and poly-

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 191.

† Ibid. p. 195.

theism, was in the most criminal sense to be traitors to the community; and to arraign a law for inflicting a capital punishment upon idolaters under that particular constitution is highly absurd. Nor could any thing be more just in such a case, than to order that a false prophet, who should endeavour to seduce the people to idolatry, should be put to death: though this writer objects against it as unjust, for this strange reason, that “miracles were daily, and almost hourly wrought in the sight of all Israel \*.” This is absolutely false, if understood of miracles strictly so called; or if it were true, it is an odd thing to urge, that which made the crime of the false prophet the greater, to be a reason for exempting him from punishment.

But what he chiefly finds fault with, is the law for destroying any Israelitish city, that should fall off to the worship of idols, Deut. xiii. 13—16. He urges, that “the innocent were to be involved in the same punishment with the guilty; neither man, nor woman, nor beast, neither the brother, the daughter, the wife nor the friend, was to be spared: and that the whole chapter is such an edict as could not be imputed to Attila without injustice.”—And after exclaiming against the obstinacy of those who pretend to justify the law of Moses in this instance, he observes, that “by that law, the undistinguishing extermination of collective bodies, and especially for matters of opinion, is allowed †.” And afterwards, arguing against Mr Locke, he adds, that “even supposing God to be their King, the objections of injustice and cruelty in those laws will remain in their full force: and that to suppose him to have given these laws would be to degrade the All-perfect Being to the character of an unjust and cruel tyrant, who authorized and even commanded his ministers expressly, to punish without measure, without discernment, and without forms of justice ‡.” And he insinuates, that there are precepts in that chapter, “from which the inquisition copied the instructions she gives to her familiars §.” But this is a gross misrepresentation. He himself elsewhere observes, that “the cruel principle of persecution for opinions was never known till Christians introduced it into the

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 183.

† Ibid. p. 184.

‡ Ibid. p. 194.

§ Ibid. p. 183.

world †;” though contrary, as he owns, to the true spirit of the Gospel. And it is manifest, that the punishments referred to, Deut. xiii. were not to be inflicted for matters of opinion, but of practice, for open acts of idolatry, in subversion of the fundamental constitution of their state; and great care was to be taken, that the punishment should not be executed without due inquiry, and full proof. They were to *inquire*, and *make search*, and *ask diligently*, so as to be assured that it was *truth*, and the *thing certain*. Great deliberation was to be used: and except the whole city was obstinately addicted to idolatry, and determined to persist in it, they were not to be exterminated. And, considering the design and nature of that peculiar constitution, a decree or law, for exterminating a city among themselves that should revolt to the worship of false gods, seemed necessary, and was like the cutting off a corrupt or gangrened limb, which was requisite to save the whole. If God had, at the original establishment of that polity, declared that he himself would in an immediate way by pestilence, or fire from heaven, or some other extraordinary judgment, exterminate or destroy any city among them that should revolt to the worship of idols, it could not be pretended that this would have been unjust, though children, as well as adults would be involved in it. But he chose that the punishment should be inflicted in a judicial way by the hands of the magistrates, and by the authority of the nation or whole community, pursuant to a law for that purpose. And the punishment was both ordered to be executed with great solemnity, and to be attended with circumstances of peculiar severity, so as to proceed to utter extermination, the more effectually to create a horror and detestation of the crime, and to shew that so wicked a race was to be entirely destroyed. To which it must be added, that this punishment was denounced in consequence of the original contract or covenant between God and that people. By coming into that covenant for themselves and their children, they voluntarily subjected themselves and them to the severest penalties in case of a revolt. And considering the mighty advantages they had as a nation by the theocracy, and by their peculiar constitution, and the signal blessings that would have followed upon their obedience, it was a condition which could not be reasonably objected against, since they might so easily



avoid the threatened calamities, by obedience to a law so just and agreeable to reason, as is that of the worship of the one true God, the Lord of the universe, and of him only.

And to have legally tolerated any among them, whether particular persons or communities, that should openly revolt to idolatry, would have been manifestly absurd, and absolutely subversive of their whole polity.

This writer takes particular notice of “the right the zealots assumed to assassinate any Jew that should seem to them to violate, by public and strong appearances, the sanctity of the Divinity, of the temple, and of the nation:” and that “this produced such scenes of horror among the Jews as no other nations ever produced.” It will be owned, that the zealots in the latter times of the Jewish state carried this to an excess of madness and fury; but the law is not accountable for it. It is evident from the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, which orders the punishment of those that should revolt to idolatry, that the whole was to be transacted in an orderly and legal way, with great deliberation, and by public authority. And the same thing is repeated, Deut. xvii. 2—6. where it is ordained, that with regard to any particular person that had served other gods, they should, before they punished him, *inquire and search diligently*. And it is expressly appointed, that *at the mouth of two or three witnesses* he should be put to death, but that *at the mouth of one witness* he should not be put to death. Nor does Lord Bolingbroke pretend to produce any law to authorize the madness of the zealots. He only mentions two instances, which, he thinks, countenanced it, viz. that of Phineas, and that of Mattathias. As to the former, he says, “Phineas murdered Zimri and Cosbi in the act of fornication.” But this was not a simple act of fornication. It was joined with avowed idolatry, and, as it was circumstanced, was a most insolent defiance of all law and authority, one of the most flagrant crimes, in open opposition to God and man, that could be committed. The person who inflicted the punishment was himself a chief magistrate, of high authority, and in a case which needed no proof, and admitted of no delay, when a plague from God was broke out among the people, on the account of that very crime which these persons so impudently avowed: and it was also in consequence of an order which Moses had given by the command of God to the Judges of Is-

rael, to slay those that were joined to Baal Peor—Numb. xxv. 4, 5. So that Phineas had full legal authority for what he did. And therefore this was no warrant to those who without any authority assassinated any man they thought fit, under pretence of his violating the law, of which they set up themselves for judges. As to the instance of Mattathias, our author observes, that “in the fury of his holy zeal he rushed on  
“the Jew that was about to sacrifice in obedience to the edict  
“of Antiochus, and on the officer appointed to take care of  
“the execution of the edict, and murdered them both \*.” That we may judge of this, it is to be considered, that never was there a greater tyrant than Antiochus. He had entirely subverted the whole Jewish constitution, abolished the ancient laws, and massacred the people. If ever there was a just foundation for rising up in defence of religion, law, and liberty, here was an occasion that loudly called for it. In these circumstances Mattathias, who was not a mere private person, but *a ruler, and a great and honourable man* in the city of Modin where he dwelt, slew a Jew, who was then openly committing a crime, for which by the fundamental laws of his country he ought to have suffered death, but at a time when no legal justice in the usual forms could be had. He also killed the King’s officer, who was then compelling the people to subvert the laws. This he designed as a signal to the insurrection which he immediately began; an insurrection fully justifiable, if ever any was so, and which was carried on with a noble spirit and fortitude, and with a success that ended in the subversion of the horrid tyranny, and the happy restoration of their liberties and laws. Such an action, so circumstanced as that of Mattathias, if it had been performed by a Greek or Roman, in opposition to horrid barefaced tyranny and cruelty, and in vindication of the essential laws and liberties of his country, would have been highly celebrated, and transmitted to all succeeding ages as a most glorious act of heroism.

The only thing farther that I shall mention is, what he observes concerning “the massacre which the Levites made of  
“three thousand men in one day, when they were command-  
“ed, without any other form of proceeding, to take every man

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 180.

“his sword, and to slay his neighbour \*.” This must be owned to be an extraordinary punishment, and the occasion was extraordinary. The revolt of the people was the most inexcusable, by this writer’s own acknowledgment, that could be supposed. It happened when the law had been just promulgated with the most amazing solemnity, and the constitution established, to which they had given their own consent. The body of the people had thereby exposed themselves to destruction: and if they had been consumed in an immediate way by a plague, or fire, or some extraordinary judgment from heaven, it was no more than they deserved. It was necessary that so open, so public, so aggravated a revolt and insurrection against the majesty and authority of the Supreme universal Lord, to whom they themselves had so lately, in the most solemn manner, vowed subjection and obedience, should be distinguished with marks of great severity. In cases of crimes where great numbers have been concerned, it has sometimes been thought just to decimate them, to make one in ten suffer the death they all deserved. But here of above six hundred thousand, three thousand only suffered, not above the two hundredth part of the whole. The numbers that were concerned rendered the trying each of them in a formal process, which is what he seems to require, impracticable. Nor was there any need of it. The fact was public and notorious: and the persons that suffered were undoubtedly such as were known to be most guilty, and to have been most active in promoting the defection and revolt. And the immediate punishment of these was the most speedy way of quelling the insurrection, and bringing the whole body to a sense of their guilt and of their duty.

The third objection I proposed to take notice of, as raised by this writer against the Mosaic œconomy, is this: That “the  
“first principles, and the whole tenor of the Jewish laws, took  
“that people out of all moral obligations to the rest of man-  
“kind: That they were taught to think themselves a chosen  
“race, distinct from the rest of mankind, and who were far  
“from owing to other men, what other men owed to them,  
“and to one another. This produced a legal injustice and  
“cruelty in their whole conduct, authorized by their law, and

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 146.

“pressed upon them by their priests and prophets\*.” And he elsewhere observes, that “the first principle of their polity, ecclesiastical and civil, was insociability; and accordingly, their manners were rendered unsuitable to the common nature and genius of mankind †.”

This is a heavy charge; but, if closely examined, this insociability amounteth to no more than this: That they had not a community of religion and rites with the heathens, as the heathens had with one another, and which they could not have without absolutely destroying and defeating the end of their most excellent constitution; that they were not to intermarry with idolaters, and were obliged to keep close to the observation of their own peculiar laws and customs; several of which were designed to preserve them as a distinct body from mixing and incorporating with other nations. And considering how different their constitution was from that which obtained in other countries; that all the world about them was immersed in idolatry and polytheism, and that they themselves were very apt to fall in with the idolatrous customs of the neighbouring nations, and to which mankind in all ages have been very prone; considering these things, if great care had not been taken to keep them distinct, by several peculiar rites and customs, and to hinder them from intermarrying with their idolatrous neighbours, they could not possibly have preserved their constitution: they must have been soon mixed and confounded with other nations; the consequence of which would have been, that they would have fallen into a conformity to their religion and worship, and have lost their own. And so the whole design of that admirable polity, so well fitted to preserve the knowledge and worship of the one true God, and of him only, in opposition to the universally prevailing polytheism and idolatry, would have been defeated; and all nations would have been involved in the same common idolatry, and perhaps have continued in it to this day. For, according to the plan laid by the divine wisdom, Judaism prepared the way for Christianity: and all that is good in Mahometanism is derived from the one or the other of these. But though the people of Israel were obliged thus to keep themselves distinct, and though none were regarded as strictly and properly incorporated into

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 290. See also *ibid.* p. 283.

† *Ibid.* vol. v. p. 148. See also *ibid.* p. 198.

their body who did not conform to the peculiar laws of their polity, they were not obliged to confine their benevolence to those of their own nation. They were directed, by many express precepts in their law, to shew great kindness to those of other nations, to the strangers that passed through their land, or that sojourned among them : to exercise great humanity towards them, and serve them in all friendly offices. This is not only allowed, but strongly pressed upon them in their law, as any one will be convinced that impartially considers the passages referred to at the bottom of the page \*. And the Jews themselves observe, that the precepts prescribing a kind conduct towards strangers are inculcated one-and-twenty times in the law.

It is mere calumny and abuse to say, that the Jews were authorized by their law, and pressed by their prophets, to exercise cruelty and injustice towards the rest of mankind ; and that they were absolved from all moral obligations, and from all rules of justice, equity, and fidelity with regard to them. Nor was there any thing in their law to oblige them to persecute others for their opinions in religion, or to compel them to conform to their peculiar rites. On the contrary, they allowed those of any other nation to dwell among them, and to worship at the temple, where there was a court provided for them who worshipped the one true God, the Maker and Preserver of all things, though they did not observe the rites which were peculiarly prescribed to those of their own body. And how happy would it have been, if the principles of toleration had been always carried thus far among those of other professions !

Their looking upon themselves to be God's chosen people ought to have engaged them to great thankfulness to God for such eminent advantages, and to have put them upon distinguishing themselves by the pure practice of religion, and every virtue, that they might walk worthy of their character and privileges : if they abused this to pride and insolence, the fault was not in their law, but in themselves. Mankind have been always too prone to abuse their real, or supposed advantages. The Greeks regarded the rest of the world as *barbarians*. And Socrates is introduced by Plato, in his fifth book of laws, as di-

\* Lev. xiv. 24. xxv. 35. Numb. xxvi, 11. Deut. x. 17—19. xxiv 19—22.

recting the Greeks to regard the *barbarians* as *by nature* their *enemies*, and as prescribing a conduct towards them, which is little reconcileable to the common rules of humanity. Christians cannot but look upon it as their great advantage, that they are distinguished from many other nations which are sunk in the grossest ignorance and barbarism. And it would argue the most inexcusable stupidity and ingratitude not to be very thankful to providence on this account. But this is no just reason for treating those nations with contempt and cruelty.

The fourth objection which was mentioned was, that there are several passages in the Scriptures which are false, absurd, and unphilosophical. And he particularly instances in the account there given of the creation of the world, and the fall of man.

With respect to the former, he says, “It is impossible to read what Moses writ on that subject, without feeling contempt for him as a philosopher, and horror as a divine. For he is to be considered under both these characters \*.” And he takes upon him to pronounce, that “we cannot admit Moses’s testimony concerning the beginning of the world for divine, without absurdity and blasphemy †.”

There cannot, in my opinion, be a greater instance of the most unreasonable prejudice, than the objections that have been raised against the authority of Moses, from the account he gives of the creation. Whosoever will take the pains impartially to compare it with the accounts left us in the traditions of the most ancient nations, concerning which the reader may see the introduction to the *Universal History*, relating to the *Cosmogony, or the Creation of the World*, will find the account given by Moses so vastly superior, as will naturally lead him to regard it as of an higher original. There is a majesty and sublimity, as well as simplicity and plainness in it, which hath greatly recommended it to the best judges. Nothing could be so proper to answer the design he had in view, as to begin his book with an account of the creation of the world. If he had merely asserted in general, that God created the world, and all things that are therein, this would not have made such an impression upon the people as was proper and necessary in a matter of such vast importance, and which, according to the author’s own

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iij. p. 231, 233.

† *Ibid* p. 308.

observation, “ leads to the acknowledgment of the Supreme Being, by a proof levelled to the meanest understanding \*.” And therefore it was proper to give them more distinct notions of the formation of things by the divine power and wisdom. Accordingly he distinctly mentions the light, the firmament, the sun, the moon, and stars, the earth, the sea, the planets, and vegetable products of the earth, the various kinds of animals, and lastly, man himself; and assures them, that these various appearances were not owing to a variety of causes, which, according to Lord Bolingbroke, the first men in the rude uncultivated ages would be naturally led to believe, but were all owing to one and the same glorious original Cause and Author. It is evident, that what was principally designed was, to give an account of the formation of our system, as far as relates particularly to our earth: at the same time assuring them, that the sun, moon, and stars, all the heavenly bodies, which the nations were apt to adore, were created by God. The whole is represented as having been effected with an Almighty facility. That God only spoke or commanded, and it was done. All things were created by the word of his power, which tends to give a noble idea of the power and majesty of the great Creator. Yet this great work, according to Moses, was carried on in an orderly progressive way. There is a general account given of the visible and successive changes wrought each day upon the face of the earth till it was completed: But our author, who is determined, on every supposition, to find fault with the Mosaic account, blames Moses for representing the solar system, or even this our planet, as having been the work of six days. He thinks “ such precipitation seems repugnant to that general order of nature which God established, and which he observes in his productions †.” As if the first formation of things must necessarily have been carried on in the slow way which is now observed, after the order and course of nature is once established. It is perfectly agreeable to reason to believe that the first formation of the world, and the several species of things in it, did not take up a long space of time: and yet there is no reason to think that it was all perfected in an instant, without any intervals, though

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 259.

† Ibid. p. 233.

it would have been easy to the divine power to have done so. And this writer, who seems here to think the creation as represented by Moses to have been much precipitated, and accomplished in too short a time, seems elsewhere to think that it was slowly carried on. For he says, “we must not conceive “the world to have been made by a laborious progression— “God willed it to exist, and it existed \*.”

As to the particular order in which the creation was carried on, according to the account given by Moses, this writer, with all his confidence, has not been able to prove, that there is any thing in it inconsistent with reason, or with true philosophy: though he has passed a severe censure on those who have endeavoured to “reconcile the Mosaic account to reason and nature, and to wrest natural philosophy into an agreement with “it †.” He instances in Moses’s saying, that “light was created, and the distinction of night and day, of evening and “morning, was made, before the sun, the moon, and the “stars ‡.” But we know so little of the real nature of light, that no man can pretend positively to determine, that it could not have made its appearance before the sun, and moon, and planets were completed in their perfect form and order. As it seems to be the noblest substance in the material world, it is reasonable to believe, that at the first formation of things it was first created, or at least separated from the chaotic mass, and put in motion, so as to make a distinction between light and darkness, and some kind of succession and vicissitude of the one and the other, answering to day and night, evening and morning; though it is evident, from the account given of the work of the fourth day, that it was not till then that the sun, moon, and stars were rendered conspicuous to the earth, and the order and course of things fully settled, so as to cause the proper distinction of times and seasons, days, months, years; for which reason, no notice is taken of the formation of those heavenly bodies till that day. It is to little purpose to say, as his Lordship has done, that “Moses was as ignorant of the “true system of the universe as any of the people of his age.” This is more than he can prove. But if it were so, it was not

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 111.

† Ibid. p. 181.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 302.



necessary, supposing him inspired as a prophet or a lawgiver; that he should be inspired also with a knowledge of the true system of philosophy and astronomy. Or, if he had been ever so well acquainted with it, it would have been altogether improper to have given an exactly philosophical account of the creation: nor could any such account of it have been given, considering the different systems of philosophy that have obtained, but what would have been as much found fault with, and perhaps more, than that which he has given. The truth is, such an account would have been no way accommodated to the capacities of the people: it would have perplexed and confounded, instead of instructing them. It was proper, for many reasons, that the account should be drawn up in a popular way, and yet in a way that is at the bottom agreeable to the real truth of things. So the moon is very fitly called a *great light*; and it may be truly called so, because it yields great light to us, though, strictly and philosophically speaking, it has no light of its own at all. And now, after all our improvements in philosophy and astronomy, we still speak of the light of the moon, of the sun's motion, rising and setting.—And the man that in a moral or theological, or in an historical discourse, would use a different language, would only render himself ridiculous.

Lord Bolingbroke farther objects, that though Moses ascribes the creation to God, “yet when God proceeds to the creation of man, he calls in other beings to co-operate with him, and make man in his and their image. This seems to lay a foundation for polytheism, which is inconsistent with that unity of God which my reason shews me, and which the general tenor, even of the Mosaic history attests\*.” And since by his own acknowledgment the general tenor of the Mosaic writings leads us to assert the unity of God, this plainly shews, that the passage he refers to was not designed to infer polytheism. And if there be something unusual in the manner of expression, it must be interpreted in a consistency with the whole Mosaic law; nor can it be supposed that Moses intended it otherwise. And this plainly appears from the very passage itself, considered in its connection. For after having told us, Gen. i. ver. 26. that *God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*: he adds, ver. 27. *And God created man in his*

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 300.

*image, in the image of God created he him* : where it is plain, that what is expressed plurally in one verse is singular in the other : and that the design of those expressions, *Let us make man in our image*, was not to signify that other beings joined with God in the formation of man, and in making him in their, as well as God's image ; since it is expressly declared in the words immediately following, that *God created man in his own image*, and for the greater emphasis, and as it were on purpose to prevent such a construction, it is again repeated, *in the image of God created he him*. I would observe by the way, how much nobler the account is, that is given by Moses of the formation of man, than that which was given by the ancient Egyptians, of whose wisdom and philosophy our author speaks in such high terms, and from whom he would have us believe Moses derived all his wisdom and knowledge. They taught, as he observes from Diodorus Siculus, “ that the first of human kind were quickened into life by the sun, and were animated systems of mud.” And he thinks, that “ if we are persuaded that this world had “ a beginning in time, we must of necessity assume, that the “ first man and the first woman, or that one man and one “ woman at least, were produced in full strength and vigour of “ body and mind \*.” This is agreeable to the Mosaic account, which is perfectly consistent with reason, though there is no great likelihood that reason alone could have assured us of it ; for, as his Lordship there observes, “ how men came “ into the world, reason will tell us no better than history or “ tradition does.” This therefore is a proper subject of divine revelation.

It argues a strange disposition to find fault, to lay such a stress as Lord Bolingbroke has done, upon that particular manner of expression Moses makes use of, that *God rested the seventh day from all his work*, as if it were alone sufficient to destroy the authority of the Mosaic writings. No man that impartially considers the noble account there given of the creation, that God is represented as having only spoke, and it was done, can reasonably imagine, that the design of those expressions was to signify, that God was *wearied with the laborious work of creation*, as our author expresses it, and needed rest after it, as men do

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 107, 108.

who are tired with their work. *Hast thou not known*, saith the prophet Isaiah, *hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?* Isaiah xl. 28. All therefore that can be understood by that manner of expression, is only this, that God had then finished the work of the creation, and had a divine complacency in it.

As to the Mosaic account of the fall of man, it is what his Lordship has frequently endeavoured to expose. And it has been a constant subject of ridicule to the deistical writers in every age. But if it be candidly and impartially examined, as it stands connected with the account given by Moses of man's original dignity, it will appear to be of great importance, and to furnish instructions of excellent use.

The account given by Moses of the state in which man was at first created, is short, but such as tends to give a noble idea of his dignity; as having been created in the image of God, in a state of purity and innocence, and invested with a dominion over all the other creatures in this lower world. His Lordship, in a passage cited above, says, "that supposing the world to have had a beginning in time, we must of necessity assume, that the first man and the first woman, or that one man and one woman at least, were produced in full strength and vigour of body and mind." And indeed man cannot reasonably be supposed to have been at first created in a state of infancy, for then he must soon have perished. He was therefore formed in a state of maturity, as were the other animals, and undoubtedly in a sound and happy constitution of body; and it is equally reasonable to suppose that he was created in an answerable perfection of mind: and that consequently there was in man at his first creation a perfect harmony and just balance in the several faculties of his nature, that his intellectual and moral powers were sound and clear, and uncorrupt, his appetites and passions in a state of just subjection to reason and the law of the mind, and his affections rightly disposed. Here then is a state of moral rectitude, in which, according to all the dictates of reason and good sense, man must be supposed to have been created. Nor can any thing be more absurd than to suppose, that this noble creature, who was

constituted lord of this inferior creation, the crown and ornament of God's works here below; made his first appearance in the world, as a huge over-grown infant, in full vigour, indeed, and beauty of body, but a mere child in understanding, and with a soul utterly unfurnished. It is reasonable to believe, that he that made him would not turn him out into the world absolutely destitute of knowledge and ideas, but that he immediately endued him with so much knowledge of things, especially of his Maker, of the creation of the world, and of his duty, as qualified him for answering the ends of his being. Moses informs us, that great things were done for him by the beneficent Creator: that he was pleased, in his great goodness, to provide a peculiarly delightful seat for the entertainment of his innocent creature, a blissful paradise, where he was placed amidst a profusion of joys. And as there was none among the inferior animals that were put under his dominion, with whom he could cultivate that society and friendship for which his nature was formed, it pleased God to make another creature of his own kind, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, adorned with all the charms of beauty and innocence, to whom he was to be united in the dearest ties of love. And from them was to proceed a race of creatures of the same species.

In this state, man was undoubtedly obliged by the law of his creation to obey and adore his Creator and Sovereign Lord and Benefactor, and to yield a ready obedience to all his known commands. But though universal obedience was his duty, Moses acquaints us, that there was a particular command given him by way of trial. Nor was there any thing in this unbecoming the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness. Since God was pleased to constitute him lord of this inferior creation, and had given him so large a grant, and so many advantages, it was manifestly proper, in the nature of things, that he should require some particular instance of homage and fealty, to put him in mind that he was under the dominion of a higher Lord, on whom he depended, and to whom he owed an unreserved subjection. And what properer instance could there be, in the circumstances man was then in, than his being obliged, in obedience to the divine command, to abstain from one or more of the delicious fruits of paradise? It pleased God to insist only upon his abstaining from one, at the same time that he in-

dulged him a full liberty as to all the rest. And this served both as an act of homage to the Supreme Lord, from whose bountiful grant he held paradise, and all its enjoyments, and it was also fitted to teach him a noble and useful lesson of abstinence and self-denial, one of the most important lessons in a state of probation, and also of unreserved submission to God's authority and will, and an implicit resignation to his sovereign wisdom and goodness. It tended to habituate him to keep his sensitive appetite in a perfect subjection to the law of reason; in which consists the proper order and harmony of the human nature, and to take him off from too close an attachment to sensible good, and also to keep his desire after knowledge within just bounds, so as to be content with knowing what is good and useful, and not to pry with an unwarrantable curiosity into things that it did not belong to him to know.

Moses farther informs us, that our first parents transgressed the command given them for the trial of their obedience, by eating the forbidden fruit. How they came to do this, when they were created innocent and upright, may seem strange, and really is so. But the same objection might have been made with regard to the first sin, or transgression of the divine law, whenever it happened, whether among men or angels. For, except we suppose them to have been created actually depraved, or under a necessity of sinning, which would be to make God himself the author of sin, they must have been formed in a state of purity and rectitude, and capable of keeping the law of God, which was given them as the rule of their obedience: and then the difficulty would recur, how came they to fall and disobey, when they might so easily have stood and continued in their obedience? All that can be said, is, that man, though created upright, and without any wrong affections or dispositions, yet was a free agent, and therefore had it in his power to disobey. The account given by Moses of the first sin is very short. There were probably several circumstances attending it, which we are not informed of. But from what is said of it, we may gather, that the tempter, who, by the consent of the Jewish and Christian church, was an evil spirit making use of the serpent as an instrument, endeavoured both to work upon the sensitive appetite, and upon that desire of knowledge and pre-eminence so natural to the human mind,

and which is of great advantage when kept within proper bounds. He might probably pretend, that the tree had a hidden excellent virtue in it, of which he might plead his own experience as a proof; and that therefore they had some way misunderstood the command, or at least God would not be severe upon them if they transgressed it. If they had exercised their thinking powers, as they might and ought to have done, they might easily have seen through these specious illusions. But this they neglected, and were inexcusable in doing so; since they ought not to have hearkened to any pretences or insinuations whatsoever, against an express divine command, so plainly given, and which was particularly designed as a trial of their obedience, and was so easy to be observed. Their disobeying in such circumstances was in effect an attempt to throw off the allegiance they owed to God, an insurrection against his sovereign authority, and an arraigning his governing wisdom; and the basest ingratitude to his infinite goodness, which had placed them in such a noble and happy station, and had heaped so many favours and benefits upon them. And now they had nothing but dismal prospects before them: there was an unhappy change in the face of things: they were expelled out of paradise; the earth lost much of its beauty and fertility; and they became subject to many pains, diseases, and death. Yet God did not utterly cast them off. He gave them tokens of his readiness to receive them to his grace and favour upon their sincere repentance; and by the original promise, the true nature and design of which was probably more distinctly explained to our first parents than is mentioned in that short account; he gave them to understand, that he would not leave them to perish without remedy under the curse and misery brought upon them by means of the tempter; and that he would raise up for them a glorious Deliverer, who was to proceed from the woman's seed, and to rescue them from the miseries and ruin to which they had exposed themselves by their sin and apostacy. And there is reason to think, that they had hopes given them, that though they were still to be subject to many evils, and to temporal death, as the effects and punishment of sin, yet upon their repentance, and sincere, though imperfect obedience, they were to be raised to a better life. And accordingly the hopes of pardoning mercy, and the expectation of a

future life, seem to have obtained from the beginning, and to have spread generally among mankind, and made a part of the primitive religion derived from the first parents and ancestors of the human race.

I have laid these things together, that we may the better form a judgment concerning the Mosaic account. The sum of it is this: That man was originally created pure and upright, constituted soon after his creation in a happy paradise, and admitted to many tokens of the divine love and favour; but that he fell from that state, by sinning against God, and violating the command given him as a test of his obedience; and that he thereby brought death and misery into the world, with all the penal evils to which the human nature is now obnoxious, And these are excellent instructions. What can be more agreeable to right reason, or have a better effect, when really believed, than that God made man at first upright and happy, in a state of moral rectitude: that sin, which was owing to his wilful defection from God, was the source of all the evils to which the human nature is now exposed, and which therefore are not chargeable on God, or on his original constitution, but on man himself: that mankind are now in a lapsed state, but not forsaken of God, who hath in his great goodness provided a proper remedy, and hath been pleased to assure them of his readiness to receive them to his grace and favour, and to accept and reward their repentance and sincere obedience.

And now upon this view of things it will be no hard matter to answer the objections which Lord Bolingbroke hath urged against the Mosaic account of the fall.

He represents it as absurd to suppose, that "this moral system was destroyed by the wiles of a serpent, and by the eating of an apple, almost as soon as it began, against the intention as well as command of the Creator\*." As to the command given to our first parents to abstain from the fruit of a particular tree, at the same time that they had a full grant made to them of all the other delicious fruits of Paradise, it had nothing in it inconsistent with the divine goodness; and it hath been shewn, that in the circumstances man was then in, it was a

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 301.

command very proper to be given; and the transgressing this command, at the solicitations of any tempter whatsoever, was an inexcusable act of disobedience: that this sin was committed against the *intention, as well as command of the Creator*, is very true, if by its being against his intention be understood that it was what he did not encourage or approve; though it was what he foresaw, and thought fit in his wise providence to permit. He urges indeed, that “ God might have prevented “ man’s fall by a little less indulgence to what is called free-  
 “ will \*.” And he elsewhere mentions the “ severity with  
 “ which God punished our first parents, for a fault which he  
 “ foreknew they would commit, when he abandoned their free-  
 “ will to the temptation of committing it †.” This, if it proved any thing, would prove that it is unjust in God ever to punish any man for any sin at all: for whenever men sin, it may be said that he leaves them to their own free-will, and that it is what he foreknew. No doubt God might, by an exertion of his absolute omnipotency, have hindered our first parents from sinning; and he might have hindered either men or angels from ever sinning at all. But we see, that in fact he chooses, as a moral Governor, to deal with men as moral agents, and leaves them to the liberty of their own wills. And in the case here referred to, man had full power to have stood, and to have resisted the temptation; and his not so doing was his own fault, and not owing to any defect of goodness in God. He himself furnishes a proper answer to his own objection, when he observes, that “ it may be truly said that God,  
 “ when he gave us our reason, left us to our free-will, to make  
 “ a proper or improper use of it; so that we are obliged to our  
 “ Creator for a certain rule and sufficient means of arriving at  
 “ happiness, and have none to blame but ourselves when we  
 “ fail of it †.” And to the same purpose he saith, that “ God  
 “ has given to his human creatures the materials of physical  
 “ and moral happiness, and has given them faculties and  
 “ powers to recollect and apply these materials. What we  
 “ shall do for ourselves, he has left to the freedom of our  
 “ elections §.”

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iii. p. 301.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 521.

‡ Ibid. p. 388.

§ Ibid. p. 474.



He urges, that “ the doctrine of two independent principles, “ the one good, the other evil, is not so absurd as the doctrine “ of an inferior dependent being, who is assumed to be the author of all evil; and that to affirm, that a God sovereignly “ good, suffers an inferior dependent being to deface his work “ in any sort, and to make his other creatures both criminal “ and miserable, is still more injurious to the Sureme Being\*.”

\* Ibid. vol. iv. p. 20. The scripture doctrine of evil angels, of whom Satan is represented as the head, hath been so often found fault with, that it may not be improper on this occasion to offer something for obviating the prejudices which some have conceived against the sacred writings on this account. That God made creatures of a nobler order, and of sublime capacities and powers, vastly superior to man, is what Lord Bolingbroke himself allows to be very probable †. And as it is reasonable to believe that they were made free agents, why may it not be supposed that some of them made a wrong use of their liberty, and became depraved and corrupt? And if one of them, of distinguished power and dignity above the rest, by a perversion of his great abilities, became eminent in evil and wickedness, and particularly instrumental to draw others to sin and disobedience, it cannot be pretended that this supposition carried any absurdity in it. And in such a case it might be expected, that he and his associates would prove enemies to all goodness and virtue, and that having fallen from their own felicity and glory, they would envy the happiness of others, and endeavour to draw them into guilt and misery. This is what we often see bad men do, who are arrived to a great degree of corruption and depravity. His lordship, indeed, pretendeth, that the supposition of an *inferior dependent being who is assumed to be the author of all evil*, is more absurd than the doctrine of *two independent principles, the one good, the other evil*. If by being the *author of all evil*, be understood that there is any one inferior dependent being, who is the sole universal cause of all evil, and that there is no evil but what he is the author of, it is wrong to charge the Scriptures or Christian divines with assuming it: but to pass by this misrepresentation, it is evident to the common sense of mankind, that there is a vast difference between the supposition of an Almighty and independent evil being, a supposition full of absurdity and horror, and that of an inferior dependent being, who was made originally pure and upright, but fell by his own voluntary defection into vice and wickedness, and who, though permitted in many instances to do mischief, and to act according to his evil inclinations, as wicked men are often permitted to do in this present state, yet is still under the sovereign controul of the most holy, wise, and powerful Governor of the world. For in this case we may be sure, from the divine wisdom, justice, and goodness, that God will in the fittest season inflict a punishment upon that evil being, and his associates, proportionable to their crimes; and that, in the mean time, he setteth bounds to their malice and rage, and provideth sufficient assistance for those whom they endeavour to seduce to evil, whereby they may be enabled to repel their temptations, if it be not their own faults;

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 177. Vol. v. p. 329, 330.

And again he repeats it, that “it is inconsistent with the goodness and wisdom of God, to suffer an inferior being, his creature, and a creature in actual rebellion, to baffle his designs\*.” And if he suffered this evil being to compel them to be criminal and miserable, it would be so: but not, if he suffered him only to tempt and to seduce, and at the same time made them every-way able to withstand the temptation, and provided them with sufficient means to that purpose; which was the case of our first parents. God had done all that was proper for him to do as a moral governor, to prevent the defection. He had formed them in a state of moral rectitude, and endued them with good dispositions. The creation was fresh about them, and the glorious evidences of the divine wisdom, power, and goodness! They knew that he was the Author of their beings, and that from him flowed all the blessings they enjoyed. He had given them the most express injunction in the plainest terms, and strongly enforced, to prevent their disobedience. I see not therefore why God should exert his own omnipotency to hinder Satan from tempting them, since he could only tempt, but not compel: and they were sufficiently armed and provided against every temptation that could befall them, if they would but use the strength and advantages they had; which, all things considered, were superior to those that any of their posterity have been since possessed of.

His lordship takes notice of “the severity which had been exercised on the whole race of mankind, who share in the punishment, though not in the crime †.” And again he charges the divines for supposing, “that all mankind were punished for the sin of one †.” That mankind are now subject

and that he will in his superior wisdom bring good out of their evil, and overrule even their malice and wickedness, for promoting the great ends of his government. This is the representation made to us of this matter in the holy Scripture; nor is there any thing in this that can be proved to be contrary to sound reason. And we may justly conclude, that in the final issue of things, the wisdom, as well as righteousness, of this part of the divine administration, will most illustriously appear.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 321.

† Ibid. p. 321.

‡ Ibid. p. 485.—See also *ibid.* p. 284.

to the evils Moses mentions as the consequence of the fall, barrenness of the ground, pains and sickness in child-bearing, diseases and death, is undeniable. The only difference between the Mosaic account, and that of those who ridicule it, is, that they suppose all these evils to be the necessary effects of the original constitution and appointment of God, at the first formation of man and of the world: but Moses supposes the original constitution of things to have been much more happy; and that all these evils were brought into the world in consequence of man's voluntary defection from God. And which of these suppositions is most honourable to God, and most likely, if believed, to have a good effect upon the minds of men, may be left to any impartial and thinking person to determine. And it seems very odd, that it should be represented as unjust in God, to lay those evils upon men in consequence of the sin of our first parents, which they might easily have avoided, when it is accounted no reflection upon the justice and goodness of God to lay those evils upon men by the original constitution, without any regard to sin, either of their first parents, or their own.

On supposition that Adam and Eve were the fountains and protoplasts of the human race, it seems evident, that their posterity must suffer under the consequences of their defection. If they were banished from Paradise, and it was just they should be so, their posterity could not expect to be continued in it. If their natures became tainted, and subject to diseases and death, they could only convey tainted and mortal natures to their offspring. It cannot be denied, that, in the ordinary course of providence, children often suffer evils that were originally owing to the crimes of their parents and ancestors. Wicked parents often by their bad conduct forfeit advantages for their children as well as themselves, and not only propagate distempered bodies to them, but, considering the great influence that the bodily crasis and temperament hath upon the dispositions of the mind, they are frequently instrumental in conveying bodily constitutions, which incline them to vicious affections and disorderly passions, though they do not bring them under an absolute necessity of sinning, or imitating their fathers' vices. Since it is appointed that man-

kind should be propagated in a way of successive generation, it is evident that children must in many cases be greatly dependent on their parents, and derive great blessings or evils from them. And this may, on many accounts, be supposed to hold much more strongly with respect to the first parents of the human race, than any others.

As to the exceptions our author makes against some particular expressions made use of, and circumstances related, in the Mosaic account of the fall, they are no other than what have been frequently repeated and answered. Dr Tindal had urged the same objections, and several others, more distinctly, and with greater force; and I have considered them largely and particularly in my answer to that writer: to which therefore I beg leave to refer, having already insisted longer on this subject than I intended\*. I would only farther observe, that some remarkable traces of the primitive paradisaical state of man, and a fall from that state, are observable in the traditions of the ancient sages, in different parts of the world. And there is great reason to think, that at the time when Moses writ, those traditions were more distinctly known. Lord Bolingbroke pronounces the account of the fall to be a *moral, philosophical, Egyptian allegory*, designed to account for the introduction of evil †. And if he had looked upon it in that light, he had no right to urge the literal sense of it as an objection against the authority of the Mosaic writings.

I proceed, in the last place, to consider what his lordship has offered with regard to the sanctions of the law of Moses. He observes, that, “in the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, “Moses, on the renewal of the covenant between God and the “people, employs no argument to induce the latter to a strict “observation of it, of an higher nature than promises of im- “mediate good, and threatenings of immediate evil. They “are exhorted to keep the law, not for the sake of the law, “nor for the sake of God, but for considerations of another “kind, and where not only their wants were to be supplied, “but all their appetites and passions to be gratified—their “avarice, and all their other appetites and passions. God “purchased, as it were, their obedience with this mercenary

\* See Answers to Christianity as old as the Creation, vol. ii. chap. xiv.

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 350.

“bargain\*.” That we may judge of the consistency of this writer, it is to be observed, that he himself, when speaking in high terms of the law of nature, as having sufficient proofs of a *divine sanction*, and a *divine original*, affirms the sanctions of that law to be *only temporal*, and that they are such as affect *nations collectively*, not *men individually*. And he proves these divine sanctions, as he calls them, to be sufficient, because such as these were the sanctions of the law of Moses †. He often insists upon it, that the only sanction of the natural law appointed by divine providence is this; that national virtue shall produce national happiness, and national vice shall produce national misery: If therefore national blessings were promised in the Mosaic constitution as rewards of their obedience, and national evils and calamities denounced as the punishment of their wickedness and disobedience, there was nothing in this, according to his scheme, but what was highly proper, and perfectly agreeable to the law of nature. Yet he thinks fit to represent it as a *mercenary bargain*; as if it were wrong to annex any sanctions at all to that law; for if any were annexed, they must, upon his scheme of principles, be only of a temporal nature. As to what he observes, that “the Israelites were exhorted to keep the law, not for the sake of the law, nor for the sake of God, but for considerations of another kind, in which all their appetites and passions, their ambition, avarice, &c. were to be gratified,” this is very unfairly represented: The blessings promised in the passage he refers to, Deut. xxviii. 1—14. are indeed chiefly of a national kind. But there is no promise made to them of extensive conquest and universal empire; and it is evident, as I have elsewhere shewn ‡, that their constitution was not designed or fitted for it. If they obeyed the laws given them, they were to have fruitful and healthful seasons, to enjoy peace, plenty, and many blessings, in their own land. And it was promised them, that if they were invaded by their enemies, they should be protected against them, and prove victorious over them: That they should be happy and honourable above all other nations: And that God would establish them an holy people to himself, which included a promise of having

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 291, 292.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 90, 91.

‡ See Answer to Morgan, vol. i. p. 136, 137.

their spiritual privileges continued to them, with the tokens of God's special favour and gracious presence among them, which was their happiness and their glory. Any one that impartially considers the Mosaic writings, will find, that the laws there given to the Israelites are enforced upon them by a great variety of important considerations. The excellency of the laws themselves is represented; as particularly Deut. iv. 6, 7, 8. And frequently is that short but comprehensive declaration subjoined to their laws, *I am the Lord, Jehovah.* They are urged to obedience by the consideration of God's sovereign authority and supreme dominion, of his infinite righteousness and goodness, of the great things he hath done for them, and the special relation he stood in towards them, by the gratitude they owed to him for all his benefits, by the hope of his favour, and fear of his displeasure. For they were taught that noble lesson, that in, and from him alone they were to look for happiness, whether relating to the people in general, or to particular persons.— And they were instructed to regard him as exercising a constant inspection over them, and taking cognizance both of their outward actions, and of the inward affections and dispositions of their hearts.

It may not be improper on this occasion to observe, that his lordship has taken upon him to affirm, that “there cannot be any thing so impiously interested and craving, as the sentiments ascribed by Moses to the Patriarchs.” And he instances “in Jacob's vow, and the conditional engagement he took with God,” Gen. xxviii. 20, 21, 22 \*. But to set this matter in a proper light, of which he has been pleased to make a most unjust representation, it must be considered, that immediately before the account which is given of Jacob's vow, we are informed of a vision he had when he was setting out upon his journey to Padan-Aram, in which God renewed the promises to him, which had been made to Abraham, concerning the giving the land of Canaan to his posterity, and that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed: at the same time assuring him, that he would be with him in all places whither he went, and would bring him again into that land, ver. 12—15. It was in consequence of this vision that Jacob made his vow the next morning; the design of which

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 291, 292.

was, to express the sense he had of the divine goodness, and his confidence in God's gracious protection; and to declare his solemn resolution, that if God would be with him, and keep him in his way, and would give him *bread to eat, and raiment to put on*, (which shews the moderation of his desires,) so that he should come again to his father's house in peace, he would after his return make an open public acknowledgment of his gratitude and devotion to the Lord as his God, set apart that place where God had appeared to him to his worship, and would devote the tenth of all the substance God should give him to his service. This, instead of being *impiously interested and craving*, will appear to every person that judges candidly and impartially to be a great argument of the simplicity and goodness of Jacob's heart, and of a pious and well-disposed mind: though undoubtedly it must appear absurd to our author, who does not believe that God concerneth himself with the individuals of the human race.

His Lordship frequently observes, that in the law of Moses there is no mention made of future rewards and punishments. He sometimes positively asserts, that Moses did not believe the immortality of the soul, nor the rewards and punishments of another life; for if he had, he would have taught it to that people; and that Solomon, the wisest of their kings, decides against it\*. But in other passages he insinuates, that Moses might possibly believe it himself, though he did not think proper to mention it to the people: and represents it as a most surprising thing, that "a doctrine so useful to all religions, and therefore incorporated into all the systems of Paganism, should be left wholly out of that of the Jews†." And he endeavours to draw an argument from this against the divine original of this constitution. This is what he particularly urgeth in the conclusion of the twenty-first of his Fragments and Essays in his fifth volume, where he introduces it in a very pompous manner, "as an observation, which he does not remember to have seen or heard urged on one side, or anticipated on the other, and which he thinks evidently shews how absurd as well as improper it is to ascribe these Mo-  
saical laws to God." The observation is this: That "neither

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 290.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 238, 239.

“ the people of Israel, nor their legislator perhaps, knew any  
 “ thing of another life, wherein the crimes committed in this  
 “ life are to be punished.—Although he might have learned  
 “ this doctrine, which was not so much a secret doctrine, as it  
 “ may be presumed the unity of the Supreme God was, among  
 “ the Egyptians. Whether Moses had learned this among  
 “ their schools, cannot be determined; but this may be ad-  
 “ vanced with assurance: If Moses knew that crimes, and  
 “ therefore idolatry, one of the greatest, were to be punished  
 “ in another life, he deceived the people, in the covenant they  
 “ made by his intervention with God. If he did not know it,  
 “ I say it with horror, the consequence, according to the hy-  
 “ pothesis I oppose, must be, that God deceived both him and  
 “ them. In either case, a covenant or bargain was made,  
 “ wherein the conditions of obedience or disobedience were  
 “ not fully, nor by consequence fairly stated. The Israelites  
 “ had better things to hope, and worse to fear, than those that  
 “ were expressed in it. And their whole history seems to  
 “ shew how much need they had of these additional motives  
 “ to restrain them from polytheism and idolatry, and to answer  
 “ the assumed purpose of divine providence\*.” This is his  
 boasted argument; and what seems mightily to recommend it  
 to him, he looks upon it to be new, and what no man had  
 insisted on before.

My first remark upon it is this: That he could not with any  
 consistency urge the not making express mention of a future  
 state, as an argument to prove, that *it is absurd and impious to*  
*ascribe the Mosaical law to God*, since it appears from several  
 parts of his book, that he himself did not believe the rewards  
 and punishments of a future state. He ought rather, upon his  
 hypothesis, to have conceived a high opinion of Moses’s strict  
 regard to truth, since he chose not to make use of a pious  
 fraud, or of false and deceitful motives, when it would have  
 been his interest, and for the advantage of his laws, to have  
 done so. If it be said, that this is only urged as an argument  
*ad hominem*, which, though false and inconclusive in itself, yet  
 is conclusive upon the hypothesis of his adversaries, and proper  
 to distress and embarrass them, they will perhaps find it no

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 195.



difficult matter to defend themselves against this dilemma : for if it should be allowed, that neither Moses, nor any of the people, had any assurance of a future state, it would not follow, that God in not revealing it had deceived him or them. If indeed he had expressly told them, that the notion of a future state was false, and that they had no rewards or punishments to fear after this life is at an end, then, supposing there were future rewards and punishments, this would have been a deceiving them, in the strictest, properest sense. But merely not to reveal it to them, was not to deceive them. And whereas he urges, that on that supposition there was a covenant or bargain made, in which the conditions of obedience and disobedience were not fully, nor by consequence fairly stated ; this proceeds upon the supposition, that if God made a covenant with them, he would not deal fairly, if he did not lay before them all the rewards and punishments of their obedience and disobedience ; which is certainly a conclusion that cannot be justified. If God had only assured them in general, that, if they kept his commandments, they should be entitled to his favour, and, if they disobeyed, they should feel the awful effects of his displeasure, this ought to have been enough to have engaged them ; and it could not be said in that case that he dealt unfairly by them ; especially since he might have commanded their obedience, and demanded their subjection to his laws, in a way of absolute authority, without any express stipulations on his part at all. Whatever particular promises or threatenings he added, depended upon his sovereign good pleasure, and he might reveal those things, in what measure or degree he in his wisdom should think fit. Our author himself has found out a reason for it, viz. that the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, “ was dressed up with so many fabulous circumstances among the Egyptians, that it was hard to teach or renew this doctrine in the minds of the Israelites, without giving an occasion the more to recal the polytheistical fables, and practise the idolatrous rites they had learned during their captivity in Egypt \*.”

But let us put the other supposition, and which I take to be the true one, viz. that Moses and the Israelites did believe a

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 240, 241.

future state of rewards and punishments. This writer himself frequently intimates, that it was believed among the Egyptians, and that it was not a part of the secret doctrine, confined only to a few, but it was spread and propagated among the vulgar. It is therefore reasonable to believe, that this doctrine obtained among the Israelites too, especially as, by his own acknowledgment, it obtained among the Babylonians, and indeed among all the ancient nations, as far as we have any accounts left us of their sentiments. And it cannot with the least probability be supposed, that the Israelites were the only people that were ignorant of it, and had no notions of that kind among them at all: except we imagine that they were taught to believe the contrary; of which there is not the least proof; nor is there any thing in the writings of Moses to contradict that notion. On the contrary, there are several things in those writings which by a fair construction imply it. Our author seems to think, that the Mosaical account of the formation of man implies that his soul was a particle of the divinity\*. There is no reason to suppose this. But it certainly leads us to acknowledge a remarkable distinction of the soul from the body: that it is a nobler substance, more nearly resembling the divinity, and not, like the body, formed of the dust of the ground. What Moses saith of God's gracious acceptance of Abel's sacrifice; who yet was murdered, and met with no reward of his piety, no good effects of God's acceptance of him, except we take in the consideration of a future state: The account he gives of the translation of Enoch, that he *walked with God, and that he was not, for God took him*, which, in the most natural construction, implies the taking him out of this world to a better state: His representing the patriarchs, as calling this their present life the *few and evil days of their pilgrimage*, which shewed they *looked for a better country, that is, an heavenly*: To which may be added, the accounts there given of the appearances of angels, which naturally led the Israelites to acknowledge an invisible world of spirits: nor can any instance be brought of any nation, who believed the existence of angels and separate intelligences, and yet did not believe the immortality of the soul, and a future state: The express declarations of

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 480.

Solomon, that the *righteous hath hope in his death*; the clear distinction he makes between the soul and body, that at death the latter shall *return to the earth as it was*, and the former, the *spirit, shall return to God that gave it*; and that there shall be a future account, in which *every work shall be brought into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*. The assumption of Elias into heaven, which naturally led the thoughts of all that heard of it to another world, where good men shall be eminently rewarded: All these things, not to mention several passages in the Psalms and in the Prophets which plainly look this way, convince me, that a future state was all along believed among that people\*. And indeed it does not appear, that, at the time of Moses, any man had arisen, as there did in the latter ages, who, through the vain deceit and false refinements of philosophy, denied it. As to the promises and threatenings addressed to the people of Israel as a collective body, of which kind those seem to be which are mentioned, Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii. these no doubt were directly and immediately of a temporal nature: and the striking representations that are there made of the consequences of their obedience or disobedience in this present world, seem very well fitted to make strong and vigorous impressions upon them, and to give them a lively sense of the constant interposition of divine providence. But, besides this, the tenor of their law led them to think that the happiness of every individual person among them, and his interest in the favour of God, depended upon his obedience to the divine commands, and the practice of righteousness. This especially seems to have been the design of that general declaration in the law, that the man that did the precepts there enjoined should *live* by them. And there is no reason to think that they looked upon this as wholly confined to this present world. That it was understood to have a more extensive view, may be reasonably concluded from what is said in the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, where the equity of the divine proceedings is vindicated, and where it is expressly declared, with the greatest solemnity, concerning every particular person that should forsake his evil ways, and

\* See this more fully proved in the Answer to Dr Morgan, vol. i. p. 339, & seq.

turn to the practice of righteousness, that he should *not die*, but should surely *live*, i. e. be happy; and concerning every wicked and impenitent sinner, that he should surely die, i. e. be miserable; which must have its principal effect in a future state of rewards and punishments: since even under that constitution it often happened, that particular good men were exposed to many outward evils and calamities, and that bad men had great outward prosperity. What made it more necessary to insist explicitly and fully upon the doctrine of a future state in the gospel, was, that through the corruption of mankind the ancient belief of the immortality of the soul and a future state was very much obscured and defaced. As to the heathens, there were many among those who made great pretensions to learning and philosophy that absolutely rejected it, and most of those who did not positively reject it, yet treated it as a thing doubtful and uncertain. And it had been so much blended with fables, that at last it seemed to have little hold, even on vulgar opinion, as his Lordship observes, in a passage cited above. To which it may be added, that there was at that time a considerable party, even among the Jews themselves, considerable for their power and quality, though not for their numbers, who denied it. On all these accounts, it became the divine wisdom to interpose by a more express revelation, containing clearer discoveries, and fuller proofs of it, than had been ever given to mankind before. And this revelation was very properly brought by the most illustrious messenger that could be sent from heaven, the Son of God himself, that glorious and divine person whose coming had been so long promised and foretold. To which it may be added, that as the gospel did not contain a system of laws immediately addressed to any particular nation, as the Mosaical was, so none of the promises or threatenings there delivered relate directly and immediately to national blessings or calamities, but are such in which every individual of the human race should look upon himself as nearly interested.

Thus I have considered the principal objections advanced by Lord Bolingbroke against the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, and especially against the Mosaic writings. There are some other objections interspersed, and which he rather briefly hints at than pursues, and which scarce deserve a di-

distinct consideration. He thinks that a divine law ought always to have the effect. "Human laws may be eluded, and miss of the effect. But if God gives a law, it may be presumed, that effectual care should be taken to make that law observed; whereas there never was a law that less had the designed effect than that of Moses, from which the people were continually revolting\*." This argument would hold equally against the law of nature, which he himself affirms to be the law of God, and yet owns that men have revolted from it in all ages. But it has been shewn, that the law of Moses had actually a great effect, and that by virtue of it the worship of the one true God was maintained among the Jews, in a manner which eminently distinguished them above the heathen nations: and that polity was surprisingly preserved in all the revolutions of their state till the coming of our Saviour, for which it remarkably prepared the way, and thus answered the ends the divine wisdom had in view in instituting it.

He seems to blame Moses for not having taken the proper measures to make his laws observed, as Ezra and Nehemiah did afterwards. But if the directions which Moses gave had been pursued, never were there better and wiser precautions taken to engage the people to make themselves acquainted with their law, and oblige them to a careful observation of it. And all that Ezra and Nehemiah did, was to bring things back as near as possible to the original institution and design. The signal calamities inflicted upon the Jews in the time of the Babylonish captivity, the greatest that had ever befallen them, the utter desolation of their country, and their having been so long banished from it, which calamities had been originally threatened in the law itself, and were regarded by them as signal punishments from heaven for their violation of it: this, together with their wonderful restoration at the time that had been fixed for it by the prophets, awakened in them a zeal against idolatry, and an attachment to their law, greater than ever they had shewn before.

He urges farther, that "a divine law should have such a clearness and precision in its terms, that it may not be in the power of persons to elude and perplex the meaning of it. And that if it be not so, all that is said about marks of di-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 393.

“vinity in any law that pretends to be revealed by God is “mere cant \*.” This is particularly intended against the law of Moses. And yet certain it is, that if the people frequently fell off into idolatrous practices, and perhaps endeavoured to reconcile these their practices with the worship of God as there prescribed, this could not be justly charged upon any want of precision in the terms of the law. For what can be clearer and more precise than the commands there given against polytheism and idolatry? Nothing can be more unreasonable than what he sometimes insinuates, that if a revelation be given at all, it must be such as it should not be in the power of man to misapprehend or misrepresent †. It may be of signal use to persons of honest and candid minds, though it be not absolutely incapable of being perverted and abused; which it could not be, if delivered in human language, except God should, by an omnipotent energy, and by a constant miracle, over-rule all the passions, inclinations, and prejudices of the human nature: the absurdity of which supposition, though it be what this writer seems sometimes to insist upon, I need not take pains to expose.

He thinks, “the Scriptures ought to be more perfect, according to our ideas of human perfection, whether we consider them as books of law or of history, than any other “books that are avowedly human ‡.” I suppose he means that there should be greater elegance of composition, beauty of language, exactness of method, or that they should be more strictly philosophical. But perhaps what seems elegant to one nation would not appear so to another. The notions of elegance in style and composition were different among the Greeks and Romans, from what they were in the Eastern nations. And what might render the Scriptures more perfect in the eyes of some persons, might render them less perfect in other respects, and less fitted to answer the end for which they were designed. To talk of elegance of composition in human laws, or to blame acts of parliament for not being oratorical, would be thought a very odd objection. But it is the great excellency of the sacred writings, that there is in the different parts of Scripture

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii, p. 292, 293, 396.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 545. vol. iv. p. 261, 267.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 290.

what may please persons of all tastes. There is a simplicity and plainness accommodated to the vulgar : and yet there is in many passages a sublimity and majesty not to be equalled, and which has gained the admiration of the ablest judges.

As to what he sometimes mentions concerning the multiplicity of copies, various readings, interpolations, I had occasion fully to consider these things in the *Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History*, p. 65. et seq. and shall not repeat what is there offered. He has flirts here and there against some particular passages of Scripture, a distinct examination of which would carry me too far. And they are only such as Dr Tindal had urged before him, and which have been considered and obviated in the answers that were made to that writer. See particularly *Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation*, vol. ii. chap. xi. xii.

## L E T T E R XXXI.

*The favourable Representation made by Lord Bolingbroke of the excellent Nature and Design of the original Christian Revelation—He gives up several of the Deistical Objections, and even seems to acknowledge its divine Original—Yet he endeavours to expose its Doctrines, and to invalidate its proofs and Evidences—The Law of Nature and Christianity not to be opposed to another—The Gospel not a Republication of the Doctrine of Plato—The pretended Opposition between the Gospel of Christ and that of St Paul considered—This Apostle vindicated against the Censures and Reproaches cast upon him—The Miracles of Christianity, if really wrought, owned by Lord Bolingbroke to be a sufficient Proof—The Gospels, by his own Acknowledgment, give a just Account of the Discourses and Actions of Jesus—Yet he has attempted to destroy their Credit—His Pretence, that it would be necessary to have the Originals of the Gospels in our hands, or attested Copies of those Originals, examined—The several Ways he takes to Account for the Propagation of Christianity, shewn to be insufficient—What he offers concerning the little Effect Christianity has had in the Reformation of Mankind, considered—Want of Universality no Argument against the Divinity of the Christian Revelation—Its being founded on Faith not inconsistent with its being founded on rational Evidence.*

SIR,

I NOW come, according to the method I proposed, to consider what relates to the Christian revelation, strictly and properly so called, as it was taught by Christ and his apostles, and is contained in the sacred writings of the New Testament. Indeed whosoever carefully considers and compares the several parts of Lord Bolingbroke's scheme, must be sensible, that the whole of it may justly be regarded as an attempt against Christianity. If the principles he has laid down with regard to the moral attributes of God, divine providence, the immortality of the soul, and a future state, should take place, the Christiani



religion would be subverted at the very foundation. This is also the manifest intention of the account he gives of the law of nature. And one reason of the extreme virulence with which he hath attacked the law of Moses, and the Scriptures of the Old Testament, seems to be, the near connexion there is between this, and the religion of Jesus, which he represents to have been originally intended by our Saviour as a system of Judaism, and designed for no other nation but the Jews only \*. But though all he hath offered against the Scriptures of the Old Testament may be regarded as designed to strike at the authority of the Christian revelation, yet there are some parts of his work which appear to be more particularly intended for that purpose, which therefore it will be necessary to take a distinct notice of.

But first it will be proper to make some observations on several passages in his writings, in which he seems to make very remarkable concessions in favour of poor genuine Christianity, as taught by our Saviour and his apostles in the New Testament, and to make an advantageous representation of its excellent nature and tendency.

After having observed, that some represent all religion founded on divine revelation as inconsistent with civil sovereignty, and erecting a private conscience, that may, and often is inconsistent with the public conscience of the state, and, after inveighing against the spirit of Judaism, and Mahometanism, he undertakes to defend Christianity against this objection, and asserts, that “no religion ever appeared in the world whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind.” See the fourth section of his fourth Essay †. He declares, that “no system can be more simple and plain than that of natural religion, as it stands in the gospel ‡.” And after having observed, that “besides natural religion, there are two other parts into which Christianity may be analyzed—Duties superadded to those of the former, and articles of belief that reason neither could discover, nor can comprehend;” he acknowledges, that “both the duties required to be practised, and the propositions required to be believed, are concisely and plainly enough expressed in the

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 305, 328. 350.

† Ibid. p. 281, 282.

‡ Ibid. p. 290, 292.

“ original gospel, properly so called, which Christ taught, “ and which the four evangelists recorded. But they have “ been alike corrupted by theology \*.” Speaking of the Christian sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, he says, “ no institutions can be imagined more simple, nor more void “ of all those pompous rites and theatrical representations that “ abounded in the religious worship of the heathens and Jews, “ than these two were in their origin. They were not only “ innocent, but profitable ceremonies, because they were extremely proper to keep up the spirit of true natural religion, “ by keeping up that of Christianity, and to promote the observation of moral duties, by maintaining a respect for the “ revelation which confirmed them †.” He declares, that “ he “ will not say, that the belief that Jesus was the Messiah is the “ only article of belief necessary to make men Christians. “ There are other things doubtless contained in the revelation “ he made of himself, dependent on, and relative to this article, without the belief of which, I suppose, our Christianity “ would be very defective. But this I say, that the system of “ religion which Christ published, and his evangelists recorded, is a complete system, to all the purposes of religion, “ natural and revealed. It contains all the duties of the former ; it enforces them by asserting the divine mission of the “ Publisher, who proved his assertions at the same time by his “ miracles ; and it enforces the whole law of faith, by promising rewards, and threatening punishments, which he declares “ he will distribute when he comes to judge the world ‡.” And he afterwards repeats it, that “ Christianity, as it stands “ in the gospel, contains not only a complete, but a very plain “ system of religion. It is in truth the system of natural religion, and such it might have continued, to the unspeakable “ advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the “ same simplicity with which it was originally taught by Christ “ himself §.” He says, that “ supposing Christianity to have “ been a human invention, it had been the most amiable, and “ the most useful invention that was ever imposed on mankind “ for their good : And that Christianity, as it came out of the

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 294.

† Ibid. p. 301, 302.

‡ Ibid. p. 314.

§ Ibid. p. 316.

“hands of God, if I may use the expression, was a most simple and intelligible rule of belief, worship, and manners, which is the true notion of a religion. As soon as men presumed to add any thing of their own to it, the human alloy corrupted the divine mass, and it became an object of vain, intricate, and contentious science \*.” After having observed, that “the political views of Constantine, in the establishment of Christianity, were to attach the subjects of the empire more firmly to himself and his successors, and the several nations which composed it to one another, by the bonds of a religion common to all of them; to soften the ferocity of the armies; to reform the licentiousness of the provinces; and, by infusing a spirit of moderation, and submission to government, to extinguish those principles of avarice and ambition, of injustice and violence, by which so many factions were formed, and the peace of the empire so often and so fatally broken;” he declares, that “no religion was ever so well proportioned, nor so well directed, as that of Christianity seemed to be, to all these purposes.” He adds, that “it had no tendency to inspire that love of the country †, nor that zeal for the glory and grandeur of it, which glowed in the heart of every Roman citizen in the time of the commonwealth; but it recommended what Constantine liked better, benevolence, patience, humility, and all the softer virtues ‡.” He alloweth, that “the gospel is in all cases one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of benevolence, and of universal charity.” He mentions “Christ’s blaming his disciples for being willing to call for fire from heaven against the Samaritans: And that the miracles wrought by him, in the mild and beneficent spirit of Christianity, tended to the good of mankind §.” He observes, that “the theology contained in the gospel lies in a narrow compass. It is marvellous indeed, but it is plain, and it is employed throughout to enforce natural religion ||.” After having said, that “the articles of faith have furnished matter of con-

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 394, 395.

† That Christianity tends to produce and promote a true love to our country in that sense in which it is properly a virtue, see above, vol. i. p. 59, 60. marg. note.

‡ Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 433. § Ib. p. 188, 189. || Ib. p. 261;

“tention in, as well as from the apostolical age, and have added  
 “a motive to that cruel principle, which was never known till  
 “Christians introduced it into the world, to persecution even  
 “for opinions;” he adds, that “the charge which the enemies  
 “of religion bring against Christianity on this account is un-  
 “justly brought. These effects have not been caused by the  
 “Gospel, but by the system raised upon it; not by the reve-  
 “lations of God, but by the inventions of men\*.” He pro-  
 fesses a great concern for true Christianity, in opposition to  
 theology, and says, that “genuine Christianity was taught of  
 “God †.” And not to multiply passages for this purpose, he  
 pronounces, that “the Christian system, of faith and practice,  
 “was revealed by God himself, and it is absurd and impious to  
 “assert, that the divine *Logos* revealed it incompletely or im-  
 “perfectly. Its simplicity and plainness shewed, that it was  
 “designed to be the religion of mankind, and manifested like-  
 “wise the divinity of its original ‡.”

I have chosen to lay together these several passages relating  
 to Christianity in one view. And if we were to look no far-  
 ther, we should certainly entertain a very favourable opinion of  
 Lord Bolingbroke’s sentiments with regard to the truth, the ex-  
 cellency, and divine original, of the gospel of Jesus.

I shall here subjoin some reflections which have occurred to  
 me in reviewing these passages, and others of the like import,  
 which are to be found in his Lordship’s writings.

The first reflection is this: That there must certainly be a  
 wonderful beauty and excellency in the religion of Jesus, con-  
 sidered in its original purity and simplicity, which could force  
 such acknowledgments from a person so strongly prejudiced  
 against it, as his Lordship appears to have been. According  
 to the representation he himself has been pleased to make of it,  
 it was a *most amiable* and *most useful* institution, whose natural  
 tendency was directed *to promote the peace and happiness of man-  
 kind*. It contains *all the duties of natural religion*, and teaches  
 them in *the most plain and simple manner*. It is *one continued lesson  
 of the strictest morality, of justice, of benevolence, and of universal  
 charity*: and tends to extinguish those *principles of avarice and*

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 313.

† Ibid. p. 349. See also vol. iii. p. 329.

‡ Ibid. p. 451.

*ambition, of injustice and violence, which have done so much mischief in the world, and disturbed the peace and order of society. As its moral precepts are excellent, so its positive institutions are not only innocent, but profitable, and extremely proper to keep up the spirit of religion. He acknowledges, that, considered in its original simplicity, it was a most simple and intelligible rule of belief, worship, and practice: that the theology contained in the Gospel is marvellous, but plain; and that the system of religion there taught, is a complete system, to all the purposes of religion, natural and revealed, and might have continued so, to the unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity with which it was taught by Christ himself. I think it plainly follows from this representation of the nature and tendency of the Christian religion as taught by our Saviour and his apostles, that those can in no sense be regarded as real friends to mankind, who do what they can to subvert its authority, and thereby destroy its influence on the minds of men, and who, by artful insinuations, or even open attempts, endeavour to bring true original Christianity into contempt; as it will appear this writer, notwithstanding all his fair professions, hath done.*

Another reflection that may be made on Lord Bolingbroke's concessions is this: that he has in effect given up several objections which have been urged by the deistical writers, and on which great stress has been laid, and has acknowledged them to be of no force against the religion of Jesus as laid down in the gospel. It has been pretended, that Christianity, or revealed religion, is not friendly to civil sovereignty, or government; but he treats those that make this objection, if designed against Christianity as revealed in the Gospel, and not merely against the duties that have been superadded to it, as *falling below notice, and scarce deserving an answer* \*: And praises the policy of Constantine in endeavouring to establish Christianity as the religion of the empire, as being the best fitted of all religions to promote the public peace and order, to reform licentiousness, to curb factions, and to infuse a spirit of moderation and submission to government. See the passages cited above, from vol. iv. p. 282, 483.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 300, 301.

Again, Christianity, or revealed religion, hath been often objected against on account of its positive precepts or institutions, added to the law of nature. But his Lordship thinks “it may be admitted, that things entirely and exactly consistent “with the law of our nature may be superadded to it by the “same divine authority, and that positive precepts may be “given about things which are indifferent by the law of our “nature, and which become obligatory as soon as they are en- “joined by such positive precepts \*.” And particularly with regard to the positive institutions of Christianity, or the Christian sacraments, as enjoined in the gospel, in their primitive simplicity, he acknowledges, in a passage above produced, that they were extremely proper to keep up the spirit of true religion, and to promote the observation of moral duties †.

Another objection which hath been urged against Christianity, is drawn from that spirit of persecution which hath obtained amongst Christians, on account of opinions in religion. But he saith, that “the charge which the enemies of Christianity “bring against it on this account is unjustly brought: that “these effects have not been caused by the gospel, but by the “system raised upon it; not by the revelations of God, but “by the inventions of men.” And he mentions Christ’s blaming his disciples for being willing to call for fire from heaven upon the Samaritans; and that all he instructed his apostles to do, even in cases of the most enormous crimes, was to separate sinners from the communion of the faithful ‡.

There is no objection which hath been more frequently urged against the Christian religion, than its teaching doctrines or articles of belief, that *reason neither could discover, nor can comprehend*. He asserts, that there are articles or doctrines of this kind in the gospel; but that they are *concisely and plainly enough expressed in the original gospel, properly so called, which Christ taught, and which his four Evangelists recorded*; though they have been since *corrupted by theology* §. And speaking “of rea- “sonable men who have received the Christian revelation for

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol v. p. 547.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 301.—See also *ibid.* p. 310, 311, 591.

‡ Ibid. p. 188, 189, 313.

§ Ibid. p. 294.

“genuine, after a sufficient examination of the external and “internal proofs;” he says, “such men having found nothing “that makes it inconsistent with itself, nor that is repugnant to “any of the divine truths which reason and the works of God “demonstrate to them, will never set up reason in contradic- “tion to it, on account of things plainly taught, but incompre- “hensible as to their manner of being. If they did, their rea- “son would be false and deceitful; they would cease to be “reasonable men\*.” It is true that he elsewhere saith, that “if the things contained in any revelation be above reason, *i. e.* “incomprehensible, I do not say in their manner of being, for “that alone would not make them liable to objections, but in “themselves, and according to the terms in which they are “communicated, there is no criterion left by which to judge “whether they are agreeable or repugnant to the religion of “nature and of reason. They are not therefore to be received †.” But it is to be considered, that when divines talk of things above reason in the Christian system, all that they mean by it is, that they are things not contrary to reason, but as to the manner of them inconceivable, and according to his own concession, it can be no objection against the truth or divinity of revelation, that it containeth an account of some things which are *incomprehensible in their manner of being.*

Another reflection that is proper to be made upon what Lord Bolingbroke hath acknowledged with regard to the original Christian revelation as laid down in the gospel of Jesus, is, that he hath, on several occasions, seemed expressly and formally to own its divine original. In some of the passages above cited, he directly declares, that *genuine Christianity was taught by God*—That the *Christian system of faith and practice was revealed by God himself*—And that the *first publisher of Christianity proved his assertions by his miracles.* To which I shall add another remarkable passage in the conclusion of his fourth Essay, which is *concerning authority in matters of religion.* “Christianity,” saith he, “genuine Christianity, is contained “in the gospel: it is the word of God: it requires therefore “our veneration and strict conformity to it ‡.” He ought

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 384.—See also p. 279.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 546.

‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 631, 632.—See also ib. p. 279, and vol. iii. p. 339.

therefore, if he were consistent with himself, on the authority of that revelation, to receive what is there plainly revealed concerning the moral attributes of God, concerning divine providence as extending to the individuals of the human race, concerning Christ's being the great Mediator between God and man, and concerning our redemption by his blood, and concerning a state of future rewards and punishments. And yet he hath endeavoured to subvert all these. Notwithstanding his professed regard for Christianity, he hath, on several occasions, used his utmost efforts to weaken or destroy the proofs of its divine original, to misrepresent and expose its doctrines and laws, those doctrines which he himself declares to have been original doctrines of the Christian religion. How far such a conduct is consistent with that truth and candour, that honesty and simplicity of heart, which become a sincere inquirer, and who declareth, that he hath nothing but truth in view, may be left to any fair and impartial person to determine.

In my reflections on this part of Lord Bolingbroke's works, the method I shall observe is this: I shall first consider those passages that seem designed to strike at the authority of Christianity in general; and then shall proceed to consider the objections he hath urged against some particular laws and doctrines of our holy religion.

With regard to Christianity in general, he runs a parallel, in the seventh and eighth of his Fragments and Essays, between the law of nature and Christianity. He compares the clearness and certainty of the former with that of the latter. He compares also their sanctions, and endeavours to shew, that the law of nature rests on fuller proofs than any that have been found or can be given, of the divine institution of Christianity †. In all that he offers on this head, he goes upon the supposition of the absolute clearness and certainty of the law of nature to the whole human race; and what he urged to this purpose has been considered in my ninth letter. But it may be easily shewn, that the whole parallel he there draws between the law of nature and Christianity, and between the proofs of the former and of the latter, is entirely impertinent. He himself there

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 90. et. seq.



declares, that “ every friend to Christianity admits, that the  
“ Christian law is nothing else than the law of nature confirm-  
“ ed by a new revelation, and that this is what the worst of its  
“ enemies does not deny, though he denies the reality of the  
“ revelation \*.” It is not true that the Christian law is nothing  
else than the law of nature : but that it comprehends it, that  
it clears and enforces it, is very true. It does not take off from  
any rational argument or evidence brought in favour of that  
law, and besides confirmeth it by an express divine testimony.  
And must not common sense lead every man to acknowledge,  
that it must be a mighty advantage to have the law of nature  
thus farther cleared and confirmed? The proofs therefore of  
Christianity, and of the law of nature, are not to be opposed  
to one another. But have a friendly harmony : and Christians  
have the great advantage of having both these proofs in con-  
junction. Christianity supposeth the law of nature, cleareth it  
where it was obscured, enforceth it by the strongest sanctions,  
and addeth these things which could not be known merely by  
that law, and which yet it was of importance to mankind to be  
acquainted with. So that Christianity, as far as it relates to,  
and republishes the law of nature, has all the advantages which  
this writer ascribes to that law, because it is that very law  
more clearly published, and strongly confirmed : and in this  
respect there is no competition between them. And with re-  
spect to those things in Christianity which are not clearly com-  
prehended in that law, and which we could not have discover-  
ed merely by our own unassisted reason, it is not to be won-  
dered at if they are not so obvious to our understandings : but as  
far as they are necessary to be known by us, they are reveal-  
ed in the gospel : and we are not obliged to believe them far-  
ther than they are there revealed. Nor shall those be condemn-  
ed for not believing them, who have had no opportunity of  
being acquainted with that revelation. Though our author,  
in order to cast an odium on Christianity, after having observ-  
ed, that “ the law of nature is universally given to all man-  
“ kind,” adds, that “ the greatest part of the world are invin-  
“ cibly ignorant of the first principles of Christianity, without

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 93.

“ the knowledge of which, and without faith in which, they  
 “ are all condemned to eternal punishment \*.”

We have seen that our author declareth Christianity to be the law of nature enforced by a new revelation : so that according to this representation, it is a *divine republication of the law of nature*. Yet he elsewhere thinks proper to represent it as only a *republication of the doctrines of Plato* : and any one that considers the representation he hath frequently made of that philosopher and his doctrines, must be sensible that this is far from being designed as a compliment to the Christian revelation. Some account of his invectives against him was given in the fifth Letter. He calls him a *mad theologist* : And tells us, that no man ever dreamed so wildly as Plato wrote : And that he introduced a false light into philosophy, and oftener led men out of the way of truth than into it. Yet he says, it is strange to observe “ the strange conformity there is between *Platonism* and genuine Christianity itself, such as it is taught in the original “ gospel. We need not stand to compare them here. In general the Platonic and Christian systems have a very near “ resemblance, *qualis decet esse sororum*, and several of the ancient fathers and modern divines have endeavoured to make “ it appear still greater.—That this may give unbelievers occasion to say, that if the doctrines are the same, they must “ have been deduced from the same principle ; and to ask, “ what that principle was, whether reason or revelation ? “ If the latter, Plato must have been illuminated by the “ Holy Ghost, and must have been the precursor of the “ Saviour, and of more importance than St John. He anticipated the gospel on so many principal articles of belief “ and practice, that unbelievers will say, it was a republication “ of the theology of Plato : And that as the republication was “ by divine revelation, the publication must have been so too : “ and they will ask with a sneer, whether a man whose passion for courtezans and handsome boys inspired him to write “ so many lewd verses, was likely to be inspired by the Holy “ Ghost † ?” This is mean banter, taking advantage of the too great admiration some particular persons have expressed for Plato. But he has not traced the conformity between Platonism

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 91.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 340.

and genuine original Christianity, under pretence that it was needless. He owns, that Plato *blundered on some divine truths* \* : That on some occasions he wrote *like a very pious and rational theist and moralist* ; and that *very elevated sentiments may be collected from his writings* : That there is in them *a mixture of the brightest truths, and the foulest errors* †. It is not to be wondered at therefore, that there was in several instances a conformity between the doctrine of Plato, and that of the gospel. But he himself acknowledges, that there were many things in his scheme contrary to that of Christianity. He says, that “ some of Plato’s writings abound in notions that are agreeable to the Christian system, and in others that are repugnant to it ‡.” That “ far from going about to destroy the pagan superstition, he refined it, and made it more plausible, and more secure from the attacks to which it was exposed before § :” And that accordingly, “ Platonism answered the purposes of those who opposed Christianity ||.” I would only farther observe, that there is no writer whom he represents as so unintelligible as Plato ; and yet he intimates, that if he had known and taught the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, “ he who is so often unintelligible, now would have been vastly more so, and less fitted for the great work of reforming mankind \*\*.” This is a very odd insinuation from one who has acknowledged, that true original Christianity is a *plain and intelligible system of belief and practice* : and that its *simplicity and plainness shewed, that it was designed to be the religion of mankind, and manifested likewise the divinity of its original.*

It may be looked upon as a farther proof of his regard to Christianity, that he represents it as an inconsistent scheme. He pretends, that the New Testament consisteth of two gospels, the one published by our Saviour himself, and recorded by the evangelists, and the other by St Paul.

He observes, that “ Christ was to outward appearance a Jew, and ordered his disciples to do what the scribes and pharisees who sat in Moses’s chair taught : and that when

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 348.

† Ibid. p. 344, 345.

‡ Ibid. p. 359.

† Ibid. p. 345. 352.

§ Ibid. p. 355.

\*\* Ibid. vol. v. p. 226.

“ he commissioned his apostles to teach and baptize all nations, “ he only meant it of the Jews dispersed into all nations.” He asserts, that “ the mystery of God’s taking the Gentiles to be “ his people without subjecting them to circumcision, or the “ law of Moses, was inconsistent with the declarations and “ practice of Jesus \*.” He asks therefore, “ if this was the “ purpose of God, to take the Gentiles to be his people under “ the Messiah, how came it that the Messiah himself gave no “ instructions about it to his apostles, when he sent them to “ preach his gospel to all nations? Why was the revelation “ of this important mystery, so necessary at the first publication “ of the gospel, reserved for St Paul, who had been a perse- “ cutor? Shall we say, that this eternal purpose of the Father “ was unknown to the Son? Or, that if it was known to him, “ he neglected to communicate it to the first preachers of the “ gospel?” He seems to think these questions unanswerable, and that “ the *pertness* and *impudence* of the men that pretend “ to account for these things *deserve no regard* †.” And yet it is no hard matter to solve these difficulties. The calling of the Gentiles was originally included in our Saviour’s scheme. It was a remarkable part of the character of the Messiah, clearly pointed out in the prophetical writings, by many express predictions. Our Lord himself, during his own personal ministry, gave plain intimations of his design that way, and after his ascension into heaven instructed his apostles in it by his spirit, whom he sent to guide them into all truth. And the gradual discovery of this, in a way fitted to remove their prejudices, was conducted with admirable wisdom as well as condescension.

Mr Chubb had insisted on this objection at great length; and I shall therefore refer to the remarks made upon that writer in the fourteenth Letter: yet, upon no better foundation than this, his Lordship hath taken upon him to affirm, that the “gospel St Paul preached was contradictory to that of Jesus “ Christ:” and that “ he taught several doctrines, which were “ directly repugnant to the word and example of the Messiah †.” And indeed our author hath on many occasions discovered a particular prejudice against that great apostle. He call him a

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 305.

† Ibid. p. 326.

‡ Ibid. p. 328.

*true cabbalistical architect* \*, a loose paraphraser and *cabbalistical commentator, as much at least as any ancient or modern rabbi*; And that the different manner of his preaching the gospel, and that of the other apostles, “marks strongly the different schools “in which they had been educated, the school of Christ, and the school of Gamaliel †.” But nothing is more evident to every one that reads the New Testament with attention, than that there is a perfect harmony between St Paul and the other apostles: and that the scheme of religion taught in the gospels and in the epistles is every-where the same. Such a harmony there is, as shews they were all directed by the same spirit. The gospel which St Paul preached was what he received by revelation from Jesus Christ, as he himself declares, Gal. i. 12. He had not learned it in the school of Gamaliel. On the contrary, in that school he had imbibed the strongest prejudices against the religion of Jesus, and which nothing less than a power of evidence, which he was not able to resist, could overcome. He was very well versed in the Jewish learning: yet none of the apostles so frequently warned the Christian converts against the Jewish fables, or speaks with such contempt of their vain traditions, their endless genealogies, their strifes and questions about words, as he has done.

There are several invidious charges brought by our author against this excellent person: He is pleased to represent him as a *loose declaimer*, as a *vain-glorious boaster*, as having been guilty of *great hypocrisy and dissimulation* in his conduct towards the Jewish Christians, as writing *obscurely and unintelligibly*, and that where he is *intelligible*, he is *absurd, profane, and trifling* ‡. He particularly instances in his doctrine concerning predestination §; though he owns, that “this doctrine is very much “softened, and the assumed proceedings of God towards men “are brought almost within the bounds of credibility, by Mr “Locke’s exposition of the ninth chapter of the epistle to “the Romans,” which he calls a *forced one*, but offers nothing to prove it so; and acknowledges, that *this sense might be admitted* ||. He also charges him with teaching passive obedience,

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iii. p. 288.

† Ibid. p. 827, 328.

‡ Ibid. p. 328, 330, 331.

§ Ibid. p. 331. 509. vol. v. p. 567.

|| Ibid. p. 456.

and as *employing religion to support good and bad governments alike* \* : though any one that impartially considers the apostle's doctrine in the passage he refers to, viz. the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, will find it wise and excellent : Mr Chubb had advanced the same charge, as well as most of the others that are produced by Lord Bolingbroke against that eminent apostle : and that I may not be guilty of needless repetitions, I shall refer to the remarks made on that writer in the fourteenth Letter.

His Lordship mentions that passage, 1 Cor. xi. 5. 14. about womens prophesying with their heads uncovered, and that it is a shameful thing for men to wear long hair, which he says, is the *most intelligible trifling that we find in the gospel*. This is very improperly brought in by the author here, where he proposes to shew that where St Paul is not obscure he is *profane and trifling* : for this is generally acknowledged to be one of the obscurest passages in St Paul's Epistles. But this is no real objection against their authority. Some obscure and difficult passages must be expected in the most excellent of ancient writings, especially in things that have a special reference to the customs and usages of those times. He is pleased to say, that the *argument may not appear very conclusive, nor indeed very intelligible to us* : And if so, he has done wrong to produce it as an instance of *intelligible trifling* : But he sneeringly adds, that *it was both*, he doubts not, to the *Corinthians*. And I doubt not they understood it better than we at this distance can pretend to. He then mentions the apostle's directions to the Corinthians with regard to the prudent and orderly exercise of those spiritual gifts : and these directions cannot reasonably be turned to the disadvantage of the apostle, since they are undeniably wise and excellent.

Among other charges which Lord Bolingbroke bringeth against St Paul, one is that of madness. He asks, " Can he be less than mad, who boasts a revelation superadded to reason to supply the defects of it, and who superadds reason to revelation to supply the defects of this too at the same time ? This is madness, or there is no such thing incident to our nature." And " he mentions several persons of great name as having been guilty

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 509. 516.

of this madness, and particularly St Paul \*. That reason and revelation are in their several ways necessary, and assistant to each other, is easily conceivable, and so far from being an absurdity, that it is a certain truth. But the stress of his Lordship's observation lies wholly in the turn of the expression, and in the improper way of putting that case. The revelation may be of signal use to assist and enlighten our reason in the knowledge of things which we could not have known at all, or not so certainly, by our own unassisted reason without it, is plainly signified by St Paul, and is what the whole Gospel supposes. And on the other hand it is manifest, that reason is necessary to our understanding revelation, and making a proper use of it; and that in judging of that revelation, and of its meaning and evidences, we must exercise our reasoning faculties and powers; *i. e.* revelation supposeth us to be reasonable creatures, and to have the use of our reason, and addresseth us as such. But this doth not imply that revelation is defective, or that reason is superadded to supply the defects of it. For let revelation be ever so sufficient and perfect in its kind, or well fitted to answer the end for which it is given, yet still reason is necessary to understand and apply it. This is St Paul's scheme, and there is nothing in it but what is perfectly consistent. It is evident from his writings, that he supposeth the revelation which hath been given to be sufficient for all the purposes for which it was designed, able to make us wise unto salvation, and to instruct us in things of great importance, which reason, if left merely to itself, could not have discovered. And at the same time he supposeth those to whom the revelation is published to be capable of exercising their reasoning faculties, for examining and judging of that revelation, and exhorteth them to do so. And though he frequently asserteth his own apostolical authority, and the revelation he received from Jesus Christ, yet he useth a great deal of reasoning in all his Epistles. Thus are reason and revelation to be joined together, and are mutually helpful to one another. And in this view there is a real harmony between them. And what there is in this scheme that looks like madness, it is hard to see.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 171.

His lordship, in his prejudice against St Paul, carrieth it so far as to pronounce, “ that St Paul received nothing immediately from Christ.” Though this apostle himself, in the passage before referred to, affirms, that he received the Gospel he preached, *not of man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.* He adds, that “ St Paul had no apostolical commission, except that which he assumes in the Acts of the Apostles, written by St Luke, and dictated probably “ by himself \*.” And again, that “ he entered a volunteer “ into the apostleship; at least his extraordinary vocation was “ known to none but himself.” And if St Paul dictated that account to St Luke, it deserves the greatest credit, since he was the properest person in the world to give an account of it. But the truth of his apostolical commission did not depend merely upon his own word. It was made manifest by the most illustrious proofs and credentials, to which he could with confidence appeal †, and was acknowledged by the other apostles, though this writer is pleased to insinuate the contrary ‡. Indeed, the plain meaning of his whole charge here is, that St Paul was an impostor, and that his call to the apostolical office was entirely his own fiction. But the great absurdity of this pretence has been so fully exposed in Sir George Lyttleton’s *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St Paul*, that it is perfectly needless to add any thing farther on that head. I shall only observe, that whosoever with a candid and unprejudiced mind considers the whole character and conduct of that great apostle, as represented in the Acts of the Apostles, and the temper and spirit which breathes in his admirable Epistles, will be apt to think, that never was there among mere men a more perfect character than that of St Paul. In him we may behold a shining example of the most exalted and unaffected piety towards God, the most fervent and active zeal for the divine glory, yet not a blind enthusiastic heat, but a zeal according to knowledge, and conducted with great prudence: the most extensive and disinterested charity and benevolence towards mankind, and the most earnest and affectionate concern for their salvation and happiness; the most steady fortitude and constancy under the severest trials and

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 388, 389.

† 2 Cor. xii. 11, 12.

‡ Gal. xi. 7, 8, 9.



sufferings, which he endured with patience, and even with joy, supported and animated by the earnest desire he had to serve the glorious cause of truth and righteousness, and by the sublime hopes of an everlasting reward in a better world for his faithful services in this. Never was there a truer greatness of mind than that which he manifested. And all this accompanied with a most amiable humility, and a great tenderness of spirit in bearing with the weakness and infirmities of others. He was a most glorious instrument in the hand of providence for promoting the sacred interest of pure and undefiled religion in the world. Our author says, that Socrates was the *apostle of the Gentiles in natural religion*, as St Paul was *in revealed*. But no instance can be brought of any one person whom the former converted from the prevailing polytheism and idolatry. And how should this be expected, when he himself, as his lordship owns, countenanced it by his own practice, and was *for the religion established by the laws* \*! But the latter turned thousands in many different nations from darkness unto light, and from serving idols to serve the living and true God, and from the most abandoned vice and dissoluteness of manners to the practice of virtue and righteousness; which he performed in opposition to the seemingly most insuperable difficulties, and through a succession of the greatest labours and sufferings that any one man ever endured. This has always highly recommended him to the esteem and admiration of those who have a zeal for true original Christianity. And on the other hand, the enemies of our holy religion have always discovered a peculiar aversion to this excellent person, who was so successful an instrument in propagating it. And this seems to be the true reason of that obloquy and reproach which Lord Bolingbroke has been so industrious to fix on so admirable a character.

His real intention towards Christianity will farther appear, if we consider the attempts he hath made to invalidate the proofs and evidences of it.

He frequently speaks with the utmost contempt of those that insist upon the internal characters of a divine original, which are to be observed in the revelation delivered in the holy Scriptures. By rejecting the internal characters, he pretends to as-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 193.

sert the authority of the Bible, and very gravely advises the divines to confine themselves to the external proofs, and to dwell very little on the internal characters; and represents them as talking a great deal of blasphemy on this head\*. And yet he himself, as appears from some of the passages that have been above cited, has acknowledged several things with regard to Christianity as taught in the Gospels, which have been deservedly reckoned among the internal characters, which lead us to acknowledge that it came from God: such as, the excellent tendency of its doctrines, precepts, and sacraments; its being *one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of charity, and universal benevolence; its being a complete system, to all the purposes of religion natural and revealed; its plainness and simplicity, which, he says, shewed that it was designed to be the religion of mankind, and manifested likewise the divinity of its original.* It is true that he charges those with *madness, and sometimes worse than madness*, who, in arguing concerning the internal characters, “pretend to comprehend the whole œconomy of the “divine wisdom from Adam down to Christ, and even to the “consummation of all things, and to connect all the dispensations.” And this is one part of his quarrel with St Paul, whom, as well as the divines, he very unfairly represents as undertaking to *shew the sufficient reason of providence in every particular instance* from the beginning of the world to the end of it †. But however he is pleased to represent it, it is a noble contemplation, and highly for the honour of the sacred writings, that there we may observe one and the same glorious plan carried on by the divine wisdom and goodness from the beginning, for the recovery and salvation of lapsed man: successive revelations communicated at different times, and in divers manners, and at the distance of several ages from one another, yet all subservient to the same glorious purposes, and mutually confirming and illustrating each other: the law and the prophets in their several ways conspiring to prepare the way for the revelation of Jesus Christ, and to furnish divine attestations to it. The religion carried on under the several dispensations, still for substance the same; and whatever seeming

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 271, 272, vol. iv. p. 229.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 271, 272, vol. iv. p. 129.

variety there may be in the parts, an admirable harmony in the whole.

His Lordship, speaking of what he calls the *internal proofs* of the Christian revelation, observes, in a sneering way, that “the contents of the whole Christian system laid down in our Scriptures are objects of such a probability, as may force assent very reasonably in such a case, without doubt; although a concurrence of various circumstances, improved by the credulity of some men, and the artifice of others, forced this assent in cases not very dissimilar\*.” He has not thought fit to produce an instance of a false revelation, whose evidence can be justly compared to that of Christianity. And as to his expression of *forcing assent* by a *probability*, it is, like many others of his, very improper. No Christian talks of forcing assent, nor would a forced belief have any great merit in it. But that there are sufficient grounds to make it reasonable to assent to it, is very true. And this is what his Lordship ought to have acknowledged, if, as he himself confesses, “it has all the proofs which the manner in which it was revealed, and the nature of it, allowed it to have †.” This is in effect to own, that the proofs of Christianity are sufficient in their kind. And if this be the case, it is, according to the rule he himself has laid down, unreasonable to demand more. For he observes, that “common sense requires, that every thing proposed to the understanding, should be accompanied with such proofs as the nature of it can furnish. He who requires more, is guilty of absurdity: he who requires less, of rashness ‡.”

With regard to the external proofs of Christianity, his Lordship does not, as several of the deistical writers have done, deny miracles to be proper, or sufficient proofs. On the contrary, he sometimes affects to cry up the mighty efficacy of miracles as alone sufficient, without any consideration of the goodness of the cause for which they were wrought, or examination of the doctrines they attest; and finds fault with “that maxim as contrary to common sense, that is not for admitting miracles as proofs of a divine original, without consideration of the

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 93.

† Ibid. p. 91.

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 246.

“ cause or doctrines : since real miracles can be operated by no power but that of God, nor for any purpose, by consequence, but such as infinite wisdom and truth direct and sanctify \*.” Accordingly he declares, speaking of the Christian revelation, that, “ considering the glorious person by whom it was brought, and the stupendous miracles that were wrought to confirm it, we might be ready to conclude, that it must have forced conviction, and have taken away even a possibility of doubt †.” And he repeats it again, that “ Christianity was confirmed by miracles, and the proof was no doubt sufficient for the conviction of all those who heard the publication of this doctrine, and saw the confirmation of it. One can only wonder that any such remained unconvinced †.” His design was undoubtedly to insinuate, that the miracles were not really wrought; because, if they had been wrought, they must have convinced all those that saw them. To talk of miracles as forcing conviction, is to carry it to an unreasonable extreme, as any man must be sensible, that considers human nature, and the mighty influence of prejudices, passions, and worldly interests. We have, however, his concession, that miracles are sufficient for convincing those who saw them: and if so, they must be proportionably sufficient for the conviction of those who have a reasonable ground of assurance, that these miracles were really wrought, though they were not themselves eye-witnesses of them. The original proof of Christianity therefore was, by his own account, every way sufficient. The only question that remains is, whether we have proper evidence to convince us that these miracles were actually performed. And of this we have evidence sufficient to satisfy every candid and impartial inquirer, and all that could be reasonably insisted upon in such a case. For the proof of this I shall refer to what has been already observed in my fourth Letter, in answer to Mr Hume.

The most remarkable of all the miracles by which the divine authority of the Christian religion is confirmed, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And as to this, his Lordship observes, that “ Christ scarce shewed himself to the few who

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 227, 228.

† Ibid. p. 461.

† Ibid. p. 91.

“ were said to have seen him after his resurrection in such a manner, as they could know by it certainly that it was he whom they had seen. I say *the few*, because St Paul, who had not probably ever seen Jesus, deserves no credit when he affirms against the whole tenor of the gospels, that he and above five hundred brethren at once had seen him after his resurrection.” He has here plainly let us know, that after all his professed regard to Christianity, he is very willing to deny that which is the principal proof of our Saviour’s divine mission, and to which he himself ultimately appealed as such. But we have nothing but confident assertions, after his Lordship’s manner, and a bold charging St Paul with a falsehood, without the least proof: for as to his pretence, that it is contrary to the whole tenor of the Gospels, there is no foundation for it. The more to expose St Paul, he represents it as if he had affirmed, that he himself was present, and saw Jesus at the same time that he was seen of five hundred brethren at once. Whereas he saith no such thing, but rather the contrary, 1 Cor. xv. 6. 8. But as to Christ’s being seen by so many persons, St Paul speaks of it as a thing certainly known, and that the greater part of them were then alive when he wrote to the Corinthians. And the question is, whether St Paul is to be believed in a fact which he publicly affirmed in that very age, and for the truth of which he appeals to great numbers of persons then living, or this writer, who, at the distance of seventeen hundred years, gives us his own word for it that there was no such thing? But I shall not need to add any thing farther on this subject here, having considered it so fully in the twelfth Letter of the former volume, which contains remarks on *The Resurrection of Jesus Considered*.

The accounts of the extraordinary facts whereby Christianity was attested, as well as of its original doctrines, are transmitted to us in the sacred writings of the New Testament, particularly in those of the Evangelists, and in the Acts of the Apostles. And it has been often shewn, that never were there any writings which carry greater marks of purity, simplicity, and uncorrupted integrity, and of an impartial regard to truth, or which have been transmitted with a clearer and a more continued evidence. With regard to the writings of the Evangelists, Lord Bolingbroke hath himself acknowledged, that “ it is out of dispute, that

“ we have in our hands the Gospels of Matthew and John,  
 “ who gave themselves out for eye and ear witnesses of all  
 “ that Christ did and taught. That two channels were as suf-  
 “ ficient as four to convey those doctrines to the world, and to  
 “ preserve them in their original purity. The manner too in  
 “ which these Evangelists recorded them, was much better  
 “ adapted to this purpose than that of Plato, or even of Xeno-  
 “ phon, to preserve the doctrines of Socrates. The Evangelists did  
 “ not content themselves to give a general account of the doc-  
 “ trines of Jesus Christ in their own words, nor presume in  
 “ feigned dialogues to make him deliver their opinions in his  
 “ own name. They recorded his doctrines in the very words  
 “ in which he taught them, and they were careful to mention  
 “ the several occasions on which he delivered them to his  
 “ disciples or others. If therefore Plato and Xenophon tell us  
 “ with a good degree of certainty what Socrates taught, the  
 “ two Evangelists seem to tell us with much more what the  
 “ Saviour taught and commanded them to teach\*.” He finds  
 fault, indeed, with Erasmus for making Christ to say to his  
 disciples, in his Paraphrase on the First Chapter of the Acts,  
 that “ the Holy Spirit would not only recal to their minds all  
 “ he had taught them, but suggest likewise unto them what-  
 “ ever it might be necessary for them to know.” And he  
 adds, that “ cavillers will say, that these words were added by  
 “ Erasmus to the text for reasons very obvious, and are not  
 “ contained in the text.” But there is certainly very little  
 ground for such a cavil, since it appears from the sacred text  
 itself, that our Saviour did both promise to send his Spirit to  
*bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto*  
*them,* and also to *lead them into all truth,* and instruct them in  
 things in which he himself had not fully instructed them during  
 his personal ministry, because they were not then able to bear  
 them, John xiv. 26. xvi. 12, 13, 14. And whereas he urgeth,  
 that “ if we do not acknowledge the system of belief and prac-  
 “ tice which Jesus left behind him to be complete and perfect,  
 “ we must be reduced to the greatest absurdity, and to little  
 “ less than blasphemy; and that it must be otherwise said,  
 “ that he executed his commission imperfectly †.” It will ap-  
 pear, if the matter be rightly considered, that it was no way

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 390.

† Ibid. p. 315, 316.

dishonourable to our Saviour, that there were several things more explicitly revealed to the apostles afterwards, than was done during his personal ministry. Some things were not proper to be openly and distinctly published till after Christ's resurrection: nor were his disciples fully prepared for receiving them before that time. He himself told them before his passion, that there were some things they did not know then, but should know afterwards. And the revelation published by his apostles, according to his commission, and under the influence of his Spirit, and by power derived from him, was as truly *the revelation of Jesus Christ*, as St Paul calls it, as that which he delivered himself in the days of his personal ministry; nor did it really differ from it in any article, but more fully explained several things, than was seasonable, or could be conveniently done before. So that Christ was faithful to the commission he had received, and the whole was conducted with admirable wisdom, and condescending goodness.

Notwithstanding the fair acknowledgment Lord Bolingbroke had made of the credibility of the Gospels which are now in our hands, he hath thrown out several hints which are plainly designed to destroy the credit of them. Thus he talks of a multitude of different Gospels which were composed in the first ages, he thinks, *no less than forty*—and asks, “If the gospels received into the canon are favourable to the orthodox belief, how do we know that the other gospels were exactly conformable to these?” He talks, as Mr Hobbes had done before him, as if “the authenticity of the four Gospels depended on the council of Laodicea, which admitted four, and rejected the rest:” and adds, “that every church judged of the inspiration of authors, and of the divine authority of books; and those books were canonized, in which every particular church found the greatest conformity with their own sentiments\*.” But this is very unfairly represented. There is nothing capable of a clearer proof, than that there was a general agreement in the churches throughout the world, from the first age of Christianity, in receiving the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and St Paul's Epistles: and that the spurious gospels he speaks of were never generally received in

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 404, 405.

the Christian church as of divine authority : and that the primitive Christians were very careful and scrupulous not to receive any books into the sacred canon, but those of whose authority they had sufficient proofs. Nothing can be more absurd, and more contrary to plain undeniable fact, than to pretend that the sacred books of the New Testament were not looked upon as authentic and divine before the council of Laodicea, which was not held till after the middle of the fourth century. They were not first made so by that council, which only declared what had been long before received as of divine authority in the Christian church. I need not say any more upon this subject in this place, but shall refer to the fourth Letter of the first volume, which contains some account of Toiland's *Amyntor*, and the answers that were made to it. To which may be added, what I have offered' in the *Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History*, at the end of this volume.

In order to weaken the credit of the original sacred records of the Christian religion, his Lordship hath farther observed, that “ in other historians, if the passages which we deem genuine should be spurious, if others should be corrupted, or interpolated, and if the authors should have purposely, or through deception disguised the truth, or advanced untruth, no great hurt could be done :” but that “ in the Scripture, besides all the other circumstances necessary to constitute historical probability, it is not enough that the tenor of facts and doctrines be true ; the least error is of consequence.” He produces two instances to prove it, neither of which relate to any Scripture expressions at all.—And then he adds, that “ when we meet with any record cited in history, we accept historical proof, and content ourselves with it, of how many copies soever it be the copy. But this proof would not be admitted in judicature, as Mr Locke observes, nor any thing less than an attested copy of the record.” And he thinks, that “ if such a precaution be necessary in matters of private property, much more is it necessary that we receive nothing for the word of God, that is not sufficiently attested to be so.” He takes notice of what the reverend Dr Conybeare, late Lord Bishop of Bristol, has said in answer to this ; of whom he speaks with a respect which is extremely just, but



which, considering his usual manner of treating the Christian divines, could scarce have been expected from him, towards one who had distinguished himself in defending the Christian cause. The answers of Dr Conybeare which he refers to is this: "That the ground of this proceeding in civil causes seems to be, that the original record, or an attested copy, is capable of being produced; and that therefore to offer any distant proof might look as if some art were intended to corrupt matters, and disguise the truth. But it is not in the nature of things possible to produce the originals or attested copies of the Scriptures." This appeareth to me to be a good observation. But his Lordship is not satisfied with it. He answers, that "the reason why the copy of a copy is refused in proof, is not solely because the original or an attested copy may be had, but because the proof would be too distant whether they could be had or no."—And he thinks "if the rule be thought reasonable in the one case, it cannot be thought, without absurdity, unreasonable in the other.—However it happens, the want of an original, or of an attested copy is a want of proof\*." But it is not the want of any proof that can be reasonably desired, or that is possible to be had, or that is necessary in any cases of the like kind. By the consent of all mankind, there may be sufficient evidence of the truth and authority of ancient writings to convince any reasonable person, though neither the originals, nor any attested copies of the originals, be now remaining †. And the man would only render himself ridiculous that should reject them

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 272.

† How long the originals of the apostolic writings continued in the churches, we cannot take upon us certainly to determine. Whether the noted passage of Tertullian, in which he speaks of the *authentica litera apostolorum* as still read in the apostolical churches, relateth to the original manuscripts of the apostolic writings, or not, about which the learned are not agreed, it is very possible, and not at all improbable, that some of the originals might have continued to that time. And considering how long pieces of that kind may be preserved, we are not removed at so vast a distance from the originals as may appear at the first view. In the year 1715, when cardinal Ximenes set forward the Complutensian edition of the Scriptures, there were some manuscripts made use of, which were looked upon to be then twelve hundred years old. The famous Alexandrian manuscript presented by Cyrillus Lucaris to our King Charles I. though learned men are not quite agreed about its age, is universally allowed to be of very high

as unworthy of credit, and give no other reason for rejecting them, but the want of such originals or attested copies. And why should a condition be insisted on as necessary with regard to the Scriptures, which would be accounted absurd to the last degree, if insisted on with regard to any other ancient writings whatsoever? To which it may be added, that when great numbers of copies are taken from an original, and got into many hands, and dispersed into various parts, by comparing these copies there arises a stronger proof in the nature of things, to satisfy a reasonable person, that those writings have not been materially corrupted or falsified, than if there were only one single copy remaining, though it should be attested by a living witness to have been faithfully copied and compared with the original; which yet, by the author's own acknowledgment would be sufficient in a court of judicature. It is manifest, that there would be more room to suspect a fraud or imposition in this case than in the other. As to what he alleges, that it is of much greater importance to guard against any mistakes in the word of God than in any thing that relates to matters of private property, and that therefore as great, or even greater precautions are necessary with regard to the former than the latter, it must be acknowledged, that if the revelation were of such a nature, that it consisted in a single precise point, as often is the case of a deed to be produced in evidence in a court of judicature, where a single expression or clause may determine the whole, and gain or lose the cause, there might be some pretence for insisting on the strictest nicety of proofs, even as to all the several particular clauses and forms of expression, because a single mistake might be of the worst consequence, and defeat the design of the whole. But it is manifest this is not the case with regard to the revelation contained

antiquity. Dr Grabe thinks it might have been written about the latter end of the fourth century. Others, as Dr Mill, suppose it was not written till near the end of the fifth century. If we take the latter computation, it may fairly be supposed, that there were at that time, viz. at the close of the fifth century, copies two or three hundred years old: and if the Alexandrian manuscript was copied from one of this sort, which is no unreasonable supposition, this will bring us to the third, or latter end of the second century, when probably the very originals, or at least several copies taken from the originals, were in being.

in the Holy Scriptures. The doctrines there taught, the precepts there enjoined, the promises there made, the important facts there related, are so often repeated and referred to, and placed in such various lights, that nothing less than a general corruption, which could not have been effected, could defeat the design for which that revelation was given. If a particular passage was altered or interpolated, still there would be many others to preserve to us the substance of that revelation, and to prevent the wrong use that might be attempted to be made of such a passage. There is not therefore so scrupulous a nicety and exactness required in this case as in the other. The divine wisdom hath so ordered it, that the revelation was originally contained in several writings, published by different persons, and copies taken of them at different times, all confirming one another, and which render a general corruption of that revelation impracticable. The account of the facts there given is not confined to one book, nor are the articles of religion there mentioned, merely mentioned once for all, or drawn up in one form or system; but the facts are so often referred to, and the articles or doctrines so often repeated, and delivered on so many different occasions, that no mistakes in particular passages, or in a particular copy, or copies, could destroy the intent or use of the original revelation.

It is with the same view of weakening and invalidating the evidence of Christianity, that his Lordship is pleased to observe what hath been often urged by others of the deistical writers before him, that “the external evidence of the Christian revelation is diminished by time.” This he represents as “so evident, that no divines would be so ridiculous as to deny it\*.” And after seeming to grant, in a passage cited above, that the proof of Christianity, by miracles, was sufficient for the conviction of all those who heard the publication of this doctrine, and saw the confirmation of it, he adds, that “this proof became in a little time traditional and historical: and we might be allowed to wonder how the effect of it continued and increased too, as the force of it diminished, if the reasons of this phænomenon were not obvious in history †.” As he has not thought fit to mention those reasons, no notice

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 269, 270.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 91.

can be taken of them. But he ought not to have represented it as a thing which is universally acknowledged, that the external evidences of Christianity is diminished by time. The absurdity of that maxim, that the certainty and credibility of moral evidence is continually diminishing in proportion to the length of time, has been often exposed; particularly by Mr Ditton, in his Treatise on the Resurrection, part ii. The evidence of Christianity hath, in some respects, increased, instead of being diminished, since the first publication of it; especially the proofs arising from the wonderful propagation of the gospel, contrary to all human appearance, notwithstanding the amazing difficulties it had to encounter with; and from the accomplishment of many remarkable predictions which they that lived in the first age of Christianity could not see the completion of \*. To talk of the proofs becoming *traditional* and *historical*, may pass with those that govern themselves by sounds, as if the words *traditional* and *historical*, and *doubtful* and *uncertain*, were terms of the same signification; when every one knows that many facts come to us by tradition and history with such an evidence, that no reasonable man can doubt of them any more than of what he hears or sees. He pronounceth indeed, according to his manner, with a decisive tone, that “it was not possible, that traditions derived from the first, and through the most early ages of Christianity, should convey either facts or doctrines down with a due authenticity and precision, unless a continued miracle had subsisted to alter the nature of things, and to produce effects repugnant to their causes †.” This is very positively determined; but we have no proof of it but his own authority. And if it be understood not merely of facts or doctrines delivered down by oral tradition, which, for the most part, cannot be much depended upon, but of facts or doctrines contained in the sacred writings, there is no real foundation for this assertion. We have proof sufficient to convince any reasonable person, as I shall hereafter shew ‡, that those writings were published in the first age of the Christian church, whilst the apostles, and

\* This is fully shewn by Mr Le Moine on Miracles, p. 252—280.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 398.

‡ See Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History.

their immediate companions, the first publishers of Christianity, were yet alive. In which age, if any had attempted to corrupt those writings in the accounts of doctrines and facts, such an attempt must have been unavoidably detected and exposed. And in the age immediately succeeding, those writings became so generally dispersed and known, so many copies of them were taken, and spread through different countries, they were had in such veneration among Christians, and so constantly read in their religious assemblies, that a general corruption of them would have been an impossible thing. Nor can any time be fixed upon from that age to this, in which such a general corruption of them could have been accomplished: and all attempts to prove such a corruption have been evidently vain and ridiculous, and have turned only to the confusion of those who have pretended it. As to what he urges about the false apostles and teachers in the first age, and their high pretensions to revelations and extraordinary gifts, and the many sects which were then formed; and that though the apostles opposed them, "it was often without effect, and always with great difficulty, as we may judge by that which St Paul had to maintain his authority in the church of Corinth, and others \*;" this is so far from diminishing the original evidence of Christianity, that it rather confirms it. Since the evidence brought for the true Christian religion by the apostles and first publishers of it, must have been exceeding strong and cogent, and their authority, which had nothing but the force of truth, and the attestations given to their divine mission, to support it, must have been on a very solid basis, which was able to overcome all those complicated difficulties, arising from open enemies without, Jews and heathens, and from false brethren within, and the scandals and offences of the several sects which sprung up under various leaders, some of them persons of great parts and subtilty, and who put on very specious appearances. What strong proofs of a divine original, and what a mighty energy must have accompanied genuine primitive Christianity, by which it triumphed over all the apparently insuperable difficulties and oppositions of all kinds, which it had to encounter with, even at its first appearance!

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 398.

The propagation and establishment of Christianity, taking it in all its circumstances, is indeed a most astonishing event, and has been always justly regarded as furnishing an argument of great weight to prove its divine original, and the truth of the extraordinary facts and attestations by which it was confirmed. Lord Bolingbroke was sensible of this, and therefore has done what he could to take off the force of it, by endeavouring to account for the spreading of Christianity without any thing extraordinary or supernatural in the case. To this purpose he observes, that “indulgence to the Jews and to the Gentiles, “in order to gain both, was a fundamental principle of apostolical conduct from the first preaching of the Gospel: and “that by such prudent conduct the Gospel was successively “propagated, and converts flocked apace into the pale of “Christianity from these different and opposite quarters\*.” He treats this, as if it were a piece of political conduct in St Paul and the other apostles, in which they deviated from the original plan laid down by our Saviour himself. But this is a great mistake. The taking the Jews and Gentiles into the Christian Church, and uniting them both into one body, was part of the original plan of Christianity, which was evidently designed by the great Author of our holy religion, in accomplishment of the glorious scheme formed by the divine wisdom from the beginning, and which had been clearly pointed out in the ancient prophecies. But so far was the indulgence shewn to the Gentiles, and the incorporating them into the Christian Church along with the Jews, from helping to bring the Jews into it, that it was one of the greatest obstacles to their entering into the pale of Christianity, and raised in them strong prejudices against it, which had so far possessed the minds, even of the apostles, that it was with great difficulty, and by degrees, that they themselves were brought to embrace this part of the Christian scheme. Nor can it be supposed that St Paul, who had been educated in the school of Gamaliel, and in the strictest Pharisaical notions, for which he was extremely zealous, would of himself have ever formed such a scheme, in opposition to all his prejudices, if it had not been, as he himself affirms, communicated to him by a divine revelation, which

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 316.

came to him with an evidence that absolutely convinced him, and overpowered all his prejudices.

With regard to the Gentiles, the taking them into the Christian Church was only an admitting them into the body of those who professed the belief and acknowledgment of a crucified Saviour. And what was there in this to allure or engage them to forsake their ancient religion, and those superstitions and idolatries to which they were so strongly addicted? To tell the Jews that they should form one Church with the Gentiles, whom they looked upon with disdain, as utterly unworthy of such a privilege: and to tell the Gentiles, that they should form one Church with the Jews, for whose *religion and nation*, his Lordship observes, that they had a *contempt and aversion*: and that they should with them be reckoned among the disciples of a crucified Jesus, *i. e.* of a Jew that had been put to a cruel and ignominious death by the hands of his own nation, and whom they were to acknowledge for their Saviour and their Lord; could this possibly have been an inducement either to Jews or Gentiles to embrace Christianity, which was so opposite to the prejudices of both, if it had not been for the conspicuous evidences of a divine attestation accompanying it?

Another way he takes of accounting for the propagation of Christianity is this: that “no ages nor countries could be more prepared to adopt every theological and metaphysical notion, even the most extravagant and least intelligible, than that wherein the Christian religion was first published and propagated\*.” And he frequently intimates, that the heathen philosophy, especially the Platonic, had greatly helped forward the spreading of the Christian faith. If this had been the case, one would have expected, that the chief harvest of converts to Christianity, at its first appearance, would have been among the philosophers and metaphysicians, and those who were bred up in their schools. But it is evident the fact was otherwise. No persons were more generally averse to the Christian scheme, than the several sects of philosophers in the heathen world, who opposed it with all the learning and and subtilty they were masters of. And indeed it was in

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 337.

some of its fundamental principles, directly opposite to their favourite notions and prejudices. Nor could it be expected, that they who valued themselves so highly upon their learning, wisdom, and eloquence, would submit to be the disciples of a crucified Jesus, or learn their religion from such persons as the apostles were. The doctrine of salvation through Christ crucified, was *foolishness* to the proud Greeks, who pretended to seek *after wisdom*, and was not agreeable to any of their schemes. And so far was St Paul, the most learned of the apostles, from blending the Pagan philosophy with the Christian system which he preached, that he thought it necessary to warn the Christian converts against it. *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit*, Col. ii. 8.

Another thing he mentions as having been a great advantage to the propagation of Christianity was, that “great collections were made, and every Church had a common purse. By these means they supported their poor; and every man who embraced Christianity being sure not to want bread, the Gospel was more effectually propagated, and great numbers of the lowest rank of people were brought into the pale\*.” One would be apt to think by his representation, that the Christians were for taking in all the poor that offered themselves, idle persons who only wanted to be maintained, in order to gain a number of converts and proselytes. But this is a very wrong representation. Every one knows, that great care was taken in the admitting persons into the Christian Church. They were to have a good assurance both of their faith and of their morals. No idle poor were to be supported. On the contrary, they were discountenanced, and were treated as persons that *walked disorderly*. It was a constitution established by apostolical authority as in the name of Christ, that if *any would not work, neither should he eat*; and that every man should *work with quietness, and eat his own bread*; and that he should *labour, working with his hands that which is good, that he might have to give to him that needeth*, 2 Thes. iii. 10, 11, 12. Eph. iv. 28. That spirit of charity and brotherly love which prevailed among the first Christians, was a noble effect of the gospel of Jesus; and that which so opened their hearts and

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 422.



hands was the full conviction and persuasion they had of the truth and divinity of our holy religion. Thus *faith worked by love*. As to the reflections he makes upon their selling their possessions, and laying the money at the apostles' feet, from whence he concludes that *less than the whole would not satisfy the Church*, this and the case of *Ananias and Sapphira*, are considered in the remarks on Chubb's posthumous works in my first volume, p. 261. *et seq.* to which I chuse to refer rather than be guilty of unnecessary repetitions.

It is a topic often insisted upon by the deistical writers, that revealed religion, particularly the Christian revelation, has been of little or no advantage for promoting the reformation of mankind. Lord Bolingbroke seems to lay a particular stress upon this. He says, "It may be a full answer to all that Dr Clarke had advanced against the heathen philosophers, and their being sufficient for the instruction and reformation of mankind, to ask, Whether that reformation which the heathen philosophers could not bring about effectually, has been effected under the Jewish or Christian dispensation \*?" What he saith concerning the effects of the Jewish dispensation hath been above considered; I shall here take notice of what he hath observed with regard to the effects of Christianity. He asserteth, that "the world hath not been effectually reformed, nor any one nation in it, by the promulgation of the gospel, even where Christianity flourished most †." And after mentioning the Christian martyrs and saints, of whom he frequently speaks with great contempt, he observes, that "as to holiness and austerity of life, that of particular men, or of some particular orders of men, will be far from proving the reformation of the world by Christianity; since there were formerly among the heathens, Chaldeans, Gymnosophists, and are now among them and the Mahometans, instances of as great, or greater austerity ‡." But he has not fairly represented the argument brought to prove the reformation of the world by Christianity. In order to judge of this, it is necessary to consider the state of the world when Christianity first appeared. Not only were the nations universally involved in the grossest polytheism and idolatry, but never

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 111.

† Ibid. p. 253.

‡ Ibid. p. 261. *et seq.*

was there an age more immersed in vice, and all manner of wickedness. The picture St Paul draws of it, Rom. i. 21, 32: shocking as it seems to be, is a very just representation of the general state of the heathen world. But in proportion as the gospel prevailed, many myriads were *turned from idols to serve the living and true God*, brought from the most stupid idolatry to the pure adoration of the Deity, and from the most abominable vices to the practice of virtue and righteousness. He himself acknowledges, that “our Saviour at his coming found “the whole world in a state of error concerning the first principle of natural religion, viz. the unity and perfections of “God, though not of absolute darkness; and that the spreading of Christianity has contributed to destroy *polytheism* and “*idolatry* \*.” And he observes, that “Eusebius, in the first “book of his evangelical preparation, has given a long catalogue “of absurd laws and customs, contradictory to the law of nature in all ages and countries, for a very good purpose, “to shew in several instances, how such laws and customs as “these have been reformed by the gospel †.” He takes notice indeed of the faults there were among the Christian converts, for which the apostle reproveth them; but it is manifest from many passages in the New Testament, that wonderful was the reformation which was then wrought in the religion and manners of men †.” The primitive Christians were, taking them generally, the most pious and virtuous body of men that ever appeared in the world. And though sometimes the ancient Christian writers, in the ardour of their zeal, complain of the corruption and degeneracy that are growing among them, as Cyprian particularly has done, especially in his book *De Lapsis*, whose testimony our author more than once refers to, yet it appeareth from many passages in their writings, that the body of the Christians was then remarkably distinguished by the purity of their lives and manners from the Pagans. One of the topics they constantly insist upon in their writings against the heathens, and in their apologies for Christianity, is the mighty change that it wrought in the lives and manners of those who embraced it. And though his Lordship banters

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 243.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 100.

‡ See 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11.—Eph. iv. 18, 24.—Gal. v. 24.—1 Thess. i. 3, 9, 10.—Col. i. 6.—1 Pet. iv. 3, 4.

Lactantius for the challenge he makes in a passage to which Dr Clarke refers, yet this I think may be plainly concluded from it, that the good effects wrought by the Christian religion, in reforming those who were converted to it, were so manifest, that their adversaries themselves were not able to deny it. And accordingly we have express testimonies of pagan writers to this purpose. That of Pliny is very remarkable, and well known. And even Julian, notwithstanding all his prejudices, in his Epistle to Arsacias, recommends the purity and charity of the Christians, and of their priests, to the imitation of the Pagans, and represents it as one cause of the progress Christianity had made: though no doubt they were then degenerated from what they had been in the first ages. As to the present state of the Christian world, his Lordship thinks, "it will not be said, that luxury and debauchery have been restrained by Christianity. Where is the court or city in which Christianity is professed, to which that phrase might not be applied, *Daphnicis moribus vivere?*" But there needs little observation to convince us, that the corruption and dissoluteness he speaks of is chiefly to be found among those who have little more of Christianity than the name, and who are in reality indifferent to all religion. And if the restraints of the Christian religion were removed, the corruption would certainly be much greater and more general than it is. Many thousands, who would otherwise be very corrupt and dissolute, are engaged by the motives and precepts of Christianity to lead a sober, righteous, and godly life. A real Christian walking according to the rules of the gospel, and I doubt not that, notwithstanding the corruption complained of, there are still great numbers of such, forms a far more complete and excellent character for virtue, taken in its just extent, as comprehending rational piety and devotion, an extensive benevolence, and exemplary purity of manners, than is to be found among the most admired Pagans. And indeed Christians are taught to keep themselves pure from several practices which the heathens scarce looked upon to be any crimes at all. As to what he mentions of the *cruel wars, persecutions, and massacres*, among Christians, he himself acknowledges, that *no part of this ought to be ascribed to*

*the gospel*, nor can be *reconciled to the principles of it* \*. The most effectual way therefore of promoting real piety, virtue, and charity, would be to endeavour to engage men to a closer adherence to the doctrines and laws of Christianity, and, instead of setting them loose from its sacred restraints, to enforce its important motives upon their hearts and consciences.

I need not take any particular notice of what his Lordship hath offered against the Christian revelation, drawn from its not having been universally published in all nations and ages †. The chief force of what he hath urged depends upon this supposition, that, according to the gospel, all those should be damned, that do not believe in Christ, whether they ever heard of him or not, *damned*, as he expresses it, *even in their involuntary ignorance* ‡; which is expressly contrary to the tenor of St Paul's reasoning in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The declarations made in the gospel of the necessity of believing in Christ, and the punishment of those who do not believe, plainly relate to those who have an opportunity of being acquainted with the Christian revelation. I shall only farther observe, that whereas it has been often urged by the advocates for Christianity, that it appears from the analogy of the divine procedure, that God may, in a consistence with his wisdom and goodness, grant to some men and some nations much greater helps and means for knowledge and moral improvement than to others, our author hath no way of avoiding this, but by boldly asserting, in contradiction to manifest fact and experience, that all men have the *same means* §; which is a-kin to another extraordinary assertion of his, that *there never was a time when it could be justly said, that the law of nature was imperfectly known* ||: though he himself frequently represents the greater part of mankind as having been ignorant for many ages together of what he owns to be the great fundamental principle of that law. And it is to be observed, that after having said, in the passage just now referred to, that all men have the *same means*, he soon after declares, that "they shall be accountable for no more than they had capacities or

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 264.

† Concerning this objection, see the first volume, p. 20.

‡ Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 295.

§ Ibid. p. 294.

|| Ibid. p. 202.

“ means of knowing :” which plainly supposes that they all have not the same means and advantages, but that there will not be as much required of those who had less advantages, as of those who had greater ; which the friends of the Christian revelation will readily allow.

I shall conclude this letter with mentioning a passage, which is undoubtedly intended by the author to expose Christianity. He observes, that “ natural law is founded in reason ; but Christianity is founded in faith ; and faith proceeds from grace ; and whether a man shall have grace or no, depends not on him \*.” This is a way of talking usual with those who laugh both at faith and grace. His Lordship is pleased on some other occasions to make mention of divine grace ; but always in a way of ridicule. The notion of divine assistance has nothing in it but what is agreeable to reason, and to the sentiments of some of the best and wisest men in all ages. And he himself, even where he treats it as a vain and groundless notion, yet thinks fit to own, that our not being able to explain how it operates, is no just objection against it ; and that a well-attested revelation is a sufficient ground for believing that such a thing there is †. And to our unspeakable satisfaction we are assured by the Christian revelation, that God is ready on his part to communicate his gracious aids to those that humbly apply to him for them, and are at the same time diligent in the use of their own endeavours. This writer here supposes faith to be opposed to reason ; and that Christianity is not founded on reason, but on faith, as opposed to it. But faith, if it be of the right kind, always supposes that there is a good reason for believing. We are not to believe without reason, nor against it. Christianity is founded on rational evidence. The proof of the Christian law, arising both from the external evidences and attestations given to it, and from the internal characters of goodness and purity, and the excellent tendency of the whole, is such as is proper to convince the reason and judgment : and it has actually had that effect upon many of the ablest persons in all ages, ever since it was first promulgated.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 93.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 499.

## L E T T E R XXXII.

*Objections against the Laws and Doctrines of Christianity considered—The Scripture Precepts not delivered in a formal Code or System, but in a Way that is really more useful; and they comprehend all the Duties of Morality—Concerning our Saviour's Precepts in his Sermon on the Mount—The Gospel-Law with respect to Polygamy and Divorces not contrary to Reason and Nature, but wise and excellent—The Christian Doctrine of a Mediator, and of our Redemption by the Blood of Christ, vindicated against his injurious Representation of it—It gives worthy Ideas of God, and shews the divine Perfections in their proper Harmony—It is full of Comfort to good Men, but gives no Encouragement to the obstinately wicked and presumptuous—It is not contrary to Reason, though it could not have been discovered by it—This Doctrine not owing to the Pride of the human Heart—Traces of the Doctrine of the Trinity to be found, according to Lord Bolingbroke, in all the ancient theistical Philosophers.*

SIR,

HAVING in my last Letter considered what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered with regard to the Christian revelation in general, and its evidences, I now proceed to examine his objections against the laws and doctrines of Christianity.

With respect to the laws of Christianity, he observes, that  
 “ Christ did not reveal an entire body of ethics—That the  
 “ gospel does not contain a code reaching to all the duties of  
 “ life—That moral obligations are only occasionally recom-  
 “ mended—And that if all the precepts scattered about through  
 “ the whole New Testament were collected and put together  
 “ in the very words of the sacred writers, they would compose  
 “ a very short, as well as unconnected system of ethics: and  
 “ that a system thus collected from the writings of heathen

“moralists would be more full, more entire, and coherent\*.” But it must be considered, that the New Testament supposes and confirms the authority of the Old. And out of both together might be compiled a much more complete body of ethics, than out of all the writings of the ancient philosophers and moralists, which would be found defective in some duties of great consequence, as was observed before, Letter XXVII. p. 58. &c. They are not indeed delivered in a philosophical way, and Lord Bolingbroke himself owns, that “this does not take off from the dignity, the authority, or the utility, even in moral doctrines, of revealed religion.—Since revelation was not given to convince men of the reasonableness of morality—by arguments drawn from the reason of things—but to enforce the practice of it by a superior authority †.” They are urged in the name of God, and as his laws. They are not wrought up into a formal code, and delivered merely once for all in a system: but they are delivered in various ways, and on different occasions, often in plain and express precepts, at other times by allusions, parables, and comparisons, recommended by excellent examples, and enforced by motives of the highest importance, by divine promises and threatenings. And what shews their great usefulness and excellence, though they seem to be delivered occasionally, yet it is so ordered, that not one duty of consequence is omitted in the Holy Scriptures. All the duties of morality are there frequently repeated and inculcated, and variously enforced.

His Lordship owns, that “our Saviour’s sermon on the mount contains, no doubt, many excellent precepts of morality.” And if some of them seem too sublime, he thinks the same reason may be given for them that Tully gives for the severer doctrines of the Stoics. That “men will always stop short of that pitch of virtue which is proposed in them; and it is therefore right to carry the notions of it as high as possible,” p. 298, 299. Some have objected it as an instance of our Saviour’s carrying things to an excessive rigour, that he not only forbids *murder*, but the being *angry without a cause*; and not only prohibits the gross act of *adultery*, but hath declared, that *whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath*

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 297.

† Ibid.

*already committed adultery with her in his heart.* Mat. v. 28. But his Lordship acknowledgeth, that the law which forbids the commission of a crime, does certainly imply, that we should not desire to commit it; and that to want or extinguish that desire is the best security of our obedience\*. Yet he afterwards observes, that some of Christ's precepts "were fit and proper enough for a religious sect or order of men, like the Essenes, and might be properly enough exacted from those who were Christ's companions, and disciples in a stricter sense: but, considered as general duties, are impracticable, inconsistent with natural instinct, as well as law, and quite destructive of society †." It is acknowledged, that some of Christ's precepts were not designed to be of universal obligation at all times, and to all his disciples, but were directed to particular persons, and were only to take place on extraordinary occasions. Such was that which he mentions of selling all and following Christ. But it does not appear, that in any of our Saviour's precepts he had any view to the Essenes, who are not once mentioned in the whole gospel. But as to other precepts which this writer mentions, and which are contained in the sermon on the mount, and directed to all the disciples, as that concerning the not resisting evil, the taking no thought for the morrow, the laying up treasures, not on earth, but in heaven; these precepts which are delivered in a concise proverbial way, taken in the true sense and intention of them, are of great and general use, as designed to restrain a malevolent revengeful spirit, anxious distracting cares, and an inordinate love of worldly riches. These and other precepts Mr Chubb had endeavoured to expose, and I shall refer to the remarks that are made in the beginning of the fourteenth Letter, vol. i.

Among the precepts of Christianity may be reckoned those relating to polygamy and divorces. Our author looks upon a prohibition of polygamy to be a prohibition of what the law of nature permits in the fullest manner, and even requires too on several occasions: concerning which see what was observed above, Letter XXVI. As to divorces, he declares, that "with them monogamy may be thought a reasonable institution: without them it is an unnatural, absurd, and cruel imposition:

\* Balingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 298, 299.

† Ibid. p. 300.



“ that it crosses the intention of nature, and stands in opposition to the most effectual means of multiplying the human species \*.” He seems very much to approve the law of Moses for allowing polygamy and divorces, and to think it in this instance much more reasonable and conformable to the law of nature than Christianity is. But he has not fairly represented the Mosaical doctrine concerning divorces. He says, “ the legal causes for divorces had a great latitude,” among which he reckons this for one, “ because the husband found “ another woman whom he thought handsomer, or whom it “ was more convenient for him to marry †.” Where he represents it, as if these were *legal causes of divorce*, i. e. causes specified in the original law itself : which is not true. It was only a corrupt gloss of some of the Jewish doctors, who in this, as well as other instances perverted the design of the original law. There is no express mention of divorces in the Jewish sacred history, after the law made concerning this matter, till they are occasionally mentioned by Isaiah and Jeremiah. In the latter times of the Jewish state, divorces seem to have been more frequent, and for slighter causes ; though even then there were many among the Jews, who opposed the loose interpretation of that law given by others of their doctors. This writer mentions “ the differences between the schools of Hillel “ and Sammeas about divorces : and that Christ decided in “ favour of the latter, and specified but one kind of turpitude “ as a just cause of divorce †.” And in this he plainly lets us know he thinks our Saviour was in the wrong. And he goes on to say in a sneering way, that “ the law of grace was su-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 163.

† He is pleased to observe, that “ the people of God had an advantage in this “ respect above other people. Plurality of wives might have made divorces less “ necessary : or, if they were all alike disagreeable, the husband had the resource “ of concubines.” Where he represents it as if there were an allowance to the people of God, in their law itself, both to have a plurality of wives, and, besides these, to have concubines, which were not wives. So it is indeed in the law of Mahomet, where every man is allowed four wives, and as many female slaves as he can keep. But there is no such constitution in the Mosaical law. And the concubines we read of in Scripture, were really wives, though without a dowry : thus in the case of the Levite's concubine, Judges xix. he is said expressly to be her husband, and her father is several times called his *father-in-law*. ver. 3, 4, 5, 7, &c.

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 170.

“perior in time to the natural and Mosaical law among Christians\*.” What follows is mean banter, mixed with a scandalous insinuation against the chastity of the Blessed Virgin, because Joseph had thoughts of divorcing her, *having suspected her to have been got with child before her marriage.* This he produces as an *anecdote* from Justin Martyr, as if it were a piece of secret history, when every one that has read the gospel knows, that the evangelist both mentions the suspicion, and shews how causeless it was, and how it was removed, Matth. i. 18—24.

He expressly calls polygamy and divorces *institutions which have reason and revelation on their side*: where he seems willing to allow for a while, that the Mosaical law was from God, that he may draw a patronage from thence for polygamy and divorces; and he speaks of them as if they were positive *institutions*, expressly prescribed and enjoined in that law as by divine authority. But this is not fairly represented. They were at best barely permitted. Polygamy is no-where expressly allowed, much less commanded in the law of Moses. But there are several things that plainly imply a disapprobation of it. As particularly the account there given of God’s having at the first creation formed one woman for one man, and appointed that there should be an inseparable union between them, and that they *should be one flesh.* And though Moses gives instances of polygamy among some of the patriarchs, they are so circumstanced as to make a very disadvantageous representation of that practice, and the consequences of it. The utmost that can be said is, that it is not expressly prohibited in that law. And there are some wise regulations added, which indeed suppose it to be what was then practised, but seem plainly designed to discourage it, and to correct and restrain the abuses which it tended to produce. See Exod. xxi. 9, 10. Deut. xxi. 15, 16, 17. The law about divorces, Deut. xxiv. 1—4. specifies *some matter of uncleanness* as the cause of divorce, which some of the Jewish doctors themselves, particularly the Caraites, who keep close to the letter of the law, understand of adultery, or at least of some immodest and unchaste behaviour. And Moses supposes the woman that was divorced to be *defiled* by a second marriage, and therefore or-

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 171.

dains that the first husband should never have it in his power to take her again; which was manifestly intended to discourage that practice. Our Saviour indeed saith, that *Moses suffered it for the hardness of their hearts*, Matth. xix. 8. This our author is pleased to represent, as if Christ maintained, that "God tolerated superstitious practices, or permitted even crimes to have the sanction of his law, because of the hardness of their hearts \*." But to this may be applied the distinction which he himself mentions, and seems to approve, made by the Civilians, "between a *plenary* and *less plenary permission*, one of which gives a right to do, and the other exempts from punishment for doing †." It is the latter kind of permission which was given to polygamy and divorces, and which our Saviour refers to, when he talks of their being suffered to do it for the hardness of their hearts: not as if it was what God countenanced and approved, but they were so far suffered to do it as not to incur a legal penalty by doing it: but when he sent his well-beloved Son to bring the clearest and most perfect scheme of religion, this practice was more plainly prohibited than it had been before. And this, instead of being a just objection against the Christian law, is proof of its great excellence; which has hereby provided for preserving to both sexes their just rights, for strengthening the union between the married pair, which it is of great importance to strengthen and improve, for uniting the care of both parents in the education of children, for maintaining the peace and order of families, and for restraining an unbounded dissoluteness and licentiousness. Whereas the contrary practice of polygamy and frequent divorces has a tendency to reduce one half of the human species to a miserable servitude, and to deprive them of their natural rights, to produce the most bitter jealousies and distractions in families, and to hinder the orderly education of children. It gives occasion to unnatural mutilations, and lets the reins loose to a licentious appetite. I shall only farther observe, that an author whom no man will suspect of being prejudiced in favour of the Christian law, has, in an ingenious Essay, upon considering and comparing what may be said for and against polygamy and divorces, shewn that the law forbidding them is founded upon better reasons, and more for the general good of mankind, and order

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 170.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 151, 174.

of society, than the contrary.—See Mr Hume's *Moral and Political Essays*, Essay twenty-second, on Polygamy and Divorces.

As to the doctrines of Christianity, that of Christ being the Mediator between God and man, and of our redemption by his blood, they are evidently of great importance. Our author himself represents them as fundamental doctrines of true original Christianity, for which he sometimes professes so great a regard, and yet hath done all in his power to expose them.

The doctrine of a Mediator in general he represents as unreasonable and absurd, and as having been originally derived from the heathens. He says, “the doctrine of a Mediator between God and man was established in the heathen theology, and the Christians held a mediation likewise. But the former seem the most excusable. For the Christian believes that he may have access at all times to the throne of grace: but the poor heathen, filled with a religious horror, durst not approach the divine Monarch, except through the mediation of his ministers \*.” And again, among the extravagant hypotheses of the Pagans, he reckons their notions of mediators and intercessors with God on the behalf of mankind, of atonement and expiation †. That the heathens had some notion of the necessity of a mediator, or mediators between God and man is very true, which might be owing both to the natural sense they had of their own guilt and unworthiness, compared with the infinite majesty, greatness, and purity, of the Supreme Being, and to some traditions originally derived from extraordinary revelation. But this, like other articles of the ancient primitive religion, became greatly corrupted, and gave occasion to much superstition and confusion in their worship. But in the Christian scheme this doctrine is set in a clear and noble light. The Christian indeed believes, as this writer hath observed, that he hath access at all times to the throne of grace, but he also believes that it is through the great Mediator whom God hath in his infinite wisdom and goodness appointed, that he hath freedom of access. And nothing can give a more amiable idea of the Supreme Being, or have a greater tendency to strengthen our hope and affiance in him, than to consider him as a *God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*, and as

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 81.

† Ibid. p. 372, 373.

having appointed his well-beloved Son, a person of infinite dignity, as the great and only Mediator, through whom he is pleased to communicate the blessings of his grace to sinners of the human race, and in whose name they are to offer up their prayers and praises to him, the Father of mercies, and the God of love. It is impossible to prove that there is any thing in such a constitution unworthy of the supreme and infinitely perfect Being. And if we are assured by a well-attested revelation, that this is the order appointed by God in his sovereign wisdom, it ought to be received and improved with the highest thankfulness. And it nearly imports those to whom this revelation is made known, to take care that they do not reject the grace and mercy of God, and his offered salvation, by refusing to accept it in that way which he himself hath thought fit to appoint. If this be a divine constitution, (and we are as sure that it is so, as that the gospel is true), they are not chargeable with a slight guilt, who, instead of making a proper use of it, and taking the advantage it is fitted to yield, presume to cavil at it, and rashly to arraign the proceedings of the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness, in a case of which they cannot possibly pretend to be competent judges.

With respect to the doctrine of redemption, which, he observes from Dr Clarke, is a *main and fundamental article of the Christian faith*, he takes upon him to pronounce, that “the utmost endeavours have been, and always must be, employed in vain, to reduce the entire plan of the Divine Wisdom, in the mission of Christ, and the redemption of man, to a coherent, intelligible, and reasonable scheme of doctrines and facts\*.” And it is the entire design of the thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh of his Fragments and Essays, to expose that doctrine, and to answer what Dr Clarke had offered to shew, that there is nothing in it contrary to reason †.

He observes, that “the fall of man lies at the foundation of the doctrine of redemption, and that the account of it is irreconcilable to every idea we have of the wisdom, justice, and goodness, to say nothing of the dignity, of the Supreme

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 318.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 279, *et seq.*

“ Being \*.” I need not add any thing here to what has been already offered on that subject in my thirteenth Letter. The great corruption of mankind has been acknowledged by the most diligent observers in all ages; and great is the guilt and misery they have thereby incurred: and it is no way reasonable to suppose that this was the original state of the human nature. The redemption of mankind is a provision made by infinite wisdom and goodness, for recovering them from the corruption into which they had fallen, and the guilt they had incurred, and for restoring them to righteousness and true holiness, and even raising them to everlasting felicity, in such a way as is most consistent with the honour of God’s government, and of his illustrious moral excellencies. And if there be some things relating to the methods of our redemption which we are not well able distinctly to explain or comprehend, it is not to be wondered at, considering that these are things of a high nature, and which depend upon the determinations and councils of the Divine Wisdom, of which, without his revelation of them, we cannot assume to be proper judges.

There are two questions here proper to be considered; one concerning expiation in general; the other concerning that particular method of expiation held forth to us in the Gospel, by the death and sufferings of Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

As to the general question, it can scarce be reasonably denied, that if we consider God as the wise and righteous Governor of the world, who is infinitely just, as well as merciful; if any expedient can be fixed upon for his pardoning his sinful offending creatures, and dispensing his graces and benefits to them, in such a way as at the same time to manifest his invariable love of order, his just detestation of all moral evil, and the steady regard he hath to the vindicating the authority of his government and laws; this would be most worthy of his rectoral wisdom, and shew forth his attributes, especially his justice and mercy, in their proper harmony, so as to render him both most amiable, and most venerable.

If it be alleged, that repentance alone is a sufficient expia-

† Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 283, 284.

tion, not to repeat what hath been already offered on this head in the XXVIIth Letter, p. 64, it may be demanded, Whether God could in strict justice punish sinners for their transgressions of his laws, and for the crimes they have committed? If he could, it is because those transgressions and crimes really deserve punishment. If those crimes deserve punishment, it must be an act of free sovereign grace and mercy to remit, or not to inflict the deserved penalty. And as it is an act of sovereignty, it must depend upon what shall seem fit to the supreme and infinitely wise and perfect Mind to determine, upon a full view of what is best and properest upon the whole. And are we so well acquainted with what the Infinite Majesty oweth to himself, and what the greatest good of the moral world doth require, as to take upon us positively to determine a thing in which the divine authority and prerogatives, and the reason of his government, are so nearly concerned? Upon what foundation can we pretend to be sure, that the great Governor of the world is obliged to pardon sinners at all times, and in all cases, barely and immediately upon their repentance, and even to crown their imperfect obedience, though attended with many failures and defects, with the glorious reward of eternal life? And if no man can pretend, without an inexcusable rashness and ignorance to be sure of this, who can take upon him to determine, what expiation or satisfaction for sin, besides the repentance of the sinner, the most wise and righteous Governor of the world may see fit to insist upon? This, if any thing, seems to be a proper subject for divine revelation.

Dr Clarke had argued, as his Lordship observes, that “the custom of sacrifices which universally obtained, shews it to have been the general sense of mankind, that some expiation was necessary for sin, and that God would not be appeased without some punishment and satisfaction\*.” Our author speaks of this way of arguing with great contempt.

He says, that “the most absurd notions which superstition ever spread in contradiction to the law of nature and reason, are applied to the proceedings of God with man.” But since it is a matter of fact that cannot be denied, that the offering

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 236.

sacrifices to God was one of the most ancient external rites of religion of which we have any account; since it obtained early and universally, not only among polytheists and idolaters, but among the most religious adorers of the one true God; this naturally leadeth us to conclude, that it was a part of the primitive religion originally enjoined to the first antecessors of the human race, and from them transmitted to their descendants. Upon any other supposition it is hard to conceive, how men should come so universally to look upon the taking away the life of a beast, to be well-pleasing in the sight of God, and an acceptable piece of divine worship. The best way of accounting for this seems to be, that it was a sacred rite of divine appointment, which was originally intended for wise and valuable purposes; *viz.* to impress men's minds with a sense of the evil and demerit of sin, and to be an acknowledgment on the part of the sinner, that his sins deserved punishment; and, at the same time, to be a pledge and token of God's being willing to receive an atonement, and of his pardoning grace and mercy. And since it appears to have been an original part of the divine scheme, that God would send his Son into the world, in the fulness of time, to suffer and die for the redemption of mankind, in whose blood that covenant was founded, by virtue of which good men in all ages were to be saved upon their repentance, and sincere, though imperfect obedience; then supposing that some discovery of this was made to the first parents of the human race after their apostacy, as a foundation for their hope and comfort, this gives a most reasonable account of the institution of such a sacred rite; than which nothing could be better fitted to keep up a notion and expectation of a suffering Redeemer, and to be a constant memorial to them both of their own guilt and of the divine mercy. And hence those sacrifices were very properly accompanied with prayers, confessions of sin, and thanksgivings, and were regarded as federal rites, and tokens of friendship and reconciliation between God and man. But this, like other parts of the primitive religion, became corrupted: The true original design of sacrifices was forgotten and lost, though the external rite still continued; and they were looked upon as in themselves and of their own nature properly expiatory.

Our way is now prepared to consider the question as it relates



particularly to that method of expiation, which is held forth to us in the Gospel, by the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, a Mediator of infinite dignity. And with regard to this he urgeth, that "our notions of God's moral attributes will lead us to think, that God would be satisfied more agreeably to his mercy and goodness without any expiation upon the repentance of the offenders, and more agreeably to his justice with any other expiation rather than this\*." In opposition to this, it may be affirmed, that supposing an expiation to have been necessary on the behalf of sinful men, none can be conceived more worthy, or more valuable, or more capable of answering the most excellent ends, than that which is set before us in the Gospel.

We are there taught, that upon a foresight of man's apostasy, and the miseries and ruin to which the human race would be exposed by their iniquities and transgressions, God had, in his infinite wisdom and grace, determined to provide a Saviour for recovering them from their guilt and misery, to holiness and happiness; and that it was appointed in the divine councils that this Saviour should, in order to the accomplishing this great design, take upon him human flesh, and should not only bring a clear revelation of the divine will to mankind, and exhibit a most perfect example of universal holiness, goodness, and purity, but that he should, on the behalf of sinful men, and to make atonement for their offences, submit to undergo the most grievous sufferings and death: that accordingly, in that season which seemed fittest to the divine wisdom, God sent his own well-beloved Son into the world, a person of infinite dignity, upon this most gracious and benevolent purpose and design: That this glorious person actually took upon him our nature, and lived and conversed among men here on earth: That he brought the most perfect discoveries of the divine will that had been ever made to mankind, for instructing them in those things which it was of the highest importance to them to know: That in his sacred life and practice he exhibited all the beauties of holiness, and yielded the most perfect obedience to the divine law, which he exemplified in the dignity of its authority and in the excellency of its precepts: That

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 286.

besides this, prompted by his own generous love to mankind, and in obedience to the divine appointment, he voluntarily submitted for our sakes to the deepest humiliations and abasements, and the most dolorous agonies and passions, followed by a most cruel and ignominious death, that he might obtain eternal redemption for us. He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us back unto God. By these his sufferings and obedience on our behalf, which was infinitely pleasing in the sight of God, he became the propitiation for the sins of the world, and did that in reality which the sacrifices could only do in type and figure. And on the account of what he hath done and suffered on the behalf of sinful men. God has been graciously pleased to promise to grant a full and free pardon of all their sins, upon their sincere repentance, to communicate to them through this great Mediator the blessings of his grace, and to crown their sincere, though imperfect obedience with the glorious reward of eternal life: That accordingly that suffering Saviour, having by himself purged our sins, was raised again from the dead, and crowned with glory and honour: That he now appears for guilty men as their great advocate and intercessor: And is constituted the great dispenser of those spiritual blessings which he had by the divine appointment procured for us, and is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.

This is one illustrious instance of what our author declares, that *the theology of the gospel is marvellous*. It could only have been known by divine revelation: and now that it is discovered to us, it calls for our highest admiration and thankfulness.

Let us now consider the objections he hath urged against it.

He represents it as absurd to suppose, that “God sent his only begotten Son, who had not offended him, to be sacrificed for men who had offended him, that he might expiate their sins, and satisfy his own anger \*.” As to God’s sending his own Son to be the Saviour of sinful men, to redeem them from misery and ruin, and to raise them to eternal life, it cannot reasonably be denied, that the more glorious and wonderful the person was, and the greater his dignity, the better was he fitted for accomplishing the great work to which he was design-

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 286.

ed; and the greater value it derived to the obedience he yielded, and the sufferings he endured on our behalf. This writer observes, that “the means of reconciling all sinners to an offended Deity were made by the pagan theology extremely “easy.” And he particularly instances in expiatory sacrifices \*. But no such thing can be justly objected against the doctrine of our redemption by the blood of Christ. It is certainly of the highest importance to mankind, that they should not entertain too slight thoughts of the evil of sin, or look upon it as too easy a matter to obtain the favour of God when they had offended him, or imagine that his just displeasure against sin may be averted by trivial expedients. All this is effectually provided against in the gospel-scheme. The expiation in this case is supposed to be effected by a sacrifice of infinite virtue, not to be equalled or repeated. This gives the most effectual conviction, that it is not a slight or trifling matter, to atone for the sins of men, and to offer such an expiation as is suited to the majesty of God to accept. No man that believes this, can possibly entertain slight thoughts of the evil and demerit of sin. It tendeth to fill us with the most awful reverential conceptions of the infinite majesty of the Supreme Being, his righteousness and purity, and the inviolable regard he hath to the authority of his government and laws.

As to the other part of the objection, that it is absurd to suppose, that the “Son of God who had not offended, should be “sacrificed for men who had offended him,” the truth is, that if he had not been perfectly innocent and holy, he could not have been properly fitted to expiate the sins of men. Had he been himself guilty and a sinner, instead of making an atonement for the sins of others, he must have been punished for his own. Nor could his oblation have been of such value and merit, as to be proper for answering the great ends for which it was designed. If it be still objected, that it is unjust and cruel, that an innocent person should be punished for the guilty, I answer, that it will be allowed, that if the evils and sufferings the guilty had incurred by their crimes should, by the mere arbitrary act and authority of the supreme ruling power, be laid on an innocent person without and against his own consent, this would be contrary to all the rules both of

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 210.

goodness and justice, and would be a confounding the whole order of things. But this is far from being the case. The sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ were not arbitrarily imposed upon him by the mere authority of God. He himself freely undertook the great work of our redemption. He consented to undergo these temporary sufferings for the most valuable ends, for promoting the glory of God, and the salvation of mankind. The admitting him therefore to suffer on our behalf, was not doing him any injustice, but giving him an opportunity of performing the most wonderful act of obedience, and exhibiting the most astonishing instance of love and goodness towards perishing sinners, from whence, according to the divine compact and covenant, the most glorious benefits were to redound to the human race; and he himself was to be recompensed with the highest glory in that nature which he assumed. It is no hard matter therefore to answer the question our author puts, "Whether the truth of that maxim—that it  
 "is not equally fit that an innocent person should be extreme-  
 "ly miserable, as that he should be free from such misery—  
 "the innocence of the Lamb of God, and the sufferings and  
 "ignominious death of Christ, can be reconciled together, and  
 "how \*." That Christ endured the most grievous sufferings, and was put to a most cruel and ignominious death, and consequently that in his case a person perfectly innocent was exposed to the greatest sufferings, is a matter of fact which cannot be denied. And it cannot reasonably be pretended, that it renders those sufferings more unjust, that he should suffer on the account of sinful men, to make atonement for their sins, and to procure for them the most valuable blessings, than if he had endured those sufferings without any such view at all. The sufferings of a most holy and righteous person are perfectly reconcileable to all the rules of justice, and to the order and reason of things, provided those sufferings are what he himself hath voluntarily undertaken, and that they answer a most valuable and excellent end for the public good, and that the suffering person himself afterwards receives a glorious recompence. And according to the account given us in the Gospel, all these circumstances concurred in the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr Clarke had mentioned some of the excellent ends which the sufferings and death of Christ were designed and fitted to answer : such as, that this method “ tends to discountenance “ and prevent presumption, to discourage men from repeating “ their transgressions, to give them a deep sense of the heinous nature of sin, and to convince them of the excellence “ and importance of the laws of God, and the indispensable “ necessity of paying obedience to them \*.” Lord Bolingbroke has not offered any argument to prove, that redemption by the death of Christ was not well fitted to answer these ends, but in his dictatorial manner has pronounced, that “ the prudential reasons assigned by Dr Clarke for the death of “ Christ would appear futile and impertinent, if applied to “ human councils ; but in their application to the divine, they “ became profane and impious. That the death of Christ, “ instead of being proper to discountenance presumption, and “ to discourage men from repeating their transgressions, as “ Clarke pretends, might, and in fact has countenanced presumption, without discouraging men from repeating their “ transgressions †.” There is no doctrine but may be abused by the perverseness of bad and licentious men. Sinners may take encouragement from the goodness and mercy of God to continue in their evil courses, in hopes that he will not punish them for their crimes. And on the other hand, the doctrine concerning the justice of God may be abused, to harden men in their sins, and to cut them off from all hopes of mercy, which would have an equal tendency to destroy all piety and virtue, and subvert the very foundations of religion. But the Gospel scheme of our reconciliation by the death of Christ provides admirably against both these extremes. On the one hand, the fullest discoveries are made of the infinite grace and goodness of God towards mankind, in that he gave his only-begotten Son, that through his sufferings and death a way might be opened for redeeming and saving the lost human race. A free and universal offer is made of pardon and salvation to all sinners without exception, that shall accept of offered mercy upon the gracious and reasonable terms which are there ap-

\* Clarke's Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, p. 351. Ed. 7th.

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol v. p. 289.

pointed. The most exceeding great and precious promises are made, the most gracious assistances are provided to help our infirmities, and we are raised to the privileges of the children of God, and to the most animating hopes of a glorious resurrection and eternal life, as the reward even of our imperfect obedience. It is impossible that any thing should give us a more amiable idea of the Supreme Being, and of his wonderful love to mankind. Nothing can have a greater tendency to enlarge our joys, and to excite the most grateful and devout affections towards our heavenly Father, as the Father of mercies, and the God of love, and towards the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Saviour and lover of our natures, and to lay us under the strongest engagements to love and obey him.

But then, on the other hand, lest this should be abused, the Gospel presents the Supreme Being as of infinite justice, righteousness, and purity, who hath such a hatred against sin, and such a regard to the authority of his government and laws, that he would not receive guilty transgressors of the human race to his grace and favour, upon any less consideration than the sufferings and sacrifice of his well-beloved Son on their behalf; than which nothing could possibly exhibit a more awful display of God's displeasure against sin: so that he hath taken care to manifest his righteousness and justice, even in the methods of our reconciliation. We are farther assured, that tho' the sacrifice Christ hath offered be so infinitely meritorious, yet the virtue of it is only applied upon such terms as the divine wisdom hath appointed, *i. e.* to those only that return to God, by a sincere repentance and new obedience. So that, on this plan the necessity of holiness and obedience is most strongly and effectually secured, since, without this, there can be no interest in that great atonement, and consequently no hope of pardon and salvation. And the severest threatenings are denounced against those who abuse all this grace, and turn it into licentiousness: and they are warned, that their punishments shall be heightened in proportion to the aggravations of their crime. Thus the Gospel scheme of redemption through Jesus Christ hath an admirable propriety and harmony in it, and bears upon it the illustrious characters of a divine original. It giveth the greatest hopes to the upright and sincere, without affording the least ground of encouragement to the obstinately

wicked, and presumptuous sinner. It represents God as most amiable, and most awful, infinitely good, gracious, and merciful, and, at the same time, infinitely just, righteous, and holy. These characters in a lower degree must concur in an excellent earthly prince; much more must they be supposed to be united in the highest possible degree of eminence in the Supreme Being, the All-wise, and All-perfect Governor of the world.

He concludes his remarks, on what Dr Clarke had offered to shew, that the doctrine of our redemption by Christ is not contrary to reason, with *a general reflection or two*. One is this, "Let us suppose a great prince, governing a wicked, and rebellious people: he has it in his power to punish, but thinks fit to pardon them. But he orders his only and well-beloved son to be put to death, to expiate their sins, and satisfy his royal vengeance." And then he asks, "Would this proceeding appear to the eye of reason, and in the unprejudiced light of nature, wise, or just, or good? No man dares to say that it would, except it be a divine \*." But no divine would put so absurd a case, which, as he represents it, could not possibly answer any valuable end. The king would have no right to put his son to death for the crimes of rebels; and to do it against his consent, would be the height of injustice and cruelty: and even, if he should consent, it would be the irretrievable loss of an hopeful Prince, both to the King his father, and to the community, who had an interest in his life. But if a case could be supposed, in which the death of an excellent Prince would be the saving of a state from ruin, and the best and properest means for averting the greatest public evils and calamities, and for procuring the greatest public happiness, I believe it would be acknowledged to be a glorious action for a King to give up his son, and for the Prince his son to give himself up to death, for so extensive a benefit, and would be celebrated as such to all succeeding ages. Though still in that case, there could be no hope of the suffering person's being restored to life, or to the public, or having a proper reward given him for so consummate a virtue: which makes a vast difference between this case, or indeed any other

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 289.

that could be put in human governments, and our redemption by the sufferings and death of Christ, as stated in the gospel.

His second reflection is, that Dr “ Clarke acknowledges, “ that human reason could never have discovered such a method as this for the reconciliation of sinners to an offended “ God.” From whence he argues, that “ therefore it cannot “ be said, that this method is agreeable to sound unprejudiced “ reason, which is what Dr Clarke here undertook to shew \*.” But there is no inconsistency between these. A thing may be of such a kind, that reason could not have discovered it, and yet, when discovered, may have nothing contrary to reason, and may be such as unprejudiced reason will approve. And this I take to be the case of the Scripture-doctrine of our redemption. Our author indeed hath attempted to shew, that this doctrine is more absurd than any thing that can be found in any system of paganism. But what he offers to this purpose is entirely to be charged, not upon the doctrine itself, as laid down in Scripture, but upon the base and injurious representation he is pleased to make of it. He concludes with saying, that “ the heathens could not imagine any thing so repugnant, as the doctrine of our redemption by the death of “ Christ, to all their ideas of order, of justice, of goodness, “ and even of theism †.” If this were so, the heathen world were far from being so disposed and prepared for receiving the Christian mysteries as he sometimes pretends they were. It will be acknowledged, that *Christ crucified* was to the Greeks, who had a high conceit of their own wisdom and learning, *foolishness* : but it was the *wisdom and power of God*, as St Paul expresseth it. And accordingly this doctrine of the cross of Christ triumphed over all the opposition which their boasted learning and philosophy, assisted by the power and authority of the civil magistrate, the influence and artifices of the priests, and the prejudices of the vulgar, and the vices and passions of men, could raise against it. There are, no doubt, great difficulties attending the scheme of our redemption. But this writer, if he were consistent with himself, ought not to make this an objection against its truth or divine original. He observes, that “ nothing is more conformable to our ideas of the infinitely Perfect Being, than to believe, that human reason



“ cannot account for the proceedings of infinite wisdom in a  
 “ multitude of instances, in many of those perhaps that seem  
 “ the most obvious to it \*.” And he elsewhere declares, that  
 “ if infinite wisdom and power created and governs the uni-  
 “ verse, we must prepare to meet with several appearances,  
 “ which we cannot explain, nor reconcile to the ideas we en-  
 “ deavour to form of the divine perfections, and which are dis-  
 “ proportionable to our, and every other finite understand-  
 “ ing †.” And finding fault with the pertness and presump-  
 “ tion of divines, he says, “ it would pass for downright mad-  
 “ ness, if we were not accustomed to it, to hear a creature of  
 “ the lowest form of intelligent beings, undertake to penetrate  
 “ the designs, to fathom the depths, and to unveil the mys-  
 “ teries of infinite wisdom, which the most exalted of created  
 “ intelligences would adore in silence ‡.” This may be justly  
 turned against himself. It is no presumption to believe  
 what God has revealed of his councils concerning the methods  
 of our salvation, or to think and speak of them as far as he has  
 been pleased to declare them. But it is an inexcusable arro-  
 gance to presume to arraign the proceedings of infinite wisdom  
 made known to us in a well attested revelation, because there  
 are some things relating to them which we are not able dis-  
 tinctly to explain, or to account for. This is what our author  
 hath done with a rashness and insolence which is shocking.  
 Some passages of this kind have been already produced, to  
 which I shall add one more. Speaking of the mystery of our  
 redemption by the blood of Christ, he asserts, that “ the love  
 “ there displayed is partiality, and the justice there shewed, is  
 “ injustice—And that injustice and cruelty are united in this :  
 “ that mankind would not have been redeemed, if the Jews  
 “ had not crucified Christ : and yet they were rejected and pu-  
 “ nished for crucifying him §.” He here chargeth it as a great  
 injustice and cruelty to reject and punish the Jews for cruci-  
 fying Christ, because mankind could not have been redeemed  
 without it : and yet he had before observed, that “ Christ was  
 “ sacrificed by men who meant no expiation, and who mean-  
 “ ed a murder, not a sacrifice ||. God’s bringing the greatest

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 182.

† Ibid. p. 365.

‡ Ibid. p. 297.

§ Ibid. p. 582.

|| Ibid. p. 291,

good out of the injustice and wickedness of the Jews, which he foresaw and permitted, but did not cause, is indeed an illustrious proof of his infinite wisdom, but is no extenuation of their crime: and therefore there was no injustice in punishing them for it. But if the Jews had not crucified Christ, which is the case this writer puts, and which depends upon the modest supposition of God's being mistaken in his prescience, it would not follow, that his designs for the redemption of mankind would have been disappointed: infinite wisdom would not have been at a loss for proper methods to accomplish its own glorious views.

This is not the only passage, in which our author, who upon all occasions sets no bounds to his invectives against the Jews, expresses some pity towards them, as having been very hardly dealt with, in being punished for crucifying our Lord. He observes, that "Christ contrived at his death to appear innocent to the Roman governor, and at the same time contrived to appear guilty to the Jews, and to make them the instruments of his death, by a sequel of the most artful behaviour—That they were rejected for not believing him to be the Messiah—And he kept them in their error; at least he did nothing to draw them out of it, that they might bring him to the cross, and complete the redemption of mankind, without knowing that they did it at their own expence\*." Nothing can possibly be more unfair and disingenuous than this representation. It is evident, that our Lord took all proper opportunities of laying before the Jews the proofs of his Messiahship: and that nothing could be more wisely conducted than the way he took gradually to remove their prejudices, though he did not make an express and public declaration of his being the Messiah, till the evidence should be completed, and it should plainly appear, that his kingdom was not of this world. Instead of laying plots to engage the Jews to put him to death, he on many occasions used the most prudent precautions to avoid the effects of their malice, till he could do it no longer, without betraying the truth, and counteracting the design upon which he was sent.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 537, 538, 539.

The last thing I shall take notice of, with regard to what Lord Bolingbroke had offered concerning the doctrine of our redemption, is, that he represents it as having proceeded from *the pride of the human heart*. He blames Archbishop Tillotson for observing very pathetically, at the close of one of his sermons, that “when the angels fell, God left them in their fallen state: but when man fell, he sent his Son, his only begotten Son, his dearly beloved Son, to redeem the race by his sufferings and passion.” Upon which he remarks, that “this raises us not only to an equality with the angels, but to a superiority over them\*.” And he afterwards censures the divines, for being “unwilling to leave their notions of human worth and importance, or of the designs of God in favour of men;” and says, that “though our religion forbids pride, and teaches humility, yet the whole system of it tends to inspire the former.” He instances in its teaching, that “man was made after the image of God, and that God abandoned myriads of angels, but determined to raise man from his fall by the sacrifice of his Son.” And he asks, “is it possible to conceive higher notions of a created being than these revealed truths must inspire †?” It is certain, that, according to the Scripture account God *spared not the angels that sinned*, though originally superior to the human race, but sent his Son to redeem mankind. And undoubtedly there were wise reasons for that proceeding, which God hath not thought fit to reveal to us, and which therefore we cannot pretend to judge of. But whatever was the reason of it, God’s extending his grace and mercy to mankind in so marvellous a way, certainly demandeth our most grateful acknowledgments. We are taught every where in Scripture to ascribe the great things God hath done for us, not to any worthiness in ourselves, but merely to his sovereign unobliged grace and goodness. It is manifest that the whole scheme of Christianity tendeth to inspire us with the most adoring thoughts of God’s infinite majesty, greatness, and purity, and at the same time to impress and affect our hearts with the most humbling sense of our own meanness, guilt, and unworthiness. It tendeth not to inspire us with pride, but with gratitude for undeserved favours and be-

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 406, 507.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 347.

nefits : and, at the same time that it filleth us with the highest admiration of the divine condescension and goodness towards us, it teacheth us to sink low into the very dust before his glorious majesty, acknowledging that we are less than the least of his mercies, and giving him the whole glory of our salvation.

It is observable, that Lord Bolingbroke seems on many occasions very solicitous to prevent our having too high a conceit of our own excellence and importance. He blames the pagan theists for flattering human nature, when they taught, that a good man imitates God, and that God is a lover of mankind, and made man to be happy \*. To human pride and ambition he attributes the notion of the soul's being a spiritual substance distinct from the body, and the belief of its immortality †. To this also he ascribes the doctrine of a particular providence, and the notion that God is attentive to the prayers and wants of men ; and is ready on many occasions to assist, protect, and reward the good, and to punish or reclaim the wicked ‡. It seems, then, that, for fear of being thought too proud and assuming, we must deny that we have any souls distinct from our bodies, or at least must confess them to be like our bodies, corruptible and mortal ; we must not dare to aspire after a conformity to the Deity in his moral excellencies, nor to think that he loveth us, or is concerned for our happiness ; we must either not address ourselves to him at all, or not presume to imagine that he heareth or regardeth our prayers. It would be thinking too highly of our own importance to imagine, that God exerciseth any care or inspection over us, or that he taketh notice of our actions with approbation or displeasure, or will call us to an account for them. Thus this sagacious writer hath found out the secret of banishing religion out of the world, under pretence of guarding against the pride of the human heart.

I need not take any particular notice of what his Lordship hath offered concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. He affirms, that “ the Scriptures which are come down to us are very far from being vouchers of the Trinity we profess to believe.—And that we may assure ourselves, that many of the Scriptures and traditions which obtained in the primitive ages, deposed against this Trinity §.” Where he talks with

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 317, 318.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 418.

‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 481.

§ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 493.

as much confidence of Scriptures and traditions which he supposes to be lost, and of what was contained in them, as if he himself had seen and read them. He chargeth St Peter and St Paul with inconsistency and contradiction, in sometimes calling Christ a man, and at other times talking a different language, and calling him God \*. Though, supposing him to have the human nature in a near union with the divine, there is no contradiction in it at all. He has a long marginal note about the sentiments of the primitive fathers concerning the Trinity, and censures bishop Bull †. And he afterwards enlarges on the differences among Christians relating to it, and the disputes between Arius and Athanasius ‡. But he says nothing on this subject but what is very common, and has been often more fully and distinctly insisted upon by others, and therefore deserves no particular consideration here. What seems more peculiar to him is, that in the account he gives of the doctrine of the Trinity, he represents it as having been originally derived from the heathen theology. He says, that the heathen philosophers “ assumed a Trinity of divine hypostases in the Godhead. They held a Monad or Unity above all essence, a second proceeding eternally from the first, and a third proceeding eternally from the second, or from the first and second §.” That the hypothesis of the Trinity made a part of the Egyptian theology. “ It was brought from Egypt into Greece by Orpheus, whosoever he was, and probably by others in that remote antiquity : and that it was in much use afterwards ; and we find the traces of it in all the theistical philosophers taught ||.” He speaks of the Egyptian, Pythagorean, Platonic, and of the Zoroastrian, Chaldic, and Samothracian Trinity ¶. And he mentions it also as having been anciently taught among the Chinese, and produces a passage out of one of their ancient books to this purpose \*\*. A late ingenious author has carried this still farther, and has endeavoured at large to shew, that some vestiges of the doctrine of the Trinity are to be found among the sages of all nations,

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 488.

† Ibid. p. 483. et seq.

‡ Ibid. p. 97. 470, 471.

§ Ibid. vol. v. p. 230.

† Ibid. p. 98. et seq.

§ Ibid. p. 94, 95.

¶ Ibid. p. 472.

times, and religions \*. But he differs from Lord Bolingbroke in this, that whereas his Lordship charges it on the vain subtilities and reveries of the ancient metaphysical theology, this gentleman supposes it must have been owing to supernatural revelation, or some tradition originally derived from thence. And I cannot help thinking, that supposing the fact to have been as they both represent it, this seems to be a more reasonable way of accounting for it. Since it is otherwise not easy to conceive how it should come to pass, that so many great and wise men in different ages and nations, from the most ancient times, should have agreed in acknowledging some kind of triad in the divine nature.

I shall only take notice of one passage more in Lord Bolingbroke's works relating to the Trinity: It is this: That "the doctrine of the Trinity gives the Mahometans as much reason to say, that the revelation which Mahomet published was necessary to establish the unity of the Supreme Being, in opposition to the polytheism which Christianity had introduced, as Christians have to insist, that the revelation which Christ published a few centuries before, was necessary to establish the unity of the Godhead against the pagan polytheism †." But the case was very different. The unity of God could not be more strongly and expressly asserted than it is in the holy Scriptures, both of the Old Testament and the New: so that the pretended revelation of Mahomet was needless in this respect. It is a fundamental principle of Christianity, that there is but one God, and one Mediator between God and man, and that Jesus Christ is he. Those who maintain the doctrine of the Trinity still hold the unity of the Godhead. Convince them that the Trinity is inconsistent with that unity, and they will abandon it. They cannot therefore be justly charged with polytheism, which is only imputed to them by a consequence which they expressly deny and disavow.

\* See Chevalier Ramsay's Principles of natural and revealed Religion, vol. ii. chap. 2.

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 501.

## L E T T E R XXXIII.

*The Christian Doctrine of future Retributions vindicated—It does not charge God with Injustice in this present State.—Future Punishments not contrary to Reason or the divine Attributes—The Pretence, that they can be of no Use either for Reparation or Terror, examined—The Rewards and Punishments of a future State shall be proportioned to the different Degrees of Virtue and Vice—The Propriety of appointing a State of Trial to reasonable Beings—It is wisely ordered, that the Sentence at the Day of Judgment shall be final and irreversible—The Christian Representation of that Judgment and its Consequences, solemn and affecting, and of excellent Use—Lord Bolingbroke's injurious Charge against the primitive Christians—His Complaints of the Corruptions brought into the Christian Church—Such Writers very improper to set up for Reformers—True genuine Christianity needs not fear the Assaults of its ablest Adversaries—Conclusion of the Observations on Lord Bolingbroke's Posthumous Works.*

SIR,

IT is a satisfaction to me, as I am apt to think it is to you, that the work is drawing near to a conclusion; and the more so, as you know that I have, during a considerable part of the time in which I have been engaged in it, laboured under great indisposition of body, which has rendered it more tedious and fatiguing to me than otherwise it would have been. It will be well, if some marks of this do not appear in the performance itself. If this be the case, I hope candid allowance will be made for it.

The only thing that now remains to be considered, with regard to Lord Bolingbroke's attempts against Christianity, relateth to what he has offered concerning the Scripture doctrine of future rewards and punishments. He has done all he could to expose that doctrine, and Christianity on the account of it, especially the doctrine of future punishments. This is the

principal design of several of his Fragments and Essays in the latter part of the fifth volume of his works : particularly of the sixty-sixth, sixty-seventh, sixty-eighth, sixty-ninth, seventieth, seventy-first, seventy-second, and seventy-seventh, of those Fragments and Essays.

Before I enter on a distinct consideration of what he has offered on that subject, I would make two general observations.

The one is, that he asserts the doctrine of future rewards and punishments to be an original doctrine of the Christian religion. He expressly asserts, that “ future rewards and punishments are sanctions of the evangelical law \*;” that “ it was “ part of the original revelation.—And when the Christians adopted this doctrine, they received the new law and the new “ sanction together on the faith of the same revelation †.” And indeed it cannot be denied, that this is a doctrine strongly and most expressly insisted on by our blessed Saviour himself, as a doctrine of principal importance. So that this may be justly regarded as a fundamental doctrine of that original Christianity, for which this writer professeth so great an esteem, and the truth, the excellence, and even divinity of which he sometimes pretends to acknowledge.

The other observation is this : that he makes the worst representation imaginable of this doctrine, as both false, and of a pernicious tendency. He asserts, that “ the double sanction of “ rewards and punishments in a future state was, in fact, invented by men. It appears to be so by the evident marks of “ humanity that characterise it.—That these notions savour “ more of the human passions, than of justice or prudence.— “ That the vulgar heathens believed their Jupiter liable to so “ many human passions, that they might easily believe him “ liable, in his government of mankind, to those of love and “ hatred, of anger and vengeance.—That the Jews entertained “ such unworthy notions of God, and their system contained “ such instances of partiality in love and hatred, of furious anger, and unrelenting vengeance, in a long series of arbitrary “ judgments, that they would be ready to receive this heathenish “ doctrine of his arbitrary and cruel proceedings hereafter.— “ That accordingly this doctrine was in vogue in the Church “ of Moses, when that of Jesus began.—And that it made a

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 513.

† Ibid. p. 516.



“part of the *original Christian revelation* \*.”—This doctrine he frequently represents as not only of human invention, but as absurd and impious, and even as *blasphemous*; and he asserts, that “it is *impossible to reconcile it to the divine attributes* †.” And after having said that the Jews “blended together at once, in the moral character of God, injustice, cruelty, and partiality,” he adds, that “the moral character imputed to the Supreme Being by the Christian theology, differs little from that imputed to him by the Jewish.” Yea, he makes it the worse of the two.—That “sudden and violent anger are imputed to him in the one system, slow and silent revenge in the other. That he is represented by the latter as waiting to punish hereafter with unrelenting vengeance and eternal torments, when it is too late to terrify, because it is too late to reform ‡.” Thus he represents that which he would have pass for an essential article in the original Christian revelation, as giving a worse idea of God than the Jewish revelation, which yet he pretends makes such a representation of the Deity as is worse than atheism.

I shall now examine what he has offered to make good so heavy and injurious a charge.

Some of his arguments are designed, if they prove any thing at all, to bear against future rewards and punishments in general; and some are particularly levelled against the Christian doctrine of future rewards and punishments.

As to the former, some notice has been already taken of what he had urged to invalidate the belief of a future state of retribution. I shall not repeat what has been offered above in the eighth Letter to this purpose, but shall proceed to mention some things, which I had occasion there to insist upon, as they make a part of the argument, as he has managed it, against the Christian revelation.

He charges those who assert, as Dr Clarke has done, that “future retributions are necessary to set the present disorders and inequalities right, and to justify, upon the whole, the scheme of providence,” as in effect maintaining, that “God

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 515, 516.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid. p. 532, 533.

“ acts against his attributes, and the perfections of his nature in  
 “ one system, only to have a reason the more for acting agree-  
 “ ably to them in another \*.” He urges, that “ it is profane  
 “ to insinuate, much more to affirm peremptorily, that the pro-  
 “ ceedings of God towards men in the present life are unjust ;  
 “ and that if that could be admitted, it would be absurd to ad-  
 “ mit that this may be set right, which means, if the words  
 “ have any meaning, that this injustice must cease to be in-  
 “ justice on the received hypothesis of his proceedings towards  
 “ man in another life.” And he argues, that “ omnipotence  
 “ itself cannot cause that which has been done not to have  
 “ been done †.” The force of this argument depends upon a  
 gross misrepresentation of the sense of those whom he has  
 thought fit to oppose. No Christian divines pretend, that  
 God’s proceedings towards men in this present life are unjust.  
 On the contrary, they maintain, that it is just and wise in God,  
 and suitable to the nature of this state of trial and discipline,  
 to suffer things to go on as they do in their present course ;  
 and that it is agreeable to the order of things, that a state of  
 final retribution should succeed. They are far from thinking,  
 that what is now injustice will in a future state cease to be in-  
 justice : but they maintain, that that justice, the execution of  
 which is for very wise reasons delayed, shall be exercised and  
 displayed in the fittest season : that that punishment of the  
 wicked which is not for the present inflicted, though designed,  
 shall be executed, when it is most proper it should be so : and  
 that reward of the righteous, which is not as yet actually con-  
 ferred, shall be conferred when it is fittest it should be con-  
 ferred, and when they are best prepared for receiving it. They  
 assert, that the evils and sufferings which good men endure in  
 this present state are perfectly consistent with the divine  
 justice, because they are either sent as chastisements and cor-  
 rections for their sins and miscarriages, or as seasonable trials  
 for the exercise and improvement of their virtues, and to  
 discipline them for a better world ; and that in a future state  
 the trial shall be over, and their virtue fully rewarded, and they  
 shall arrive at the true felicity and perfection of their nature :  
 and, on the other hand, that wicked persons are here often suf-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol v. p. 356.

† Ibid. p. 493; 494.

ferred to prosper, and have many advantages and benefits given them, to lead them to repentance, and to answer many wise ends of providence. And if they prove incorrigible to the methods of discipline which are here made use of, those punishments which were here deferred, shall be at length inflicted, and God's righteousness, and just detestation against sin, shall be awfully manifested and displayed.

But it is especially against future punishments that he bends his force. He observes, that "the heathen philosophers, even those of them who assumed providence to be the most active in directing the affairs of this world, were unanimous in their opinion, that the Supreme Being was never angry, nor ever did harm;" for which he cites a passage from Tully's *Offices*, lib. iii. *Num iratum timemus Jovem? At hæc quidem commune est omnium philosophorum—Nunquam nec irasci Deum, nec nocere* \*. It will be easily allowed, that anger, strictly speaking, as it signifies a passionate emotion, such as is to be found in such imperfect creatures as we are, cannot be ascribed to God; but to deny, that he is displeased or offended with the sins of his creatures, which is all that is intended, when anger is ascribed to him in the sacred writings, is really to strike at the foundation of all religion, and, under pretence of honourable thoughts of God, to banish the fear of a Deity out of the world. It was a maxim of the Epicureans concerning the divine nature,

*Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur ira.*

And their design in it was to deny the providence of God, and to represent him as absolutely unconcerned about the actions of men, so as neither to reward the good, nor to punish evil-doers. And this, if it holdeth at all, will equally hold against God's punishing the wicked in this life, and in the next. And it looks as if this was our author's intention. He urges, that "neither reason nor experience will shew us, in the Author of nature, an angry, revengeful judge, or bloody executioner †." But to miscal things does not alter their nature. It is easy to throw a hard name, and to call justice vengeance and cruelty: but no argument can be drawn from this to prove, that that which is

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 510.

† Ibid p. 209.

one of the most glorious perfections, and inseparable from the wise and righteous Governor of the world, ought to pass for the worst of characters. If the Supreme Being be not utterly indifferent to virtue and vice, to good and evil, to the happiness and misery of his creatures, it must be said, that he approveth the one, and is displeas'd with the other; and in that case he will shew his approbation and displeasure by suitable effects. What should we think of an earthly prince, that should not concern himself whether his laws be observed or not, and should suffer them to be transgressed with impunity? And is this the idea we should form of the Supreme Lord of the universe? If this were the case, what could be expected but universal disorder and confusion in the moral world? It is the same thing, as if all things were left to a wild chance, without a Supreme Governor and Judge.

There is a very extraordinary way of arguing which this writer makes use of to set aside future punishments. He observes, that "to assume that the divine providence towards mankind in this world has one criterion, and in the next another, would be extravagant\*." and therefore he mentions it as an absurdity in the Christian scheme, that "the proceedings of the future state shall be the very reverse of the present; for then every individual human creature is to be tried; whereas here they are only considered collectively; that the most secret actions, nay the very thoughts of the heart, will be laid open, and sentence will be pronounced accordingly †." The plain meaning of this is, that the individuals of mankind shall not be obnoxious to any punishment from God, either in this world or in the next; and consequently that there shall be no exercise of divine justice here or hereafter. For he himself declares, that "justice requires, that rewards and punishments should be measured out in various degrees, according to the various circumstances of particular cases, and in proportion to them." He has endeavoured to turn that into an argument against the Christian account of a future judgment, which is really its glory, and a great proof of its truth, *viz.* that men's secret actions, and even the thoughts of their hearts, shall then be laid open. These

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 498.

† *Ibid.* p. 494.

are things that lie quite out of the reach of human judicatories, and yet upon these it is that the morality of actions doth properly depend. If therefore there be no account to be given of them here or hereafter, men's best or worst actions or dispositions will go unrewarded or unpunished, which is the highest absurdity, supposing there is a Supreme moral Governor or Judge. But according to the account given us in the Gospel, *the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed*, the hidden springs shall be inquired into, from whence good and evil actions flow, men shall be shewn in their true characters, no real good action shall pass unrewarded, or evil one unpunished; than which nothing can possibly have a greater influence to engage us to exercise a constant care over our inward temper, and our outward conduct.

Another argument he makes use of, which, as far as it is of any force, bears against future punishments in general: it is this: that "reparation and terror are objects essential to the constitution of human justice. But what does that justice require, if it may be called justice, when it tends neither to reparation nor terror \*?" He acknowledges, what some engaged in the same cause have thought fit to deny, that "to reform offenders is not the sole nor the principal end of punishment. Those that are capital must have some other. The criminal is executed for the sake of others, and that he may do some good by the terror of his death. The prince that should punish without regard to reparation or terror, could have no motive to punish but the pleasure of punishing; which no spirit but that of anger, vengeance, or cruelty, can inspire." He asks therefore, "What effects can punishments have, when the system of human government is at an end, the state of probation is over, when there is no farther means for reformation of the wicked, nor reparation to the injured by those who injured them, and when the eternal lots of all mankind are cast, and terror is of no farther use †?" But it is to be considered, that the terror of the future punishment is of great use in this present state. The proper design of the threatenings of future punishment is not to inflict the punishment, but to prevent the wickedness, and thereby to prevent the punishment. But when once those

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 494, 495.

† Ibid. p. 507, 508.

threatenings are denounced, justice and truth, and the majesty of the Supreme Ruler, require that they should be ordinarily executed upon those who, notwithstanding those threatenings, persist in their wicked courses. For if it were laid down as a principle, that though these threatenings were denounced, justice or goodness would not suffer them to be executed, it would be the same thing as if there were no threatenings at all; since they would in that case answer no purpose, and could not be said to be so much as *in terrorem*. But besides the necessity there is that such punishments should be threatened here, for the sake of preserving order, and restraining wickedness among mankind, even in this present state, and consequently, that they should be executed hereafter upon those that have incurred the threatened penalties, of what use the execution of them may be to other orders of beings in a future state, to inspire an abhorrence of sin, and a fear of the divine majesty, and how far the influence of them may extend, no man can take upon him to determine. The Scripture intimates, as if the future judgment were to be transacted in a most solemn manner, in the view not merely of the whole human race, but of other orders of intelligent beings. Mention is often made of great numbers of angels as present on that occasion. Those punishments may therefore be of very extensive use, for any thing that can be proved to the contrary, for promoting the general good, for displaying the evil of sin, and vindicating the majesty of the divine laws and government, and may serve as solemn warnings to the intellectual creation. God takes no pleasure in their torments, as such, but in answering the great ends of his government, in taking the properest methods to promote the good of the whole, in the exercise and display of his own infinite righteousness and purity, in separating the just from the unjust, and putting a visible eternal discrimination between the obstinate opposers of his authority and goodness, and those who loved and served him in sincerity.

When this writer reckoneth *reparation* among the ends of punishment, he seemeth by reparation to mean only the repairing the injuries done by one creature to another; as if all the malignity and demerit of sin consisted only in its being a wrong done to our fellow-creatures; and as if it were not to be considered or punished at all as an offence against the divine majesty, and a

violation of the laws of the Supreme universal Lord. But this is a great mistake. Sin is indeed a great evil, considered as an offence committed against our fellow creatures, and against the true dignity, perfection, and happiness of our own natures, and a counteracting the proper end and order of our beings; but the principal part of its malignity is its being an insurrection against the majesty and authority of the great Lord of the universe, to whom we owe all possible subjection and obedience, an opposing our wills and appetites to the will and law of the Supreme, the basest ingratitude to his infinite goodness, a casting an indignity on his adorable perfections, and on the wisdom and righteousness of his government, and therefore a breach of universal order. This is what renders sin principally criminal and odious, and what we ought to have a chief regard to in our humble confessions, or else we are not true penitents. And it is in this that its malignity chiefly consisteth, as God would have us abhor it principally on this account, so it is on this account especially that he punisheth it; for he judgeth of those things as they really are. If the greatest evil of sin consisteth in its being an offence committed against the divine majesty, a wilful transgression of his known laws, and an opposition to his authority and goodness; if the more there is of this in any sin, the more heinous its guilt must be acknowledged to be; if this carrieth an infinitely greater, a more monstrous malignity in it, than its being merely an offence against creatures like ourselves; it is contrary to all the dictates of reason and good sense to suppose, that the most wise and righteous Governor of the world, in punishing sin, hath not principally a regard to that, on the account of which it principally deserveth punishment. It is true that God cannot be really hurt by our sins and vices, not beatified by our obedience and our virtues. But this is only owing to the transcendent excellence of his own most perfect nature. And it would be a strange thing to make the infinite perfection of his nature, a reason why his creatures should be allowed to transgress his laws with impunity. On the contrary, the greater the excellency of his nature is, the greater is the evil of sin as committed against his infinite majesty; and that very perfection of his nature makes it impossible for him not to hate all moral evil. For it is manifest, that an eternal love of order, purity, and righteousness,

is necessarily included in infinite perfection. And how shall he shew his just abhorrence of sin, and aversion to the breach of moral order, but by the marks and effects of his displeasure against it, that is, by punishing obstinate presumptuous transgressors ?

Our author tells us, that “ future punishments were not believed by the philosophers, not even by Plato and Pythagoras, though they talked of them \*.” And that “ at the coming of our Saviour they were generally disregarded, even by the vulgar.” If this were so, it became the more necessary to renew the discovery, and set it in a clearer and stronger light, since it was of vast importance to mankind to believe it. By his own acknowledgment, the ablest philosophers and legislators thought so ; and he himself frequently owns the great usefulness of this doctrine. And its usefulness is, as I have before observed, in conjunction with other considerations, no small argument of its truth.

Having considered what he hath offered with relation to future rewards and punishments in general, I shall now examine the particular objections he hath urged against the accounts given of them in the Christian revelation.

He observes, that “ had the doctrine of future rewards and punishments been more general, and less descriptive ; had future punishments been represented, like the rewards, to be simply such as eye never saw, nor heard, nor the heart of man could conceive, it might have been maintained in credit, and have had an universal and real influence—perhaps to the great advantage of religion. But, besides the absurdity of supposing that God inflicts eternal punishments on his creatures, which would render their non-existence infinitely preferable to their existence on the whole ;” he apprehends, that “ an air of ridicule has been cast on this doctrine by preserving all the idle tales and burlesque images, which were propagated in those days.” He represents it as “ nearly resembling the *mythologia de inferis*, which has been so often laughed at †.” As to the account given us in the gospel of the future reward, it is incomparably noble and excellent, and not quite so general as he represents it, but such as is fitted to raise in us the highest ideas of the felicity and perfec-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 513.

† Ibid. p. 542.



tion to which good men shall be raised in the heavenly world. The descriptions there set before us of future punishments are general, but very expressive. And the burlesque images he speaks of are awful and striking representations, designed and fitted to convey images of terror, but not mixed with any trifling or ridiculous circumstances, like the poetical tales and fables he refers to.

But what he seems to lay a principal stress upon, for exposing the Christian doctrine of future rewards and punishments, is this: that "justice requires most certainly that rewards and  
"punishments should be measured out in every particular case,  
"in proportion to the merit and demerit of each individual.  
"But instead of this, it is assured, that the righteous and the  
"wicked are transported into heaven, or plunged into hell,  
"without any distinction of the particular cases which have  
"been so solemnly determined, and without any proportion  
"observed between the various degrees of merit and demerit  
"in the application of those rewards and punishments \*." And in all that he offers in the latter part of the sixty-eighth of his Fragments and Essays, he proceeds upon this supposition, that "the greatest and least degree of virtue shall be reward-  
"ed, and the greatest and least degree of vice punished alike." And that it is "arbitrary and tyrannical to make no distinction  
"of persons in dissimilar cases †." And again he urges, that "the hypothesis of all being saved alike, or damned in the  
"lump, tends to destroy little by little all those impressions  
"which the belief of a future state is so usefully designed to  
"give ‡."

All that his Lordship here offers, depends upon a great misapprehension, or a wilful misrepresentation of the Christian doctrine on this head. If men were to be rewarded and punished hereafter only collectively, and no regard had to individuals, which our author would persuade us is the method of God's proceedings towards mankind in this present state, then it might be admitted that men are saved and damned only *in the lump*, as he is pleased to express it. But this is not the Scripture representation of God's proceedings in a future state. We are there most expressly assured, that the case of every

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 495.    † Ibid. p. 496.    ‡ Ibid. p. 503.

individual shall be examined and judged. It is thus that our Lord, who is to be our Judge, represents it: he tells us, that he will *come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him, and then shall he reward every man according to his works*, Matth. xvi. 27. St Paul expressly declares, that *God will render to every man according to his deeds*, Rom. ii. 6. *That every one of us shall give an account of himself to God*, Rom. xiv. 12. *That we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*, 2 Cor. v. 10. *That every man's work shall be tried, and made manifest*, 1 Cor. iii. 13. In speaking of the respective duties of masters and servants, he lets them know, that the meanest shall not be neglected, but shall receive a proper reward: *That whatsoever good thing a man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free: But he that doth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons*, Eph. vi. 8, 9. Col. iii. 25. St Peter assureth us, that *God, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work*, 1 Pet. i. 17. Christ is introduced as declaring, *I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works*, Rev. ii. 23. And in the description of the future judgment, Rev. xx. 12. to shew the exactness of that judgment, it is said, that *the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works*. And it is repeated again, ver. 13. *they were judged, every man according to their works*.

From these several passages compared together, it appears with the utmost evidence, that, according to the whole tenor of the New Testament, in the dispensing future retributions, *the rewards and punishments shall be measured out in every particular case, in proportion to the merit and demerit of each individual*, which, our author saith, is what justice requires. It is therefore manifest, that what is there said concerning that future state of rewards and punishments, must be understood in a consistency with the making an exact distribution according to particular cases and circumstances; and that the general representations there made of heaven as a state of future happiness to the righteous, and of hell as a state of future punishment to the wicked, must be so taken and explained as to comport with the

different degrees of rewards and punishments to the one and to the other ; and not as if all good men were to be raised to the same degree of future glory and happiness ; and all bad men to be punished with the same degree of misery ; since it is so frequently and expressly declared, that God will then, without respect of persons, render to every man according to his deeds ; and that every man shall then receive according to what he hath done in the body. The general descriptions of that future glory are indeed sublime and noble, and represent it in a most attractive view. And it was proper it should be so. They set before us a happiness beyond imagination, great and glorious, the more effectually to animate us to a patient continuance in well-doing. And it is signified, that it is of such a nature, so transcendently great and excellent, as vastly to exceed what any of the human race could in strictness of justice have deserved. For the obedience of the best of men is very imperfect, and mixed with many defects ; and therefore that eternal life and happiness is represented as the *gift of God through Jesus Christ*. That reward is the effect of free sovereign grace and goodness. And therefore none can find fault, if the glory and happiness which shall be conferred upon good men hereafter be above what they could be said to have strictly merited. But though the very lowest degree of reward and happiness in that future state shall be far superior to what the best of men could have pretended to have challenged, as in strictness of justice due to his merits, yet God shall so order it, in his infinite wisdom and righteousness, that there shall be an admirable proportion observed in giving different degrees of glory, according to the different proficiencies men had made in real goodness during their state of trial. Nothing can be clearer to this purpose, than our Saviour's determination, in the parable of the pounds, Luke xix. 12, 20. where he represents higher honours and rewards conferred upon some than upon others, according to their different degrees of usefulness, and the different improvements they had made of what was committed to them. And in the blessings he pronounceth upon those that are persecuted for righteousness sake, he plainly intimates, that they should be distinguished with a higher reward in heaven than many others, in proportion to

their greater sufferings and services. And in general he declares, that in his *Father's house*, are many mansions; which supposes that there shall be different abodes provided for good men in that future world, into which they shall be distributed, each of them happy in their several ways, and each contented with the lot assigned them. But nowhere are we particularly told, what shall be the lowest degree of happiness and reward which shall be conferred on the lowest degrees of real virtue and righteousness, nor would such a discovery be of any use to mankind, or answer any valuable purpose.

As to future punishments, in the inflicting of these the strictest regard shall be had to the rules of justice, so that no man shall be punished beyond his demerits. This incontestably follows from the frequent declarations that are made, and which have been already produced, that God will render to every man according to his deeds, without respect of persons. But besides these general declarations, there are several passages of Scripture which are designed to shew, that there shall be a remarkable difference made between some bad men and others in the punishments inflicted on them: and that in the inflicting these punishments, a regard shall be had to the different aggravations of their crimes. This is what our Lord plainly signifies, when he declares with great solemnity, that *it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment*, that is, for the most profligate parts of the heathen world, than for those that obstinately rejected and abused the gospel-offers of mercy and salvation, and who go on in an obstinate course of presumptuous sin and disobedience, in opposition to the clearest light and most glorious advantages. And again, he declares, that *that servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more*, Luke xii. 47, 48. Nothing can be plainer than it is from this representation, that among those who shall be punished in a future state, great difference shall be made in the degrees of punishment inflicted on them, according to their different demerits; and that an exact consideration shall be had of their several cases, and an equitable proportion shall be observed, and all proper al-

lowances made. The general descriptions therefore of these future punishments are to be interpreted in a consistency with supposing a very great difference made between some and others in the degrees of their punishment. In these general descriptions, the strongest images of terror are made use of, and it is highly proper it should be so. The punishments are described in their highest degree, as they shall be inflicted on the most obstinate and heinous offenders. No where are we particularly told what shall be the lowest degree of punishment which shall be inflicted in that future world; nor what that state of vice and guilt is which shall subject men to the least punishment. Such declarations could answer no good end, and would probably be abused. It is more wisely done to leave that matter in general expressions; at the same time assuring us, that every man shall be punished in a strict proportion to the circumstances of his crime.

A due consideration of this will, in a great measure, obviate the principal objections this author hath urged against the eternal duration of that future punishment which depend principally upon this supposition, that all shall be alike subjected to the most extreme degree of torment and misery, and so shall continue for ever: whereas if it be considered, that there shall be a great difference made between some and others, in that future world; that the state of some shall be tolerable, compared with that of others; and that every man's case shall be considered, and his condition wisely and exactly proportioned to what he had deserved; on this supposition, whatever the duration of it is supposed to be, it is still just.

Here it will not be improper to take notice of a remarkable passage of this writer in relation to this present subject. He says, "he could easily persuade himself, that the mercy of God pardons the offenders who amend, consistently with his justice: for else, as all men offend, all men would be punished; and that his goodness may carry on the work his mercy has begun, and place such as are the objects of both in a state where they will be exempt, perhaps eternally from all natural, and; as much as finite creatures can be, from all moral evil. He could persuade himself, that they who are the objects of neither, and are not therefore pardoned, remain, if they do remain, excluded from the happiness of the

“others, and reduced to a forlorn state. Some such hypothesis, where no certainty is to be had, I could admit,” says he, “as probable, because it contradicts none of the divine attributes, sets none of them at variance, nor breaks their harmony.” Here he supposes it to be a probable hypothesis, and perfectly consistent with the divine attributes, not only that some men, who are the proper objects of the divine goodness and mercy, may continue eternally in a happy state exempt from all evil; but that others, who by their conduct have rendered themselves not the proper objects of the divine mercy, may be debarred from pardon, and may remain, whilst they do remain, and consequently may remain eternally, supposing them to continue in eternal existence, excluded from that happiness which the others enjoy, and reduced to a forlorn state. If therefore we be assured by a well-attested revelation, that this shall really be the case, he ought not to object against it.

But he urges, that “it is absurd to suppose, that our state of probation ends with this present life, and that judgment will be determined by what we have done in this state.—And that a virtue or wickedness of fifty or sixty years, should be rewarded with eternal happiness, or punished with eternal misery\*.” The objection that is drawn from the disproportion that is between the duration of the state of trial, and the eternity that is to succeed it, might be made, whatever we suppose the continuance of the time of trial to be. But the shortness of this state of trial furnisheth a powerful consideration to engage us to improve it. And very probably, if it were ordinarily much longer than it is, the condition of mankind might be worse, in the present corrupt state of the human nature, than it now is; as the length of men’s lives before the flood probably contributed to the wickedness that so much abounded. The argument therefore, as far as there is any weight in it, holdeth against the supposing any state of trial at all, of whatever continuance. But do we know enough of the measures and designs of the divine government, to be able to pronounce, that it may not be worthy of God, as the Supreme Governor of the world, to appoint to his reasonable creatures a state of trial and discipline, and to deal with them according to their behaviour in such a

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 493, 504, 505.

state, and let them know, that if they obstinately persist in their rebellion and disobedience, he will at length shut up his grace from them, and they shall be excluded from that glory and felicity, with which he would have bountifully rewarded their perseverance, in a course of piety and virtue during the time of trial allotted them? It may be left to impartial reason, whether this constitution would not be more wisely ordained, and more likely to promote the interests of virtue and good order in the world, and to repress vice and wickedness, than to set no bounds at all to the offers of his mercy, and to assure them, that let them behave ever so wickedly and presumptuously, and abuse and reject all the methods of his grace, yet still after they leave this world, and at any other time throughout eternity, whenever they repent, they shall be forgiven, and even restored to favour, and raised to glory and felicity? Would this be a rule of government worthy of the divine wisdom, or fit to be published throughout the whole intellectual world?

As reason leads us to conclude, that it is necessary, for answering the great ends of moral government, that punishments should be denounced against the obstinate transgressors of the divine laws, so it may be justly doubted whether to creatures designed for an immortal existence, the threatening of none but temporary punishments would be sufficient; especially if they apprehended that they should outlive those punishments for infinite ages in bliss and glory. It certainly becometh us, in our inquiries concerning such matters as these, to proceed with great modesty, since we cannot pretend of ourselves to be proper judges of what the governing wisdom and righteousness of the Supreme Lord of the universe doth require, and what is most worthy of God, and most for the good of the whole, which is of far greater importance than the interests of particular beings.

To consider the sentence which shall pass upon bad men at the great day of judgment, as final and irreversible; and that after this there shall be no fresh offers of grace and mercy, but they shall continue under the effects of that sentence during the whole of their existence; is certainly a consideration of the highest moment, and must needs have a wonderful weight to engage us to make the best use of the present state of trial allotted us, and to lay hold on the offers of salvation that are

now made to us upon the reasonable terms of the new covenant. Whereas, if we had reason to apprehend, that there were to be new states of trial, new seasons and offers of grace, after the general judgment, it would greatly weaken the influence of the motives drawn from the threatenings of future punishment. Nor is there any thing in this constitution which can be proved to be inconsistent with the wisdom, justice, and equity of the divine government. For as to the exclusion from the heavenly felicity, which shall be a considerable part of that future punishment, there is no reasonable ground for expecting, that those who now reject the divine grace and mercy should ever be admitted to that transcendent bliss and glory, which God hath been pleased of his own free and rich goodness to promise to the righteous, and which no man could pretend to challenge as in strictness of justice due to him. Nor is it any impeachment of the divine wisdom and goodness to leave obstinate sinners during the whole course of their existence under that part of the punishment which ariseth from the stinging reflections of their own guilty consciences, or from the natural effects of their wickedness and bad temper of mind. And whatever farther punishments there may be more directly and immediately inflicted by the divine hand, we may be sure they shall be in such measures and proportions to each individual, as never to exceed the demerit of their crimes.

What has been said may help us to judge of the strange representation this author is pleased to make of the Scripture doctrine of future punishments: That "such a proceeding can be ascribed to no principle, but to the revenge of a being, who punishes to the full extent of his power, and merely for the pleasure of punishing, and without any regard to justice, creatures who did not offend him, merely for the pleasure of offending him; creatures who had free-will, and made wrong elections; creatures who might plead, in mitigation of their punishments, their frailties, their passions, the imperfections of their natures, and the numerous temptations to which they stood exposed\*." This representation is unjust in every article. The tendency of it is plainly this: to apologize for sin, and to diminish the evil of it. And what good can be proposed by this, it is hard to say. Nothing can be more con-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 518.



trary to the honour of God, to the good of mankind, to the peace and order of the moral world, than to endeavour to make men entertain slight thoughts of the evil of sin. To what purpose is it to say, that sinners do not offend God merely for the pleasure of offending him? If they do it for the pleasure of gratifying their own corrupt inclinations and appetites, which they oppose and prefer to the most wise and holy will and law of the sovereign Lord of the universe, is not this a very heinous guilt? Their having free-will, and making wrong elections, when it was in their choice to have done otherwise, though mentioned here in mitigation of their guilt, is a great aggravation of their crime, and an abuse of their reason and liberty, which are amongst the noblest gifts of God. To plead passions and temptations, is an excuse, which, if admitted, may serve to apologize for the greatest crimes. But they are not allowed by any wise human judicatories as a reason for exempting those that transgress the laws from the penalties to which their transgressions had exposed them. And Lord Bolingbroke himself has elsewhere very properly observed, that those very persons who pretend that inclinations cannot be restrained, and who speak most of the power of the appetites and passions, can resist and controul them, when any evident interest, or contrary inclination, leads them to do so \*. And, as to any transgressions that may properly be called frailties and infirmities, and which have little of the will in them, the wise and just Ruler of the world will no doubt make all the allowances that equity can demand.

Upon the whole, the Christian doctrine of future rewards and punishments is so far from furnishing a just objection against the divine original of the gospel revelation, that, if rightly considered, it yieldeth a noble evidence of its usefulness and truth. It is scarce possible to form an idea of any thing more solemn and affecting, and better fitted to make a strong impression on the human mind, than the representation given in the New Testament of the future judgment. The whole human race convened before the sovereign universal Judge, innumerable myriads of holy angels attending, the judicial process carried on with the greatest solemnity, a strict and impartial

\* See his Letters on the Study and Use of History, let. iii. sect. 1.

inquiry made, the most hidden actions brought to light, and the very secrets of the heart laid open, and all followed by eternal retributions. It seemeth plain from our Saviour's manner of representing things, that he regarded it as a matter of great importance, that sinners should have no hope or expectation given them of obtaining mercy and salvation, if they persisted to the end of this present life in a course of impenitence, presumptuous sin, and disobedience. He no where giveth the least intimation, that the punishment of the wicked in a future state shall have an end. On the contrary, he still speaketh of it in terms, which, according to the natural import of the expressions, seem to signify that it shall be of a perpetual duration, without adding any thing to qualify those expressions. And for any persons to flatter themselves, that God may in his absolute sovereignty dispense with the rigour of his threatenings, and to depend upon such an expectation, would be an extreme folly, when the plain tenor of the revelation seems to go the other way.

I have now finished the design I had in view, which was to defend natural and revealed religion against the attacks made upon both by this very confident and assuming author. In the execution of this design, I have principally confined myself to the reasoning part of his Lordship's works, as far as religion is concerned, and have not willingly overlooked any thing that had the appearance of argument. But I have not attempted to follow him in several of those excursions which seem to have been principally intended to shew the variety of his reading, of which it must be owned there is a great appearance, though I cannot say he has given many proofs of his having maturely digested it. Several things there are in his scheme of metaphysics, and in the account he has given of the sentiments of the ancient philosophers, which might be justly animadverted upon, though it will not be denied that some of his observations on these heads are just and curious. But as a distinct examination of them would have very much enlarged this work, which is already longer than I at first intended, or than I would have wished it to be, I have chosen to omit them: for the same reason I have taken no particular notice of the reflections he has occasionally cast upon the ancient fathers

of the Christian Church, and upon the body of the primitive Christians \*, of whom he has made a most injurious representation, and has in effect justified the persecutions raised by the heathens against them. He tells us, that “ their clergy were, “ under pretence of religion, a very lawless tribe.—That they “ broke the laws in the most public manner, and instigated “ others to break them by popular insurrections against the au- “ thority of magistrates, and by tumults and riots, in which “ they insulted the established religion of the empire.—And “ he believes the list of the martyrs consisted more of those “ who suffered for breaking the peace, than of those who suf- “ fered quietly for the sake of their religion †.” Such is the charge he has thought fit to bring against a worthy and peaceable body of men (for so the primitive Christians generally were), whose innocent and virtuous behaviour has been acknowledged by some of their pagan adversaries themselves.

You will observe, that I have, for the most part, except where the argument led to it, passed over the bitter sarcasms he so frequently throws out against the Christian divines.

\* As a specimen how ready our author is to lay hold of the slightest appearances for casting a slur upon the ancient fathers and primitive Christians, I would observe, that after mentioning the Gnostics, and their pretences, he adds, that “ the orthodox grew in time as much Gnostics as others; and we see that “ the church of Alexandria thought it necessary to be so, in order to be truly “ religious §.” He is so fond of this thought, that he afterwards repeateth it, and talks of the “ heretics assuming the pompous title of Gnostics, and despising “ the first preachers of Christianity, as ignorant and illiterate men: And that “ Clement of Alexandria maintained, that to be a good Christian it was necessary “ to be a good Gnostic ||.” It would be hard to produce an instance of greater disingenuity than Lord Bolingbroke is here guilty of, and it can scarce be supposed that he was so ignorant as not to be sensible of it. The word *Gnostic* properly signifies a man of knowledge. Some corrupters of Christianity in the primitive times, who made high pretences to extraordinary knowledge, assumed that title to themselves. And because Clement describes the true Gnostics in opposition to the false, to shew that this name, in which those heretics gloried belonged in its just sense only to the true Christian: therefore he and the orthodox Christians were Gnostics, i. e. of the same principles and practices with that sect which they condemned. It may be safely left to the reader to judge of the fairness of such a conduct.

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 434.

§ Lord Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 336.

|| *Ibid* iv. p. 458.

They have the honour to be reviled and insulted in every work that is designed against revealed religion. But it must be owned, that his Lordship has in obloquy and reproach far exceeded all that have gone before him. He has found out what the world did not know before, that the divines are in a formed alliance and confederacy with the atheists against God and his providence, and that the latter are not such dangerous enemies to religion as the former.

I have not thought myself obliged to take any distinct notice of the long account he has given in his fourth essay, of the encroachments of the ecclesiastical upon the civil power, and the several steps by which those encroachments were carried on, especially in the times of the papal usurpation. He has advanced little on these heads that can be called new, or which had not been observed by others before him. And we have his Lordship's own acknowledgment frequently repeated, that this is by no means chargeable on true original Christianity. It would therefore be very disingenuous, to turn that to the disadvantage of the religion of Jesus, which has been only owing to a gross abuse and corruption of it, a corruption which was plainly foretold in the sacred writings, at a time when it was impossible for any human sagacity to foresee it.

He frequently exclaims against artificial theology, and complains of the profane mixtures which have been brought into the Christian religion, by the subtilties of a vain philosophy, and by idle traditions. It must be acknowledged, that there has often been too much ground for such complaints. And to endeavour to separate pure uncorrupted Christianity, as taught by Christ and his apostles, from debasing mixtures and the corrupt additions that have been made to it, is undoubtedly a noble and useful work, and, when properly performed, is doing a real service to Christianity, and tendeth to establish the credit of it, and to promote its sacred interests. But such writers as Lord Bolingbroke are certainly the unfittest persons in the world to undertake it :

*Non tali auxilio, nec defensoribus istis,  
Tempus eget.*

Instead of promoting the good work of reformation, and of contributing to restore religion in its primitive purity, they bring a disgrace upon those who would in good earnest attempt it, and furnish the patrons of those corruptions with a plausible pretence for reproaching and misrepresenting such persons, as having an ill intention against Christianity itself, and as serving the cause of deists and infidels.

His Lordship charges the mischiefs which have befallen the Christian Church as having been chiefly owing to this: That “the pure word of God neither is, nor has been the sole criterion of orthodoxy\*.” He asserts, that “no human authority can supply or alter, much less improve, what the Son of God came on earth to reveal †.” He says, that “divines should return to the gospel, as philosophers have returned to nature, and presume to dogmatize no farther than the plain import of it will justify ‡.” And here he recommends it as the most effectual way to remove the scandals arising from the dissensions among Christians, that the Christian divines “should be content to explain what they understand, to adore what they understand not, and to leave in mystery all that Christ and his apostles have left so §.”

These advices, considered in themselves, might have been thought to proceed from a good and friendly intention. But every thing is suspected that comes from such a hand. Yet a real friend to Christianity will know how to make a proper use of admonitions and reproofs, even when given by an enemy.

I shall conclude with this observation: That the religion of Jesus, as delivered in the New Testament in its original purity and simplicity, will be ever able to stand its ground against all the assaults of the most subtile and most malicious adversaries. It hath a dignity and excellence in it, which hath often extorted favourable acknowledgments even from those who have appeared to be strongly prejudiced against it, of which we have a remarkable instance in the late Lord Bolingbroke. And I am persuaded, that the more any thinking man considered it with a free and unprejudiced mind, the more he will admire it, and will be the more convinced of its truth and excellence,

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 448.

‡ Ibid. p. 449.

† Ibid. p. 627.

§ Ibid. p. 629.

and of its divine original. You will, I doubt not, join with me in earnest prayer to God, that this holy religion may be more universally diffused, that it may be made known to those who know it not, and that where it is known and professed, it may have more of the happy effects which it is so well fitted to produce.

I am,

Reverend and dear Sir,

Most sincerely and affectionately yours,

JOHN LELAND.

## LETTER XXXIV.

SIR,

THE foregoing Letter finished the observations I had made on Lord Bolingbroke's posthumous works. In the course of those observations, I had occasion to make some references to a small treatise I had published before, intitled, *Reflections on the late Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History*, which was the first of his Lordship's writings in which he had appeared in an avowed opposition to the Christian cause. And it having been thought proper to reprint those Reflections, I was advised by you and other friends to insert them in the *Supplement to the View of the Deistical Writers*, lately published, as they bear a near affinity to the subjects there treated of, and might render that part which relates to Lord Bolingbroke more complete. For the same reasons, these Reflections are retained in this new edition of the *View of the Deistical Writers*, and are here subjoined to the observations on the late Lord Bolingbroke's posthumous works. But whereas in the two first editions of those Reflections, besides the remarks which were made upon those passages in his Lordship's Letters that relate to Christianity and the holy Scriptures, there were several things added of a political nature, and which were designed to examine and detect his Lordship's misrepresentations; in the third, fourth, and this edition, it was thought proper not to intermix any thing of a *political nature*, which would not be so well suited to the design of the present work. For this reason, whereas in the first and second editions of these Reflections, it was proposed to distribute the remarks into three heads, the third of which related to the severe reflections Lord Bolingbroke had made upon the consequences of the late Revolution, and the state of things under the present establishment; this third head, which in those editions reached from p. 133 to p. 166, is omitted. But there are additions and improvements made in other parts of these Reflections; the most considerable of which relates to the *curse pronounced by Noah upon Canaan*, which, in the opinion of some judicious friends, was not so fully considered before as it ought to have been.

This addition was drawn up, as you know, some time ago, and sent over in order to be inserted in the new edition of these Reflections, before I saw Dr Newton's accurate dissertation on this subject, in his excellent *Dissertations upon Prophecy*, which came but very lately into my hands. It will now probably be thought not so necessary; but I have chosen to let it stand as it was first drawn up, because it may possibly not be without its use, and will tend to render the *Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History* more complete. The method I have pursued is something different from Dr Newton's. He seems to incline to think there is a defect in the *Hebrew copies*. But I choose to defend the passage according to the present reading of the *Hebrew copies*, which is followed by almost all the ancient versions, as well as by our own translators.

The Preface to the Reflections is somewhat long; but it was not thought proper to omit it, as it contains several things, which, in the opinion of some whose judgment I regard, may be as useful as any part of those Reflections.



# REFLECTIONS

ON THE LATE

**LORD BOLINGBROKE'S LETTERS**

ON THE

STUDY AND USE OF HISTORY :

ESPECIALLY SO FAR AS THEY RELATE TO CHRISTIANITY, AND  
THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

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THE SEVENTH EDITION.

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*N. B.* These *Reflections* were first published in the Year 1753, and before any Part of this *View of the Deistical Writers* was written.

THE HISTORY OF

THE CITY OF BOSTON

FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT

TO THE PRESENT TIME

BY

JOHN B. BOWEN

AND

JOHN W. BOWEN

EDITORS

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OF THE

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**A**LTHOUGH no man needs to make an apology for using his best endeavours in defence of our common Christianity, when it is openly attacked; yet as my engaging again in this cause, after having done it on some former occasions, might have an appearance of too much forwardness, it was with some reluctance that I was persuaded to undertake it. What had great weight with me, was the judgment and advice of a person of great worth \*, of whose sincere friendship I have had many proofs, and whom I greatly honour for his truly Christian and candid spirit, as well as his zeal for our holy religion. He urged, that it was highly proper to take notice of the contempt and abuse attempted to be thrown upon Christianity and the Holy Scriptures, by a writer of so great name, and whose specious insinuations, and confident assertions, might probably make disadvantageous impressions upon minds too well prepared to receive them. And, as he had not then heard that any other had undertaken it, or intended to do so, he thought my drawing up Remarks on these Letters, which had made so much noise, might be of some use. This determined me to attempt it; and how far what is now offered is fitted to answer the intention, must be submitted to the judgment of the Public. I am sensible of the disadvantage one is under in appearing against a writer of so distinguished a character as the late Lord Viscount Bolingbroke.

\* The Rev. Dr Thomas Wilson, Rector of Walbrook, and Prebendary of Westminster.

His Lordship's admirers will no doubt expect, that a proper decent respect should be paid to his great abilities and talents, as well as quality: This I readily acknowledge: but there is certainly a still greater regard due to the honour of Christianity, which he hath unworthily insulted. However, it is hoped the reader will find, that care has been taken not to transgress the rules of decency, or to push the charge against him farther than his own words give just ground for; and that angry and reproachful expressions have not been made use of, even where there seemed to be a sufficient provocation given.

It might have been expected, from a person of his Lordship's genius, and who seems fond of saying things which had not been insisted upon before, that when he thought fit to appear against the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and the Christian religion, he would have managed the argument in a different manner, and to greater advantage, than had been done by others in the same cause before him. But I do not find, that, with all his sagacity and penetration, he hath advanced any thing on the argument, that can be properly called a new discovery; or that he hath given any additional force to the objections which have been urged by others, and to which sufficient answers have been made.

In that part of his Letters, in which he attempteth to expose the Scripture history as false and uncertain, there are several things thrown in, which seem rather calculated to shew his Lordship's reading, than to answer the main design he appears to have had in view. It would be no difficult matter to point to some mistakes and inaccuracies he hath fallen into. But I have chosen, for the most part, to pass them by, and confine myself to those things that have a nearer relation to the argument.

Any one that is conversant with those that are called the Deistical Writers, must have observed, that it is very usual for them to put on an appearance of respect for Christianity, at the same time that they do all in their power to subvert it. In this his Lordship hath thought fit to imitate them.

He hath sometimes expressed a seeming regard for the holy Scriptures; and hath carried it so far as to make a shew of owning the divine inspiration of some parts of them. But I believe he would have been loth to have had it thought, that he was in earnest. It is not easy to see the justice, or even the good sense, of such a conduct; since the disguise is too thin to impose upon the most unwary reader: Nor can I see what end it can answer, but to give one no very good opinion of the writer's sincerity.

This justice, however, must be done to the noble author, that he hath brought the controversy, relating to the divine authority of the Christian religion, into a narrower compass than some others engaged in the same cause have seemed willing to do. He asserteth, that Christianity is a religion founded upon facts; and fairly acknowledgeth, that if the facts can be proved to be true, the divine original and authority of the Christian religion are established. And what he requireth is, that these facts should be proved, as all other past facts, that are judged worthy of credit, are proved, *viz.* by good historical evidence. This bringeth the controversy to a short issue: For if it can be shewn, that the great important facts, recorded in the evangelical writings have been transmitted to us with as much evidence as could be reasonably expected, supposing those facts to have been really done; then, by his Lordship's concessions, and according to his own way of stating the case, they are to be received as true; and consequently the Christian religion is of divine authority.

His Lordship had too much sense to deny (as some have been willing to do) the certainty of all historical evidence as to past facts, or to insist upon ocular demonstration for things done in former ages. Since therefore the best way of knowing and being assured of past facts, is, by authentic accounts, written and published in the age in which the facts were done; all that properly remains is, to prove the credibility and authenticity of the gospel-records; and that they have been transmitted to us with such a degree of evidence, as may be safely depended upon. And notwithstanding what his Lordship hath insinuated to the contrary, this hath been often done with great clearness and force, by the writers that have appeared on the behalf of Christianity. What is offered in this way in the following Reflections, will, I hope, be judged sufficient; though I have done little more than point to the heads of things, which might easily have been enlarged upon, if I had not been afraid of swelling these Reflections to too great a bulk.

The chief danger to be apprehended from his Lordship's book, appears to me to arise from the contemptuous insinuation he has thrown out against Christianity, as if it could not bear the light, or stand the test of an impartial inquiry, and as if every man of sense that examines into first principles without prejudice, must immediately see through the delusion. This, from a man of his Lordship's known abilities, and fine taste, may be apt to do mischief among those, who, without any uncommon abilities, or giving themselves the trouble of much thinking, yet want to pass for persons of extraordinary penetration, and raised above vulgar prejudices. But if authority were to decide this cause, it were easy to produce, on the side of Christianity, many great names

of persons, whose learning and good sense, and eminent merit, are universally acknowledged. I shall not mention any of the clergy on this occasion, because they might perhaps be excepted against: Though, if extensive knowledge and learning, if depth of thought and exactness of judgment, if great candour and probity of manners, or if fineness of genius, and elegance of taste in polite literature, might recommend them as fit to judge in these matters, many of them might be named, so confessedly eminent, in all these respects, as would render them ornaments to any profession in the world. But it may not be improper to mention some illustrious Laymen, who have either professedly written in defence of Christianity, and the holy Scriptures, or have, in their writings, shewn an high esteem and veneration for them. Of foreigners, among many that might be mentioned to advantage, I shall only take notice of the Lord Du Plessis Mornay, who was both a very wise statesman, and eminently learned; the celebrated M. Pascal, one of the finest writers, and greatest geniuses of the last age; that extraordinary man, Grotius, not easily to be paralleled for force and extent of genius, as well as variety of learning; those great men, the Barons Puffendorf and Ezekiel Spanheim, the former deservedly admired for his great knowledge of the law of nature and nations, the latter peculiarly eminent for his acquaintance with the Belles Lettres, and refined taste in the politer parts of learning. To these might be added many excellent persons of our own nation, such as Lord Bacon, Mr Selden, Sir Charles Wolsely, Sir Matthew Hale, the honourable Robert Boyle, Mr Locke, Sir Isaac Newton, Mr Addison, Mr Forbes, the Late Lord President of Scotland. I believe there are few but would think it an honour to be ranked with these illustrious names,

some of them remarkable for their eminent station and figure in the world, and great political abilities; and all of them justly admired for the extent of their learning and knowledge, the solidity of their judgment, or correctness of their taste. And I cannot help, on this occasion, mentioning two gentlemen (the latter lately deceased) of acknowledged learning and fine sense, who have distinguished themselves by their writings in defence of Christianity, Sir George Lyttleton and Mr West.

No man needs therefore be apprehensive as if his appearing to shew a zeal for Christianity might be looked upon as a reflection upon his understanding, or as a mark of a narrow and bigotted way of thinking; since it cannot be denied, that some of the wisest men, the greatest geniuses, and exactest reasoners of the age, have been persons that professed an high regard for the Christian religion. And the same might, I doubt not, be said of numbers of gentlemen now living, of eminent abilities, and distinguished worth, who might be mentioned with great honour, though they have had no occasion of appearing in the world as writers. But the Controversy is not to be decided by the authority of great names. Christianity does not stand in need of that support. It standeth fixed on its own solid basis, and only requireth to be considered with an attention suitable to its vast importance. It hath nothing to fear from a true freedom of thought, from deep reasoning, and impartial inquiry. What it hath most to apprehend, is a thoughtless levity and inattention of mind, and an absolute indifference to all religion, and to all inquiries about it. It is no easy matter to prevail with those to think closely in such a case as this, who are under the power of sensual affections and appetites, who are sunk in indolence and a love of ease, or car-

ried off with a perpetual hurry of diversions and amusements; or engaged in the warm pursuits of ambition or avarice. But surely, if the voice of reason is to be heard; and if there be any thing at all that deserveth a serious attention; it is this. The inquiry whether Christianity be true, and of a divine original, or not, is a matter of high importance; and upon which a great deal dependeth. The gospel itself most certainly representeth it so. If Christianity be true and divine, those to whom it is published; and who have an opportunity of inquiring into it; and yet neglect to do so, can never be able to justify their conduct to the great Ruler and Judge of the world. It cannot with any consistency be supposed, that if God hath sent his Son into the world; to bring a clear revelation of his will, and to guide men in the way of salvation, it is a matter of indifference whether those to whom it is offered; and made known, pay any regard to this signification of the divine will; or not, or comply with the terms which are there prescribed. And therefore for such persons to reject it at a venture, without giving themselves the trouble of a serious inquiry; or to continue in a wilful negligence and careless suspense of mind in a matter of such vast consequence, is a most unaccountable and inexcusable conduct, altogether unworthy of reasonable thinking beings.

Let Christianity therefore be carefully examined: Let the evidence for the facts on which its divine authority is supported be coolly and impartially considered: Whether it is not as much as could be reasonably desired, supposing those facts were true; and which would be accounted sufficient in any other case. Let the original records of Christianity be inquired into: Whether they have not the characters of genuine simplicity, integrity; and a sincere regard to

to truth, and whether they have not been transmitted to us with an evidence equal, or superior to what can be produced for any other writings whatsoever. Let the nature and tendency of the religion itself be considered: Whether the idea there given us of the Deity be not such as tendeth to render him both amiable and most venerable, to fill our hearts with a superlative love to God, as having given the most amazing proofs of his wonderful love and goodness towards mankind, and at the same time with a sacred awe and reverence of him as the wise and righteous governor of the world, a lover of order, and an hater of vice and wickedness; whether its precepts be not unquestionably pure and holy, and such as, if faithfully complied with, would raise our natures to an high degree of moral excellence; whether the uniform tendency of the whole scheme of religion there held forth to us, be not to promote the honour of God and the good of mankind, and the cause of piety, righteousness and virtue in the world: To engage us to worship God with a pure adoration and devotion, to deal justly, kindly, and equitably with all men, and to subdue the sensual irregular affections and lusts, and keep them within proper bounds. Superstition and false devotion have frequently put men upon unnatural and excessive rigours and austerities; but Christianity, like the blessed Author of it, keeps clear of all extremes. It abridgeth us of no pleasures within the bounds of purity and innocence; nor doth it oblige us to extinguish our natural appetites and passions, but to govern and moderate them, and preserve them in a regular subjection to reason, and the law of the mind; And certainly it is necessary, for our own quiet and happiness, and for the good order of society, that we should do so. And finally, let



it be considered, whether any motives could possibly be exhibited more powerful and engaging than those which the gospel setteth before us. It proposeth the noblest models of our imitation! God himself, in his imitable moral excellencies; and his well-beloved Son, the most perfect image of his own goodness and purity. It displayeth all the charms and attractions of redeeming grace and love, to allure us. It giveth the greatest encouragement to sinners to repent, and forsake their evil ways; and promiseth the most gracious assistances to help our infirmities, and to strengthen our weak, but sincere endeavours in the performance of our duty. It raiseth us to the most glorious prospects and sublime hopes, than which nothing can possibly have an happier tendency to engage us to a patient continuance in well-doing, amidst the many difficulties and temptations of this present state. The rewards it proposeth are such as are fitted to animate holy and generous souls, and to produce, not a servile and mercenary frame of spirit, but a true greatness of mind; viz. an happiness consisting in the perfection of our natures, in a conformity to God, and the eternal enjoyment of him, and in the pure pleasures of society and friendship with glorious angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect. And on the other hand, to make an impression upon those that are insensible to the charms and beauty of virtue, it maketh the most lively and affecting representations of the terrors of the wrath to come, and the punishments that shall be executed in a future state upon those that obstinately persist in a course of presumptuous sin and disobedience.

This is an imperfect sketch of the nature and design of Christianity, as laid down in the gospel. In this view let it be considered, and not be unjustly charg-

ed, as it hath often been, with corruptions that are only owing to a deviation from its original purity; or with the practices of those, who, though they make a profession of believing it, allow themselves in courses which it forbids and condemns. What an happy world would this be, if men could be more generally persuaded to yield a willing subjection to its divine authority, and to comply with its true spirit and design, and to give themselves up to be governed by its excellent precepts and important motives!

What then can those propose, that take pains to turn men from such a religion as this, and to weaken or subvert the evidences of its divine authority? Can they pretend to introduce a more pure and sublime morality, or to enforce it with more powerful motives? Do they propose to render men more holy and virtuous, more pious and devout towards God, more just, and kind, and benevolent towards men, more temperate and careful in the due government of their appetites and passions, than the gospel requireth and obligeth them to be? Do they intend to advance the interests of virtue, by depriving it of its most effectual encouragements and supports; or to exalt the joys of good men, by weakening their hopes of everlasting happiness; or to restrain and reclaim the wicked and vicious, by freeing them from the fears of future punishment?

There is a great complaint of a growing dissoluteness of manners, and of a general corruption. His Lordship representeth this in the most lively terms; but, instead of ascribing it to the proper causes, he is for laying the whole load of it on the present establishment. Far from directing to the proper cure, he hath done what he could to take away that which would be the most effectual remedy, the influence of

Christianity on the minds and consciences of men. When the restraints of religion are once taken off, what can be expected but that they should abandon themselves to the conduct of their passions! Human laws and penalties will be found to be weak ties where there is no fear of God, nor regard to a future state, or the powers of the world to come. In proportion as a neglect or contempt of religion groweth amongst us, a dissoluteness of morals will prevail; and when once this becometh general among a people, true probity and virtue, a right public spirit, and generous concern for the real interests of our country, will be extinguished. Surely then all that wish well to the good order of society, and to the happiness of mankind, ought to wish that true uncorrupted Christianity should generally obtain and prevail; and that men should not only heartily believe, but seriously consider it, and endeavour to get it wrought into the very frame and temper of their souls. For Christianity is not a mere outward form and profession, but a living principle, of a practical nature and tendency. And it is not enough to have a speculative notion and belief of it, but we must consider it with that attention which becometh us, and do what we can to enforce its excellent doctrines and motives upon our hearts.

I have the pleasure of having the honor to inform you that  
 your letter of the 10th inst. has been received and that  
 the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for  
 their consideration. I am sorry that I cannot give you  
 a more definite answer at this time, but I trust that  
 you will be satisfied with the result. I am, Sir,  
 very respectfully,  
 Yours,  
 J. B. [Name]

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 your letter of the 10th inst. has been received and that  
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# REFLECTIONS

ON THE LATE

## LORD BOLLINGBROKE'S LETTERS.

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### PART I.

#### *On the Study and Use of History.*

THE late Lord Bolingbroke has generally obtained the reputation of being one of the finest writers in our language. This hath procured him a kind of authority in the world, which makes way for an easy and favourable reception of any thing that is published under his name. A writer possessed of such talents hath it in his power to be signally serviceable to religion, and the true interest of his country; and on the other hand, there is scarce any thing of more pernicious influence than such talents misapplied. When the public was first informed of Letters written by him on the Study and Use of History, it was natural to expect something very entertaining and improving from such an author on such a subject. And it will not be denied, that he has many good, and some very curious observations, expressed in a very genteel manner, and with great elegance and purity of style; but these are interspersed with others of a very different kind, and of a dangerous tendency.

In these Letters his Lordship has done what he could to expose the authority of the Scriptures to contempt, and at the same time has made the most disadvantageous representation of the present state of the government and constitution of his country. If we are to trust the accounts he giveth us, Christianity hath no real foundation of truth in fact to depend upon; it hath been upheld by superstition, ignorance, and imposture; and hath been visibly decaying ever since the revival of learning and knowledge. And our civil constitution, instead of being

rendered better at the late revolution, hath been ever since growing worse; and our liberties are in more real danger than they were in before. The natural tendency of such representations is to inspire a thorough contempt and disregard of the religion into which we were baptized, and to procure endless jealousies and discontents, if not open insurrections, against the government under which we live. No man therefore, who hath a just zeal for either of these, can see without concern such an insolent attempt against both. And in this case, the quality, the ability, the reputation of the writer, as it maketh the attempt more dangerous, rendereth it more necessary to guard against it. If an inferior writer had said all that his Lordship hath advanced, it would have deserved very little notice. But there are too many that are ready almost implicitly to swallow down any thing that cometh to them recommended by a great name; especially if it be advanced with a very peremptory and decisive air. And if an author's account of himself must be taken, there perhaps scarce ever was a writer whose judgment ought to have greater weight, or who better deserves that an almost implicit regard should be had to his dictates, than the author of these Letters.

He enters upon his first Letter with declaring, that the rules he is going to recommend as necessary to be observed in the study of history, were—“very different from those which writers on the same subject have recommended, and which are commonly practised.”—But he assured his reader (and I believe him) that—“this never gave him any distrust of them.”—And therefore he proposeth to tell his sentiments—“without any regard to the opinion and practice even of the learned world\*.”—He declareth it as his opinion, that—“A creditable kind of ignorance is the whole benefit which the generality of men, even of the most learned, reap from the study of history, which yet appeareth to him of all other the most proper to train us up to private and public virtue †.”—Surely then the world must be mightily obliged to an author, who comes to give them instructions and directions in a matter of such great importance, which the generality of men, even of the most learned, were unacquainted with before.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol 1. p. 1, 2.

† Ibid. p. 15.

In his Letter on the *True Use of Retirement and Study*, he finely representeth, what——“ a desirable thing it must be to every thinking man, to have the opportunity indulged to so few, of living some years at least to ourselves, in a state of freedom, under the law of reason, instead of passing our whole time under those of authority and custom.”——And asks——“ Is it not worth our while to contemplate ourselves and others, and all the things of this world, once before we leave them, through the medium of pure and undefiled reason \*?”——He observes that “ they who can abstract themselves from the prejudices, and habits, and pleasures, and business of the world, which, ” he says, “ is what many are, though all are not, capable of doing, may elevate their souls in retreat to a higher station, and may take from thence such a view of the world as the second Scipio took, in his dream, from the seats of the blessed.”——That this will enable them to——“ distinguish every degree of probability, from the lowest to the highest, and mark the difference between this and certainty, and to establish peace of mind, where alone it can rest securely, on resignation †.” In what follows he seems to apply this to his own case. He represents himself as in a state of retirement from the world, abstracted from its pleasures, and disengaged from the habits of business: though at the same time he declareth his resolution, *in his retreat*, to contribute as much as he can to *defend and preserve the British constitutions of government*; for which he expected his reward from God alone, to whom he *paid this service ‡*. He goes on to observe in the same Letter, that——“ he who has not cultivated his reason young, will be utterly unable to improve it old.”——And that——“ not only a love of study, and a desire of knowledge, must have grown up with us, but such an industrious application likewise, as requires the whole vigour of the mind to be exerted in the pursuit of truth, through long trains of discourse, and all those dark recesses, wherein man, not God, has hid it.”——And then he declares, that *this love*, and *this desire*, he has *felt all his life*, and is *not quite a stranger to this industry and application §*.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. ii. p. 197.

† Ibid. p. 199.

‡ Ibid. 201, 202.

§ Ibid. p. 205, 206.

His *Reflections upon Exile* tend also to give one an high idea of the author. Speaking of the necessity of standing watchful as centinels, to discover the secret wiles and open attacks of that capricious goddess, Fortune, before they can reach us, he adds, "I learned this important lesson long ago, and never trusted to Fortune, even while she seemed to be at peace with me. The riches, the honours, the reputation, and all the advantages which her treacherous indulgence poured upon me, I placed so, that she might snatch them away without giving me any disturbance. I kept a great interval between me and them. She took them, but she could not tear them from me\*." He frequently expresseth himself in those Reflections, as one superior to fortune and exile, and that had attained to a perfect philosophic calmness and tranquillity, whose mind was not to be discomposed by any outward evils; as one who was *far from the hurry of the world, and almost an unconcerned spectator of what passes in it*, and who, *having paid in a public life what he owed to the present age*, was resolved to *pay in a private life what he owes to posterity*; and and who was determined to *write, as well as live without passion*†. And who would not be inclined to pay a vast regard to the sentiments of a great genius, that had always from his youth loved study, and desired knowledge, and to this added industry and application: who had an opportunity for retirement from the world, and knew how to improve it; and who had made use of his solitude to contemplate himself and others, and all the things of this world, through the medium of pure and undefiled reason!

But there are several things that tend to take off from that dependence one might otherwise be apt to have upon an author possessed of so many advantages.

It can scarce be denied, that there is a great appearance of vanity in these Letters. A certain air of sufficiency breathes through the whole. He every-where pronounceth in a dogmatical and decisive way, and with a kind of dictatorial authority; and seemeth to regard himself as placed in a distinguished sphere, from whence he looketh down with superiority and contempt upon those that have hitherto passed for learned and knowing.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. ii. p. 234.

† Ibid. p. 282.



To this it may be added, what can scarce escape the notice of the commonest reader, a visible affectation of advancing something new, and which had not been thought of, or insisted upon, before. How often doth the polite author of these Letters, when giving his directions, and making his observations upon the study and use of history, put his noble correspondent in mind, that they were quite different from any thing that had been observed by those learned men who had treated of this subject before him! In this I think him mistaken. But at present I only mention it as a proof of the desire he was possessed with of appearing to think in a way different from, and superior to the rest of mankind, even of the learned world. Such a desire and affectation of novelty, and of thinking out of the common way, may lead persons of great parts astray in their inquiries after truth, and hath often done so.

But there are other passions and affections, that have a still less friendly influence, and which are apt to give a wrong bias to the mind. Such is that keenness and bitterness of spirit, which disposeth a man to find fault, and to put the most unfavourable constructions upon persons and things. I will not charge the late Lord Bolingbroke with having been really under the influence of such a temper; but there are several things in his Letters which have that appearance. In his *Reflections upon Exile*, he layeth it down as a rule, *to live and write without passion*: he talks as if he had got above all outward evils, and had attained to a perfect tranquillity. And yet in these very Reflections, there are several passages that discover a very strong resentment, and great bitterness of spirit. He there intimates, that——“his country had reaped the benefit of his services, and he suffered for them——That the persons in opposition to whom he served, and even saved the public, conspired and accomplished his private ruin——That these were his accusers, and the giddy ungrateful crowd his judges——That art, joined to malice, endeavoured to make his best actions pass for crimes, and to stain his character——That for this purpose the sacred voice of the senate was made to pronounce a lie; and those records, which ought to be the eternal monuments of truth, became the vouchers of imposture and calumny\*.” This is very strongly expressed. I

\* Bolingbroke's Works. vol. ii. p. 270, 271.

shall not at present inquire into the truth and justness of those Reflections. I shall only observe, that this is not the language of a man, who *lives and writes without passion*, or who is so *indifferent to common censure or approbation*, as he professeth himself to be \*. Nor is it to reconcile this with that philosophic calmness, that moderation, and tranquillity of mind, which he sometimes makes so great a shew of. There are several parts of his Letters, as I may have occasion more distinctly to observe afterwards, in which he expresseth himself with all the rage and virulence of a passionate party-writer.

It were not so much to be wondered at, if he discovered a resentment against those whom he might apprehend to be the authors of his sufferings; but there are several things that look as if he were out of humour with mankind. Of the critics, chronologers, antiquaries, and of the learned in general, even those of them that have been in the highest reputation, he frequently expresseth the utmost contempt. He inveighs severely against the divines, ancient and modern; and represents even those of them who, he says, may be called so without a sneer, as not sagacious or not honest enough, to make an impartial examination. The gentlemen of the law fall under his heavy-censure; and he will scarcely allow, that, since Lord Bacon, and the Earl of Clarendon, there have been any of them that have attained to any eminent degree of learning and knowledge; and he taketh upon him to foretel, that, except there should come some better age, there will not be any such among them for the future. The members of parliament he represents as regarding the business of parliament only as a trade; that few know, and scarce any respect, the British constitution; and that the very idea of wit, and all that can be called taste, has been lost among the great. Such general censures might be expected in a writer that professedly sets himself to display his talents in satire and ridicule; but do not look so well in one that appeareth in a superior character, and who taketh upon him to instruct and guide, to form men's taste, and direct their conduct, and enable them to pass right judgments on persons and things. Such a temper is not a very good disposition for an impartial inquiry; it is apt to represent persons and things in a disadvantageous light, and to give a ma-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 6.

Signant tincture to the Reflections: nor is it very surprising to see a writer of this turn pass harsh and severe censures, not only on the administration, but on the religion of his country.

All the use I would make of these observations is, to keep us from suffering ourselves to be too strongly biassed in favour of a writer so distinguished by his abilities, and who putteth on such specious appearances.

I shall now proceed to a more distinct examination of Lord Bolingbroke's Letters:

In them we may find, as hath been already hinted, many good and fine observations relating to the study and use of history, delivered with great clearness of expression, and propriety of sentiment. His directions are full of good sense; and many of them very aptly illustrated by proper and well-chosen instances. In general, it must be allowed, that his observations concerning the usefulness of history, the advantages he ascribes to it, and the ends to be proposed in it, are, for the most part, just; but there is not much in them that can be regarded as perfectly new: I do not say this by way of disparagement, to detract from the merit of his Reflections: perhaps on such a subject it is scarce possible to make any observation which hath not been made by some one or other before. It is a sufficient commendation of an author, if he hath placed his reflections and observations in an agreeable and advantageous light, if he hath disposed them in a beautiful order, and illustrated his rules by proper exemplifications. But his Lordship seems not to be contented with the praise of having done this: He appears to be extremely desirous to have it thought, that his observations are not only just, but new, and such as other writers have not made before him. He declareth, in a passage cited before from his first Letter, that the rules he gives—"are very different from those which writers on the same subject have recommended; and which are commonly practised\*:"—And that—"he will have no regard to the methods prescribed by others, or to the opinion and practice even of the learned world †."—And he speaks to the same purpose in his third Letter ‡. And after having declared, that the study of history will prepare us for action and observation, and that—"history is conversant about the past; and

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 1.    † Ibid. p. 2.    ‡ Ibid. p. 69.

“ by knowing the things that have been, we become better able to judge of the things that are ;” —he adds, —“ This use, my Lord, which I make the proper and principal use of the study of history, is not insisted on by those who have written concerning the method to be followed in this study ; and since we propose different ends, we must of course take different ways\*.” He immediately subjoins, “ Few of their treatises have fallen into my hands.” And is it not a little strange that he should so positively pronounce, that others have not, in their treatises concerning the method to be followed in the study of history, insisted on that which he makes the proper and principal use of it, when, at the same time, he acknowledgeth, that few of their treatises had fallen into his hands? One would think, by his way of representing it, that none before this noble writer had mentioned it, as the proper use and end of history, to promote our improvement in virtue, to make us better men and better citizens, to teach us by example, and to prepare us for action and observation, that by knowing the things that have been, we may become better able to judge of the things that are. And yet, I am apt to think, that few have set themselves to shew the use that is to be made of history, the ends to be proposed in it, and the advantages arising from it, but have in effect said the same thing. And it were no hard matter, if it were necessary, to fill up several pages with quotations to this purpose, from authors ancient and modern.

History is, no doubt, capable of being improved to excellent purposes ; and yet the author of these Letters seems sometimes to have carried it too far, as if history (not sacred history—for this, with the examples it affordeth, he discards as of little or no use), were the best, the only school of virtue, the most universal and necessary means of instruction, alone sufficient to make us good men and good citizens, and to furnish us with all the knowledge that is proper for our direction in practice. He observes, —that “ history is philosophy, teaching us by example, how to conduct ourselves in all the stations of private and public life.” —And that —“ it is of all other the most proper to train us up to public and private virtue †.” —He declares, that —“ every one that is

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 67, 68. † Ibid. p. 15. 57.

“able to read, and to reflect upon what he reads, is able to  
 “make that use of history which he recommends: and every  
 “one who makes it, will find in his degree the benefit that a-  
 “rises from an early acquaintance with mankind, contracted  
 “in this method\*.”—He adds, that—“we are only pas-  
 “sengers or sojourners in this world; but we are absolute  
 “strangers at the first steps we take in it. Our guides are of-  
 “ten ignorant, often unfaithful. But by this map of the  
 “country which history spreads before us, we may learn, if  
 “we please, to guide ourselves.”—So that history is the  
 guide he proposeth to all men to conduct them in their jour-  
 ney through this world, and by which every man is capable of  
 guiding himself in all the situations and circumstances of pub-  
 lic and private life.

History is, no doubt, very useful in its proper place; but  
 there are other means of instruction to be joined with it, in or-  
 der to its answering the end. It is not to serve instead of  
 every thing, and to supersede all other methods of instruction.  
 We stand in need of being well seasoned and principled with  
 a just sense of the moral differences of things, and with the  
 excellent rules of religion, and the important considerations it  
 setteth before us, that we may form just sentiments of things,  
 and may make a right use of history for our improvement in  
 virtue, and may know properly how to apply the examples it  
 furnisheth. Accordingly our author himself insisteth upon it,  
 that we must apply ourselves to history—“in a philosophi-  
 “cal spirit and manner †.”—He observeth, that—“par-  
 “ticular examples in history may be of use sometimes in par-  
 “ticular cases, but that the application of them is dangerous.”  
 —He would have a man therefore study history as he would  
 study philosophy. And in the account he gives in his third  
 Letter of what is necessary in order to make a right use of  
 history, he carrieth it so far, and really maketh the work so  
 difficult, as to be above what can be expected, from the gene-  
 rality of mankind; and concludeth with saying, that—“by  
 “such methods as these a man of parts may improve the study  
 “of history to its proper and principal use ‡.”—Where he  
 seemeth to represent the making a right use of history, as a

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 171, 172.

† Ibid. p. 58.

‡ Ibid. p. 65, 66.

very difficult thing, which none but men of parts and philosophic spirits are capable of, and which requireth the exactest judgment, and nicest discernment. as well as a very close application. In this passage, the use and advantage of history seems to be confined within too narrow bounds, as in some of the former it had been extended too far.

As to the method to be followed in the study of history, tho' the author of these Letters speaks with great disregard, and even contempt, of those that have written on this subject before him, yet the only one he particularly mentions is Bodin.—He observeth, that “in his method we are to take first a general view of universal history and chronology in short abstracts, and then to study all particular histories and systems.”—Upon which his Lordship remarketh, that—“This would take up our whole lives, and leave us no time for action, or would make us unfit for it\*.”—And afterwards he observes, that—“the man who reads without discernment and choice, and, like Bodin's pupil, resolves to read all, will not have time, nor capacity neither, to do any thing else †.”—But I cannot think it was Bodin's intention, to lay it as an injunction upon his pupil, to read without choice, and discernment all the particular histories, that have ever been published. But the meaning is, that the best and most regular way of reading and studying history is, first to take a brief general view and survey of universal history, and chronology, and then to proceed to the histories of particular countries, nations, and ages. And this appeareth to be a very reasonable and natural method. And if Bodin proposes the taking a large scope and compass in reading history, his Lordship, tho' he seems here to blame him for it, sometimes expresseth himself in a manner that looks no less extensive: for he recommendeth the reading history of all kinds, of civilized and uncivilized, of ancient and modern nations, as necessary to give us a right knowledge of the human species, and of ourselves. He observes in his fifth Letter, that “man is the subject of every history, and to know him well, we must see him and consider him as history alone can present him to us, in every age, in every country, in every state, in life, and in death. History therefore of all kinds, of civilized and uncivilized, of

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 69.

† Ibid. p. 142, 143.

“ ancient and modern nations, in short, all history that descends  
 “ to a sufficient detail of human actions and characters, is useful  
 “ to bring us acquainted with our species, nay, with ourselves\*.”  
 And particularly with respect to ancient history, he mentioneth  
 it in his second Letter as a great advantage, that “ in ancient his-  
 “ tory, the beginning, the progression, and the end, appear, not  
 “ of particular reigns, much less of particular enterprises, or  
 “ systems of policy alone, but of governments, of nations, of  
 “ empires, and of all the various systems that have succeeded  
 “ one another in the course of their duration †.” And yet he  
 afterwards seems to confine our attention to modern history. —  
 He will allow us indeed to *read* the histories of former ages and  
 nations, because it would be shameful to be entirely ignorant of  
 them ; but he would not have us *study* any histories, but those  
 of the two last centuries. That these deserve a particular at-  
 tention, will easily be acknowledged, for several reasons, and,  
 among others, for that which he assigns ; the great change that  
 has been brought about in the civil and ecclesiastical polity of  
 these parts of the world since the latter end of the fifteenth  
 century ; of which he gives an elegant representation in his  
 sixth Letter. But certainly there are many things in the his-  
 tories of the preceding ages, both in other countries, and in our  
 own, that well deserve to be not only read, but to be thorough-  
 ly considered by us ; and which are capable of furnishing very  
 useful reflections, and answering those excellent ends, for which,  
 in the former part of these Letters, he had recommended the  
 study of history. This might be easily shewn, if it be ad-  
 mitted of any doubt, both with regard to civil history and ec-  
 clesiastical.

But, not to insist longer upon this, and some other observa-  
 tions that might be made on particular passages in these Letters,  
 I shall proceed to what is the principal intention of these Re-  
 marks, *viz.* to consider those things in them, of which a bad  
 use may be made, or which appear to be of a pernicious tendency.

And here I shall first consider the reflections he has cast up-  
 on literature ; and then shall proceed to those passages in his  
 Letters, which are designed to expose the holy Scriptures,  
 and the Christian religion.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 170.

† *Ibid.* p. 42.

It may seem a little surprising, that so polite a writer, and one who, as he lets us know, always from his youth loved study and application, should yet, in several parts of these Letters, express himself in a manner that seems calculated to throw a contempt upon learning, and to put men off from applying themselves to the pursuit of it. Every friend of learning should, I think, acknowledge, that there is a regard due to those that in their several ways have contributed to promote it. But this ingenious writer takes every occasion to place them in a ridiculous or contemptible light. In his first Letter, he gives a very disadvantageous idea of those who, as he expresseth it, "make fair copies of foul manuscripts, give the signification of hard words, and take a great deal of other grammatical pains." He owns indeed, that *they enable others to study with greater ease, and to purposes more useful*; but he assures us, that *they neither grow wiser nor better by study themselves*. He adds, that "the obligation to these men would be great indeed, if they were in general able to do any thing better, and submitted to this drudgery for the use of the public, as some of them, it must be owned with gratitude, have done; but not later, I think, than about the time of the resurrection of letters." And he at length condescendeth to declare, that "they deserve encouragement, whilst they continue to compile, and neither affect wit, not presume to reason\*." This is a very hard censure pronounced upon all those, without distinction, that since the time of the resurrection of letters, *i. e.* for these two centuries past, have compiled dictionaries, or glossaries, or have revised and published ancient manuscripts, or correct editions of books; or have been employed in explaining hard words, and in clearing obscure passages in ancient authors, or making critical observations upon them, and in other things of that kind. Not content to represent them as absolutely void of genius, and having no pretensions to wit or reason, and as neither wiser nor better for their studies themselves, he will not allow, that any of them had the public good in view, in the drudgery they submitted to. But I scarce know a greater sign of a malignity of temper, than a disposition to give the worst turn to every thing, and to judge harshly of the in-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, p. 5, 6.



ward intentions of men's hearts, when there is nothing in their actions to support judgment. It were easy to name persons, that, within these two last centuries, have employed themselves in the way he mentions, who were unquestionably men of great judgment and genius, as well as industry: or, at least, a small share of good-nature and candour would incline one to allow them the praise of having had the public utility in view, in works, which, by his own acknowledgment, have greatly served the interests of learning, and contributed to the spreading of it.

But how meanly soever he thinks of the grammarians, critics, compilers of dictionaries, and revisers and publishers of manuscripts, he maketh a still more disadvantageous representation of antiquaries and chronologers. Speaking of persons that have hitherto been regarded as of great figure and eminence in the republic of letters, he avoweth "a thorough contempt for the whole business of their learned lives; for all the researches into antiquity, for all the systems of chronology and history, that we owe to the immense labours of a Scaliger, a Bochart, a Petavius, an Usher, and even a Marsham\*." It seems very odd, for one that speaks so highly of the advantage of history, to express such a contempt for the labours of chronologers, which certainly are of great use for digesting history into its proper periods, in order to a regular and orderly conception and understanding of it. In a passage cited above, he mentioneth it among the advantages of history, especially ancient history, that we there see events as they followed one another; "that there the beginning, the progression, and the end, appear, not of particular reigns, much less of particular enterprizes, or systems of policy alone, but of governments, of nations, of empires, and of all the various systems that have succeeded one another in the course of their duration." This seems to shew the advantage, and even necessity, of chronology; and, with regard to this, the labours of a Scaliger, a Petavius, and Usher, are highly useful and commendable. To endeavour to digest the history of mankind, and of the principal events that have happened in the world, in a regular series, to mark the

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 6.

rise and fall of cities and empires, to compare and connect the histories of different countries and nations, sacred history and profane; and, in order to this, to lay together the scattered hints and fragments of different ages, is, notwithstanding his degrading representation of it, a noble employment, an employment that even a Sir Isaac Newton judged not to be unworthy of his great genius. One would be apt to think, that every impartial person, who hath a just value for learning, must have a great honour for those that have taken pains to set these things in a proper light: and where absolute certainty cannot be attained to, an happy conjecture may be both pleasing and useful.

In his third letter, he findeth great fault with those that make laborious inquiries into the first originals of nations.— And in his fifth letter, he warneth the Noble Lord to whom he writes, to *throw none of his time away*, as he saith he himself had done, in *groping in the dark in his searches into antiquity*\*. He speaks with contempt of what he calls *dry registers of useless anecdotes*; and declares, that “ten millions of such anecdotes, though they were true; and complete authentic volumes of Egyptian or Chaldean, of Greek or Latin, of Gallic or British, of French or Saxon records; would be of no value in his sense, because of no use towards our improvement in wisdom and virtue; if they contained nothing more than dynasties and genealogies, and a bare mention of remarkable events in the order of time, like journals, chronological tables, or dry and meagre annals †.”—But whatever opinion I may have of his Lordship’s taste, I cannot help thinking, that in this he is too rigid. It seems to be a very natural and unblameable curiosity, to search as far as we can into the recesses of antiquity, and the originals of nations; and there is a pleasure even in those glimmerings of light that break through the obscurity, provided we do not represent those things as certainties, which are only conjectural. And I believe there are few but would be apt to wish, that there were—“authentic volumes of Egyptian or Chaldean, Greek or Latin, Gallic or British records”—even though they were only like what he calls—“dry and meagre

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. i. p. 149.

† Ibid. p. 150.

“annals,”——or, as he elsewhere speaks,——“the gazettes of antiquity;”——and contained dynasties and genealogies, with a mention of remarkable events that happened to those nations in the order of time, like journals or chronological tables. And if any learned man could discover such ancient authentic records or monuments, few, I should think, would blame him, or think him idly employed in publishing them to the world.

It looks a little odd, that there is no kind of men for whom, throughout these letters, he sheweth a less regard than for those that are generally accounted men of learning. Speaking of those who “affect the reputation of great scholars, at the expence of groping all their lives in the dark mazes of antiquity,” he says, that “all these mistake the true design of study, and the true use of history.” Great as the advantages are that he ascribeth to history, and which he thinks every man is capable of that is able to read, and to reflect upon what he reads, yet——“a creditable kind of ignorance is, in his opinion, the whole benefit which the generality, even of the most learned, reap from it.”——And he intimates, that the only effect of their reading and studying history is, to become pedants, *i. e.* as he explaineth it, “worse than ignorant, always incapable, sometimes meddling and presuming\*.”——And elsewhere he representeth the credulous learned as only employed——“in wrangling about ancient traditions, and ringing different changes on the same set of bells †.”

To all which may be added, what he saith, in his letter on the true use of retirement and study, concerning——“the scholar and philosopher, who, far from owning that he throws away his time, reproves others for doing it; that solemn mortal who abstains from the pleasures, and declines the business of the world, that he may dedicate his whole time to the search of truth, and the improvement of knowledge.”——He supposes him to have read “till he is become a great critic in Latin and Greek, in the oriental tongues, in history and chronology; and not only so, but to have spent years in studying philosophers, commentators, and rabbies, and whole legions of modern doctors, and to be extremely well

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 14, 15, 21.

† Ibid. p. 169.

“versed in all that has been written concerning the nature  
 “of God, and of the soul of man, about matter and form,  
 “body and spirit, &c.\*”——And yet he pronounceth, that  
 notwithstanding all his learning, he is in a state of ignorance,  
 for want of having——“examined the first principles, and the  
 “fundamental facts on which these questions depend, with an  
 “absolute indifference of judgment, and scrupulous exact-  
 “ness†.” This he supposeth to be the case of many a great  
 “scholar, many a profound philosopher, many a dogmatical  
 “casuist;” yea, and as appeareth from other passages in his  
 letters, of every learned man, of every philosopher and divine  
 whatsoever, that believeth Christianity. On the other hand, he  
 declareth concerning——“the man who hath passed his life in  
 “the pleasures or business of the world,”——that whenever  
 he sets about the work of examining principles, and judging  
 for himself——“concerning those things that are of greatest  
 “importance to us here, and may be so hereafter, he will soon  
 “have the advantage over the learned philosopher. For he  
 “will soon have secured what is necessary to his happiness,  
 “and may sit down in the peaceful enjoyment of that know-  
 “ledge; or proceed with greater advantage and satisfac-  
 “tion to the acquisition of new knowledge; whilst the other  
 “continues his search after things that are in their nature,  
 “to say the best of them, hypothetical, precarious, and super-  
 “fluous‡.”

The natural tendency of these, and other reflections of a like  
 kind, which occur in these letters, seems to be, to pour contempt  
 upon what have been hitherto esteemed valuable branches of lite-  
 rature. Researches into antiquity, chronological studies, criti-  
 cism and philosophy, disquisitions concerning the nature of  
 God, the human soul, and other philosophical and theological  
 subjects, all these are represented as of little or no use; and only  
 a more specious kind of idleness. And if this be the case, I  
 think it is wrong to complain of the Goths, Vandals, Saracens,  
 and other barbarous nations, that burnt whole libraries, and  
 destroyed the monuments of learning. They rid the world of  
 a great deal of useless lumber, which tempted men to mis-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. ii. p. 211, 212.

† Ibid. p. 213, 214.

‡ Ibid. p. 216, 217.

spend their time and pains ; and it would have been an advantage to mankind, if more of them had been destroyed. Instead of being thankful to those learned persons that have taken such pains to recover and publish ancient monuments, we are only to regard them as industrious triflers, to whose labours the world is very little obliged. Nor can I see, upon such a view of things, what use or need there is of seminaries of learning. But, in good earnest, can this be regarded as a proper way to mend our taste, and help forward our improvement ? Such a way of thinking, if it generally obtained, would it is to be feared, instead of producing an extraordinary refinement of taste, tend rather to sink us into ignorance and barbarism, and bring us back to the darkness of the most illiterate ages.

Taken in this view, I cannot think that these letters have a favourable aspect on the interests of literature. Methinks there appeareth to be no great necessity at present of warning persons not to spend their lives in laborious pursuits of learning. The prevailing turn of the age doth not seem to lie this way. Many of our gentlemen will no doubt be very well pleased to be assured, that though they pass their lives in the business or pleasures of the world, yet if they at length set themselves to examine first principles, and consult the oracle of their own reason, without any regard to the opinion of others, or troubling themselves to read the writings of philosophers or divines, they are in a more likely way of discovering truth, and making a progress in useful knowledge, than any of those "solemn mortals, who abstain from the pleasures, and decline the business of the world, that they may "dedicate their whole time to the search of truth, and the improvement of knowledge." This is certainly a very flattering scheme, and seems to open a very short and easy way for attaining to wisdom. When they find a man of his Lordship's fine and elegant taste, and great talents, and who by his own account hath spent so much time and pains in the learned inquiries, pronouncing them absolutely vain and useless, they will be very apt to take his word for it, and not give themselves the trouble of laborious study ; the result of which might be only filling their heads with what he calleth *learned lumber*, and exposing them to the ridiculous character of *pedants*, *i. e.* as

he describeth them, "men worse than ignorant, always incapable, sometime smeddling and presuming." Instead of such learned drudgery, the more easy and delightful task of studying modern history may be sufficient to furnish them with all the knowledge they want, and answer every end of useful improvement.

But surely such a manner of representing things is not altogether just, nor is this the most effectual way of promoting real improvement in wisdom and virtue. Great is the extent, and wide the field of science. Many noble subjects there are of inquiry, which well deserye our attention. The desire of knowledge is the strongest in the noblest minds; but comparatively small is the progress that a man is capable of making by his own unassisted ability, within the short compass of this present life; and therefore, be his abilities ever so great, he will need the assistance of others, and ought to be very thankful for it. Many excellent persons in different ages have employed their pens this way; and a mighty advantage that man hath, who has the opportunity, and knows how to improve it, of profiting by their labours. He may, by reading, vastly increase his stock of knowledge, may meet with many valuable hints, which else would not have occurred to him, and may find important subjects set in a clearer light, than otherwise he would have seen them. The Author of our beings, who hath implanted in us the desire of knowledge, and fitted us for communicating our sentiments, undoubtedly designed, that, in acquiring knowledge, as well as in other things, we should be helpful to one another, and not depend merely upon ourselves. And this is the great advantage of language, and of letters. We must indeed make use of our own reason, but we ought also to take in all the helps and advantages we can get: and he that is careful to improve those helps which are afforded him, and who, without submitting implicitly to the judgments and opinions of others, endeavours to make the best use he can of their labours and studies, as well as of his own thoughts, is in a far more likely way of improving his knowledge, and will better approve himself to God, and to all wise men, than he that, from a vain confidence in his own judgment, despiseth and rejecteth those helps; and, under pretence of consulting the oracle of reason in his own breast, (for, as

his Lordship expresseth it, "every man's reason is every man's oracle,") will not give himself the trouble to read and to examine what others have said and thought before him. Such an high conceit of a man's own capacity and judgment, such an arrogant self-sufficiency, and a contempt of the labours and judgments of others, is not a very proper disposition for finding out truth. A man of this character was Epicurus, who boasted that his knowledge was all of his own acquiring, and scorned to seem to be beholden to any other for his notions.

Having considered those parts of the late Lord Bolingbroke's Letters that seem not very favourable to the interests of literature, I shall now proceed to what is the principal design of these Remarks, to examine the reflections he has cast upon the sacred monuments of our religion. He first attacks the history of the Bible, especially as contained in the books of the Old Testament; and then proceeds to a more direct attempt upon Christianity. And this appears not to be a thing he treats of merely by-the-by, but to be a point he has formally in view, and for which he professes a kind of zeal. I shall therefore consider distinctly what he hath offered.

In his third Letter on the study of history, he setteth himself to consider the state of ancient history, both sacred and profane: and begins with declaring his resolution—"to speak plainly and particularly in favour of common sense, against an absurdity which is almost sanctified\*." After having made some observations on the state of ancient profane history, and shewn, that it is full of fables, and altogether uncertain, he next comes to apply these observations to ancient sacred history †. What he seems at first to propose, is, to shew that it is "insufficient to give us light into the original of ancient nations, and the history of those ages we commonly call the first ages." But it is evident, that, under pretence of shewing this, his intention is, to represent the whole history of the Bible as absolutely uncertain, and not at all to be depended upon for a just account of facts. He not only denieth, that the writers of the historical parts of the Old Testament, were divinely inspired, but he will not allow them the credit that is due to any common honest historians. He represents those histories as "delivered to us on the faith of a supersti-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 70.

† Ibid. p. 88, et seq.

“tious people, among whom the custom and art of lying prevailed remarkably\*.” And observes, that “the Jewish history never obtained any credit in the world, till Christianity was established †.” He sometimes expresseth himself, as if he were willing to allow the divine inspiration of the doctrinal and prophetic parts of the Bible, and were only for rejecting the historical. And this he pretends to be the best way to defend the authority of the Scriptures ‡. But it is evident that this is only a sneer. For he was, no doubt, sensible, that the sacred history is so interwoven with the prophecies and laws, that if the former is to be regarded as lying fiction, and not at all to be depended upon, the divine authority of the other cannot be supported. And what he afterwards repeatedly affirmeth of Christianity, that the credit of its divine institution dependeth upon facts, holdeth equally concerning the Old Testament œconomy.

After having done what he can, in his third Letter, to shew the uncertainty of ancient sacred, as well as profane history, he begins his fourth with observing, that as “we are apt naturally to apply to ourselves what has happened to other men; and as examples take their force from hence, so what we do not believe to have happened, we shall not thus apply; and, for want of the same application, the examples will not have the same effect:” And then he adds, “ancient history, such ancient history as I have described,” [in which ancient sacred history is manifestly comprehended] “is quite unfit in this respect to answer the ends that every reasonable man should promise to himself in his study; because such ancient history will never gain sufficient credit with any reasonable man §.” And afterwards, speaking of ancient fabulous narrations, he declares, that “such narrations cannot make the slightest momentary impressions on a mind fraught with knowledge and void of superstition. Imposed by authority, and assisted by artifice, the delusion hardly prevails over common sense; blind ignorance almost sees, and rash superstition hesitates: nothing less than enthusiasm and phrensy can give credit to such histories, or apply such examples.” He thinks, that what he

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 87.

† Ibid. p. 91.

‡ Ibid. p. 93, 98, 99.

§ Ibid. p. 113.



has said will "not be much controverted by any man that has examined our ancient traditions without prepossession:" And that all the difference between them, and Amadis of Gaul, is this, that "in Amadis of Gaul we have a thread of absurdities that lay no claim to belief; but ancient traditions are an heap of fables, under which some particular truths are inscrutable, and therefore useles to mankind, may lie concealed, which have a just pretence to nothing more," [*i. e.* to no more credit than Amadis of Gaul] "and yet impose themselves upon us, and become, under the venerable name of ancient history, the foundation of modern fables\*." He doth not directly apply this to the Scriptures: but no one can doubt that this was his intention. It is too evident, that these are designed to be included in what he calleth "our ancient traditions;" (a word which he had applied several times before to the sacred records;) and which he representeth as "imposed by authority, and assisted by artifice." And I think it scarce possible to express a greater contempt of any writing, than he here doth of the history of the Bible, and the examples it affords.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 120, 121.

# REFLECTIONS

ON THE LAIE

## LORD BOLINGBROKE'S LETTERS

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### PART II.

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#### SECTION I.

*The History and Scriptures of the Old Testament vindicated  
against his Lordship's Exceptions.*

HAVING given this general view of the author's design, I shall now proceed to a more distinct and particular examination of the principal things he hath offered to invalidate the authority of the Old Testament history. What he saith of Christianity shall be considered afterwards.

I need not take much notice of what he hath urged to shew, that the writers of the Sacred Books did not intend an universal history, or system of chronology\*. I know nobody that supposes they did; so that he might have spared that part of his pains. But notwithstanding the Bible was not designed for an universal history, or to exhibit a complete system of chronology, though it may safely be affirmed, that no one book in the world gives so great helps this way, it is sufficient if it gives us a true history as far as it goes, and which may be safely depended upon. This is what our author will not allow. It is manifest, that he placeth it in the same rank with the most fabulous accounts of ancient times. This, then, is the point we are to consider. Let us therefore examine what proofs or arguments he hath brought against the truth and credit of the Sacred History.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 202, et. seq.

Some of the things offered by him to this purpose have scarce so much as the appearance of argument. Of this kind is what he saith concerning the use that has been made by Jewish Rabbies, and Christian fathers, and Mahometan doctors, of the short and imperfect accounts given by Moses of the times from the creation to the deluge. Let us grant that the fables they have feigned concerning Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Enoch, Noah, and his sons, &c. are such as "Bonzes or Tapolains would almost blush to relate;" I do not see how this can be reasonably turned to the disadvantage of the books of Moses, or hurt the credit of them; since his Lordship owns, that these fables "are profane extensions of this part of the Mosaic history;" and that history is certainly no-way answerable for the additions which have been made to it. It would have been easy for Moses, if he had been a fabulous writer, to have filled up this part of his history with marvelous relations, and to have embellished it with such fictions; concerning our first parents, and the most ancient patriarchs; as our author here referreth to: And his not having done so is a strong presumption in his favour; that he did not give way to fancy or invention, but wrote down the facts as they came to him, with an unaffected simplicity. His accounts are short, because he kept close to truth, and took care to record no more of those times than he had good information of; or than was necessary to the design he had in view; which seems principally to have been to give a brief account of the creation; the formation of the first human pair, the placing them in Paradise, the fall, and the flood, which were the most remarkable events of that period; and to continue the line from Adam by Seth to Noah, as afterwards he does from him to Abraham.

What his Lordship observes concerning the blunders of the Jewish chronologers \*, is not much more to his purpose, except he could prove, that those blunders are chargeable upon the Scriptures; which is so far from being true, that if accurately examined, arguments may be brought from those very Scriptures to confute the blunders he mentions:

As to the differences he takes notice of †, between the Scripture-accounts of the Assyrian empire, and those given by pro-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 104.

† Ibid. p. 114, 115;

fane authors, *i. e.* by Ctesias, and them that copy from him, very able chronologers have endeavoured to shew, that those accounts may be reconciled. But if not, it would only follow, that the Scripture history differeth from Ctesias, who, in his Lordship's own judgment, and by the acknowledgment of the most judicious among the Greeks themselves, was a very fabulous writer \*; and how this can be fairly thought to derogate from the credit and authority of the sacred history, I cannot see.

But to come to those things on which he seems to lay a greater stress. The sum of what he hath offered to destroy the truth and credit of the sacred writings amounteth to this: "That the Jews, upon whose faith they are delivered to us, were a people unknown to the Greeks, till the time of Alexander the great: That they had been slaves to the Egyptians, Assyrians, Medes, and Persians, as these several empires prevailed: That a great part of them had been carried captive and lost in the east; and the remainder were carried captive to Babylon, where they forgot their country, and even their language:" And he intimates, that there also they lost their ancient sacred books: That they were a superstitious people, among whom the custom and art of pious lying prevailed remarkably: That the original of the Scriptures was compiled in their own country, and, as it were, out of the sight of the rest of the world: That the Jewish history never obtained any credit till Christianity was established; but though both Jews and Christians hold the same books in great veneration, yet each condemns the other for not understanding, or for abusing them: That the accidents which have happened to alter the text of the Bible shew, that it could not have been originally given by divine inspiration; and that they are come down to us broken and confused, full of additions, interpolations, and transpositions: That they are nothing more than compilations of old traditions, and abridgments of old records made in later times: and that Jews and Christians differ among themselves concerning almost every point that is necessary to establish the authority of those books." He concludes with "some observations on the curse said to be pronounced by Noah upon

\* Bolingbroke's Works, p. 76, 80.

"Canaan," which he would have pass for an absurd fiction "of the book of Genesis;" and he seemeth to have singled out this as one of the properest instances he could find for exposing the Scripture.

Let us consider these things distinctly.

It is no just prejudice against the credit of the Scripture-history, that the Jews, among whom those writings were preserved, and whose affairs are there recorded, were, as appeareth from those writings, "slaves to the Egyptians, Assyrians, Medes, and Persians, as their several empires prevailed\*." It rather furnisheth a proof of the truth and impartiality of those records, that they give an undisguised account, not only of the flourishing times of their state (for there were times in which they were flourishing, free, and independent,) but of their disgraces, defeats, captivities, and all the calamities that befel them, which, according to these accounts, were in a way of just punishment for their national iniquities, their disobedience and ingratitude. Yet under all these various revolutions, their nation was never entirely lost, nor incorporated with their conquerors. Though many of them revolted, still there was a number of them that with an unalterable zeal and constancy adhered to their ancient religion and laws, which they regarded as of a divine original: A religion remarkably distinct from that of the nations to which they were subjected, and on the account of which they were frequently exposed to hatred, persecution, and reproach.

If the Jews were unknown to the Greeks before Alexander the Great; this affordeth not the least probable presumption, that their ancient history is not to be depended upon: The Greeks, by this author's own acknowledgment, did not begin to write history till very late. The knowledge they had of other nations was very narrow and confined; and, particularly, they were in a great measure strangers to the languages, laws, customs, and history of the eastern nations. He himself observes, that after the times of Alexander the Great, and even long after the Jewish Scriptures were translated into Greek, the Jews, and their history were neglected by them, and continued to be almost as much unknown as before †. And yet certain it is, that the Jews were then a considerable people, and

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 84.

† Ibid. p. 90.

that the Greeks had many opportunities of being acquainted with them. Let us grant what he insinuates, that this was owing, not to want of curiosity in the Greeks, since they were, as he observes, "inquisitive to the highest degree, and "published as many idle traditions of other nations as of their "own \*;" but to the contempt they had for the Jews. What can be inferred from thence? Doth it follow that the Jewish Scriptures are not authentic, nor their histories to be credited, because the Greeks neglected or despised them, and did not own their authority? This is easily accounted for by any one that considers the nature of the Jewish institutions. It is not to be wondered at, that a people so excessively vain as the Greeks, and who looked upon the rest of the world as barbarians, should conceive an aversion or contempt for a nation, whose laws and religion were so different from their own, among whom all image-worship was most expressly prohibited, and no adoration was paid to inferior deities, in which the religion of the Greeks, and of which they were extremely fond, principally consisted. If the Jewish sacred books had contained strange stories of the exploits of their gods, of their genealogies, battles, and amours, or traditions that tended to support a system of idolatry, the Greeks undoubtedly would have been ready enough to transcribe these things into their writings; these fables would have been suited to their taste. But it cannot be supposed, that they should pay any regard to the accounts given of extraordinary miraculous facts, that were designed to establish and give sanction to a constitution, the manifest tendency of which was to condemn and subvert that idolatrous worship, to which they were so excessively addicted.

Among all the heathen nations, none expressed a greater enmity to the Jews than the Egyptians, who were themselves of all people the most stupidly idolatrous. One of their writers, Apion of Alexandria, is particularly mentioned by our author as having "spoken of the Jews in a manner neither much to their honour, nor to that of their histories." This seems to have recommended him to his Lordship's favour; for he speaks of him as a man "of much erudition, and as having

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 88.

“ passed for a curious, a laborious, and learned antiquary,” though he owns that he passed also “ for a vain and noisy pedant \*.” But if we may judge of him by the fragments of his work which Josephus has given us, he was, with regard to the Jews, an ignorant and malicious writer, who does not appear to have been acquainted with their histories and laws, though he pretended to write against them, and might so easily have procured information, if he had desired it. And this appears to have been the case of several others of the heathen writers that mention the Jews. They seem not to have given themselves the trouble to make any diligent inquiry into their history or laws, as delivered by themselves, but took up with idle reports and traditions to their prejudice; and yet in the accounts given of the Jews by the heathen writers, imperfect as they are, there are some valuable hints and traces to be discerned, which shew the falsehood of other things they report concerning them †.

It is therefore a little odd, that such a stress should be laid upon this, that “ the Jewish history never obtained any credit in “ the world, till Christianity was established:” *i. e.* It obtained no credit among the heathen nations; or, as he elsewhere expresseth it, “ we do not find, that the authority of these books prevailed among the pagan world ‡.” How could it be expected that it should! Since the heathens could not acknowledge it, and continue heathens; for it was absolutely subversive of the whole system of paganism. The authority of those books was believed and received among all those, by whom it could be reasonably expected that it should be believ-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 90, 91.

† There is an heathen writer, of a very different character from Apion, who gives a much more candid account of the Jewish nation: I mean the judicious Strabo, of whom our Author himself speaks with the highest esteem. He makes the cause of Moses's forsaking Egypt to be his being dissatisfied with the false notions of God, and his worship, that had obtained among the Egyptians; and supposes him to have entertained juster and nobler notions of the divinity than the Egyptians, or Lybians or Greeks. That with him went from Egypt *many that honoured the deity*, πολλοὶ τιμῶντες το θεῖον; that he persuaded many good men, and brought them into the country where Jerusalem is built; and that there they continued, *practising justice or righteousness, and being truly religious, or sincere worshippers of God* δικαιοπραγεῦντες καὶ ἑστειότες ὡς ἀληθῶς ὄντες, but that afterwards they degenerated.—See Strabo, lib. xiv.

‡ Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 87, 91.

ed and received: that is, it was acknowledged and received by that nation among whom those writings, and the memory of the laws and facts, had been constantly preserved, and who regarded them with great veneration, as of a divine original; and also by those among the heathens themselves, who, upon the credit of the Jewish religion, laws, and records, quitted the heathen idolatry: and these were all that could be reasonably expected to acknowledge the authority of the Jewish sacred books, even supposing their authority to have been ever so well founded.

But it is urged as a ground of suspicion against the Jewish Scriptures, that "they were compiled in their own country, and, as it were, out of the sight of the rest of the world." And it was certainly most proper, that the books in which their laws, and the most remarkable events relating to their nation, are recorded, should be published in their own country, the scene where the chief actions were laid. This is no diminution of their credit; but the contrary; and if they had been compiled in any other country, or by foreigners, and persons not of their own nation, it might have been said, and not without some appearance of reason, that they might be mistaken, and take up with wrong and imperfect accounts, both of laws and facts.

But what this author seems chiefly to insist upon, to shew that little credit is to be given to these writings, is, that they are "histories delivered to us on the faith of a superstitious people; among whom the custom and art of pious lying prevailed remarkably \*."

In order to form a proper judgment of this matter, let us take a brief view of the Jewish Scriptures, that we may see what likelihood there is of their having been feigned by a superstitious and lying people.

In general, it may be observed, that if we compare the sacred books of the Jews with those of any other, the most admired nations, such as Greece and Rome, we shall soon see a most striking and amazing difference. Their whole constitution was of a peculiar nature; so vastly different from that of other countries, that it well deserveth the attention and admiration of every impartial and considering observer. It was the only constitution in the world, where the acknowledgment and worship of

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 87.



the one true God, the sovereign Lord of the universe, and of him alone, is made the fundamental maxim of their state, and principle of their government, in which all their laws centre, and the main end to which they are all directed. All worship of inferior deities is forbidden; no deified heroes admitted; no images suffered. Many of their sacred rites seem to have been instituted in a designed opposition to those of the neighbouring nations, that they might not incorporate with them, or learn their idolatrous customs, to which the Israelites, for a long time, were very prone. Nor is there any likelihood that they would have embraced or submitted to a constitution so different from the then generally prevailing idolatry, if it had not been for the manifest proofs that were given them of its divine original. The author of these Letters indeed intimates, that many of their rites were derived from the Egyptians; but whatever conformity there might be in some particular instances, nothing is more certain and evident, than that the whole system of the Jewish religion was most essentially opposite to that of the Egyptians, and other pagan nations, and tended to cast contempt on their adored deities, and on that idolatrous worship to which the heathens were so much addicted, and which was established by the laws of their respective countries.

As to the moral and devotional treatises, which make up another part of their sacred writings, they are incontestably excellent. Their poetry is of a most divine strain, far superior to that of other ancient nations, having an unexampled dignity, elevation and sublimity in it, filled with the noblest sentiments of the Divinity, and of his glorious incomparable perfections, and governing providence.

The same observation may be made on the prophetic writings, in which we may discern many remarkable characters of genuine truth and purity. A fervent zeal for God, and for pure and undefiled religion, every-where appears: nor is there any thing in them that breathes the spirit of this world, or that savours of ambition, artifice, or imposture. The whole intention of them is manifestly to reclaim the people from idolatry, vice, and wickedness, to engage them to the pure worship of God, and to the practice of universal righteousness. With a noble freedom and impartiality do they reprove their kings, princes, priests, people; denouncing the most awful threaten-

ings against them, if they should persist in their evil and sinful courses; and encouraging them with the most gracious promises to repentance, and new obedience: and all this mixed with many remarkable and express predictions of future events, which no human sagacity could have foreseen, and which derived such an authority to them, that though they were often reproached and persecuted when alive, their character and writings were afterwards regarded by the whole nation with the profoundest veneration. And it deserveth to be particularly remarked, that whereas the Jews, as well as mankind in all ages, have been prone to place religion chiefly in external forms, and ritual observances, as if these would compensate for the neglect of the moral precepts, there are many passages in their sacred books, especially those of the prophets, which in the strongest terms represent the utter insufficiency of all ritual observances without real holiness of heart and life, and even speak of them in a very diminutive manner, and with a seeming contempt, when opposed to, or abstracted from moral goodness and virtue; and such writings certainly do not look like the inventions of a superstitious and lying people.

But as the sacred history is what this writer setteth himself particularly to expose and invalidate, let us take a brief view of the historical parts of Scripture; and these are no less remarkable, and worthy of our attention, than the laws, the prophecies, the moral, and devotional writings.

As to a general idea of their history, it is of as different a complexion from that of other nations as their laws, and is of the same noble tendency with their other sacred books. It every-where breathes the profoundest veneration for the Deity. The chief design of it is not merely to answer civil or political views, or to preserve the annals of their nation, or trace it up to its original (though this also is done), but for nobler purposes; to promote the true worship of God, and the practice of piety and virtue; to preserve the remembrance of God's wonderful works of providence towards his professing people; to shew the favours, the blessings, the deliverances, vouchsafed to them; the prosperity and happiness they enjoyed, when they kept close to the laws of God, and continued in the practice of virtue and righteousness; and on the other

hand, the great calamities which beel them when they broke the divine law and covenant, and lapsed into idolatry, vice, and wickedness. Such are the useful lessons which their history is designed to teach, and to this excellent end is it directed.

To which it may be added, that there are observable in it remarkable characters of simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth. It is plain, from the whole tenor of their history, that it was not compiled to give false and flattering accounts of their nation, or partial and elegant encomiums of their great men. Their great actions indeed are recorded, but their faults are also related, with a simplicity and impartiality that deserves to be admired. Neither Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, nor any other people, have formed their histories so much to the disadvantage of their own nation, or charged them with such repeated revolts from the religion and laws of their country. Let us suppose the Jews ever so much possessed with the spirit of lying, it would never have put them upon forging a body of history so much to the prejudice of their own national character. It tendeth, indeed, to give an high idea of the great things God had done for them, of the privileges conferred upon them, and the excellency of their laws (and that their laws are excellent, no man can doubt that seriously reads and considers them), but, at the same time, it setteth the ingratitude, the disobedience, the stupidity, of that people, their opposition to God's authority, and abuse of his goodness, their manifold backslidings, and unstedfastness in his covenant, in the strongest light. Their disgraces, defeats, captivities, are no where concealed; they are represented as frequently brought under the yoke of the neighboring nations, in a manner much to their dishonour; and their deliverances are ascribed, not to their own wisdom, conduct, and bravery, but to the mercy of God, upon their repentance. In a word, their history is a continued account of God's goodness, patience, and justice, exercised towards them; and of their own strange, perverse, and unaccountable conduct. This is so manifest, that it hath been often turred to their reproach, and hath given occasion to the representing them as an obstinate, ungrateful, and rebellious race, and to such a charge as St Stephen advanceth against them from their own Scriptures: *Ye stiff-necked, and uncir-*

*cumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted ?* Acts vii. 51. These considerations naturally tend to derive a peculiar credit to the Jewish Scriptures, as containing true and faithful accounts, not forged by a superstitious lying people. Whatever opinion, therefore, we may have of the Jews, yet their sacred books deserve great regard. Nor is there any ground to suppose, that these books of records were of their inventing. At least, I believe, this will scarce be pretended with regard to the Jews in the latter times of their state, however they might otherwise be addicted to fiction and embellishment. They received these books as sacred from their ancestors, and were themselves so fully persuaded of the divine original and authority of their laws, and the certainty and authenticity of these records, that they adhered to them with a zeal scarce to be paralleled in any other nation. So great was the veneration they had for them, that after the canon was completed, they were extremely scrupulous not to make any additions to their sacred books, or receive any others into their number as of equal authority, tho' written by the greatest and wisest men of their nation. And if any persons had endeavoured to alter or corrupt them, the fraud, the imposture, must have been immediately detected. For these sacred books were not, like those of other nations, confined to the priests only ; they were in the hands of the people, constantly and publicly read in their synagogues ; the laws, and the facts, were what they were all acquainted with, and instructed in from their infancy.

If therefore there be any ground of suspicion, it must fall, not upon the latter Jews, but upon Ezra, and those by whom the sacred canon was finished. If their history and sacred books were forged or corrupted, the most likely time that can be fixed for it, is upon their return from the Babylonish captivity. And this seems to be the æra fixed upon by the author of these Letters. He observes, that “ the Babylonish captivity lasted  
“ so long, and such circumstances, whatever they were, accompanied it, that the captives forgot their country, and even  
“ their language, the Hebrew dialect, at least, and character\*.”

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p.

And afterwards he intimates, that the Scriptures were "lost during the captivity †." And he observes, that "Ezra began, and Simon the Just finished, the canon of the Scriptures †."

Let us grant, that in the Babylonish captivity, the Jews learned the Chaldee language, which thenceforth became more familiar to them than the Hebrew; and that the old Hebrew character was, as many learned men suppose, though it is far from being certain, changed for the Chaldee; the latter being fairer, easier, and more generally used among the people; yet this is far from proving, either that the Hebrew language was entirely forgotten by them, or that their sacred books were lost in the captivity. There are many things that plainly shew the contrary. The prophet Ezekiel, who prophesied during the captivity to the Jews in Chaldea, wrote and published his prophecies in Hebrew. So did the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who prophesied several years after the return from the Babylonish captivity: which shews, that the Hebrew language was still in use, and was understood by many of the people. The same thing may be concluded from this; that all the sacred books that were written after the captivity were written in Hebrew, except a part of Ezra and Daniel. Nehemiah, who had been a great man in the Persian court, wrote his own memoirs in Hebrew: which shews, that the Jews who continued in Persia, their great men at least, still retained the knowledge of that language. And as the Hebrew language was not absolutely forgotten among the Jews in their captivity, so neither were their sacred books entirely lost. Indeed it were absurd to suppose it. That captivity, though it lasted seventy years from the first beginning of it under Jehoiakim, yet from the time of the utter desolation of Jerusalem, and the temple, and the carrying away the last remainder of the people to Babylon, continued but about fifty years. And there were not a few of them that had been carried away from Jerusalem, who survived the whole time, and lived to come back. *Many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of the second house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice,* Ezra iii. 12. All those among them that lived to seven-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. ii. p. 101.

† Ibid. p. 85.

ty or eighty years were twenty or thirty years old when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed; and to suppose, that these should entirely forget their language, or their religion, history, and laws, is very absurd: add to this, that the people were in expectation of a deliverance, and restitution to their own land, of which the prophets had assured them; and this would naturally make them more careful to preserve their laws, and the ancient authentic records and memorials of their nation. It appeareth from the accounts given of those that returned, that many of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the porters, the Nethinims, &c. had preserved their genealogies during the captivity, in prospect of their return, and of their being again employed in the sacred functions; and those who could not clearly shew their genealogies, were put from the priesthood, Ezra ii. 62. Neh. vii. 64. Great numbers of the people could also prove their genealogies: and where there were any that could not do this, it is particularly taken notice of, that *they could not shew their father's house*, Ezra ii. 59. It is manifest therefore, that there were registers of genealogies preserved in Babylon; and is it not reasonable to conclude, that they would be no less careful to preserve their sacred books, especially those of Moses, in which were their original records, and the laws on which their whole constitution depended?

If the Jews had been for changing their own laws and customs, we may suppose it must have been in order to their adopting those of their conquerors, and of the country to which they were transplanted, and in which they settled. But it is evident, that, in fact, they did not do this; since the whole system of their worship and constitution was, upon their return, very different from that of the Babylonians. If therefore they learned their language, or used their letters and characters in writing; yet still it is certain, that they worshipped not their gods, nor adopted their religion, and sacred rites. They still preserved their own; and the captivity and desolation of their nation, which they looked upon a punishment for their manifold revolts, idolatries, and deviations from their law, tended to increase, instead of extinguishing their veneration for it.

By Daniel's solemn supplication and fasting, when the time came that had been marked out in the prophecies for their re-

turn, it appeareth, that he had the book of Jeremiah's Prophecies before him, Dan. ix. 2. And the confession he there maketh is remarkable: *All Israel have transgressed thy law—therefore the curse is come upon us; and the oath that is written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, because we have sinned against him—And he hath confirmed his words which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us—As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us*, ver. 11, 12, 13. Here it is plainly supposed, that there was a written law of Moses extant, in his time, known to him and to the people, and which was regarded as the law of God himself: that they had transgressed that law, and thereby had exposed themselves to the dreadful judgment denounced against them, and written in that law, as the just punishment of their revolt and disobedience. Soon after this, when the people returned, under conduct the of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and others, we find them gathered together to celebrate the feast of tabernacles, in the seventh month, and offering the *daily burnt offerings*, and those of the *new-moons*, and *set feasts*, besides *free-will offerings*: and all this is said to be done as *written in the law of Moses*, Ezra iii. 1—6.: and this plainly sheweth, that they had the written law of Moses with them. They also appointed the priests and Levites, in their several courses, and the singers, and service of the temple, *according to the ordinances of David, the man of God*, Ezra iii. 10, 11. The sacred hymns or psalms, therefore, that had been used in the temple worship, were not lost in the captivity; and indeed the Psalms of David carry evident characters of genuineness in them. They were many of them composed on special occasions, and adapted to his peculiar circumstances, in a manner which plainly shewed they were not forged in after-times. And the preserving so many of the psalms and hymns, some of which contain an abridgment of their sacred history, is a manifest indication of the care they took; and that there was not a general destruction of their sacred books in the captivity. The same observation may be applied to the prophetic writings, and to their sacred records. It is plain, that the history of their kings was preserved; to which there is frequent reference in the books compiled after the Babylonish captivity.

The commission afterwards given to Ezra by Artaxerxes,

plainly supposed the law of Moses to be then in being, and in the highest authority; and only empowered him to regulate every thing according to that law. He is described in Artaxerxes's commission as *a ready scribe in the law of Moses*: as one greatly skilled in that law, and fit to instruct others in it; and is required to set magistrates and judges to judge the people, such as *knew the law of God*, Ezra vii. 6. 10. 25. Soon after Ezra came Nehemiah, a great man in the Persian court, and who was appointed governor of Judea; and every thing throughout his book discovereth, that he and the whole people professed the highest veneration for the law of Moses. Before he came to Judea, he was well acquainted with that law, and regarded it as of divine authority, Neh. i. 7, 8, 9. During his administration, we have an account of a solemn reading of the law, by Ezra, in the hearing of all the people; who heard it with the utmost reverence and attention: in this he was assisted by several Levites, who *read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*, Neh. viii. 1—9. Again, we are told of another solemn reading of the law, before all the people, Neh. ix. 1, 2, 3. And in the admirable confession made on that occasion by the Levites, there is an excellent summary of the principal events recorded in the historical parts of the books of Moses; such as the calling of Abraham; their bondage and oppression in Egypt; their being brought out from thence with signs and wonders, and dreadful judgments executed upon Pharaoh and his people; the dividing of the sea before them, so that they passed through it as on dry land, whilst the Egyptians that pursued them were overwhelmed in the deep; the promulgation of the law at Sinai, with remarkable tokens of the divine presence and glory; the miracles wrought in the wilderness, the leading them by a cloud in the day, and a pillar of fire by night; the giving them manna-bread from heaven to eat, and cleaving the rock to give them water to drink; and finally, bringing them into possession of the land of Canaan. These things, which are the most remarkable facts in the history of their nation, together with their frequent rebellions, disobedience, and ingratitude, particularly their making and worshipping the molten calf in the wilderness, the standing disgrace of their nation, and their subsequent revolts, calamities, and deliverances,



after they came into the land of Canaan, are there taken notice of in the public confessions and acknowledgments made to God in the name and presence of all the people; and are mentioned as things commonly known and acknowledged among them, and as of undoubted truth and certainty.

Taking these things together, it seems to appear, with all the evidence which the nature of the thing is capable of, that the Jewish sacred books and records were not lost in the Babylonish captivity; that they were in possession of them, and held them in great veneration, before Ezra came to Jerusalem: and it would be a wild imagination to suppose, that he had it in his power, even if he had it in his inclination, so far to impose upon all the Jews, both those in Judea, and those that continued in Babylon, and other parts of the Persian empire, as to make them all with one consent receive those for their ancient laws, by which their nation had been always governed, which were not their ancient laws; and those for their ancient authentic histories, and sacred records, which were not the ancient authentic records. All that his commission from Artaxerxes extended to, was, to order things according to the law of Moses; and this he effected. When he came, he found several abuses contrary to that law, countenanced by men of great power and interest, and in which several of the chief priests, as well as numbers of the people, were engaged; and he set himself to reform them according to that law; and these regulations would not have been tamely submitted to, if it had not been well known, that the laws and constitutions he urged upon them, were the true original laws of Moses.

As to the establishing the sacred canon, which is attributed to Ezra, and to those whom the Jews call the men of the great synagogue, the last of whom was Simon the Just, this is not to be understood as if these books were not accounted sacred, or were regarded as of no authority before. The books were already well known, and looked upon as sacred: They had not their authority, because Ezra acknowledged them, but he collected and published them, because they were known to be authentic. It may indeed be well supposed, that faults and variations might have crept into the copies of those books, and that they needed to be carefully revised: and this was a work for which Ezra was admirably fitted, by his great skill in the

law, and in the sacred records of his nation, as well as his noted integrity. And if he accordingly revised the original sacred books, and published a more correct edition of them, or abridged some of their ancient records, to render them of more general use among the people, and here and there inserted some passages, for explaining and illustrating things that were grown obscure; this was certainly a work of great use.— And supposing him to have done this, and that this work continued to be afterwards carried on by some of the most knowing and excellent men of their nation, till it was with great care completed, I do not see how it in the least affects the authority or credibility of those books. The whole nation in general were so sensible of Ezra's great fidelity and diligence, that he was always afterwards had in the highest honour: and they were so convinced that these were the original sacred books, that they received them with an extraordinary veneration. Nor did they ever pay the same regard to any other subsequent writings, in their own nation: and though the Sanhedrim continued to have great authority among them, they never pretended to put any other books upon them as divine, or as of equal authority with the sacred books. Now how comes it, that they put so great a difference between them, and that the authority of these books was universally acknowledged by the whole nation, and the other not? This sheweth, that however credulous the Jews might be in other things, yet they were particularly exact and scrupulous in not receiving any books into the sacred canon, but what they judged they had good reason to look upon as authentic.

The most remarkable part of the Jewish history is that which is contained in the books of Moses. It is there we have an account of the first constitution of their sacred polity; the promulgation of the ten commandments, with the most amazing demonstrations of a divine power and majesty; and the extraordinary miraculous facts done in Egypt and in the wilderness, by which the authority of that law was established. And whosoever alloweth this part of the Jewish history to be authentic, will not much scruple the subsequent parts of their history. Now it is evident, that as it was not Ezra that gave authority to the law of Moses, which was in the highest authority before, or who caused

the people to receive it as divine ; so neither were the *facts*, whereby the authority of that law was attested, *first* published by him. They had been all along believed, and the remembrance of them kept up among the people. *The books of Moses* exhibit a remarkable intermixture of *laws* and *facts* : and it appears to have been so from the beginning, though our author insinuates the contrary, but gives no reason for it \*. And it was wisely ordered, that the facts should go along with the law ; several of which suppose those facts, and have a manifest relation to them. And as the laws were received with great veneration, so the facts were equally received and believed among the people, in all ages, from the time in which those laws were given. And it deserveth to be remarked, that the facts were of such a kind, that they could not have been imposed upon the people, however stupid we suppose them to have been, at the time the laws were given, if they had not been true. If Moses had only told the Israelites, as Mahomet did the Arabians, instead of working miracles before them, as they demanded, of a journey he made to heaven, where he received the law : or as Numa did the ancient Romans, of conferences he had with the goddess Egeria in a wood or grove, to which no other persons were witnesses, and which depended entirely upon his own word ; this might have administered ground of suspicion, that he only feigned a divine commission, the more effectually to enforce his laws upon an ignorant and superstitious people. But he took a quite different method. The facts he relateth, and upon the credit of which the divine authority of his laws is rested, were of a most public nature, done in open view before the people, of which they were all said to be witnesses, and in which therefore, if they had not been true, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to have detected him. And indeed, considering the stubborn disposition of the people, and their great proneness to idolatry, it can scarce be conceived, that they would have received or submitted to such a law and constitution, if they themselves had not been assured of the truth of those facts whereby the divinity of it was confirmed. In the admirable recapitulation of the law, contained in the Book of Deuteronomy, which carrieth

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 100.

as strong evidences of genuine *antiquity, simplicity, and integrity*, as any writings can possibly have, and in which he delivereth himself with an inimitable gravity, dignity, and authority, mixed with the most affectionate tenderness and concern, as becometh the lawgiver and father of his people, and exhorteth them to the observance of the law in the most pathetic and engaging manner; there is a constant reference to the great and extraordinary facts wrought in Egypt, and in the wilderness; an appeal is made to the people concerning them, as things which they themselves had seen and known. And never was there greater care taken to preserve a remembrance of any laws and facts than there was of these. He delivered the book of the law, containing an account both of laws and facts, not only to the *priests*, but to *the elders of Israel*, the heads of the several tribes, before his death: and the original of the law was deposited in the sides of the ark, in the most holy place. A most solemn charge was laid upon the people, in the name of God, as they valued his favour, and their own happiness, frequently to consider those laws and facts themselves, and to teach them diligently to their children. Sacred rites were instituted, and public festivals appointed, to preserve the memorials of the principal facts, from the time in which those facts were done. And, accordingly the remembrance of them was constantly preserved among them in all ages. In all the succeeding monuments of their nation, throughout their whole history, and in their devotional and prophetic writings, and in their public solemn forms of confession and thanksgiving, there was still a constant reference to those facts as of undoubted credit; and upon the credit of those facts, those laws were both at first received, and continued afterwards to be acknowledged and submitted to: for notwithstanding the frequent defections of the people to the idolatrous rites and customs of the neighbouring nations, yet they never totally and universally apostatized from the law of Moses, but still acknowledged its sacredness and divine authority\*.

\* That the law of Moses, with the facts there recorded, may be traced, from the time in which that law was given, and the facts done, through all the succeeding ages of the Jewish nation; and that we have all the evidence of their having been transmitted without any material corruption or alteration, that can be reasonably desired; I have elsewhere more fully shewn, in the *Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation*, vol. ii. chap. 4.

The author of these Letters taketh particular notice of the fables invented by the Hellenistic Jews, to authorize the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures\*. But I do not see how any argument can be fairly drawn from these fables to the prejudice of the sacred books themselves, which were thus translated, or to destroy their authority or credibility. The strong persuasion they had of the divine authority of the original Scriptures, might make the Jews at Alexandria more ready to entertain stories in favour of the translation of these Scriptures into Greek, from which they found great benefit; this being the language they best understood, and which was then become of general use. But those stories were not generally received by the Jewish nation, though they all universally agreed in acknowledging the authority of the originals; nor were they ever inserted in the sacred writings, or in any books, the authority of which was generally received among them.

The first thing that gave rise to those stories was, the history of Aristeas; which seems to have been contrived on purpose to do honour to that version, and gives a pompous account of it. And yet even in that history there is nothing said of those miraculous circumstances, which were afterwards invented, to shew, that those interpreters were under an extraordinary divine guidance. On the contrary, that book, though it be the foundation of all that is said concerning the Septuagint, may be proved to be plainly inconsistent with those subsequent fables and fictions, and is sufficient to detect the falsity of them. There is therefore no parallel at all between these Hellenistical fables, and the sacred Hebrew records; except it could be proved, that one part of those ancient records is inconsistent with other subsequent parts of them, and furnishes manifest proofs of their falsehood; which neither his Lordship, nor any other, has been able to shew.

Another argument, on which he seems to lay a mighty stress, in order to set aside the authority of the Scripture, is drawn from the accidents that have happened to the sacred text. He will not allow the answer made by Abbadie and others, that "such accidents could not have been prevented without a perpetual standing miracle, and that a perpetual standing miracle is not in the order of Providence." On the contrary, it

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 85, 86.

seems evident to him, that if the Scriptures had been originally given by divine inspiration, "either such accidents would not have happened, or the Scriptures would have been preserved entirely in their genuine purity, notwithstanding these accidents." He thinks the proof of this "is obvious and easy, according to our clearest and most distinct ideas of wisdom, and moral fitness \*." But, besides that the present question, as he has managed it, relating to the sacred history, is not about the divine inspiration of it, but whether it be a true and faithful history, an honest and credible relation of facts? which he absolutely denies; I see no consequence at all in his way of reasoning, even if the question were, whether those sacred books were originally written by persons divinely inspired. For all that could be reasonably concluded, supposing any books to have been originally given by divine inspiration, is, that providence would take care, that those books should be transmitted with a sufficient degree of certainty and integrity, to answer the end for which they were originally intended. But it was no way necessary to this purpose, that all the transcribers that should ever copy these writings in any age or nation, should be under an infallible guidance, so as to be kept by an extraordinary interposition from ever committing any mistake or blunder, or being guilty of any slips or negligences; or that all those that have ever revised and compared those copies, should, in every instance, be infallibly guided in their judgments concerning them. This is evidently absurd. It would be multiplying miracles without necessity, and would therefore be unworthy of the divine wisdom, and not very consistent with the methods of God's moral government of men, considered as reasonable creatures, free agents. For will any man in good earnest undertake to prove, that supposing an excellent revelation given, of doctrines, laws, &c. together with authentic accounts of extraordinary facts, tending to confirm and establish the divine authority of those doctrines and laws, this revelation could not be of any use, nor could those accounts of facts be at all fit to be depended on, if there were any variations, omissions, transpositions, or mistakes, in any copies of them that should be taken of them in any age? If, notwith-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 95.

standing those variations, the copies should still so far agree ; that from thence a sufficient notion might be formed of the doctrines and laws contained in that original revelation, and of the truth of the facts whereby it was attested and confirmed, this would be sufficient to answer the end which we might suppose the divine wisdom to have had in view in giving such a revelation. And this is actually the case with regard to the holy Scriptures. Whatever *additions, interpolations, or transpositions*, may be supposed to have crept into any of the copies, yet all the main laws and facts are still preserved. Of this we have a remarkable proof, by comparing the Hebrew and Samaritan codes of the Pentateuch. There are differences between them : but the laws, the precepts, the history, the important facts, whereby the law was attested, are the same in both.— And in general it may be justly affirmed, that notwithstanding all the differences in the copies, about which such a clamour has been raised, yet there is a sufficient agreement among them to satisfy us, that such and such laws were originally given, such prophecies were delivered, and that such facts were done : and the variations among the copies in smaller matters, the mistakes that have crept into the genealogies, numbers, dates, catalogues of names, ages of some of the patriarchs, and the like (for it is in these things that the differences principally lie), do really confirm their harmony in the main ; and therefore are far from destroying the authority of the sacred writings, or the credibility of the scripture history.

The learned Capellus, who had thoroughly considered this matter, and who, it is well known, allowed himself great liberties in judging concerning the variations in the copies of the Hebrew Scriptures, justly observeth, in his defence of his *Critica Sacra*, that all these variations are of little or no moment as to faith, or manners ; so that in that respect it is indifferent which reading we follow : *Sanè omnes illæ varietates, uti sæpius in Critica Sacra repeto, nullius aut penè nullius sunt quoad fidem et mores momenti, ut eo respectu perinde sit hanc an illam sequaris lectionem.* And I believe there are few competent and impartial judges of these things, but will be ready to own, with M. Le Clerc, the freedom of whose judgment in such matters must be acknowledged, that, through the good providence of God, no books from the earliest antiquity, have come to us

equally correct with the sacred books of the Hebrews, particularly the Masoretical copies. *Nullos libros ex ultima antiquitate ad nos, Dei beneficio, pervenisse æquè emendatos ac sacros Hebræorum codices, et quidem Masoreticos.* See his *Dissertatio de Lingua Hebræa*, prefixed to his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*.

What our author himself maketh a shew of granting is very true, that—"amidst all the changes and chances to which the books, in which they are recorded, have been exposed, neither original writers nor later compilers, have been suffered to make any essential alterations, such as would have falsified the law of God, and the principles of the Jewish and Christian religion, in any of those divine fundamental points\*." And indeed, the precepts, the doctrines of religion inculcated in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, are so frequently repeated, and the principal facts there related are so often referred to, in different parts of those sacred volumes, as to be abundantly sufficient to answer the design for which they were originally intended; *viz.* to instruct men in the knowledge, adoration, and obedience of the one true God, and to engage them to the practice of righteousness, and to prepare the way for a more perfect dispensation, which was to be introduced, in the fulness of time, by that Divine person, whose coming, character, offices, sufferings, glory, and kingdom, were there prefigured and foretold. Accordingly, our Saviour speaketh of the writings of Moses and the Prophets, as of signal use to instruct and direct men in the knowledge and practice of religion, Luke xvi. 29, 30, 31. And though it be not true, which our author asserteth, that the Jewish Scriptures had no authority but what they derived from Christianity (for they had an authority founded upon sufficient credentials before Christianity was established); yet their being acknowledged as Divine by Christ and his Apostles, giveth them a farther confirmation: for when a subsequent revelation, which is itself founded on convincing proofs and evidences, giveth testimony to a prior revelation, and referreth to it as of divine authority; when both together concur to form one system of religion, and to exhibit the history of God's various dispensations towards his Church, the former being subservient and preparatory to



the latter, and the latter giving farther light and a fuller completion to the former ; this confirmeth the authority of both, and sheweth one great uniform design and plan carried on by the divine wisdom and goodness from the beginning.

It is no just objection against the authority of the sacred books of the Old Testament, though the writer of these letters seems to think it so, that “ though Jews and Christians hold “ the same books in great veneration, yet each condemns “ the other for not understanding or for abusing, them \*.” This is to be understood, not of the sacred history, which yet he would be thought to have particularly in view ; for, as to this, the Jews and Christians are generally agreed ; but of some passages in the prophetic writings, in the interpretation of which they differ. And with respect to these, it may be observed, that if the Jews, at the time of our Saviour’s appearing, had universally interpreted the prophetic writings as the Christians do, and applied them to Jesus Christ ; and had accordingly turned Christians, and embraced Jesus as the Messiah promised to their fathers, it would undoubtedly have been alledged, that they forged or corrupted the prophecies in favour of the Christian system ; whereas now there is no room for this pretence. Their vouching and acknowledging those writings, as of divine authority, notwithstanding the difficulty they have been put to in answering the arguments brought from thence against their own favourite notions and prejudices, giveth their testimony to the prophetic books great force.

There is another remarkable passage in his third letter, which it is proper to take some notice of. He observes †, that “ the “ Jews and Christians differ among themselves, and from one “ another, concerning almost every point that is necessary to “ be known and agreed upon, in order to establish the authori- “ ty of books which both have received as authentic and sacred. “ Who were the authors of these scriptures, when they were “ published, how they were composed, and preserved, or re- “ newed ; in fine, how they were lost during the captivity, and “ how they were retrieved after it ; are all matters of contro- “ versy to this day.” That the sacred books were *not lost* in captivity, and that consequently they were *not retrieved*

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. i. p. 92.

† Ibid. p. 100, 101

after it by immediate inspiration, hath been clearly shewn: A fiction which seems to have had its rise from the apocryphal second book of Esdras, the authority of which never was acknowledged either in the Jewish or Christian church. There are indeed differences, both among Jews and Christians, concerning several points relating to these sacred books; but these differences are, for the most part, about things that do not properly concern the divine authority or credibility of those writings. There is a general agreement among them, that the prophetic books were writings by persons divinely inspired; and that the Pentateuch was written by Moses, the greatest of all the prophets; and that the historical writings were either the very original authentic records, or faithfully compiled out of them; and were received and acknowledged by the whole nation, as containing true and just accounts of facts. And whereas he urgeth, that it is matter of controversy, who were the authors of those scriptures, or, when they were composed or published, it is certain that, with respect to the much greater part of the sacred books, both Jews and Christians are generally agreed who were the authors of them.

This is true concerning all the writings of the prophets, the books of Solomon, most of the Psalms, the *five books* of Moses, which have been constantly received by the Jewish and Christian church, in all ages, as written by Moses; though a few in these latter times have attempted to contest it. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel, seem plainly to shew their authors: and concerning all these, there has been a general agreement. The books therefore, concerning the authors of which there is properly any ground of controversy, are the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. As to the first of these, *viz.* the book of Joshua, the ancient Jews in general, and the greater part of Christian writers, with good reason look upon it to have been written by Joshua himself; though there are some particular passages in it that were inserted afterwards, by way of illustration. It is principally concerning the books of Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, that there is any colourable pretence for saying with our author, that they were "abridgments of old records made in latter times\*." Some of them seem plainly

to have been compiled after the return from the Babylonish captivity, probably by Ezra, from ancient authentic records, which are frequently quoted and referred to in them, as books of acknowledged credit and authority; so that there is little room to doubt of the truth and certainty of the accounts there given. For that they were faithfully extracted from those original records, to which they refer for a larger account of the things there related, there is the highest reason to believe. And it was wisely ordered, that these shorter accounts should be inserted in the sacred canon, when it was to be brought, as it were, into one volume, for the lasting instruction and edification of the church. For as the sacred history was intended not merely to gratify curiosity, but to promote the purposes of religion, piety, and virtue, and to keep up the remembrance of the remarkable actings of divine providence towards them, both in a way of mercy and judgment, according to their behaviour, it was proper that it should be brought into as narrow a compass as was consistent with that design. This would make it more generally known and easily remembered; whereas larger and more particular accounts might have been too voluminous for a book designed for universal use.

The only thing that yet remaineth to be considered, with regard to the sacred books of the Old Testament, is what he saith concerning the *curse* pronounced upon Canaan by Noah: Of which we have an account, Gen. ix. 24, 25, 26, 27. This he seems to have fixed upon as one of the properest instances he could find to expose the authority of the scripture. He treateth it as an invention of the writer to justify the Israelites in their invasion of the Canaanites, and representeth this curse as *contradicting all our notions of order and justice*. "One is tempted to think," says he, "that the patriarch was still drunk, and that no man in his senses could hold such language, or pass such a sentence: Certain it is, that no writer but a Jew could impute to the œconomy of Providence the accomplishment of such a prediction, nor make the Supreme Being the executor of such a curse."

His Lordship observes, that "Ham alone offended: Canaan was innocent—Canaan was however alone cursed, and became, according to his grandfather's prophecy, a *servant of servants*,

“ *i. e.* the vilest and meanest of slaves—to Shem, not to Japheth, when the Israelites conquered Palestine; to one of his uncles, not to his brethren. Will it be said—it has been said—that where we read *Canaan* we are to understand *Ham* whose brethren Shem and Japheth were? At this rate, we shall never know what we read: As these critics never care what they say. Will it be said—this has been said too—that Ham was punished in his posterity, when Canaan was cursed, and his descendants were exterminated? But who does not see, that the curse and punishment in this case fell on Canaan and his posterity exclusive of the rest of the posterity of Ham: And were therefore the curse and punishment of the son, not of the father properly? The descendants of Misraim, another of his sons, were the Egyptians: And they were so far from being servants of servants to their cousins the Semites, that these were servants of servants unto them, during more than fourscore years. Why the posterity of Canaan was to be deemed an accursed race it is easy to account, and I have mentioned it just now, but it is not so easy to account why the posterity of the righteous Shem, that great example of filial reverence, became slaves to another branch of the family of Ham\*.”

Before I proceed to a distinct consideration of what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered, it will be proper to lay before the reader the sacred text, as it is in our translation, Gen. ix. 21—27. *Noah—was uncovered within his tent: and Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem: And Canaan shall be his servant.*

It is acknowledged, that there is a considerable difficulty in this passage. And if we were not able to account for it at all

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 110, 111, 112.

at this distance, it would be much more reasonable to suppose that some circumstances have been passed by in this short narrative, which, if known, would help to clear it; or that there may have been some defects in the copies, not now to be remedied; than upon the account of one difficult and obscure passage, to throw off all regard to writings, which have the most just pretensions, both to the greatest antiquity and most venerable authority.

But that the difficulties which his Lordship hath urged are far from being unanswerable, will appear from the following observations.

First, The foundation of the whole charge, and that upon which the greatest stress is laid, is this, that "Ham alone offended: Canaan was innocent. Canaan however was alone cursed: and he became, according to his grandfather's prophecy, a servant of servants, *i. e.* the vilest and worst of slaves." Some learned persons have supposed, that where the curse is pronounced upon Canaan, ver. 25. the word *ABI*, *father*, is to be understood, which is expressly mentioned, ver. 21.; and that instead of *Cursed be Canaan*, it should be read, *Cursed be Ham, the father of Canaan*. And though Lord Bolingbroke speaks of this with great contempt, there are instances of such elipses or omissions to be found in some other passages of Scripture. A remarkable one of this kind is in 2 Sam. xxi. 19. where our translation has it, that *Elbanan*—*slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam*: which is certainly right, as appears from the nature of the thing, and from a parallel passage, 1 Chron. xx. 5. where he is expressly called *the brother of Goliath the Gittite*, &c. But the word *brother* is not in our present copies of the original, in 2 Sam. xxi. 19. where it runs thus, *Elbanan*—*slew Goliath the Gittite*, &c. instead of *the brother of Goliath the Gittite*. In like manner the word *father* may be supplied here, as well as the word *brother*, in the place now mentioned; so that for *Cursed be Canaan*, it may be read, *Cursed be Ham the father of Canaan*. So the Arabic reads it, and so Vatablus renders it. And it is followed by other learned writers, particularly by the Bishop of Clogher, in his *Vindication of the Histories of the Old and New Testament*. But if that be not admitted, as not only the Hebrew, but the Sama-

ritan, the Septuagint, and all the ancient versions, except the Arabic, which is of no great authority, read as we do\*, this will not prove, either that Canaan was entirely innocent, or that he alone was cursed. The Jews are generally of opinion, in which they follow a very ancient tradition, that Canaan was the first that saw Noah's nakedness, and made a jest of it to his father Ham; who, instead of reproving him, went himself to see it, and in a mocking way told it to his brothers, Shem and Japheth. Lord Bolingbroke makes mention of this, and endeavoureth to obviate it by observing, that "the Hebrew, and other doctors, who would make the son an accomplice with his father, affirm not only without, but against the express authority of the text." This is confidently said. But if the text doth not expressly mention Canaan as an accomplice, neither can it be

\* It may be justly laid down as a rule, not to be lightly departed from, that where the Hebrew and Samaritan, and best ancient versions, agree in any reading, that reading is not to be altered or given up without necessity and I cannot see any necessity; in the present case. There are few readings that have a more general consent in their favour than that which our translators have followed in the passage before us. Not only the Hebrew and Samaritan, but the Septuagint, in those copies that are of the greatest authority, particularly in the Roman and Alexandrian, to which may be added the Complutensian, and many others, and the remains of Origen's Hexapla, collected by Montfaucon, the Targums, both of Onkelos and Ben Uzziel, the Syriac, the vulgar Latin, agree in it. There are indeed some copies of the Septuagint which read *Ham* instead of *Canaan*: and so it was in the first Venetian edition; but it appears to me, that both in those copies of the Septuagint, and in the Arabic, this reading is rather an interpolation, inserted for avoiding the difficulty, than to have been a version taken from the original. And it may more easily be accounted for, why Ham's name should be afterwards inserted in the text, than why it should have been dropped or omitted, supposing it to have been expressly mentioned in the original. Nor is it likely that that omission should have been repeated three times together in the compass of three or four lines.

If the present reading be at all altered, that reading which puts the least force upon the text is, that which instead of *Canaan* substitutes *Ham, the father of Canaan*. But it does not seem to me very likely, that Ham should be so often over described under the character of the *father of Canaan* in so short a prediction. At least it does not seem to me probable that Noah himself, in pronouncing it, should three times over characterize Ham as the *father of Canaan*. Let any man read over the prediction with this addition so often repeated, and see if it has not an odd appearance. If it be said, that it was Moses himself, who

said, that the authority of the text is expressly against that notion. On the contrary, whosoever impartially examineth the story as there related, will be naturally led to believe, that Canaan was in some degree accessory to his father's crime.—Ham is in this story particularly characterized as the *father of Canaan*, and Canaan's being so often mentioned affordeth a plain intimation, that he was some way or other concerned, and might either be the first that saw his grandfather's nakedness, and acquainted his father with it, or might be with his father when he saw it, and joined with him in making a mock of it. But as Ham was Canaan's father, from whom better might have been expected, considering his age, and the dutiful regard he owed to his father, Noah, with whom he had been saved from the deluge, he alone is expressly mentioned in this short narration; though the curse pronounced upon Canaan leads us to think, that he was some way partaker of his father's crime. And supposing this to be

in repeating Noah's malediction against Ham, added this of his being the *father of Canaan*, to put the Israelites in mind that Canaan was the offspring of accursed Ham, even in this view the so frequent repetition seems to be needless. The sacred historian had in the 18th verse of this chapter, observed that Ham was the *father of Canaan*; and again, in the 22d verse, in entering upon this narration, he had characterized Ham as the *father of Canaan*. The mention of this was certainly very proper in the beginning of the account, on supposition that Canaan was concerned with his father Ham in that affair, and also to prepare the reader for the distinct mention of Canaan, in the prediction which was pronounced upon occasion of Ham's wickedness. But this being done, it does not seem likely that Moses should think it necessary, in recounting that short prediction, to repeat it so often over, that Ham was the *father of Canaan*.

Besides, it seems to me to be of some weight, that if that be admitted to be the original reading, Canaan is not directly pointed out in the prediction at all. The being the *servant of servants*, and *servant* both to Shem and Japheth, is not in that case said of Canaan, but of Ham. At the most it is only insinuated, by calling Ham the *father of Canaan*, that Canaan might be involved in the curse, as one of Ham's sons; but it is not expressly applied to him. Whereas in the common reading it contains a manifest prediction of the curse and servitude as relating to Canaan. And this was a very good reason for Moses' taking care to record it. It is not improbable, that Noah might have said more on that occasion than is mentioned; but Moses contented himself with recording that part of the prediction or prophetic curse which related to Canaan; as it was that which more immediately answered his design, and which it most nearly concerned the Israelites to know.

so, and that he was Ham's favourite son, and like him in his dispositions, the curse pronounced upon him was really intended against both. If we met with the same account in any wise and credible historian, this is the construction we should have been apt to put upon it, that both Canaan and his father were concerned in the affair. And it is no very unusual thing in Scripture, and in other histories too, to omit some circumstances in a short narration, which are plainly implied and which the reader is left to collect. Indeed, if what some expositors suppose be admitted, it is not only implied in the text that Canaan was an accomplice, but is expressly signified in those words, ver. 24. that *Noah knew what his younger son had done unto him*. Where by *younger son*, they understand his grandson; for a grandson, according to the Hebrew idiom, may be properly called a son; and they think Ham was not the youngest of Noah's sons, but the middlemost, according to the order in which he is always placed, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: so Theodoret and Drusius, after some of the Hebrew writers, with whom agrees bishop Patrick. But whatever becomes of this conjecture, and though we should suppose Ham to be here intended by *the younger son*, (which he might really be, though mentioned between Shem and Japheth, since the order of their birth and age is not designed to be signified by it; for Japheth was the eldest, Gen. x. 21.), yet still the strain of the story seems to imply, that Canaan had a guilty part in it, who alone of all Ham's sons is expressly mentioned upon this occasion.

But secondly, let us suppose that Canaan was innocent, and no way accessory to this particular instance of Ham's impiety and wickedness, the prophetic curse and prediction may notwithstanding this be fairly accounted for. It must be said in that case, that the curse was not properly pronounced upon Canaan for Ham's crime, but that, upon occasion of Ham's wickedness, Noah foretold the miseries and calamities that should befall his posterity, and particularly his descendants by Canaan. And supposing Noah to have been then enabled by a prophetic spirit to foresee, that from Ham would proceed a profligate and impious race, like him in wickedness, and whose crimes would at length bring down the vengeance of heaven upon them, and subject them to the basest servitude and punishment, his men-



tioning it on this occasion, and pointing to that branch of his posterity on whom this curse should particularly fall, had a manifest propriety in it. This could not but greatly humble Ham, and had a tendency to cause him to reflect on his own wickedness, and affect him with sorrow and remorse on the account of it, if any thing could do it. For who that has the bowels of the human nature, would not be greatly affected at the thought, that his posterity should be infamous and abandoned, and among the most wretched of the human race? And though Canaan alone be mentioned in this short account, it doth not follow that no other of Ham's posterity fell under the curse. Noah might have named others of Ham's sons or descendants, though Moses only takes notice of what related to Canaan, because this was what more especially concerned the people of Israel to know.

This leads me to observe,

Thirdly, That as to the insinuation that this prophecy or prediction was feigned, to justify the cruelties exercised by Joshua upon the Canaanites\*, it is the author's own groundless suspicion, without producing any proof of it. Supposing it to have been a real prophecy originally delivered by Noah the tradition of which had been preserved in the family of Shem, and which was transmitted by Abraham, who might have had it from Shem himself, to his descendants, it is easily accounted for, that Moses should take care to commit it to writing. Nor will it be denied, that one end he might have in view in recording it, was to encourage and animate the Israelites, as he knew the time was at hand for the accomplishment of that prediction, and that the Israelites were to be the instruments of it. Such a true prophecy, known to have proceeded originally from Noah, was much more likely to answer Moses's end, than if it had been a mere fiction of his own, which had never been heard of before. And that Moses did not feign this prophecy may be justly concluded, because, if it had been invented by himself purely to bring an odium upon Canaan and his descendants, the story would probably have

\* Lord Bolingbroke in other parts of his works, frequently insists upon these cruelties, as a demonstration that the Mosaic constitution could not be of divine original. See this fully examined, *View of the Deistical Writers*, vol. ii. p. 196, et seq.

been contrived otherwise than it is. It would have been pretended, not that Ham, but that Canaan had been guilty of that impiety and irreverence towards Noah, the second father of mankind, and repairer of the world, and who was had in great veneration. Thus would Moses have laid it, if the whole had been his own fiction. He would not have contented himself with leaving the reader to collect from the story that Canaan was some way faulty, but would have taken care to have made it more directly answer his purpose, by expressly charging the crime upon Canaan himself. But as it was a real prophecy of Noah, Moses gave it as he had received it, without altering the original story, or adding new circumstances.

This leads me to a fourth observation upon this remarkable passage; *viz.*

That if rightly understood, instead of furnishing a just objection against the authority of Scripture, it rather confirmeth it, and should increase our veneration for it. For we have here a most remarkable prophecy, which extended to events at the distance of many ages, and hath been wonderfully fulfilled in all its parts. It is manifest, that what is here foretold concerning Canaan, Shem, and Japheth, relateth to them, not merely considered in their own persons, but to their offspring, in whom it was chiefly to receive its accomplishment: and the blessings pronounced by Isaac upon Jacob and Esau, and afterwards by Jacob upon his twelve sons, though applied to them by name, were principally to be understood of their descendants. Taking it in this view, the prophecy here pronounced by Noah is of a great extent. The blessing which should attend Shem is foretold, and it is intimated that God would be in a special manner his God, and would pour forth so many blessings upon his posterity, as would lay a foundation for praises and thanksgivings; so that whosoever observed it, should have reason to say, *Blessed be the Lord God of Shem.* And this was signally fulfilled; since among his posterity the knowledge and worship of the true God was preserved, when the rest of the world was deeply immersed in idolatry: and from his seed the great Messiah sprung. It was also foretold, that *God should enlarge Japheth*: and accordingly his posterity wonderfully increased, and spread through a great part of the world. Bochart and others have observed, that not only all Europe, but the Lesser Asia, Iberia, Albania, part of Armenia,

Media, and the vast regions in the northern parts of Asia, and probably America, were peopled by his descendants. It is also foretold that he should *dwell in the tents of Shem*; which was accomplished both by his posterity's possessing part of the countries in which the Shemites inhabited, and especially by their being admitted to a participation of the same spiritual privileges, and received into the true church. So that this may be regarded as an illustrious prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles, many ages before it happened. As to that part of Noah's prophecy which relateth to Canaan, this hath also received a remarkable completion. Noah was enabled to foretel the curse and punishment which a long time after befel the Canaanites, for their execrable wickedness and impurity. For that the true and proper ground of the punishment which was inflicted upon them was their own wickedness, is evident from many express declarations of Scripture, particularly Levit. xviii. 24, 25, 27, 28. Deut. ix. 5. This wickedness of theirs God perfectly foresaw, and determined, on the account of it, to inflict exemplary punishment upon them; though he would not suffer the threatened punishment and curse to take place, till their *iniquities were full*, i. e. till they were arrived at the height. And when this was the case, it tended to render the punishment more remarkable, that it had been foretold so long before. And it was wisely ordered, that this prophecy should be recorded by Moses, that, when it came to be visibly accomplished in Canaan's posterity, the hand of Providence in it might be more distinctly observed. It is far therefore from being true, that Noah pronounced this in a *passion or drunken fit*, as his Lordship seems willing to represent it. It was not properly an imprecation, but a prophecy, and it might be fitly rendered, *Cursed shall Canaan be*. It was a prediction of what should befall Ham's descendants by Canaan, who resembled Ham, their ancestor, in wickedness and impurity.

Lord Bolingbroke hath several little cavils, which are designed to invalidate the credit of this prophecy. One is, that Canaan was a servant of servants, not to his *brethren*, as is foretold, ver. 25. but to his *uncles*, viz. *Shem* and *Japheth*. But this objection seems to betray an utter ignorance of the Hebrew idiom, according to which the word *brethren* is of a large extent, and taketh in not only brothers strictly so called, but

even distant relations, of which many instances might be given. And it must be farther considered, that the prophecy was not properly designed to signify, that Canaan, in person, should be servant of servants to his uncles Shem and Japheth, but that his posterity should be servants to theirs, who might, by reason of the original relation between them, be called their *brethren*.

It is farther urged, that Canaan became a *servant of servants* unto Shem indeed, but not to Japheth, though this is foretold, ver. 27. But this cavil is no better founded than the former. For the Canaanites became servants to the posterity of Japheth as well as of Shem. The most powerful and famous of Canaan's descendants, the Tyrians and Carthaginians, after having made a great figure in the world, were destroyed, or reduced to the most miserable servitude; the former by the Greeks under Alexander the Great, the latter by the Romans, both of whom descended from Japheth.

Another objection, which he insinuates, is, that Shem's posterity were *servants of servants for above fourscore years* to the Egyptians, who were the descendants of Mizraim, another of Ham's sons. But there is no pretence for urging this as a breach of the prediction, since no express mention is made there of any of Ham's sons, but Canaan, concerning whom it is foretold, that he should be a servant of servants unto Shem and Japheth, which was remarkably fulfilled. Or, if we suppose, as many great divines have done, that the curse was designed to extend to others of Ham's posterity, as well as the Canaanites, though not particularly mentioned in this short account, because Moses' design led him only to take express notice of that part of the curse which related to the Canaanites, who were more than ordinarily corrupt, and upon whom the curse took place in the fullest manner; even on this view of it, the prophecy may be fully justified. Ham's descendants have had a brand upon them, and been generally among the most abject and wretched of the human race. It is true, that the Israelites, who were a branch of Shem's posterity, were for a time held in the bitterest bondage by the Egyptians, who proceeded from Ham. This was permitted for very valuable ends, and ended in a glorious deliverance of the former from the tyranny and oppression of the latter. To which it may be added, that

notwithstanding the Egyptians were for a long time a flourishing people, and had great power and dominion, yet they also became remarkably subjected to the posterity of Shem and Japheth, and so have continued for a great number of ages. They have been subjected successively to the Persians, Grecians, Romans, Saracens, Mamelukes, Turks, so as to verify that remarkable prophecy of Ezekiel, that Egypt should be *the basest of kingdoms*, neither should it *exalt itself any more among the nations*, Ezek. xxix. 15.

Thus it appears, that this boasted objection, upon which so mighty a stress has been laid, as if it were alone sufficient to overthrow the authority of Holy Writ, turneth out rather to the confirmation of it.

## SECTION II.

*His Lordship's Attempt against the Gospel History, and the Divine Authority of the Christian Religion, considered.*

HAVING examined what the late Lord Bolingbroke hath urged against the authority and credibility of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, let us next consider the attempt he makes against the authority of the New. He had indeed, whilst he expressed a great contempt of the Jewish scriptures, affected to speak with a favourable regard to Christianity. But he afterwards throws off the disguise, and makes it plainly appear, that he hath as little veneration and esteem for the one as for the other. It is no great sign of his respect for Christianity, that at the same time that he does all he can to destroy the credit of the Jewish history, and to shew that it is not at all to be depended upon, he declares—"that the foundation of the Christian system is laid partly in those histories, and in the prophecies joined to them, or inserted in them\*." But, not content with this general insinuation, he afterwards proceedeth, in his fifth Letter, to a more direct attack upon the Christian revelation †." He insisteth upon it, that the facts, upon which the authority of the Christian religion is founded, have not been proved as all historical facts, to which credit should be given, ought to be proved. He declares to the noble Lord to whom he writes, "that this is a matter of great moment; and that therefore he makes no excuse for the zeal which obliges him to dwell a little on it †." And after having endeavoured to shew, that "there remains at this time no standard at all of Christianity," either in the text of Scripture, or in tradition, he argues, that—"by consequence, either this religion was not originally of divine institution, or else God has not provided effectually for preserving the genuine purity of it, and the gates of hell have actually prevailed, in contradiction to his promise, against the Church."

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 91, 92.

† Ibid. p. 174—185.

‡ Ibid. p. 176.

He must be worse than an atheist that affirms the last; and therefore the best effect of this reasoning that can be hoped for, is, that men should fall into theism, and subscribe to the first. And accordingly he roundly declares, that "Christianity may lean on the civil and ecclesiastical power, and be supported by the forcible influence of education: but the proper force of religion, that force which subdues the mind, and awes the conscience by conviction, will be wanting\*." He adds, "Since I have said so much on the subject, in my zeal for Christianity, I will add this further—The resurrection of letters was a fatal period: the Christian system has been attacked, and wounded too, very severely since that time †." And again, speaking of those of the clergy who act for spiritual, not temporal ends, and are desirous that men should believe and practise the doctrines of Christianity, he saith, that "they will feel and own the weight of the considerations he offers; and will agree, that however the people have been, or may be, amused, yet Christianity has been in decay ever since the resurrection of letters ‡." This is an odd proof of his pretended *zeal for Christianity*, to insinuate, that all good and honest divines will agree with him, that Christianity has been losing ground ever since the revival of learning and knowledge; as if it could not bear the light, and only subsisted by darkness and ignorance. It will help farther to shew his design in this, if we compare it with what he saith in his sixth Letter §; where he mentions the resurrection of letters, after the art of printing had been invented, as one of the principal causes that contributed to the diminution of the papal authority and usurpations. And he observes, that "as soon as the means of acquiring and spreading information grew common, it is no wonder that a system was unravelled, which could not have been woven with success in any age, but those of gross ignorance, and credulous superstition." We may see by this what a compliment he designs to Christianity, when he represents it as having received a fatal blow at the resurrection of letters, and as having been in decay ever since. He plainly puts it on a level with the papal authority and us-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol i. p. 181. 182.

† Ibid. p. 185.

‡ Ibid. p. 182.

§ Ibid. p. 206, 207.

urpation, and supposes the same of Christianity that he does of popery, that it was a system which could only have been woven in the ages of ignorance and superstition, which owed its reception and prevalency to times of darkness, and has been decaying ever since the means of acquiring and spreading information grew common.

This may suffice to shew the respect that the writer of these Letters bears to Christianity. Before I enter on a distinct examination of what he hath offered, I would observe, that he endeavoureth to prepare his way by declaiming, for several pages together, against the priests, divines, and ecclesiastical historians, on the account of that spirit of lying that hath prevailed among them in all ages \*. But he himself well observes and proves, in opposition to an historical Pyrrhonism, that tho' there have been abundance of lies and false history put upon the world, this ought not to diminish the credit of the true. And therefore the frauds and falsehoods of many that have professed a zeal for Christianity, ought to be no prejudice against the authority of the New Testament, or the credibility of the facts on which it is supported, provided it can be shewn, that these facts come to us with a sufficient degree of evidence to make it reasonable for us to receive them as true.

If, as he asserts, "numberless fables have been invented to support Judaism and Christianity; and for this purpose false history as well as false miracles have been employed;" —it is certain, that no persons have taken greater pains, or been more successful in their attempts to detect and expose such frauds and false history, than Christian divines and critics; many of whom have exercised themselves this way with great judgment and impartiality, as being sensible that Christianity needeth no such supports, and that such frauds dishonour the cause they are intended to serve. If we examine the New Testament, we shall find no encouragement there given to such methods. A remarkable simplicity, and impartial regard to truth, every-where appear. And to lie for the glory of God, or to *do evil that good may come of it*, is there most expressly condemned. It was when men began to fall from the true original spirit of Christianity, and, not content with

\* Bolingbrok's Works, vol. i. p. 123, et seq.



the simplicity of religion as Christ and his apostles left it, attempted to bring in innovations, additions, alterations in the Christian doctrine, and worship; it was then that fraud and imposture, of a foolish credulity, began to prevail, and grew more and more, the farther they removed from the first and purest ages. And it is capable of a clear proof, that it was principally in favour of those corrupt additions and abuses of Christianity, that false history and false miracles have been artfully contrived, and zealously propagated. And why should it be turned to the disadvantage of the gospel-history or miracles, that history has been corrupted and falsified, in favour of doctrines or practices, *e. g.* the *invocation of saints, purgatory, the worship of images, relics, &c.* which Christianity has not countenanced or authorized? To which it may be added, that it is plainly foretold in the New Testament, that there should be a great apostacy from the purity of religion, and that the corruption should be introduced, and carried on, by *signs and lying wonders*. And if this hath actually been the case, instead of furnishing a proper objection against true original Christianity, it affordeth a manifest proof of the perfect foreknowledge of its divine authority.

He seems to lay a great stress upon it, that “the church has had this advantage over her adversaries—that the works of those who have written against her have been destroyed; and whatever she advanceth to justify herself, and to defame her adversaries, is preserved in her annals and the writings of her doctors \*.”—And he takes particular notice “of Gregory the Great’s proclaiming war to all heathen learning, in order to promote Christian verity †.” But it is certain, that the humour of destroying the heathen writings never generally obtained in the Christian Church. On the contrary, it was principally owing to Christians that so many of those writings have been transmitted to us. The Mahometans, and some of the barbarous nations, destroyed *libraries*, and monuments of learning, wherever they came. But it is a matter of fact not to be contested, that great numbers of heathen writings and monuments have been preserved; by Christians they have been preserved; and from thence the learned have been able to give

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. i. p. 127, 128.

† Ibid. p. 131.

an ample account of their *religion, rites, laws, and history*.— And this is so far from being a disadvantage to Christianity, that great use hath been made of the heathen learning to serve and promote the Christian cause. The emperor Julian was so sensible of this, that he formed a design of modelling the schools, so that the Christians should not be acquainted with the heathen writers. As to the books that have been written against Christianity \*, it is possible that the ill-judged zeal of some Christians may have occasioned the loss of some of them : but I am apt to think it was owing in most instances to the same causes and accidents, to which we may attribute the loss of so many ancient monuments, and admired writings, not only of the heathens, but of eminent fathers, and ancient writers of the Christian church. Many celebrated apologies for Christianity, and books in defence of religion, have been lost ; when, on the contrary, the works even of Lucretius, a system of Epicurism, the life of Apollonius Tyaneus, and others of the like sort, have come down to our times.

These insinuations do not properly come up to the main point. But in his fifth letter, under pretence of giving advice to divines, and shewing that it is incumbent upon them to apply themselves to the study of history, he sets himself more directly to attack the authority of the Christian religion, and to subvert, as far as in him lieth, the foundations on which the proof of its divine original depends. And the course of his reasoning is plainly this: that Christianity is wholly founded upon facts, and that those facts do not come to us with a sufficient degree of evidence to be relied on : they have not been proved as matters of fact ought to be proved. He declares, that——“ it has been long matter of astonish-

\* The heathen writers against Christianity seem not to have been much esteemed among the Pagans themselves; and this may be one reason why they were not very carefully preserved. There is a remarkable passage of Chrysostom to this purpose, who, in a discourse addressed to the heathens, observes, That the philosophers, and famous rhetoricians, who were against Christianity, had only rendered themselves ridiculous: that they had not been able to persuade any one among so many people, either wise or simple, man or woman; that the books written by them were had in such contempt, that they disappeared almost as soon as they were published: and that if any of them were preserved, it was among Christians that one might find them. Chryf. tom. ii. p. 559. *Edit. Bened.*

“ment to him, that Christian divines, those of them that can  
 “be called so without a sneer, could take so much silly pains  
 “to establish mystery on metaphysics, revelation on philoso-  
 “phy, and matters of fact on abstract reasoning. A religion  
 “founded on the authority of a divine mission, confirmed by  
 “prophecies and miracles, appeals to facts: and the facts must  
 “be proved, as all other facts that pass for authentic, are prov-  
 “ed. If they are thus proved, the religion will prevail with-  
 “out the assistance of so much profound reasoning; if they  
 “are thus proved, the authority of it will sink in the world,  
 “even with this assistance\*.”—He therefore blames the di-  
 vines for using improper proofs in their disputes with deists.  
 He asks—“What do they mean to din improper proofs in ears  
 “that are open to proper proofs?” Thus it is that character-  
 izes the deists; and afterwards describes them as persons—  
 “of minds candid, but not implicit; willing to be informed,  
 “but curious to examine †.” But how different is the account  
 he giveth even of the most learned Christians! He affirms  
 that “they have not been hitherto impartial enough, to take  
 “an accurate examination of the Jewish and Christian system,  
 “or have not been honest enough to communicate it ‡.”—This  
 is a very severe and confident censure. There have been many  
 persons, not only among divines, but among the laity, of dis-  
 tinguished eminence for probity and virtue, as well as for learn-  
 ing and judgment, and who, to speak modestly, were in these  
 respects no way inferior to the late Lord Bolingbroke, that  
 have professed to examine with all the attention they were  
 capable of, and with an earnest desire of knowing the truth,  
 the evidences of the Jewish and Christian system: but because,  
 as the result of their inquiries, they were confirmed in the be-  
 lief of the divine original of the Jewish and Christian revela-  
 tion, therefore in his judgment, not one of them was honest or  
 sagacious enough to make an accurate examination: and I ap-  
 prehend they have no other way of obtaining the character of  
 sagacity or impartiality from writers of this cast, but by re-  
 nouncing Christianity. If they do this, they shall be allowed  
 to be sagacious and impartial inquirers; but otherwise, they  
 must be content to have their judgment or honesty called in  
 question. But if we may judge by the writings of the

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 175. † Ibid. p. 179. ‡ Ibid. p. 181.

deists that have hitherto appeared, not excepting those of his Lordship, they have not given very favourable indications, either of an uncommon sagacity, or of a candid and impartial inquiry.

He tells the noble Lord to whom he writes,—“ You will find reason perhaps to think as I do, that it is high time the clergy in all Christian communions should join their forces, and establish those historical facts, which are the foundations of the whole system, on clear and unquestionable historical authority, such as they require in all cases of moment from others, and reject candidly what cannot be thus established \*.”

Christian divines have frequently done what his Lordship blames them for not doing. The facts on which the Christian system is founded, relate principally to what is recorded in the writings of the New Testament, concerning the *holy life*, and excellent *character*, of our blessed Saviour, his admirable *discourses*, the many illustrious *miracles* he performed during the course of his personal ministry in proof of his divine mission, his *resurrection* from the dead, and consequent *exaltation*, the extraordinary *effusion of the Holy Ghost* upon his disciples, and the miraculous attestations that were given to his apostles, and the first publishers of the Christian revelation.—The question is, what reason have we to think that those facts were really done? His Lordship requires, that these facts should be proved, as all other facts that pass for authentic are proved: and that divines should establish the credit of those facts on clear and unquestionable historical authority, such as they require in all cases of moment from others. The Christian divines are willing to join issue on this point. The best, the properest way of proving the truth of ancient facts is undoubtedly by authentic accounts published in the age in which the facts were done, and transmitted with sufficient marks of credibility to our own times. And several things are to be considered, in order to our judging whether, and how far, those accounts may be depended on.—If the facts there related were of a public nature, done for the most part in *open* view, and for which an appeal is made to numbers of witnesses:—if the ac-

counts of those facts were given by persons that were perfectly well acquainted with the facts, and who, having had full opportunity to know them, were themselves absolutely persuaded of the truth and reality of those facts: if they appear from their whole character to have been persons of great probity, and undesigned simplicity, and who could have no worldly interest to serve by feigning or disguising those facts; and if their prejudices had not any tendency to bias them in favour of those facts, but the contrary: if the writings themselves have all the characters of genuine simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth, that can be reasonably desired: and if they can be clearly traced from the age in which they were written, and the facts were said to be done, through the succeeding ages, to our own times: and finally, if it is undeniably evident, that there were surprising effects produced in the very age in which the facts were said to be done, and which cannot otherwise be accounted for, than by allowing the truth of those facts, and the effects of which continue to this day: where these several circumstances concur, they lay a just foundation for receiving the accounts given of facts as true. According to the justest rules of criticism, such accounts of facts may be depended on: and many facts are generally received and believed, that fall greatly short of this evidence.

Now it is capable of being proved, and has been often proved with great clearness and strength, that all these circumstances concur in relation to the important facts on which the Christian system is founded. The facts themselves were, for the most part, done in open view, and of which there were many witnesses. Christ's whole personal ministry was a very public thing. The scene of it was not laid in a dark obscure corner, nor was it carried on merely in a private way. His admirable discourses were, for the most part, delivered, and his miracles wrought, in places of the most public concourse, before great multitudes of people, and even before his enemies themselves, and those who were most strongly prejudiced against him. Many of his wonderful works are represented as having been done at Jerusalem, at the time of their solemn festivals, when there was a vast concourse of people from all parts. The same may be said of the remarkable circumstances which attended his crucifixion, the

earthquake, the splitting of the rock, the extraordinary preternatural darkness that covered the whole land for the space of three hours, &c. ; which things happened at the time of the Jewish passover, and could not have been imposed upon the people of that age, if they had not been known to be incontrovertibly true. And the relating such things was, in effect, appealing to thousands of witnesses. And though Jesus did not appear publicly after his resurrection to all the people ; yet besides that he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, to his apostles and others, who best knew him, and were therefore most capable of judging that it was he himself, and not another ; and was seen even by five hundred at once, who all concurred in their testimony ; besides this, the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost upon his disciples on the day of Pentecost, which was the most illustrious confirmation of his resurrection and ascension, is represented to have been of the most public nature, in the presence of vast multitudes, then gathered together at Jerusalem from all parts of the world. To which it may be added, that many of the miracles that were wrought in the name, and by the power, of a risen Jesus, and which were so many additional proofs of his resurrection, were also done in open view, before great numbers of people. The accounts of these facts were written and published in the very age and place in which the facts were done, and the laws and doctrines delivered, which are there recorded, and by persons who appear to have been perfectly acquainted with the things they relate, and fully persuaded of the truth of them. And many of the facts were of such a nature, and so circumstanced, that they could not be deceived in them, allowing them to have had their senses, which I think it is but reasonable to suppose.

The writers of these accounts appear to have been persons of plain sense, and of great probity and simplicity, and to have had a sincere regard to truth. They write without art, without passion, or any of that heat which enthusiasm is wont to inspire : they take no pains to prepossess or captivate the reader ; but content themselves with a plain simple narration of facts, without ornament, amplification, or disguise : they relate with a calm simplicity, and in a manner that hath not the least sign of an over-heated imagination, Christ's wonderful actions,

and excellent discourses, without interposing any reflections of their own. With the same coolness they relate the bitter censures, the scoffs and reproaches, that were cast upon him by his adversaries, and the grievous and ignominious sufferings he endured, without expressing their indignation against the authors of them. And it is observable, that they do not represent him, as one might be apt to expect they would have done, as triumphing over those sufferings with an exulting bravery, but rather as manifesting great tenderness of heart and sensibility under them, though mixed with remarkable constancy and resignation.

It is a farther proof of that impartial regard to truth, which is observable in the writers of those accounts, that, though some of them were apostles themselves, and others their special friends and intimates, yet they relate, without disguise, things which seem to bear hard upon their characters. They relate not only the lowness and meanness of their condition and circumstances, but their ignorance, their dulness of apprehension, the weakness of their faith, the power of their prejudices, their vain ambition, and contentions among themselves who should be the greatest, the reproofs they received from their Lord, their cowardly forsaking him in his last sufferings, and particularly the shameful fall of Peter, one of the chief of them, and his denial of his Lord and master, with the aggravating circumstances that attended it. They have not attempted to conceal any of these things, which they might easily have done, or to excuse or disguise them; than which nothing could better shew their impartiality, and love of truth.

It farther strengthens the credit of their relations, when it is considered, that they had no temptation to disguise or falsify the great facts recorded in the gospels, in order to serve any worldly interest, or to humour and confirm any darling prejudices. On the contrary, it appeareth, that they were themselves brought, by the irresistible evidence of the facts they relate, to embrace a religion, which was not only contrary to their worldly interests, and exposed them to all manner of reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings, but which was also contrary to their former most favourite notions, and rooted prejudices. For what could be more contrary to the notions and prejudices, which then universally possessed the minds of

the vulgar than the doctrine of a crucified Messiah, who was to erect a kingdom, not of this world, but of a spiritual nature, in the benefits and privileges of which the Gentiles were to be joint sharers with the Jews? And finally, they gave the highest proof of their being themselves persuaded of the truth of those facts, by their persisting in their testimony with an unshaken constancy, in opposition to all the powers and terrors of this world. To this it may be added, that the writings themselves have all the characters of genuine purity, simplicity, and uncorrupted integrity; that any writings can have, nor is there any thing in them that gives the least ground of suspicion of their having been written in any later age, or that savours of the spirit of this world, of ambition, avarice, or or sensuality. And these writings have been transmitted to us with an unquestionable evidence, greater than can be produced for any other writings in the world. We can clearly trace them through all the intermediate ages up to that immediately succeeding the apostles, and have the most convincing proof of their having been still extant, and still received and acknowledged among Christians. There are great numbers of books, now in our hands, that were written and published in the several ages between that time and this, in which there are continual references to the gospels, and other sacred books of the New Testament. And by the numerous quotations from them, and large portions transcribed out of them in every age, it is incontestibly manifest, that the accounts of the facts, discourses, doctrines, &c. which now appear in them are the same that were to be found in them in the first ages. Innumerable copies of them were soon spread abroad in different nations: They have been translated into various languages: Many commentaries have been written upon them by different authors, who have inserted the sacred text in their writings: They have been constantly applied to on many occasions, by persons of different sects, parties inclinations, and interests. These are things which no man can be so hardy as to deny. And by this kind of evidence, the greatest and the most convincing which the nature of the thing can possibly admit of, we are assured, that the evangelical records, which are now in our hands, have been transmitted safe to us, and are the same that were originally published in the apostolical age; and that a general corruption



of them, or a substitution of other accounts instead of them, if any had attempted it, would have been an impossible thing.

Taking all these considerations together, it appeareth that never were there any accounts of facts that better deserved to be depended on. And what mightily confirmeth the credit of those writings, and of the facts there related, is, that it cannot be contested, that great numbers, both of Jews and heathens, upon the credit of those facts, forsaking the religion of their ancestors, were brought to receive the religion of Jesus in the first age, when they had the best opportunity of inquiring into the truth and certainty of those facts: And this in opposition to their most inveterate prejudices, and when, by embracing it, they exposed themselves to all manner of evils and sufferings. The spreading of the Christian religion, as the case was circumstanced, furnisheth a very strong proof of the truth of the facts on which it was founded, and cannot otherwise be accounted for.

Our author asserts, that "if the facts can be proved, the Christian religion will prevail, without the assistance of profound reasoning: but, if the facts cannot be proved, the authority of it will sink in the world, even with this assistance \*." I think it may be fairly argued from this, that if the extraordinary facts had not been true, on the evidence of which alone Christianity is founded, it must have sunk at the very beginning, and could never have been established in the world at all; considering the nature of this religion, and the difficulties and oppositions it had to encounter with. It was manifestly contrary to the prevailing prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles: It tended entirely to subvert the whole system of the pagan superstition and idolatry, which was wrought into their civil constitution, and upon which the prosperity of the Roman empire, and the establishment of their state, were thought to depend. It also tended to set aside the peculiar polity of the Jews, upon which they so highly valued themselves, and to subvert all the pleasing hopes and expectations of the temporal kingdom of the Messiah, with which they were so infinitely delighted. It obliged them to receive one that had been ignominiously condemned and crucified as their Redeemer and their Lord, the Son of God, and

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 75.

Saviour of the world. It proposed no temporal advantages to its votaries, to bribe men to embrace it; gave no indulgence, to their corrupt lusts, nor had any thing in it to soothe and gratify their vicious appetites and inclinations. At the same time it had all the powers of the world engaged against it: Yet it soon triumphed over all opposition, though propagated by the seemingly meanest instruments; and made an astonishing progress through a great part of the Roman empire, then the most knowing and civilized part of the earth. This is a strong additional confirmation of the truth of those accounts which are contained in the gospel records; since there could not be, as the case was circumstanced, any possible inducement to Jews or Gentiles to embrace Christianity; but a thorough conviction of its divine original, and of the truth of those extraordinary facts by which it was attested.

And if the first propagators of this religion had offered no other proof but their own words in support of it, and in confirmation of the divine authority of a crucified Jesus, it cannot, with any consistency, be supposed, that a scheme of religion, so destitute of all worldly advantages, and so opposite to men's prejudices, as well as vices, and which subjected those that made profession of it to such bitter reproaches and persecutions, could possibly have prevailed in the world.

If, at the time when Christianity made its first appearance in the world, it had been embraced by the Roman emperor, as it afterwards was by Constantine the Great, if it had been countenanced by the higher powers, there might have been some pretence for ascribing the progress it made to the encouragement it met with from the great and powerful. The author of these Letters, speaking of the miracles said to be wrought at the tomb of the Abbe Paris, observes, "That if the first minister had been a Jansenist, all France had kept his festival; and those silly impostures would have been transmitted, in all the solemn pomp of history, from the knaves of his age to the fools of the next\*." But this very instance, in which the deists have triumphed so much, may be turned against them, since it affordeth a plain proof, how difficult it is to maintain the credit of miraculous facts, when they are discountenanced by the civil power;

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 125, 126.

“ power. The miracles supposed to be wrought at the tomb of the Abbé Paris were quashed, and a stop put to the course of the miraculous operations, and the falsehood of some of them plainly detected, notwithstanding there was a numerous, a powerful, and artful body of men engaged, in reputation and interest, to support the credit of them. It may therefore be justly concluded, that if the extraordinary facts, on which Christianity was founded had been false, the credit of them must soon have sunk, and that religion with it, when all the reigning powers of the world, Jewish and heathen, joined their forces and influence to suppress it \*.

In what hath been said above, to shew the credit that is due to the accounts given of the facts by which Christianity is established, it is supposed, that these accounts were written by Christ's own disciples, or their most intimate companions, and in the first age, the age in which the facts were done, *i. e.* by persons perfectly well acquainted with those facts. But this is what our author seems unwilling to allow. In his fifth Letter, after having observed, that—“ false history has “ been employed to propagate Christianity formerly, and that “ the same abuse of history is still continued,”—he instances in Mr Abbadie's saying, that—“ the gospel of St Matthew “ is cited by Clemens, bishop of Rome, a disciple of the Apostles; that Barnabas cites it in his Epistle; that Ignatius “ and Polycarp receive it; and that the same fathers give testimony for St Mark.” He adds, that—“ the bishop of “ London, in his third Pastoral Letter, speaks to the same effect.” And then he proceeds—“ I presume the fact advanced by the minister and the bishop, is a mistake. If “ the fathers of the first century do mention some passages “ that are agreeable to what we read in our Evangelists, will “ it follow, that these fathers had the same gospels before “ them? To say so, is a manifest abuse of history, and quite “ inexcusable in writers that knew, or might have known, “ that these fathers made use of other gospels, wherein such “ passages might be contained, or they might be preserved in “ unwritten tradition. Besides which, I would almost ven-

\* The difficulties Christianity had to encounter with, are elegantly represented by Mr West, in his admirable Treatise on the Resurrection.

“ ture to affirm, that the fathers of the first century do not  
 “ expressly name the gospels we have of Matthew, Mark,  
 “ Luke, and John \*.” His design is plainly to signify, that  
 there is no proof, that the Gospels, the books of the Evange-  
 lists, which we now have in our hands, were written in the  
 first age of Christianity.

As this is a matter of importance, I shall offer some ob-  
 servations upon it.

And, first, it is to be observed, that though but few of the  
 writings of the fathers of the first century are come down to  
 us, and those generally very short; yet it cannot be denied, that  
 in all these writings the facts recorded in the gospels, especially  
 relating to our Lord’s passion and resurrection, and the scheme  
 of religion there taught, are all along supposed, and referred to,  
 as of undoubted truth and certainty, and of divine original: so  
 that those writings of the apostolical fathers bear testimony ma-  
 terially to the gospels, and to the facts there related, and come  
 in aid of those accounts. It is also manifest, that there are se-  
 veral particular passages quoted in these writings, which seem  
 plainly to refer to passages that are now found in the Evangelists,  
 and these passages are mentioned in a manner which shews,  
 that they regarded them as of divine authority. Nor is it a  
 valid objection against this, that they do not cite the gospels of  
 Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, by name: for it is not their  
 custom, in mentioning passages of Scripture, to name the par-  
 ticular books out of which these passages are extracted; they  
 content themselves with producing the passages, or giving the  
 sense of them. This they generally do with regard to testi-  
 monies produced from the sacred books of the Old Testament:  
 and yet no one will deny, that they had those books in their  
 hands, and acknowledged their divine authority.

Barnabas, in his Epistle, has some plain references to pas-  
 sages that are found in St Matthew’s gospel: and with regard  
 to one of them, he introduced it with saying, *It is written*; which  
 was a form of quotation usual among the Jews in citing their  
 sacred books, and seems plainly to shew, that he referred to  
 written accounts of the actions and discourses of our Saviour.

Clement, in his Epistle, mentions several remarkable passages

in our Lord's discourses, recorded by the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke; he calls them, *the words of the Lord Jesus which he spake*, and represents them as of the highest authority, and deserving the greatest regard.

Ignatius hath several passages, which either are plain references, or manifest allusions, to passages that are to be found in St Matthew's gospel, and to several other books of the New Testament. He tells those to whom he writes, that they "ought to hearken to the Prophets, but especially to the gospel, in which the passion has been manifested to us, and the resurrection perfected \*." Where, as by the Prophets are undoubtedly to be understood the prophetic writings, so by *the Gospel* seems plainly to be understood the writings of the Evangelists, collected into one book called the Gospel. And in other passages he speaks to the same purpose †, and in a manner which shews, that this book of the gospel was of the most sacred authority among Christians.

Polycarp, in his Epistle, though very short, hath many passages that plainly refer, or allude to texts of the New Testament; and quoting some passages which are expressly found in the Evangelists, he introduces them thus, *The Lord hath said*. He expresses his confidence, that the Philippians, to whom he writes, *were well exercised in the Holy Scriptures*. And it is manifest from what he there adds, that by the Holy Scriptures he particularly intends the sacred writings of the New Testament; which shews, that they were had in the greatest veneration by the Christians of that age.

He that would see a more distinct account of these things, may consult the learned Dr Lardner's accurate collection of the passages from the apostolical fathers, in his *Credibility of the Gospel History*, part ii. vol. i.

It appeareth from this brief account, that the apostolical fathers have taken as much notice of the evangelical writings, as could be reasonably expected, or as they had occasion to do. And therefore I see not why Mr Abbadie should be charged with an abuse of history, for representing the fathers of the first century as having cited the books of the Evangelists;

\* Ep. ad Smyrn. S. 7.

† Ep. ad Philadelph. S. 5, and 9.

since, though they do not expressly quote them by name, yet they quote passages as of sacred authority, which are to be found in these books: And therefore it may be reasonably supposed, that they refer to those books, which, as I shall presently shew, were then extant, and the authority of which was then acknowledged.

But it is urged, that if the fathers of the first century do mention some passages that are agreeable to what we read in our Evangelists, it does not follow, that they had the same gospels before them; because “those fathers made use of other gospels, “ wherein such passages might be contained, or they “ might be preserved in unwritten tradition.” But this way of stating the case does not afford the least presumption, that the books of our Evangelists were not then extant. It is only supposed, that there might be other accounts in that age, in which the same things might be contained; and that the actions and discourses of our Lord were well known among the Christians of the first age, both by written accounts, and by tradition received from the preaching of the Apostles. And this certainly confirmeth, instead of invalidating, the accounts given in the gospels, and supposeth the facts there recorded to have been of well-known credit and authority. But he ought not to mention it as a thing that is, and must be acknowledged by all the learned, that those fathers of the first century made use of other gospels besides those of the Evangelists. It cannot be proved, that they ever refer to any other gospel. The only passage in all the apostolical fathers, which seems to look that way, is one in Ignatius, which some suppose was taken out of the gospel of the Hebrews, which itself was really St Matthew’s gospel, with some interpolations and additions; and yet that passage may be fairly interpreted, as referring to the words of our Saviour, recorded by St Luke, chap. xxiv. 39. \*

It may be gathered indeed from the introduction of St Luke’s gospel, that many in that first age had undertaken to write an account of the history of our Saviour’s life, miracles, discourses, &c. but it does not appear, that those writings were generally

\* See *Lardner’s Credibility*, &c. part ii. vol. i. p. 184, 185, 186.

received among Christians as authentic; probably because they were not done with sufficient exactness, and had a mixture of things false or uncertain. And therefore it is not likely, that the passages referred to by the fathers of the first century, were taken from those writings: It is far more probable that they were taken from the books of the Evangelists, where we still find them, and which were then extant, and their authority acknowledged among Christians.

That the gospels which we have now in our hands were undoubtedly extant in the apostolical age, and regarded as authentic, admitteth of a clear proof, if it be considered, that in the age immediately succeeding we find them universally received and acknowledged in the Christian church. There are several books come down in our times, which were written by authors who unquestionably lived in the second century, in which these gospels are frequently and by name referred to as of divine authority, and many express quotations drawn from them; by which it is manifest, that they were then received with great veneration in the Christian churches. And it appeareth from the first Apology of Justin Martyr, published about an hundred years after the death of our Saviour, that it was then the ordinary practice to read the *memoirs of the Apostles*, and the *writings of the Prophets*, in the religious assemblies of Christians. And that by the *memoirs of the Apostles* he means the books of the Evangelists, is evident from several passages in his writings: and particularly from a passage in this very Apology, where, having mentioned the *memoirs composed by the Apostles*, he adds, *which are called Gospels*: and there are frequent citations from all of them in his writings; which plainly shew, that he looked upon those books as authentic histories of Jesus Christ. The same may be observed concerning other writers in that century. And since it is manifest, that the four gospels were generally received and held in the highest esteem and veneration, among Christians in the second century, even in the former part of it (for that Apology was written about the year 139 or 140,) this plainly sheweth, that the gospels must have been written and published in the apostolical age itself. And it was, because they were known to have been written by the Apostles, or their companions and intimates: and that the accounts there

given were authentic, and absolutely to be depended upon; that these writings were so generally received. Eusebius, speaking of Quadratus, and other eminent persons, who “held the first rank in the succession of the Apostles,” informs us, “that they travelled abroad, performed the work of Evangelists, being ambitious to preach Christ, and deliver the Scripture of the divine Gospels\*.” The persons he speaketh of flourished in the time of Trajan, in the beginning of the second century, and had undoubtedly lived a good part of their time in the first: And their carrying the books of the gospels with them where they preached, and delivering them to their converts, sheweth that those gospels were then well known to be genuine, and had in great esteem. And indeed if they had not been written in the apostolical age, and then known to be genuine, it cannot be conceived, that so soon after, even in the next age, they could have been so generally dispersed, and statedly read in the Christian assemblies, and regarded as of equal authority with the writings of the ancient prophets, which had been for some ages read in the synagogues on the Sabbath-days. And though a great clamour hath been raised concerning some spurious gospels which appeared in the primitive times, there is nothing capable of a clearer proof, than that the four gospels, and those only, were generally received as of divine authority in the Christian church, in the ages nearest the Apostles; and have continued so ever since, and have been all along regarded with the profoundest veneration.

To this ought to be added, that the heathen writers, who lived nearest those times, never pretended to deny, that the books of the Evangelists received among Christians were written by Christ’s own disciples. Celsus lived in the second century. He speaks of Jesus, the author of the Christian religion, as having lived *πρὸ πάντων ὀλίγων ἐτῶν*, a very few years before. He mentions many things recorded in our Evangelists, relating to the birth, life, miracles, sufferings, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and tells the Christians—“These things we have produced out of your own writings.” He all along supposeth them to have been written by Christ’s own disciples, that lived and conversed with him, though he does all he can to ridicule

\* Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. iii. cap. 37.



and expose them \*. To this it may be added, that the Emperor Julian, who flourished about the middle of the fourth century, and who was both of great acuteness, and very well disposed to take all advantages against Christianity, and had no doubt, an opportunity of reading whatsoever books had been written against the Christians before his time, never pretends to contest the gospels being written by Christ's own disciples, and those whose names they bear, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; whom he expressly mentions as the writers of those books †; though, no doubt, he would have been very well pleased, if he could have met with any proof or presumption that could make it probable, that the books of the Evangelists, so generally received among Christians, were written, not by Christ's own immediate disciples, or their companions, or in the apostolical age, but were compiled afterwards, and falsely ascribed to the Apostles. To which it may be added, that none of the Jews; in any of their writings against Christianity, though they often mention the books of the Evangelists; have ever pretended, that those books were not written by those to whom they are attributed, but by others; in after-times, under their names: Nor do they ever mention any charge or suspicion of this kind, as having been brought against those books by their ancestors.

Thus we find, by the acknowledgment of friends and enemies, who lived nearest to those times; that the accounts contained in the books of the Evangelists were written in the apostolical age; the age in which those facts are said to have been done, which are there recorded. There are plain references to them, and passages produced out of them, in the few writings that remain of the first century. And in the age immediately succeeding, we have full proof, that they were universally received in the Christian church as of divine authority, and read as such in the Christian assemblies, and were ascribed to Christ's own immediate attendants, or their intimate companions, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, by name. This hath been universally admitted ever since, in all ages: And these books have been transmitted and continu-

\* *Orig. contra Cels.* lib. ii. p. 67, 69, 70.

† *Cyrl Alex. contra Julian*, lib. x. p. 327. *Edit. Spanheim.*

ed evidence, as cannot be produced for any other books whatsoever. He would be accounted a very unreasonable man that should deny, or even question it, whether the books of Livy, Sallust, Tacitus, were written by those whose names they bear. But the deists, and his Lordship among the rest, most unreasonably reject that historical testimony and evidence in behalf of the scriptures, which they would account to be sufficient with regard to any other books in the world.

It gives a mighty force to all this, that upon a careful examining and considering the books themselves, they bear the plain marks and characters of the first, the apostolical age, and not one mark of a later date. Though three of the Evangelists make particular mention of our Saviour's predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, yet there is not any intimation given, in any one book of the New Testament, of that destruction as having been actually accomplished, which yet was in forty years after our Lord's crucifixion. And it could scarce have been avoided, but that some or other of them must have taken notice of it, considering the many occasions there were for mentioning it, if these books had been generally written after that event. It appeareth from the beginning of St Luke's gospel, compared with the introduction to the Acts of the Apostles, that he wrote his gospel before he wrote the Acts. And yet this latter was evidently written in the apostolical age, and sometime before the death of St Paul. For it is plain, from the accounts given in that book, that the writer of it was a companion of St Paul in his labours and travels, and particularly was with him in his voyage to Rome; with an account of which, and of his preaching there two years in his own hired house, the book ends. It taketh no notice of his after-labours and travels, and of his martyrdom at Rome, which it would undoubtedly have done, as well as of the martyrdom of St James, if it had been written after those events happened. And it is a great proof of the high veneration the first Christians had for those writings, and how careful they were not to insert any accounts into them which were not originally there, that none of them ever pretended to make supplemental additions to that book, either with regard to St Paul himself, or any other of the apostles. And as we may justly conclude, that St Luke's gospel was published in the aposto-

lical age itself, whilst many of the apostles were yet living; so it hath been generally agreed, that St Matthew's gospel was published before that of St Luke; and that the gospel of St John was written last of all. And yet this last, as is manifest from the book itself, was written by one of Christ's own disciples, *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. And it appeareth to have been principally designed to record several things, which were not distinctly taken notice of by the other evangelical writers. Accordingly we find, that though the facts are there plainly supposed, which are related by the other Evangelists, yet those miracles and discourses of our Lord are chiefly insisted upon, which either were omitted by them, or but slightly mentioned. Indeed, whosoever impartially considereth the writings of the New Testament, will easily observe in them many peculiar characters, which plainly point to the time in which they were written. And there is all the reason in the world to think, that if these books had been written in any succeeding age, they would have been in several respects different from what they now are. The Christian religion here appeareth in its primitive simplicity, without any of the mixtures of following ages. The idea that is given of the Christian church, in the writings of the New Testament, is such as is proper to the first age, and from which there were some variations, even in that which immediately followed. The discourses of our blessed Lord, as recorded by the Evangelists, are of such a nature, so full of divine wisdom, and admirable sentiments, as would manifestly appear, if there were room in this place to enter on a particular consideration of them: they are delivered with so much gravity and authority, and yet, for the most part, in such a particular way, that they carry the evident proofs of their own genuineness. The character given of our Saviour, in the books of the Evangelists, seems plainly to have been drawn from the life. And it may be justly affirmed, that it was not in the power of such writers, destitute, as they appear to be, of all art and ornament, to have feigned such a character: a character, in which is wonderfully united, a divine dignity becoming the Son of God, and an amiable humility and condescension becoming the Saviour of men; an admirable wisdom, in conjunction with the greatest candour and simplicity of heart; an ardent zeal for the glory of God, and

the most extensive charity and benevolence towards mankind ; an impartial freedom and severity in reproofing faults, and great tenderness in bearing with men's weaknesses and infirmities ; an unparalleled purity and sanctity of manners, without any thing sour or unsociable, or a supercilious contempt of others ; the most exemplary patience and fortitude under the greatest sufferings, joined with a remarkable tenderness and sensibility of spirit. To this may be added, the beauty of his maxims, the solidity of his reflections, the just and sublime notions of religion which he every where inculcated, far superior to any thing that was taught by the most celebrated doctors of the Jewish nation. The morals he is represented as having taught are the most pure and refined, and yet without running into any superstitious extremes, such as were the affected strictnesses of the Pharisees and Essenes, or the false refinements of some Christians in the following ages. The motives there proposed are the most powerful and efficacious that can be presented to the human mind, drawn from all the charms of the divine love and goodness ; from the engaging offers of grace and mercy made to the truly penitent ; which yet are so ordered as not to give the least encouragement to the obstinately wicked and disobedient ; from the promises of divine aids to assist our sincere endeavours in the performance of our duty ; from the important solemnities of the future judgment, and the eternal retributions of the world to come ; the inexpressible glory and felicity prepared for good men, and the dreadful punishments that shall be inflicted upon the wicked. In a word, so perfect is the idea of religion contained in those writings, that all attempts to add to it in succeeding ages, or raise it to an higher degree of perfection, have really fallen short of its original excellence, and tended to tarnish its primitive beauty and glory.

Taking all these considerations together, they form a very strong and convincing proof of the truth and authenticity of the gospel-records ; and that, whether we consider the method of conveyance, whereby they have been transmitted to us, and which we can trace up with a continued evidence to the first age, or the internal characters of original truth and purity, and genuine integrity, which appear in the writings themselves.

To take off the force of the evidence brought for the facts on which Christianity is established, it hath been urged, that these

facts are only attested by Christians. The author of these Letters observes, that the church has this advantage over her adversaries, that the books that were written against her have been destroyed, whilst whatever tends to justify her has been preserved in her annals: And that "he must be very implicit indeed, who receives for true the history of any nation or religion, and much more that of any sect or party, without having the means of confronting it with some other history\*." He here seems to suppose it as a thing certain, that there had been historical evidence against Christianity, but that the church had suppressed it†. But this is a precarious supposition, without any thing to support it. The account of the facts on which Christianity is founded, was published, as hath been shewn, by persons who pretended to be perfectly well acquainted with those facts, and in the age in which they were done, and who speak of them as things publicly known, and of undoubted certainty. The proper way therefore for the enemies of Christianity to have taken, would have been, to have published, if they were able, contrary authentic accounts, in that very age, for disproving those facts; which it would have been easy to have done, if they had been false: for, in that case, thousands must have known them to be so; since many of the facts are represented as having been done in public view, and in the presence of great multitudes. But that no such contrary historical evidence was then produced or published, we may confidently affirm; not only because there is no account of any such evidence, but because if the facts on which Christianity is established had been authentically disproved, even in the age in which they were said to have been done; and if there had been good historical evidence produced on the other side, by which it appeared that those facts were false, the Christian religion, considering the other disadvantages that

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 128. 132.

† Lord Bolingbroke seems to have laid a great stress upon this thought, for he elsewhere observes, that "if time had brought to us all the proof for Christianity and against it, we should have been puzzled by contradictory proofs." See his works, vol. iv. p. 270. where he presumes upon it as a thing certain, though he does not attempt to produce the least evidence for it, that there was formerly proof against Christianity, which, if it had come down to us, would have destroyed the evidence brought for it, or, at least, has very much weakened the force of that evidence, and kept the mind in suspense.

attended it, and that it was principally supported by those facts, must have sunk at once. How it is conceivable, that in that case it would have flourished more and more; and that vast numbers, and many of them persons of considerable sense and learning, would have continued to embrace it, in the face of the greatest difficulties and discouragements? How comes it, that none of the *Apologies for Christianity* that were published very early, and presented to the Roman emperors, some of which are still extant, take any notice of such contrary historical evidence, or endeavour to confute it, but still speak of those facts as incontestably true and certain? The first heathen author that appears to have written a formal book against the Christian religion, is Celsus: and what he advanced to this purpose, we learn from his own words, preserved by Origen, in his excellent answer to him. He endeavoureth, as far as he can, to turn the gospel-accounts to ridicule; but he never referreth to any authentic history, or book of credit and authority, which had been published, to shew that the facts, recorded by the Evangelists, and believed by the Christians, were false. He pretended indeed, that "he could tell many other things, relating to Jesus, truer than those things that were written of him by his own disciples; but that he willingly passed them by\*:" but we may be sure, that if he had been able to produce any contrary historical evidence, which he thought was of weight sufficient to invalidate the evangelical records, a man of his virulence and acuteness would not have failed to produce it; and his not having done so, plainly sheweth that he knew of none such; though, if there had been any such, he must have known it.—Nor do I find that Julian, when he wrote against Christianity, pretended to produce any contrary historical evidence for disproving the facts recorded in the gospels: if he had, something of it would have appeared in Cyril's answer, in which there are many fragments of his book preserved. I think therefore the pretence of there having been contrary evidence to disprove the facts recorded in the gospel, which evidence was afterwards suppressed by the Christians, is absolutely vain and groundless. And to refuse our assent to the gospel-history, for want of having an opportunity to confront it with

\* Orig. contra Cels. lib. ii. p. 67. Edit. Spencer.

contrary historical evidence, when we have no reason to think there ever was such evidence, would be the most unreasonable conduct in the world.

But still it is urged, that the accounts of those facts, in order to their obtaining full credit from any impartial person, ought to be confirmed by the testimony of those who were not themselves Christians; since Christians may be excepted against as prejudiced persons; and that, if there be no such testimony, it administers just ground of suspicion. As a great stress has been frequently laid upon this, I shall consider it distinctly.

To expect that professed enemies, who reviled and persecuted the Christians, should acknowledge the truth of the main facts on which Christianity is founded, is an absurdity and contradiction. And if any testimonies to this purpose were now to be found in their writings, it would undoubtedly be alleged by those gentlemen, who now complain of the want of such testimonies, that those passages were foisted in by Christians, and ought to be rejected as supposititious. But yet we have the testimony of adversaries concerning many facts relating to Christianity, as far as can be expected from adversaries. It cannot be expected, that Jews or heathens, continuing such, should acknowledge Christ's divine mission; that he was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world: but none of them ever pretended to deny, that there was such a person as Jesus Christ, who was the author of the Christian religion, and appeared in Judea in the reign of Tiberius. Tacitus's testimony, as well as that of Celsus, is very express to this purpose\*. And some of the heathens went so far as to speak very honourably of him. So did the emperor Alexander Severus, who would have built a temple to him, if some of the pagans about him had not made strong remonstrances against it, as Lampridius informs us in his life †. And even Porphyry himself, whose words Eusebius hath preserved, speaks of him as a pious man, whose soul was taken into heaven ‡. It would be unreasonable to expect, that the enemies of Christianity should acknowledge the accounts given of Christ by the Evangelists

\* Tacit. Annal. lib. xv.

† Cap. xxix. xliii. Hist. August. tom. i. Edit. Var.

‡ Euseb. Demonstrat. Evangel. lib. iii. p. 134.

to be true and authentic, and absolutely to be depended upon; for then they must have turned Christians. But yet they never denied, what some of our modern unbelievers seem unwilling to acknowledge, that Christ's own disciples, who had lived and conversed with him, had written accounts of his life, and actions, and discourses, which were received by Christians as true and authentic. The testimony of Celsus, as was observed before, is very full to the purpose. It cannot be expected, that Jews and heathens should acknowledge Christ's miracles to have been really wrought by a divine power. But they do not deny, that he did, or seemed to do, wonderful works. And the way they take to account for them amounteth to an acknowledgment of the facts. Some ascribed them to magical arts, as Celsus, who saith, that, on the account of the strange things he performed, Jesus claimed to be regarded as a God\*. Others, as Hierocles, opposed to them the wonders pretended to have been wrought by Apollonius Tyanæus. The Jews ascribed the works he performed to the virtue of the ineffable Name, which he stole out of the temple. And the emperor Julian expressly acknowledgeth some of his miraculous works, particularly his healing the lame and the blind, and casting out devils, at the same time that he affects to speak of them in a very slight and diminishing manner†. As to Christ's having suffered under Pontius Pilate, the heathens and Jews were so far from denying it, that they endeavoured to turn it to the reproach of Christians, that they believed in, and worshipped one that had been crucified. It cannot be expected indeed, that they should own, that he really rose again from the dead on the third day, as he himself had foretold; but they acknowledge, that his disciples declared that he did so, and professed to have seen him, and conversed with him, after his resurrection. This appeareth from the testimony of Celsus, at the same time that he endeavours to ridicule the account given by the Evangelists of Christ's resurrection‡. The Jews, by pretending that the disciples stole away the body of Jesus, whilst the soldiers that were appointed to guard it slept, plainly acknowledged, that

\* Orig. contra Cels. lib. i. p. 7. 22. 30.

† See his words in Cyril contra Julian. lib. vi. p. 121. Edit. Spanheim.

‡ Orig. contra Cels. lib. ii. p. 94. 96, 97. lib. vii. p. 355.



the body did not remain in the sepulchre where it had been laid after his crucifixion; and that therefore he might have risen from the dead, for any thing they could prove to the contrary. The early and remarkable diffusion of Christianity, notwithstanding all the difficulties it had to encounter with, and the persecutions to which the professors of it were exposed, is a very important fact, and which, as the case was circumstanced, tends very much to confirm the truth of the gospel-accounts. And this is very fully attested by heathen writers, though it cannot be expected, that they would ascribe this propagation of Christianity to its proper causes, the force of truth, and a divine power accompanying it.

Tacitus, in a passage where he expresseth himself in a manner that shews he was strongly prejudiced against Christianity, informs us, that there was a *great multitude* of Christians at Rome in Nero's time, which was in little more than thirty years after the death of our Saviour; and gives an account of the terrible torments and sufferings to which they were exposed\*. Julian, speaking of the Evangelist John, whom he represents as one of Christ's own disciples, saith, that in his time a great multitude, in most of the cities of Greece and Italy, were seized with that disease (for so he calls Christianity), and that John, observing this, was encouraged to assert that Christ was God, which none of the other apostles had done†. And we learn from the younger Pliny, that in the reign of Trajan, *i. e.* about seventy years after our Lord's crucifixion, the Christian faith had made such a progress in several parts of the Roman empire, that the temples of the gods were almost desolate; their solemn sacred rites long neglected; and that there were very few that would buy the sacrifices‡. It cannot be expected, that heathens, continuing such, should acknowledge that the Christians were right in their notions of religion; but the last mentioned celebrated heathen gives a noble testimony to the innocency of their lives and manners, and that they bound themselves by the most sacred engagements to the practice of righteousness and virtue, and not to allow themselves in vice and wickedness, falsehood

\* Tacit. Annal. lib. xv.

† See the passage in Cyril, lib. x. p. 327.

‡ Plin. lib. x. Ep. 97. ad Trajan.

and impurity. Even Celsus, than whom Christianity never had a more bitter enemy, owns, that there were among Christians *many temperate, modest, and understanding persons* \*." And Julian recommends to his heathen pontiff Arsacius the example of the Christians, for their kindness and humanity to strangers, and not only to those of their own religion, but to the heathens; and for their apparent sanctity of life; and this he supposes to be the chief cause why Christianity had made such a progress †. If none but Christian writers had celebrated the constancy of the ancient martyrs, some would have been ready to have suspected, that they feigned this to do them honour, or, at least, greatly heightened it: but it appeareth from the undoubted testimonies of the above mentioned Pliny, of Arrian, who flourished under the reign of Hadrian, and of the emperor Marcus Antoninus, that the ancient Christians were very remarkable for their fortitude and contempt of torments and death, and for their inflexible firmness and constancy to their religion under the greatest sufferings ‡.

Though therefore it were absurd to expect, that the enemies of Christianity, continuing such, should directly attest the truth and certainty of the main facts on which the Christian religion is founded; yet we have several testimonies from them, that contribute not a little to the confirmation of those facts. Besides which, what ought to have great weight with us, we have the testimony of persons who were once Jews, or heathens, and strongly prejudiced against the Christian system, who yet, upon the convincing evidence they had of those facts, were themselves brought over to the religion of Jesus §. Of such persons there were great numbers even in the first age, the age in which the facts were done, and in which they had the best opportunity of inquiring into the truth and certainty of them. But there could not be a more remarkable instance of this kind than the apostle Paul. Never was there any man more strongly prejudiced against Christianity than he: which had carried him so far, that he was very active in persecuting the professors of it, and thought

\* Orig. contra Cels. lib. i. p. 22.

† Julian. Ep. xlix. ad Arsac.

‡ Plin. ubi sup. Arrian Epict. lib. iv. cap. 7. Marcus Anton. lib. xi. 3.

§ See Addison's Treatise of the Christian Religion, sect. iii. iv.

that in doing so he had done God good service. He was at the same time a person of great parts and acuteness, and who had a learned education; yet he was brought over to the Christian faith by a divine power and evidence, which he was not able to resist; and thenceforth did more than any other of the apostles to propagate the religion of Jesus: though thereby he not only forfeited all his hopes of worldly interest and advancement, but exposed himself to a succession of the most grievous reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings; all which he bore with an invincible constancy, and even with a divine exultation and joy. In his admirable epistles, which were undeniably written in the first age of Christianity, and than which no writings can bear more uncontested marks of genuine purity and integrity, there are continual references to the principal facts recorded in the gospels, as of undoubted truth and certainty. And it manifestly appeareth, that great miracles were then wrought in the name of Jesus, and that extraordinary gifts were poured forth upon the disciples. And why should not his testimony in favour of Christianity be of the greatest force? Must it be disregarded because of his turning Christian, *i. e.* because he was so convinced of those facts by the strongest evidence, that it over-ruled all his prejudices, and brought him over to Christianity, in opposition to all his former notions, inclinations, and interests? Whereas it is this very thing that giveth his testimony a peculiar force\*. And if he had not turned Christian, his testimony in favour of Christianity, if he had given any, would not have had so great weight, as being insufficient for his own conviction; or it would have been rejected as a forgery, under pretence that he could not say and believe such things without embracing the Christian faith.

This very pretence has been made use of to set aside the remarkable testimony of Josephus. And indeed, if that testimony be genuine (and a great deal has been strongly urged to prove it so, at least for the substance of it), it must be acknowledged, that he was far from being an enemy to Christianity, though he was perhaps too much a courtier openly to profess it.

There is another argument, which the ingenious author of

\* See this clearly and solidly argued in St George Lyttelton's excellent Observations on the conversion and Apostleship of St Paul.

these Letters proposed, and upon which he layeth no small stress, as if it were a demonstration against the divine authority of the Christian religion. He observes, that—"the writers of the Romish religion have attempted to shew, that the text of the holy writ is on many accounts insufficient to be the sole criterion of orthodoxy;" and he apprehends they have shewn it: And the writers of the reformed religion have erected their batteries against tradition: and that they have jointly laid their axes to the root of Christianity: that men will be apt to reason upon what they have advanced, that there remains at this time no standard at all of Christianity: and that, by consequence, either this religion was not originally of divine institution, or else God has not provided effectually for preserving the genuine purity of it, and the gates of hell have actually prevailed, in contradiction to his promise, against the Church. He must be worse than an atheist that affirms the last: and therefore the best effect of this reasoning that can be hoped for is, that men should fall into Theism, and subscribe to the first;—*viz.* that the Christian religion was not originally of divine institution\*. He seems to think this dilemma unanswerable; and in order to this, he pronounceth, on the side of the Romish church, that their writers have shewn, that the sacred text is—"insufficient to be the sole criterion of orthodoxy;"—or, as he afterwards expresseth it, that—"it has not that authenticity, clearness, and precision, which are necessary to establish it as a divine and certain rule of faith and practice."—Why his Lordship giveth the preference to the Romish divines in this controversy, is very evident. It is because it best answereth the design he hath in view; which manifestly is, to subvert the credit and authority of the Christian religion, and leave it nothing to depend upon but the *force of education, and the civil and ecclesiastical power.*

It cannot be denied, that some writers of the Romish Church, whilst they have endeavoured to shew, that the Scripture is insufficient to be a complete rule of faith and practise, have said as much to expose the sacred text, as if they were in league with the infidels against it, though they, as well as we, profess to

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. i. p. 179, 180, 181.

own its divine original. The enemies of Christianity have not failed to take advantage of this. And indeed there cannot be a greater absurdity than to suppose, that God should inspire men to reveal his will to mankind, and to instruct them in the way of salvation, and order it so, that they should commit that revelation to writing, for the use and benefit of his church; and yet that it should be insufficient to answer the end, or to guide those that, in the sincerity of their hearts, and with the attention which becometh them in an affair of such infinite importance, apply themselves to the understanding and practising of it.

What his Lordship here offers (and it contains the sum of what has been advanced by the Romish writers on this subject), is this—"I am sure that experience, from the first promulgation of Christianity to this hour, shews abundantly, with how much ease and success, the most opposite, the most extravagant, nay, the most impious opinions, and the most contradictory faiths may be founded on the same text, and plausibly defended by the same authority \*."—This way of arguing beareth a near affinity to that which lieth at the foundation of all scepticism, *viz.* that there is no certain criterion of truth, or right reason, because reason is pretended for the most contradictory opinions: and that it is impossible to be certain of any thing, because of the differences among mankind about every thing: that there are no certain principles at all, even in natural religion or morality; since there are none, not even those relating to the existence and perfections of God; a Providence, a future state, the natural differences of good and evil, but what have been controverted, and that by persons who have pretended to learning, to wisdom, and philosophy. But the absurdity of this way of arguing is very evident. The principle is fallacious, that whatever hath been controverted is uncertain. As well might it be said, that, whatever is capable of being abused is not good or useful. It doth not follow, that the scriptures are not sufficiently clear and determinate to be a rule of faith and practice in all that is essential or necessary to salvation, because there have been men in every age that have interpreted them in different senses. The plainest passages in any writings whatsoever may be perverted; nor is

men's differing about the meaning of the sacred text any argument against its certainty or perspicuity. Laws may be of great use, though they do not absolutely exclude chicanery and evasion. That can never be a good argument to prove, that the scriptures are not a rule to be depended upon, which would equally prove, that no revelation that God could give could possibly be a rule of faith and practice, or of any use to guide men to truth and happiness. If God should make a revelation of his will, for instructing mankind in what it most nearly concerneth them to know, and for directing them in the way of salvation (the possibility of which cannot be denied by any theist), and should for this purpose appoint a code to be published, containing doctrines and laws; it may be justly questioned, whether it could possibly be made so clear and explicit, as that all men in all ages should agree in their sense of it. This could hardly be expected, except God should miraculously interpose, with an irresistible influence, to cause them all to think the same way, and give them the same precise ideas of things, the same measures of natural abilities, and exactly the same means and opportunities for acquiring improvement, the same sagacity, the same leisure, the same diligence; and except he should exert his divine power in an extraordinary manner, for subduing or removing all their prejudices, and over-ruling their different passions, humours, inclinations, and interests; and should place them all exactly in the same situation and circumstances. And this would be by no means consistent with the wisdom of the divine government, or with the nature of man, and his freedom as a moral agent, and with the methods and orders of Providence. Nor is there any necessity for so extraordinary a procedure: for it would be absurd to the last degree to pretend, that the scripture can be of no use to any man, except all men were to agree about it; or that it is not sufficiently clear to answer the end, if there be any persons that pervert or abuse it.

Yet, after all the clamour that has been raised about differences among Christians as to the sense of Scripture, there are many things of great importance, about which there hath been in all ages a very general agreement among professed Christians: They are agreed, that there is one God, who made heaven and earth, and all things which are therein: That he preserveth all things by the word of his Power, and governeth all things by

his Providence : That he is infinitely powerful, wise, and good, and is to be loved, feared, adored, obeyed, above all : That as there is one God, so there is one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ *the righteous*, whom he, in his infinite love and mercy, sent into the world to save and to redeem us : That he came to instruct us by his doctrine, and bring a clear revelation of the divine will, and to set before us a bright and most perfect example for our imitation : That he submitted to the most grievous sufferings, and to death itself, for our sakes, that he might obtain eternal redemption for us : That he rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and is now crowned with glory and honour, and ever liveth to make intercession for us : That through him, and in his name, we are to offer up our prayers, and hope for the acceptance of our persons and services, and for gracious assistances in the performance of our duty : That in him there is a new covenant established, and published to the world, in which there is a free and universal offer of pardon and mercy to all the truly penitent, and a most express promise of eternal life, as the reward of our sincere, though imperfect obedience : That it is not enough to have a bare speculative faith, but we must be formed into an holy and godlike temper ; and, in order to be prepared for that future happiness, must live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world : That there shall be a resurrection, both of the just and of the unjust, and a future judgment, when Christ shall judge the world in the Father's name, and give to every man according to his deeds : That the wicked shall be doomed to the most grievous punishments ; and the righteous shall be unspeakably happy to all eternity. These are things of great consequence, and which have been generally acknowledged by Christians in all ages. And if there have been several things advanced by those that call themselves Christians, which are not well consistent with these generally-acknowledged principles ; if there have been controversies among them about points of considerable importance, as well as many contentions about things of little, or no moment, this is no argument against the divine authority or usefulness of the sacred writings. Those that *wrest the Scriptures* must be accountable to him that gave them, for that perversion and abuse ; as men must be account-

able for the abuse of their reason: but this is far from proving, that therefore the Scriptures answer no valuable purpose, and could not be of a divine original. Still it is true, that whosoever will, with a teachable and attentive mind, and an upright intention to know and do the will of God, apply himself to read and consider the holy Scriptures, in an humble dependence on God's gracious assistances, will find vast advantage for instructing him in the knowledge of religion, and engaging him to the practice of it, and for guiding him in the way of salvation.

It appears then, that the foundation, on which this formidable dilemma is built, will not bear. There is at this time a *standard for Christianity*; even the doctrines and laws of our Saviour and his apostles, as contained in the holy Scriptures. It must be, and is acknowledged by all that profess themselves Christians, that whatever is revealed in those sacred books is true and certain, and whatever can be shewn to be contrary to what is there revealed is false. The Romanists as well as Protestants own the divinity and authenticity of the sacred text, though for particular views they would join unwritten tradition with it: and are for giving the church alone the authority to interpret the Scriptures. The reason of their conduct is evident. It is not because they look upon the sacred text to be so obscure and ambiguous, that it cannot be understood by the people; but because they think the people, if left to themselves, will understand it so far as to see the inconsistency there is between true primitive Christianity, as laid down in the New Testament, and the papal system, and because their corrupt additions to Christianity cannot be proved by Scripture authority.

I have already taken notice of what he saith concerning the fatal blow that Christianity received by the resurrection of letters. I suppose we are to take his word as a decisive proof of this; for no other proof of it is offered. But it may be affirmed on the contrary, that true primitive Christianity, that is, Christianity, as laid down in the New Testament, had then a glorious revival. Many corrupt additions that had been made to it were thrown off. It hath never been better understood, nor its evidences set in a clearer light, than since that time.—Some of the most admired names in the republic of letters have thought themselves worthily employed in endeavouring to illustrate the beauties of Scripture, and to clear its difficulties;



It were easy to shew, if it were not a thing so well known as to render it needless, that those who have done most for the revival and spreading of learning and knowledge in all its branches, and who were most celebrated for their genius, judgment, various reading, and probity, have been persons that expressed a great admiration for the holy Scriptures, and an hearty zeal for Christianity.

Thus I have considered what the late Lord Bolingbroke hath offered in these Letters against the authority of the holy Scripture, and the Christian religion, as far as may be necessary to take off the force of the objections he hath raised against it, and which seem to have nothing in them proportioned to the unusual confidence with which they are advanced. It is hard to see what good end could be proposed by such an attempt. But perhaps it may be thought an advantage, that by "discovering" error in first principles founded upon facts, and breaking the "charm, the enchanted castle, the steepy rock, the burning lake" will disappear\*." And there are persons, no doubt, that would be well pleased to see it proved, that Christianity is no better than delusion and enchantment; and particularly, that the wicked have nothing to fear from *the burning lake*, some apprehensions of which may probably tend to make them uneasy in their vicious courses. But I should think, that a true lover of virtue, and of mankind, who impartially considers the purity of the gospel-morals, the excellent tendency of its doctrines and precepts, and the power of its motives for engaging men to the practice of piety and virtue, and deterring them from vice and wickedness, will be apt to look upon it as a very ill employment, to endeavour to expose this religion to contempt, and to set bad men free from the wholesome terrors it inspires, and deprive good men of the sublime hopes and sacred joys it yields. But Christianity hath withstood much more formidable attacks, and will, I doubt not, continue to approve itself to those that examine it, and the evidences by which it is established, with minds free from vicious prejudices, and with that sincerity and simplicity of heart, that seriousness and attention, which becomes them in an affair of such vast importance.

\* See his *Letter on the Use of Study and Retirement*, vol. ii. p. 221.

## L E T T E R XXXV.

*The Account of the Deistical Writers closed—General Reflections on those Writers—The high Encomiums they bestow upon themselves, and their own Performances, and the Contempt they express for others—They differ among themselves about the most important Principles of natural Religion—The unfair Methods they take with regard to Christianity—No Writers discover stronger Marks of Prejudice—The Guilt and Danger of rejecting the Christian Revelation—An Aversion to the Laws of the Gospel, one of the principal Causes of Infidelity—Terms proposed by the Deists for making up the differences between them and the Christians—Their Pretence of placing Religion wholly in Practice, and not in useless Speculations, considered.*

SIR,

I SHALL now close the account of the deistical writers who have appeared among us for above a century past, and shall take occasion to subjoin some reflections which seem naturally to arise upon this subject.

If we were to judge of the merit of these writers, by the encomiums they have bestowed upon their own performances, and the account they have given of their designs and views, we should be apt to entertain a very favourable opinion of them, as persons to whom the world is under great obligations. Dr Tindal begins and ends his book with declaring, that his scheme *tends to the honour of God, and the happiness of human societies*; that there is *none who wish well to mankind, but must also wish his hypothesis to be true*; and that it *most effectually prevents the growth, both of scepticism and enthusiasm*. The *Moral Philosopher* every-where speaks very advantageously of himself, as having nothing in view but to vindicate and promote the cause of *real religion, and moral truth and righteousness*. The author of *Christianity not founded on Argument*, spends some pages in recapitulating and extolling his own work. The same observation may be made concerning the author of the *Resurrection*

of *Jesus considered*. He declares, “ that reason is his only rule, and the displaying truth his only aim : that his design is to recover the dignity of virtue, and to promote that veneration for wisdom and truth, which have been destroyed by faith \*.” And he concludes with expressing his hope, that his “ treatise will be of real service to religion, and make men’s practice better, when they find they have nothing else to depend upon for happiness, here and hereafter, but their own personal righteousness, with their love of wisdom and truth †.” In like manner, Mr Chubb has, in his *Farewell to his Readers*, with great solemnity, told the world how much they are obliged to him for having taken care to leave them his instructions in matters of the highest importance. Mr Hume assumes the merit of throwing light upon the most curious and sublime subjects, with regard to which all the received systems had been extremely defective, and which had escaped the most elaborate scrutiny and examination. He proposes to reconcile profound inquiry with clearness, and truth with novelty, and to undermine the foundations of an abstruse philosophy, which seems to have served hitherto only as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to absurdity and error ‡. And he begins his *Essay upon Miracles* with declaring, that “ he flatters himself that he has discovered an argument, which, if just, will with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently will be useful as long as the world endures §. Lord Bolingbroke makes the most pompous professions of his intentions to “ separate truth from falsehood, knowledge from ignorance, relations of the Creator from inventions of the creature, dictates of reason from the sallies of enthusiasm—and to go to the root of that error, which sustains our pride, fortifies our prejudices, and gives pretence to delusion—to discover the true nature of human knowledge—how far it is real, and how it begins to be fantastical—that the gaudy visions of error

\* *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, p. 72.

† *Ibid.* p. 82.

‡ Hume’s *Philosophical Essays*, p. 18, 19. and his *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, p. 172.

§ See Hume’s *Philosophical Essays*, p. 174.

*being dispelled, men may be accustomed to the simplicity of truth* \*.

Nor do these gentlemen only join in representing themselves as persons of extraordinary penetration, and of the most upright intentions; but they sometimes seem to claim a kind of infallibility. They talk of having their *understandings irradiated with the beams of immutable, eternal reason*, so that *they are sure not to run into any errors of moment*. And that they have an *infallible mark and criterion of divine truth*, in which *men cannot be mistaken* †. They propose to direct men to *the eternal and invariable rule of right and wrong*, as to an *infallible guide*, and as the *solid ground of peace and safety* ‡. They assure us, that *deism*, or the religion they would recommend, is “*bright as the heavenly light, and free from all ambiguities: that it makes all men happy that embrace it; that it perfectly satisfies all doubts, and procures the troubled soul unshaken rest* §.”

And as they take care to recommend themselves, and their own writings, to the esteem and admiration of mankind, so they give a very disadvantageous idea of those that stand up as advocates for revealed religion. They speak in a sneering contemptuous way of such books as Stillingfleet's *Origines Sacrae*, Dr Clarke's *Discourse of Natural and Revealed Religion*, the *Analogy of Reason and Revelation*, &c. and the excellent discourses at Boyle's lectures ||. A writer of great note among them thinks fit to represent the Christian divines, as, for the most part, *mortal enemies to the exercise of reason*, and *below brutes* \*\*. Another charges them, as acting as if *they wanted either understanding or honesty*. And he assures us, that “*those who think most freely, have the least share of faith; and that in proportion as our understandings are improved, faith diminishes*.” The same writer expressly calls it *foolish faith*, and saith, that “*in this glorious time of light*

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii p. 328. 331.

† *Christianity as old as the Creation*, p. 336. edit. 8vo. *Mor. Phil.* vol. i. p. 92.

‡ Chubb's Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 249.

§ *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, p. 9.

|| *Christianity not founded on Argument*.

\*\* *Christianity as old as the Creation*, p. 250, 251.

“and liberty, this divine hag, with her pious witchcrafts, which were brought forth in darkness, and nourished by obscurity, faint at the approach of day, and vanish upon sight\*.” And one of their latest and most admired authors hath thought fit to pass this arrogant censure upon all that believe the Christian religion—that “Whosoever is moved by faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe whatever is most contrary to custom and experience †.” Lord Bolingbroke brings it as a charge against both clergy and laity, who believe Christianity, that they have been hitherto either *not impartial, or sagacious enough, to take an accurate examination, or not honest enough to communicate it ‡*. And he takes all occasions to pour forth the most virulent contempt and reproach upon the most eminent Christian divines and philosophers, both ancient and modern. Many instances of this kind have been observed above in the first volume of this work, and 22d Letter, and this vol. Letter 25th.

After such specious professions, it would be natural to expect, that these gentlemen should oblige the world with clearer *directions* than have been hitherto given to lead mankind to truth and happiness. But this is far from being the case: they indeed all join in endeavouring to subvert revealed religion, but they are by no means agreed what to substitute in its room. They often speak magnificently of keeping close the *eternal reason and nature of things*, and profess a high esteem for what they call the *uncorrupted religion of reason and nature, which is always invariably the same §*. But when they come to explain themselves more particularly, it is not easy to know what they intend by it. Some of them have reckoned among the principles of natural religion, and which are of great importance to mankind, the belief of God’s universal and particular providence, his moral government of the world and of mankind, the obligations we are under to pay to

\* *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, p. 4, 8, 72.

† *Ibid.*

‡ Bolingbroke’s *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, vol. i. p. 181.

§ Chubb’s *Posthumous Works*, vol. ii. in the Appendix.

him, and worship him, the natural differences of moral good and evil, man's free agency, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions. Others of their applauded writers deny several of these principles, or, at least, represent them as absolutely uncertain. And though, when they want to make a fair appearance to the world, these principles are to pass as making a part of the deist's creed, yet it cannot be denied, that the general effect and tendency of their writings has rather been to unsettle these foundations, and introduce an universal scepticism and indifference to all religion. When such persons therefore set up for benefactors to mankind, it puts one in mind of the boasts of the Epicureans, who speak in high terms of the obligations the world was under to their great Master Epicurus for undertaking the glorious work of rescuing mankind from the unsufferable yoke of superstition, by freeing them from the fear of God, and the apprehensions of providence, and a future state of retributions. And even with regard to those of the deists that put on the fairest appearances, I think it may be truly said, that it is not among them, that we must look for the best and most perfect scheme, even of natural religion. What has been done to greatest advantage this way has been done by Christian writers, who have produced the noblest systems of natural religion, and have taken pains to establish its great principles on the surest foundations. And to what can this be reasonably ascribed, but to the clearer light which the Christian revelation hath thrown upon this subject, and the excellent helps and assistances it hath brought us? It appeareth then, that if it be of any advantage to mankind to have natural religion set in a clear light, and strongly enforced, the deists have no right to appropriate the honour of this to themselves, or to set up for benefactors to mankind on this account. Much less have they reason to value themselves upon their opposition to the Christian religion. If the account some of themselves have given of the nature and design of Christianity be just, they must be very badly employed that endeavour to subvert its credit and authority. Lord Herbert calls it the *best religion*, and saith, that all its doctrines, ordinances, precepts, sacraments, aim at the establishment of those five important articles, in which he

makes all religion to consist \*. Dr Tindal owns, that “Christianity itself, stripped of all additions that policy, mistake, and the circumstances of time have made to it, is a most holy religion †.” The *Moral Philosopher* frequently presseseth himself to the same purpose; and Mr Chubb acknowledgeth, that “Christianity, if it could be separated from every thing that hath been blended with it, yields a much clearer light, and is a more safe guide to mankind, than any other traditional religion, as being better adapted to improve and perfect human nature ‡.” Lord Bolingbroke represents it as a *most amiable and useful institution*, and that its *natural tendency is to promote the peace and happiness of mankind*. That the *system of religion* it teaches, is a *complete system*, to all the purposes of religion, natural and revealed,—and might have continued so, to the *unspeakable advantage of mankind*, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity with which it was taught by Christ himself §. If therefore they had laid out their pains in endeavouring to separate true original Christianity from the corrupt additions that have been made to it, and to engage men to a stricter adherence, in principle and practice, to the religion of Jesus in its primitive purity and simplicity, as delivered by Christ and his apostles in the New Testament, they might have had some pretence to the character they seem willing to claim, of friends and benefactors to mankind. But the method they have taken is very different: at the same time that they have affected to commend pure original Christianity, they have used their utmost efforts to subvert its divine authority, and thus to deprive it of its influence on the minds of men, and set them loose from all obligations to believe and obey it. This is a manifest proof, that it is not merely the corruptions of Christianity that they find fault with, but the Christian revelation itself, which they have not scrupled to represent as the product of enthusiasm or imposture.

Various are the ways they have taken to destroy its credit and authority, as sufficiently appeareth from the account which

\* *Herbert relig. laici*, p. 9, 10.

† *Christianity as old as the Creation*, p. 382. edit. 8vo.

‡ Chubb's *Posthumous Works*, vol. ii. p. 370.

§ Several other Passages to this purpose are collected above in the 31st Letter.

hath been given in the foregoing Letters. And considering how many writers appeared in this cause within this century past, and what liberty they have had to propose their reasonings and their objections, it can hardly be supposed they have left any thing unattempted that had the face of argument, by which they thought they could answer their end. And therefore if it appears, as I hope it does, upon the view which hath been taken of them, that their most plausible objections have been solidly answered; it is to be hoped, that their attempts, however ill intended, will turn to the advantage of the Christian cause; as it will thence appear, how little its enemies have been able to say against it, considered in its original purity, even where they have had the utmost freedom of proposing their sentiments. They have appealed to the bar of reason; the advocates for Christianity have followed them to that bar, and have fairly shewn, that the evidences of revealed religion are such as approve themselves to impartial reason, and, if taken together, are fully sufficient to satisfy an honest and unprejudiced mind.

Although, therefore, it cannot but give great concern to all that have a just zeal for our holy religion, that so many, instead of being duly thankful for the glorious light of the gospel which shineth among us, have used their utmost endeavours to expose it to contempt and reproach: yet, on the other hand, it yields matter of agreeable reflection, that there have been as many valuable defences of Christianity published among us within this century past, as can be produced in any age. Besides those mentioned in the foregoing Letters, there have been many excellent treatises, setting forth the reasons and evidences of the Christian religion, which the nature of the work I have been engaged in did not lead me to take notice of, as they were not written professedly in answer to any of those deistical books which I had occasion to mention.

It is a reflection that must obviously occur, upon a review of the account which hath been given of the authors who have appeared against Christianity, that they have been far from contenting themselves with sober reasoning, as might be expected in a case on which so much depends. The weapons they have chiefly made use of, are those of misrepresentation and ridicule, and often even low jest and buffoonery. This seems to be a pre-



sumption in favour of Christianity, that its adversaries are themselves sensible that little can be done against it, in a way of plain reason and argument. It is true, there are no writers who make greater pretensions to freedom of thought, or inveigh more strongly against prepossession and bigotry; so that one would expect, that they should every where discover minds open to conviction and evidence: and yet it may safely be affirmed, that no writers whatsoever, discover stronger signs of prejudice; and there is great reason to complain that they have not carried on the debate with that fairness and candour which becomes the importance of the subject\*.

Any one that is acquainted with their writings must be sensible, that it is not their way to make a fair and just representation of true original Christianity as contained in the Holy Scriptures. They throw it into false lights, in order to expose it, and often charge it with corruptions and abuses, which they themselves well know do not really and originally belong to it. In some of their books which are written in the way of dialogue, they introduce Christian dialogists, who are to make a shew of defending the Christian cause; but it is evident that it is only to betray it. These dialogists make a most despicable figure in their writings, and are scarce allowed to say any thing that discovers learning, or even common sense, nor ever fairly state the argument or evidence on the side of Christianity. Any one that has read Tindal's *Christianity as old as the Creation*, or the first volume of the *Moral Philosopher*, cannot but have observed this.

In their treatment of the Scriptures, they have every-where discovered an eager desire and resolution to expose and run them down at any rate. In examining writings of venerable antiquity and authority, a man of candour, and an impartial inquirer after truth, would be inclined to put the most favourable interpretation upon them that they will bear; but instead of this, these writers seem only solicitous to find out something that may make the scriptures appear ridiculous. They take pains to wrest and pervert them, as if they thought it meritorious to treat those sacred writings in a manner that would not be borne with regard to any other books of the least credit.—

\* See this clearly shewn in Dr Ducha's Preface to his excellent Sermons on the presumptive Evidences of Christianity.

Of this many instances might be produced. If they meet with any passages of Scripture that have difficulty in them, and which at this distance are not easy to explain; and some such passages must be expected in books of so great antiquity, written in times and places, as well as dialects, so different from our own; this is immediately improved, as if it were sufficient to shew that the whole sacred volume is false; or so corrupted as not to be depended on. Thus a late celebrated author, who has endeavoured to expose the scripture history, has thought the curse said to have been pronounced by Noah upon Canaan sufficient to destroy the credit of it; but not to repeat what has been offered for explaining or vindicating that passage, supposing we were not able in any manner to account for it, would it not be far more reasonable and becoming a man of sense and candour, to suppose that in so short a relation some circumstances are omitted, which, if known, would set it in a fair light, rather than, on account of an obscure passage, to reject and discard the authority of the whole?

What can be a plainer proof of the power of their prejudices, than to advance rules, in judging of the truth and credibility of scripture history, which would be absolutely rejected and exploded, if applied to any other history in the world; and to reject the evidence as insufficient with regard to the facts recorded in the gospel, which they themselves would count sufficient with regard to any other facts done in past ages? What greater sign of prejudice, than when they are not able to invalidate the truth of the gospel-records, or to shew that they have not been safely transmitted to us, to fly out into general clamours and invectives against all historical evidence whatsoever, as absolutely uncertain? The author of *Christianity not founded on Argument* speaks out, and plainly declares that no man ought to believe any thing but what he sees with his own eyes. "To believe a thing," says he, "because another man says he saw it, is a very unprecedented and new sort of logic\*." And it is a constant topic with these writers to declaim against every thing as uncertain that comes to us through the hands of fallible men. As if no man could be sure that there is such a place as Paris,

\* *Christianity not founded on Argument*, p. 53.

except he had been there, or that there had been such a person as Queen Elizabeth. Moral certainty is ridiculed and exposed; though nothing can be more plain, from the very frame of our nature, and the circumstances in which we are placed by divine providence here on earth, than that the author of our beings designed that we should in many cases be determined by moral evidence and testimony, and that we should acquiesce in it, as fully sufficient\*. It is what all men, even the wisest, do in numberless instances, and think it reasonable to do so. And to reject all this at once, is a certain sign of their being reduced to the last distress in point of argument. And if the advocates for revelation were driven to such shifts, they would no doubt be treated as irreconcilable enemies to reason and common sense.

Many other things might be mentioned which shew the strength of their prejudices against Christianity. They often make use of arguments, which, if they were good for any thing, would hold for casting off all religion, all certainty of reason, all learning and instruction, and, if pursued to their genuine consequences, would introduce universal barbarism. And what a strange prejudice does this argue, to have such an aversion for Christianity, as to be willing to throw off all religion, learning, and knowledge, rather than admit it? If they can but expose revealed religion, it seems to give them very little concern; though natural religion falls with it: some of their admired authors argue against all methods of education, all attempts to instruct children in the principles of religion or morality. This is an extraordinary refinement of the present age. The best and wisest men of all former ages have looked upon it to be a thing of vast consequence, to season the minds of children betimes; with good and just notions of things. But some of our modern free-thinkers have, in their superior wisdom, found out, that the best way would be to leave children entirely to themselves; without any instruction or cultivation at all. This is the scheme of the author of *Christianity not founded on Argument*; and another of their applauded writers, Dr Tindal, seems sometimes to declare against all instruction; by word or writing, as useless or needless; and as only

\* See this excellently stated and cleared in Ditton, on the Resurrection, part 24.

tending to turn men aside from attending to the things themselves, and to the pure simple dictates of nature.

Their desire at any rate to subvert Christianity has involved them in many inconsistencies. Sometimes, to shew that there is no need or use of divine revelation, the powers of reason in matters of religion are mightily extolled, as if it were able to do every thing by its own force, without any assistance. At other times, to render us indifferent to religion, reason is degraded; and it is expressly declared, that "it is not her proper province to judge of religion at all; nor is this an affair in which she has the least concern\*." Sometimes all men, even those that cannot read their mother tongue, are supposed to be so clear-sighted, as to be able, without any instruction, to know the whole of religion. At other times, the bulk of mankind are represented as unable to know any thing of religion, and therefore not under any obligation to believe it, and as not capable of judging where there is any thing of induction or inference in the case.

If the doctrines of the gospel appear, upon a strict examination, to be such as right reason approves when once they are discovered, then it is urged, that reason alone might have discovered them, and that a revelation in such cases is perfectly needless, and of no use at all. But if there be any thing in these discoveries, which was not discoverable by unassisted reason, and which we could not have known but by extraordinary revelation, this is made an objection against receiving it; and to believe in that case is branded as an implicit faith, and a giving up our reason.

Sometimes the apostles are represented as hot-brained enthusiasts, who really believed themselves to be inspired of God, and were so mad as to imagine that they wrought miracles, and had extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, when there was no such thing. At other times they are represented as artful impostors, who formed a scheme of worldly power and grandeur under spiritual pretences, and forged facts and evidences which they knew to be false.

The character of our blessed Lord, as set before us in the gospel, is so excellent and admirable, that the enemies of our holy religion know not well how to fix a stain upon it. But

\* *Christianity not founded on Argument*, p. 7.

when they can find nothing in his doctrine, or in his temper or conduct; that savours of the spirit of this world, or of a carnal policy, they are willing to suppose, that under these specious appearances he concealed ambitious and interested views; which were to take effect in the proper time. Lord Shaftesbury had insinuated this; and it was a part of Mr Woolston's scheme to charge Christ with a secret design of aspiring to temporal power and dominion, and with encouraging the Jews to take him for their king. The same thing is pretended by the *Moral Philosopher*, and by the author of *The Resurrection of Jesus considered*. Thus, this malignant insinuation is repeated by one of these writers after another, without any thing to support it but the malice of the accusers, and an earnest desire to find a flaw in the most perfect character: since both the whole of his life and conduct, and the entire strain and tendency of the religion he taught, afford the strongest proofs to the contrary. And at this rate the best and noblest characters may pass for the worst; and the greater marks there are of self-denial and disinterestedness, the greater will the ground of suspicion be.

Sometimes Jesus and his apostles are represented as teaching wholly in a way of authority, and never applying to men's reason at all, and even absolutely forbidding them to use their understandings. This is what the author of *Christianity not founded on Argument* has laboured to prove. At other times, it is asserted, as it is particularly by the *Moral Philosopher*; that Christ appealed wholly to men's own reason, and would not have them take any thing upon his authority at all as a teacher sent from God, or upon any other evidence than the reason and nature of the thing\*.

When they are not able to produce any ancient evidences against Christianity, they presume upon it as a certain thing, that there was evidence formerly against it, but that this evidence was destroyed, and that it was because of the strength of the evidence, that it was found necessary to destroy it. Thus, these gentlemen know how to turn even the want of evidence against Christianity, into an argument against its truth. I shall not here repeat what has been above offered to

\* *Moral Philosopher*, vol. ii. p. 23, 24. 41, 42.

shew the vanity and unreasonableness of this pretence. I shall only observe, that, according to their usual way of repeating continually the same objections, this has been urged with great confidence by Mr Woolston, by the author of *The Resurrection of Jesus considered*, and very lately by a writer of quality, who hath distinguished himself in the same cause.

Many other instances might be produced, by which it appears, that no writers whatsoever shew more apparent signs of strong prejudice and prepossession, than those that honour themselves with the title of *Free-thinkers*. It were greatly to be wished for their own sakes, as well as for the sake of others, whom they take pains to pervert, that they would endeavour to divest themselves of their prejudices, and would consider the evidences for Christianity with that seriousness and attention which becomes them in an affair of such vast importance. I am sensible indeed, that many are ready to represent this as a thing of no consequence at all. They look upon all forms of religion to be alike with regard to the favour of God, and that it is perfectly indifferent what a man professes, provided he be a man of virtue. But real piety and virtue will engage a man to receive whatever he has reason to think is a true signification of the divine will. And if Christianity be indeed a true revelation from God, as it claims to be, and if the declarations there made in the name of God are to be depended upon, it cannot possibly be a matter of indifference, whether those to whom it is published and made known, receive or reject it: the believing and receiving it must in that case needs be of great consequence to our happiness, and to disbelieve and reject it is infinitely hazardous. It therefore highly concerneth us to inquire, whether Christianity be in reality a true divine revelation; whether the laws there prescribed in the name of God be indeed his laws, and be obeyed as such; whether the terms of acceptance there proposed be of his own appointment; whether the promises there made are to be regarded as his promises, and the threatenings there denounced are to be considered as really enforced by his authority. For if they really be so, and we reject them without examination, or refuse to consider them, as if they were not worthy of a serious thought, we shall be absolutely without

excuse, and shall never be able to justify our conduct to God, or our own consciences.

A noted deistical author, after having insinuated that we need not give ourselves the trouble to inquire into the several pretended revelations that have appeared in the world, yet thinks fit to own, that “when a revelation which assumes a “divine character comes to our own door, and offers itself to “our consideration, and as it may possibly be what it is pre- “tended to be, and as such we may possibly be interested in it, “this may excite our concern to try and prove it; otherwise “we can be under no obligation with regard to it\*.” Where he plainly supposes, that, in the case he puts, we are under an obligation to try and prove a revelation which assumes a divine character, and offers itself to our consideration. And it strengthens this, if the revelation itself, supposing it to be really given by God, does in his name require and demand our attention and submission, as a condition of our being interested in his favour. In such a case, it must be no small guilt to disregard and reject it at once without a due inquiry, but especially to cast contempt and reproach upon it, and endeavour to engage others to reject it.

And the guilt and danger of rejecting that revelation is mightily heightened, if it should be found, that the true cause of that infidelity, and of the disregard shewn to that revelation, is the strength of vicious appetite, and an aversion to the holy and excellent laws which are there prescribed. And this, it is to be feared, is the case of the generality of those among us who reject the gospel-revelation. When we see them, under pretence of disbelieving the doctrines, discarding the morals of the gospel; when with Christianity they seem to throw off the fear of God, and give themselves up to boundless licentiousness; there is too just reason to apprehend, that the true cause of their dislike to the Christian revelation, is not so much their being dissatisfied with the evidences produced for it, as because they cannot bear the restraints it lays upon their corrupt lusts and passions. The real end they aim at is expressed by one of themselves to be, “to save a soul from the dismal apprehensions of eternal damnation;” to relieve a person “from labouring under that uneasiness of mind, which he

\* Chubb's Posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 11.

“often is under, when pleasure and Christianity come in competition\*.” And a late noble writer mentions it as an advantage of the way of thinking he recommends, that the *burning lake will then disappear* †. And if, by shutting their eyes against the evidence, they could alter the real state of the case, and render their condition safer than it would otherwise be; if their not believing *eternal damnation* would secure them against the danger of that damnation; it would be wisely done to take pains to disbelieve it. But if their unbelief in such a case, instead of making the danger less, only aggravates their guilt, and heightens their danger, and puts them off from taking the properest methods for avoiding it, the folly of such a conduct is very apparent. Christianity professes to direct to a true and certain way, both of avoiding that future punishment, and of obtaining the greatest glory and felicity that can possibly be proposed to the human mind. But if these gentlemen will rather venture to expose themselves to that future punishment, than endeavour to prevent it by a true repentance, and by abandoning their vicious courses; and if they will choose rather to forfeit the hopes of everlasting happiness, than go on in that uniform course of piety and virtue that leads to it; there is no remedy: they must take the consequences. But certainly the bare possibility of the *wrath to come* is so dreadful a thing, that a wise man would not run the hazard of it for a few transient vicious gratifications. For what one of their own admired authors says, though in a sneering way, is a sober and momentous truth, and what the reason of mankind cannot but approve, that “where there is a hell on the other side, it is but natural prudence to take readily to the safest side ‡.”

I shall conclude this letter with taking notice of a proposal, made by a deistical writer, for putting an end to the important controversy between the Christians and the deists. “If those learned gentlemen,” says he, “that are the directors of others, will choose to give up speculative principles, and an historical faith, and insist only on that practice which will

\* See two Letters from a Deist to his friend, p. 17. 19, cited by Dr Waterland in his preface to the first part of *Script. Vind.*

† Lord Belingbroke’s *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, vol. ii, p. 221.

‡ *Christianity not founded on Argument*, p. 88.



“ recommend men in every religion to the favour of God, the  
“ good-will of men, and peace of their own conscience, and  
“ own, that the whole of the Christian religion, which is worth  
“ contending for, are all relative and social virtues, then the  
“ contention between the Christians and deists will drop\*.”  
So then we see here upon what terms the deists are willing to  
be at peace with the Christian divines. They must give up  
*speculative principles*, and an *historical faith*. By an *historical*  
*faith*, in these gentlemen’s language, must be understood  
faith in Jesus Christ, a belief of what is related in the gospels  
concerning him, concerning his person, ministry, miracles, suf-  
ferings, resurrection, ascension; and all this must be given up  
as of no consequence to mankind at all. And *speculative prin-*  
*ciples* must also be abandoned. And what is intended by these,  
and how far this demand is to extend, it is hard to know.—  
With some that call themselves deists, the most important  
principles of natural religion, the belief of a providence, of the  
immortality of the soul, and a state of future judgment and re-  
tribution, are looked upon to be needless speculations, and ei-  
ther denied, or treated as matters of doubtful disputation. But  
let us suppose that no stress is to be laid upon any doctrines  
or principles at all, and that practice alone is to be insisted on,  
though some principles seem to lie at the foundation of a good  
and virtuous practice, yet still it will be found no easy matter  
for the Christian and deist to agree what that practice is which  
is to be regarded as necessary. This writer would have the  
divines own, that *the whole of the Christian religion, which is*  
*worth contending for, are all relative and social virtues*. Here  
is not a word said of the duties of piety and devotion, of love,  
reverence, adoration, submission, affiance, and resignation to-  
wards the Supreme Being, or of prayer, confession of sins,  
thanksgiving, praise, and the outward acts of religious homage  
which we owe to God. Yet this is an important part of our  
duty, on which Christianity, and even right reason itself, teach-  
eth us to lay a great stress; though it is treated by many a-  
mong the deists as a thing of small consequence. Nor is there  
any thing here said of the duties of self-government, chastity,  
purity, humility, temperance, and the due regulation of our  
appetites and passions. And when this comes to be explained,

\* *Resurrection of Jesus considered*. p. 33.

there is likely to be a wide difference between the Christians and deists, as to the particulars included in this part of our duty. It is very probable, that these gentlemen will plead for allowing much greater liberties, in indulging their sensual appetites and passions, than is consistent with the morals of the gospel, and with that purity of heart and life which Christianity requireth. And even as to relative and social virtues, in which this author makes the whole of religion to consist, the deists have often objected against that forgiveness of injuries, that charity and benevolence, even towards our enemies themselves, that returning good for evil, which the great author of our religion hath urged upon his disciples, both by his doctrine and by his example. It is to be feared, upon the whole, that they will be as far from agreeing to the morals, as to the doctrines of the gospel; and that some of its laws and practical precepts stand more in their way, and create greater prejudices against it, than its mysteries themselves; though it is a little more plausible and decent to put the reason of their rejecting Christianity upon the latter than upon the former.

This may help us to judge, whether there be any just ground for their pretences, as if the world were greatly obliged to them for endeavouring to take men off from useless speculations, and teaching them to lay the whole stress upon practice. The last-mentioned author concludes his treatise against the resurrection of Jesus with declaring his hope, that it "will be of real service to religion, and make men's practice better, when they shall find they have nothing else to depend upon for happiness here and hereafter, but their own personal righteousness, with their love of wisdom and truth\*." And others of them have made the same boast, but very undeservedly. For can the necessity of personal obedience and righteousness be more expressly insisted upon than in the gospel of Jesus, or be bound upon us by stronger and more sacred arguments? Do these gentlemen pretend to teach more excellent morals than the Christian religion does, or to carry piety, charity, benevolence, purity of manners, and universal righteousness, to a nobler height, or to enforce the practice of it by more powerful and prevailing motives? Or, do they propose to make men's practice better, by leaving them at large, without any

\* *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, p. 82.

express divine precepts determining the particulars of their duty, and by taking away the glorious hopes and promises of the gospel, which are designed to animate us to obedience, and the awful threatenings which are there denounced against vice and wickedness?

But enough has been said of these gentlemen and their pretences; and I intended here, as a proper conclusion of this work, to have given a summary representation of the principal arguments and evidences for the truth and divinity of the Christian revelation. But as you will probably think this letter to be already of sufficient length, I choose to reserve it for the subject of my next.

I am yours, &c.

J. LELAND.

## L E T T E R XXXVI.

*An extraordinary Revelation from God to Mankind possible to be given—The Propriety and Usefulness of such a Revelation shewn—Those to whom it is made known indispensably obliged to embrace it—The Marks and Evidences by which we may be satisfied that such a Revelation is really given, viz. when the Revelation itself is of an excellent Nature and Tendency, and when it is accompanied by the most extraordinary divine Attestations, especially Miracles and Prophecy—The Proof from Miracles vindicated—Confession of some of the Deists themselves to this Purpose—The Revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures confirmed by a Series of the most extraordinary Works, which manifestly argued a divine Interposition—The Nature of the Revelation itself considered—Distinguished into three Periods, under each of which the Religion, for Substance, the same—First, The Patriarchal Religion—The Second relates to the Mosaical Dispensation—The Third, which was the Perfection of all the rest, is the Christian Revelation—The God-like Character of its Author—The Nature and Tendency of the Religion itself particularly considered, and shewn to be worthy of God—It could not be the Effect, either of Imposture or Enthusiasm, and therefore must be of divine Original—The Christian Scheme of the Mediator wise and excellent—The Difficulties attending it, no just Objection against Christianity—The Conclusion.*

SIR,

HAVING finished the account of the *deistical* writers, it will not be improper to lay together some considerations, relating to the reasons we have to believe that Christianity is a true revelation from God, and that therefore they to whom it is published and made known are under indispensable obligations to believe and embrace it.

With regard to revelation in general, the first thing that comes to be considered, is the possibility of it. That God can,

if he thinks fit, make extraordinary discoveries of his will, and communicate important truths to one or more men, to be by them communicated to others in his name, cannot be denied with the least appearance of reason. For upon what foundation can any man go, in pretending that this is impossible? Is there any thing in it which implieth a contradiction, either to the nature of God or man? This cannot be pretended, nor has any man attempted to shew that it involveth a contradiction. Accordingly, the possibility of a revelation has been generally acknowledged by those who believe the existence of God and a providence, nor do I see how any man that acknowledgeth a God and a providence can consistently deny it.

And as the possibility of God's making an extraordinary revelation of his will to mankind must be acknowledged, so the propriety of it, or that it is worthy of God to grant such a revelation, supposing, which hath been unanswerably proved to have been the case in fact, mankind to have been sunk into a state of great darkness and corruption in matters of religion and morals; and that if he should grant such a revelation, for guiding men into the knowledge of important truths, or for enforcing their duty upon them, it would be a signal instance of the divine wisdom and goodness, cannot be reasonably contested. And indeed, this is no more than what some of the deists themselves have thought fit to acknowledge. The *Moral Philosopher* expressly owns it, and a remarkable passage from Mr Chubb to the same purpose was cited in my thirteenth letter, Vol. I.

It greatly strengthens this, when it is considered, that several things there are of great importance to mankind to know, particularly concerning the attributes and providence of God; the most acceptable way of worshipping him; the extent of the duty we owe him, and the methods of his dealings towards his offending creatures; how far, and upon what terms he will pardon their iniquities, and receive them to his grace and favour; what rewards it will please him to confer upon those that serve him in sincerity, though their obedience is mixed with infirmities and defects; and what punishment he will inflict upon obstinate presumptuous transgressors: I say, there are several things, with respect to these and such like matters, which as they relate to things invisible or things future, and which de-

pend upon God's most wise counsels, of which, if left to ourselves, we cannot pretend to be competent judges, we could not have a clear and full assurance of by the mere light of our own unassisted reason. It seems evident therefore that mankind stood in great need of an extraordinary revelation from God, and that this would be of the most signal advantage. And though it cannot without great rashness be pretended, that God is absolutely obliged to give this advantage to any, or that, if he gives it to any, he is obliged to give it equally to all men, since it is manifest, in fact, that, in the course of his providence, much greater advantages are given to some than to others, with respect to the means of religious and moral improvement; yet it is reasonable to conclude, that he hath not left all mankind at all times, entirely destitute of an assistance of such great consequence and so much wanted. This affordeth a strong presumption, that God hath at some time or other made discoveries of his will to mankind in a way of extraordinary revelation, additional to the common light of nature.

It is also manifest, that, supposing such a revelation to have been really given from God, and that men have sufficient evidence to convince them that it was from God, those to whom this revelation is made known, are indispensably obliged to receive and embrace it. This every man must acknowledge, who hath just notions of the Deity, or that God is the moral governor of the world, and hath a right to give laws to his creatures, and to require obedience to those laws. And it were the greatest absurdity to suppose, that men may innocently reject what they have good reason to regard as the significations of the divine will, made to them for this purpose, that they should believe and obey them.

These are principles which cannot justly be contested; the grand question then is, whether any sufficient proofs or evidences can be produced, that such a revelation hath been really given, and what those proofs and evidences are. Some there are who seem not willing to allow that any persons, but those to whom the revelation is immediately made, can have sufficient evidence or proof to satisfy them that it is a true revelation from God. This is what Lord Herbert insisteth upon in his book *De Veritate*, and in several parts of his other works, where he makes it a necessary condition of a man's having a certain knowledge

of a divine revelation, that it be made immediately to himself, and that he should feel a divine afflatus in the reception of it. In this his Lordship has been followed by other writers that have appeared in the same cause. According to this scheme, it is vain for those that have received a revelation from God to offer to produce any proofs of their divine mission, since no proofs or evidences can be offered that will be sufficient, except every one of those to whom they impart this have another particular revelation to assure them of it. This is in effect to pronounce, that supposing God to have communicated to any person or persons extraordinary discoveries of his will, to be by them communicated for the use and instruction of mankind, it is absolutely out of his power to furnish them with such credentials of their divine mission as may make it reasonable for others to receive the doctrines and laws delivered by such persons in his name as of divine authority. But such an assertion cannot be excused from great rashness and arrogance, and is a most unwarrantable limitation of the divine power and wisdom. It will indeed be readily allowed, that supposing persons to declare with ever so great confidence that they are extraordinarily sent of God, we are not to receive their bare word for a proof of it; and though they themselves should be firmly persuaded of the truth and divinity of the revelation made immediately to them, this their persuasion is not a sufficient warrant for others to receive that revelation as true and divine, except some farther proofs and evidences are given. And it is reasonable to believe, that in that case, if God hath sent persons, and extraordinarily inspired them to deliver doctrines and laws of great importance to mankind in his name, he will furnish them with such proofs and evidences as may be a sufficient ground to those to whom this revelation is not immediately made, to receive those doctrines and laws as of divine authority. And here in judging of these, it must be acknowledged, that great care and caution is necessary, since it cannot be denied that there have been false pretences to revelation, the effects of enthusiasm or imposture, which have given rise to impositions that have been of ill consequence to mankind. And though that is not a just reason for rejecting all revelation at once, as false or uncertain, yet it is a very good reason for making a very careful inquiry into the evidences that are produced for

any pretended revelation. And with regard to this it may be observed, that where persons, pretending to bring a system of doctrines and laws, which they profess to have received by revelation from God, have had their divine mission confirmed by a series of the most extraordinary works, bearing the illustrious characters of a divine interposition, and which they have been enabled to perform in declared attestation of it; especially, if they have been enabled also to make express predictions in the name of God, concerning things future, which no human sagacity could foresee; and if, at the same time, the revelation itself appeared to be of a most excellent tendency, manifestly conducive to the glory of God, and to the good of mankind, and to the promoting the interest of important truth, righteousness, and virtue in the world, and thereby answering the main ends of all religion; there seems in that case to be sufficient evidence to produce a reasonable conviction, that this is a revelation from God, and consequently to justify and demand our receiving and submitting to it as of divine authority. For in this case, there seemeth to be as much evidence given to satisfy an honest and impartial inquirer as could be reasonably expected or desired, supposing a revelation really given. And that this hath actually been the case with regard to the revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures, the advocates for Christianity have set themselves to shew, with great force of reason and argument.

With regard to the external attestations given to the truth and divinity of the Scripture-revelation, there is scarce any thing in which the deistical writers have been more generally agreed than in bending their force against the proof from miracles. The methods they have taken to this purpose have been various: sometimes they have gone so far as to pretend to prove, that miracles are absolutely impossible; at other times, that they are needless, and are incapable of shewing the divine mission of persons, or truth of doctrines, because there is no connexion between power and truth. But though it will be readily acknowledged, that power and truth are distinct ideas, this does by no means prove, that the former can in no case give attestation to the latter; for if power be exerted in such a way as to manifest an extraordinary divine interposition in favour of a person professing to bring doctrines and laws from God to



mankind, and be appealed to for that purpose, in such a case power so exerted may give an attestation to the truth and authority of those doctrines and laws. Some of the deists themselves are so sensible of this, that after all their pretences, they are obliged to make acknowledgments with regard to the use of miracles that are of no small disservice to their cause. They acknowledged that they may be of use to excite and engage attention to doctrines and laws; which supposes them to carry something in them of the nature of an attestation or proof, since otherwise no more regard ought to be paid to doctrines or laws on the account of miracles, than if they were not attended with miracles at all. The *Moral Philosopher* owns, that "miracles, especially if wrought for the good of mankind, are perhaps the most effectual means of removing prejudices, and procuring attention to what is delivered." Mr Collins goes so far as to acknowledge, that miracles, when done in proof of doctrines and precepts that are consistent with reason, and for the honour of God and the good of mankind, ought to determine men to believe and receive them; and that Christ's miracles might have been sufficient, if he had not appealed to prophecy, and laid the principal stress of the proof of his divine mission upon it, as this writer pretends he did\*. Mr Woolston says, "I believe it will be granted on all hands, that the restoring a person indisputably dead to life is a stupendous miracle, and that two or three such miracles, well attested and credibly reported, are enough to conciliate the belief, that the author of them was a divine agent, and invested with the power of God †." And Spinoza is said to have declared, that if he could believe that the resurrection of Lazarus was really wrought as it is related, he would give up his system.

That God can, if he thinketh fit, alter or suspend the course of natural causes in particular instances, must be allowed by all who acknowledge that he is the Lord of nature, and the Sovereign of the universe. And that it may be agreeable to his wisdom to do so on some extraordinary occasions, may appear from this consideration, that such interpositions may be of use to awaken in men a sense of a governing providence, and to

\* *Scheme of Literal Prophecy*, p. 321. 322.

† Fifth Discourse on Miracles, p. 3.

convince them that the course of nature is not a fatal series of blind necessary causes, but under the regulation of a most wise and free, as well as powerful mind, which, as it hath very properly appointed that things should ordinarily go on in an uniform course according to established laws, so it can alter or over-rule, interrupt or suspend, the effect and influence of natural causes, and deviate from the usual course of things on special occasions for valuable purposes: and such a valuable purpose it would be for providence to interpose for giving an illustrious attestation to doctrines and laws of great importance to mankind, and to the divine mission of persons sent to instruct them in religion, to recover them from great errors and corruptions, and guide them to a true knowledge, obedience, and adoration of the Deity, and to a holy and virtuous practice.— Extraordinary miraculous interpositions in such a case would answer an excellent end, and be worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness. This seems to be a way of God's giving his testimony the most powerful and striking that can be, and which is peculiarly fitted for engaging mankind to receive and submit to such a revelation as of divine authority. And thus it was with regard to the miracles wrought at the first establishment of the Jewish and Christian dispensations. There was not merely a single extraordinary event or two, in which case it might have been supposed that it was only some strange thing that had happened, of which no account can be given, and from which nothing certain can be concluded; but there was a marvellous succession and concurrence of the most extraordinary facts, done in the most open public manner, in a great number of instances, and for a series of years together, all visibly tending to the same important end, *viz.* to give attestation to the divine authority of a system of doctrines and laws delivered in the name of God himself. And these facts were of such a nature, so manifestly transcending all human power, and which bore such evident marks of divine interposition, that, taken together, they form as strong an evidence as could be reasonably expected and desired. And I believe few, if any, can be found, who are really persuaded of the truth of those facts, and do not also acknowledge the divine original and authority of the revelation thus attested and confirmed. And supposing such miraculous attestations to

have been really given, at the first promulgation and establishment of a system of doctrines and laws, which is declared to have come from God; this is sufficient to establish its authority, not only at that time; but to succeeding ages, provided that the accounts of those doctrines and laws, and of the extraordinary facts whereby they were attested, were faithfully transmitted, in a manner which may be safely depended upon. And that this has been the case with regard to the Mosaic and Christian revelation, hath been often clearly shewn.

With regard to the former, never were there in the world facts of a more public nature, than those by which the Mosaic law was attested. They were not merely things done in a way of secret intercourse and communication with the Deity, in which case there might have been some suspicion of imposture, but they were facts done openly in the view of all the people, who, let us suppose them ever so stupid, could not possibly have been made to believe that all these things happened in their own sight, and that they themselves had been witnesses to them if they had not been so. Nor can it be supposed that Moses, who was certainly a wise man, would have attempted so wild a thing as to have appealed to the people, as he does all along, for the truth of those facts, and to have put the authority of his laws upon them, if, at the same time, they all knew them to be false. If therefore Moses published those facts himself to all the people, the facts were true. And that he did himself publish those facts, we have the same proof which we have that he gave the laws. And that he gave the laws to the people of Israel, as the whole nation who were governed by those laws have constantly affirmed, no reasonable man can deny. The accounts of the facts are so interwoven with the very body of the laws, that they cannot be separated. Some of the principal motives to engage the people to the observance of those laws are taken from those facts. Many of the laws were peculiarly designed to preserve the remembrance of those facts. And this was the professed end of the institution of some of their most solemn and sacred rites, which were to be constantly observed by the whole nation, in every age from the beginning of their policy. These laws and facts were not transmitted merely by oral tradition, which in many cases is a very uncertain conveyance, but were im-

mediately committed to writing. And those writings were not kept secret, in the hands of a few, but, from the time they were first written, were published to the people, who were commanded, in the name of God, to acquaint themselves with those laws and facts, and to teach them diligently to their children, and were assured, that, upon their preserving and keeping them, their prosperity and happiness, public and private, and all their privileges depended. Accordingly, in all the remaining writings of that nation, whether of an historical, moral, or devotional kind, there is a constant reference, not only to the laws, as having been originally given by Moses in the name of God to their nation, but to the wonderful facts that were done in attestation to those laws as of undoubted credit, and as things universally known and acknowledged among them. If those facts had been only mentioned in a few passages, it might possibly be pretended that the accounts of them were interpolations, afterwards inserted in these writings. But as the case is circumstanced, there is no room for this pretence. The facts are repeated and referred to on so many different occasions, that it appears with the utmost evidence, that those facts have been all along known and acknowledged, and the remembrance of them constantly kept up among the people in all ages. Their peculiar constitution, whereby they were so remarkably distinguished from all other nations, was plainly founded upon the truth and authority of those facts, nor could have been established without them.

To all which it may be added, that the very quality of the writings which contain an account of those facts, or in which they are referred to as of undoubted truth, derives no small credit to them. A profound veneration for the Deity everywhere appears, together with a remarkable unaffected simplicity and integrity, and an impartial love of truth. It cannot reasonably be pretended, that they were forged to humour and flatter their nation; for with the utmost freedom they relate things greatly to the disadvantage of their national character. They represent, impartially and without disguise, their frequent defections from their law, their disobedience and ingratitude to God for all his benefits, and the great punishments inflicted upon them on that account. Besides which, it is to be observed,

that there are in those writings clear and express predictions of future extraordinary events, which no human sagacity could foresee, and which yet have been most remarkably accomplished. And particularly it is there most expressly foretold, that the people of Israel for whom God had done such great things, should yet be distinguished with judgments and calamities above all other nations; that they should be dispersed all over the face of the earth, exposed to universal obloquy, and yet not be utterly lost or destroyed, but still preserved as a distinct people; which we see most signally verified at this day: A thing so wonderful, taken in all its circumstances, that this people may be regarded as a living continued monument of the truth of their own ancient sacred writings; and of the extraordinary facts there recorded.

As to the extraordinary and miraculous facts whereby the divine original and authority of the Christian revelation was attested and confirmed, never were there any facts that had clearer and more convincing evidence attending them. They were many in number, done for the most part in the most public manner, and for a series of years together, and produced the most wonderful effects, in bringing over vast numbers, both of Jews and Gentiles, in the very age in which the facts were done, and when they had the best opportunity of knowing the truth of those facts, to receive a crucified Jesus as their Saviour and their Lord, than which nothing could be imagined more contrary to the prejudices which then universally obtained. The accounts of these facts, as well as of the pure and excellent laws and doctrines in attestation of which they were wrought, were published in the very age in which these laws were delivered, and those facts were done; and by persons who were perfectly acquainted with the things they relate. And the facts themselves were of such a nature, that they could not be deceived in them themselves, supposing they had their senses. Nor had they any temptation or interest to put them upon endeavouring to impose upon others, by giving false accounts of those facts. For, besides that the falsehood of those accounts must, as the case was circumstanced, have been immediately detected and exposed, the religion which was confirmed by those facts was in many things directly contrary to those notions and prejudices with which their own minds had been most strongly prepossessed, and which nothing less than the undeniable evidence

they had of those facts was able to overcome. And it strengthens this when it is considered, that this religion, instead of promising them any worldly advantages, exposed them to the most cruel reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings, and to whatever is most grievous to human nature, which they endured with an amazing constancy, persisting in their testimony even to death. To which it may be added, that if we examine the writings themselves, we shall find in them all the characters of genuine purity, integrity, undisguised simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth, that any writings can possibly have. And the whole scheme of religion there laid down is uniformly directed to the glory of God; and the good of mankind, and to serve the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world. Accordingly these writings were immediately received with great veneration in the very age in which they were first written and published, and from that time regarded as of undoubted truth and of divine authority. They were soon spread far and wide, read in the public religious assemblies of Christians, translated into various languages, and they have been constantly cited by great numbers of writers in every age since, whose works are still extant, many of whom have not only quoted particular passages, but have transcribed large portions of them into their writings, by which it incontestably appears, that they were the same, both with regard to the accounts of doctrines and facts, that are now in our hands. They have been on numberless occasions appealed to by persons of different sects, parties, and opinions in religion; so that it would not have been in the power of any party of men, if they had been so disposed, to have destroyed or corrupted all the copies, or to have made a general alteration in the scheme of religion there taught, or in the accounts of the facts there recorded. And it is evident in fact, that no such alterations have been made, since religion there appeareth in its primitive simplicity, as it was in the first age of the Christian church, without any of the corruptions of latter ages. And, upon the whole, it may upon good grounds be affirmed, that the proofs which are brought to shew, that the scriptures are safely transmitted to us, are greater than can be produced for any other books in the world. This hath been often fully vindicated, and set in so clear a light, that the enemies of

Christianity have had no other way of avoiding the evidence, but by most absurdly flying out (as hath been observed before) into invectives against all historical evidence, and against the credit of all past facts whatsoever. It may therefore be justly said, that no greater evidence of the truth of the extraordinary facts whereby Christianity was attested, can reasonably be desired, except all these stupendous facts were to be done over again for our conviction. And if one man thinks he may justly demand this, another man hath an equal right to demand it, and so every man may demand it. And those facts must be repeated in every age, in every nation, and in the sight of every single person, which would be the most absurd and unreasonable thing in the world, and the most unworthy of the divine wisdom.

This may suffice with regard to the extraordinary attestations given to the revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and which exhibit illustrious convincing proofs of its divine original. It will be proper next to consider the nature and excellence of the revelation itself, with the scheme of religion there delivered to us; and it will appear upon the most impartial examination to be worthy of God, of a most admirable tendency, and well fitted to answer the important ends for which we might suppose a revelation to have been given to mankind.

That we may have a juster notion of the religion held forth to us in the Holy Scriptures, it is proper to take a brief view of it from the beginning. The sacred volume opens with that which lies at the foundation of religion, an account of God's having created the world, which is there described in a plain and familiar manner, accommodated to the capacities of the people, and with a noble simplicity; as is also the original formation of man, who is represented as having been formed after the divine image invested with a dominion over the inferior creation, with a reservation of the homage he himself owed to God as his sovereign Lord, and constituted it in a paradisaical state, a happy state of purity and innocence. There is nothing in this but what is agreeable to right reason, as well as to the most ancient traditions that have obtained among the nations. We are farther there informed, that man fell from that state by sinning against his maker; and that sin brought

death into the world, and all the evils and miseries to which the human race is now obnoxious: but that the merciful parent of our being, in his great goodness and compassion, was pleased to make such revelations and discoveries of his grace and mercy, as laid a proper foundation for the faith and hope of his offending creatures, and for the exercise of religion towards him. Accordingly, the religion delivered in the Scriptures is the religion of man in his lapsed state; and any one that impartially and carefully considers it, will find one scheme of religion, substantially the same, carried all along through the whole, till it was brought to its full perfection and accomplishment by Jesus Christ.

This religion may be considered principally under three periods. The first is the religion of the patriarchal times, which consisted in the pure adoration of the Deity, free from idolatry in a firm belief of his universal and particular providence, a hope of his pardoning mercy towards penitent sinners, and a confiding in him as the great rewarder of them that diligently seek him: which reward they looked for, not merely in this present world, but in a future state: for we are told, that they *sought a better country, that is, an heavenly*. These were the main principles of their religion, together with a strong sense of their obligation to the practice of piety, virtue, and universal righteousness. To which it may be added, that there seems to have been a hope and expectation from the beginning, originally founded on a divine promise, of a great Saviour, who was to redeem mankind from the miseries and ruin to which they were exposed, and through whom God was to make the fullest discoveries and exhibitions of his grace and mercy towards the human race, and to raise them to a high degree of glory and felicity. As to the external rites of religion then made use of, the most ancient rite of which we have any account, is that of offering sacrifice to God: and its having so early and universally obtained among all nations, and in the most ancient times as a sacred rite of religion can scarce be otherwise accounted for, than by supposing it to have been a part of the primitive religion, originally enjoined by divine appointment to the first ancestors of the human race, and from them transmitted to their descendants. This patriarchal religion, as it has been described, seems to have been the religion of Adam after his fall, of Abel, Seth, Enoch, and the



antediluvian patriarchs: and afterwards of Noah, the second parent of mankind, and of the several heads of families derived from him, who probably carried it into their several dispersions. But, above all, this religion was signally exemplified in Abraham, who was illustrious for his faith, piety, and righteousness, and whom God was pleased to favour with special discoveries of his will. From him descended many great nations, among whom this religion, in its main principles, seems to have been preserved, of which there are noble remains in the book of Job. There were also remarkable vestiges of it for a long time preserved among several other nations; and indeed the belief of one supreme God, of a providence, a hope of pardoning mercy, a sense of the obligations of piety and virtue, and of the acceptance and reward of sincere obedience, and the expectation of a future state, were never entirely extinguished. And whosoever among the Gentiles at any time, or in any nation, was a fearer of God, and a worker of righteousness, might be justly regarded as of the ancient patriarchal religion, and was favourably accepted with God. But in process of time the nations became generally depraved, sunk into a deplorable darkness and corruption, and the great principles of religion, were, in a great measure covered, and overwhelmed with an amazing load of superstitions, idolatries, and corruptions of all kinds.

The second view of religion as set before us in the Scriptures, is that which relates to the Mosaical dispensation. This was really and essentially the same religion, for substance, which was professed and practised in the ancient patriarchal times, with the addition of a special covenant made with a particular people, among whom God was pleased, for wise ends, to erect a sacred polity, and to whom he gave a revelation of his will, which was committed to writing as the safest conveyance; whereas religion had been hitherto preserved chiefly by tradition, which was more easily maintained during the long lives of men in the first ages. The special covenant was no ways inconsistent with God's universal providence and goodness towards mankind; nor did it in any degree vacate or infringe the ancient primitive religion which had obtained from the beginning, but was designed to be subservient to the great ends of it, and to preserve it from being

utterly depraved and extinguished. The principal end of that polity, and the main view to which it was all directed, was to restore and preserve the true worship and adoration of the one living and true God, and of him only, in opposition to that polytheism and idolatry which began then to spread generally through the nations; and to engage those to whom it was made known, to the practice of piety, virtue, and righteousness, by giving them holy and excellent laws, expressly prescribing the particulars of their duty, and enforced by the sanctions of a divine authority, and by promises and threatenings in the name of God. And also to keep up the hope and expectation of the Redeemer, who had been promised from the beginning, and to prepare men for that most perfect and complete dispensation of religion which he was to introduce. And whosoever impartially examines that constitution must be obliged to acknowledge, that it was admirably fitted to answer these important ends. The laws of Moses, and the sacred writings of the Old Testament, teach us to form the justest and noblest notions of God, as having created all things by his power, as preserving and governing all things by his providence, as possessed of all possible perfections; infinitely powerful, wise, and good, holy, just, and true, a lover of righteousness, a hater of sin and wickedness; omnipresent, omniscient; to whom we owe the highest love, the profoundest reverence, the most absolute submission and resignation, and the most steady dependence. There is a strain of unequalled piety every-where running through those sacred writings. We are there taught to refer all to God, to do every thing we do as in his presence, and in a subordination to his glory. We have there also excellent precepts given us with regard to the duties we owe to our fellow-creatures. All social duties may be regarded as comprehended in that admirable precept of the law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. A just, a kind, and benevolent conduct is prescribed, and not only are all injurious actions forbidden in the strongest manner, but even all inordinate desires and covetings after what belongeth to others, which lie at the foundation of all the injustice men are guilty of towards their neighbours. The ten commandments, which contain a comprehensive summary of the moral precepts, were, that they might make the greater impression, delivered with the greatest majesty and solemnity that can be conceived.

There was indeed a variety of ritual injunctions prescribed under that constitution, the reasons of all which cannot be clearly assigned at this distance. But some of them were manifestly intended in opposition to the rites of the neighbouring nations, and with a view to preserve them as a distinct people, and keep them free from the infections of their idolatries. Others of their rites were instituted to keep up the memorials of the signal and extraordinary acts of divine providence towards them, especially those by which their law had been confirmed and established. And some of them seem to have been originally designed as types and prefigurations of good things to come, under that more perfect dispensation which was to succeed. The rite of sacrificing, which had been in use from ancient times, and began to be greatly perverted and abused among the nations, was brought under distinct regulations, and only to be performed to the honour of the one true God, the great Creator and Lord of the universe. Polytheism, and the worship of inferior deities were forbidden; no obscene or filthy rites, no unnatural rigours or austerities, no human sacrifices or cruel oblation, made a part of their religion, as among many other nations. And the absolute necessity of virtue and righteousness, in order to their acceptance with God, was strongly inculcated, and on this they were directed to lay the principal stress, and not merely on external rites or forms. This constitution is represented as having been introduced and established with the most amazing demonstrations and displays of God's supreme dominion and glorious majesty, and with a visible triumph over idolatry in its proper seat (for so Egypt and Canaan may be looked upon to have been,) and with the most awful manifestations of God's just displeasure against those abominable vices as well as idolatries, which were then making a great progress in the world, and of which the Canaanites were remarkably guilty.

What is especially observable, is, that under that constitution there was a succession of prophets, who were sent to reclaim the people from the idolatries and corruptions into which they had fallen, and to enforce upon them the practice of real religion and righteousness. Their writings everywhere abound with the sublimest descriptions and representations of the Deity; they discover a pure and ardent zeal for

the glory of God, a noble impartial detestation against vice and wickedness, and a deep and earnest concern for promoting the interests of substantial piety and virtue, and taking men off from too great a dependence on outward forms and ritual observances. And what is peculiarly remarkable, they contain the most illustrious predictions of future events, many of them clear, express, and circumstantial, relating to nations, both of their own and others, and to particular persons. Some of which events were to take place in their own times, or soon after, and were most remarkably fulfilled; and others were removed to the distance of several ages from the time in which those prophets lived and uttered their predictions, and, though absolutely beyond the reach of any human sagacity to foresee, have also received their accomplishment. This shews that they were extraordinarily inspired by Him who alone can foretell future contingencies; and their prophecies gave a farther proof and attestation to the divine original of the Mosaic constitution, since they were designed to engage the people to the observance of the excellent laws that had been given them; and they were also intended to prepare them for expecting a more glorious dispensation, to be brought by a person of unparalleled dignity, whose coming they foretold, and whom they described by the most remarkable characters. Some of these prophets described him by one part of his office and undertaking, and some by another. They pointed to the tribe and family from which he was to spring, the time of his appearance, the place of his birth, the miracles he should perform, the exemplary holiness of his life, his great wisdom and excellence as a teacher; they spoke in the highest terms of his divine dignity, and yet foretold that he was to undergo the most grievous humiliations and bitter sufferings for the sins of men; they testified, not only his sufferings, but the glories that should follow; his wonderful exaltation, and the kingdom of righteousness and truth which he was to erect and establish; that the Jews would generally reject him, and that the Gentiles should receive his law, and be sharers of the benefits of his kingdom.

Accordingly, the third period relates to that dispensation of religion which was brought by that glorious and divine person whom the prophets had foretold. This is properly the Christian dispensation, which was designed and fitted for an universal extent, and in which, considered in its original purity,

religion is brought to its highest perfection and noblest improvement. An admirable wisdom, goodness, and purity, shone forth in the whole conduct and character of the great Author of it. He came in the fulness of time, the time which had been pointed out in the prophetic writings. In him the several predictions relating to the extraordinary person that was to come were fulfilled, and the several characters by which he was described were wonderfully united, and in no other. He appeared, as was foretold concerning him, mean in his outward condition and circumstances, and yet maintained in his whole conduct a dignity becoming his divine character. Many of his miracles were of such a kind, and performed in such a manner as seemed to argue a dominion over nature, and its established laws, and they were acts of great goodness as well as power. He went about doing good to the bodies and to the souls of men; and the admirable instructions he gave were delivered with a divine authority, and yet with great familiarity and condescension. And his own practice was every way suited to the excellence of his precepts. He exhibited the most finished pattern of universal holiness, of love to God, of zeal for the divine glory, of the most wonderful charity and benevolence towards mankind, of the most unparalleled self-denial, of the most heavenly mind and life, of meekness and patience, humility and condescension. Never was there so perfect a character, so god-like, venerable, and amiable, so remote from that of an enthusiast or an impostor. He himself most expressly foretold his own sufferings, the cruel and ignominious death he was to undergo, his resurrection from the dead on the third day, his ascension into heaven, the dreadful judgments and calamities that should be inflicted on the Jewish nation, and what seemed the most improbable thing in the world, the wonderful progress of his own gospel from the smallest beginnings, notwithstanding the persecutions and difficulties he foretold it should meet with. All this was most exactly fulfilled; he rose again on the third day, and shewed himself alive to his disciples after his passion by many infallible proofs, when their hopes were so sunk, that they could hardly believe that he was risen, till they could no longer doubt of it, without renouncing the testimony of all their senses. He gave them commission to go and preach his gospel to all nations; and promised that, to enable them to do it with success, they should

be endued with the most extraordinary powers and gifts of the Holy Ghost. This accordingly they did, and though destitute of all worldly advantages, without power, riches, interest, policy, learning, or eloquence, they went through the world, preaching up a crucified Jesus, as the Saviour and Lord of men, and teaching the things which he had commanded them; and by the wonderful powers which they were invested with, and the evidences they produced of their divine mission, they prevailed, and spread the religion of Jesus, as their great Master had foretold, in the midst of sufferings and persecutions, and in opposition to the reigning inveterate prejudices, both of Jews and Gentiles.

If we examine the nature and tendency of the religion itself which was taught by Christ, and by the apostles in his name, we shall find it to be worthy of God. It retaineth all the excellencies of the Old Testament revelation; for our Saviour came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them, and carry the scheme of religion there laid down to a still higher degree of excellence. The idea given us of God, of his incomparable perfections, and his governing providence, as extending to all his creatures, particularly towards mankind, is the noblest that can be conceived, and the most proper to produce worthy affections and dispositions towards him. Great care is especially taken to instruct us to form just notions of God's illustrious moral excellencies, of his wisdom, his faithfulness, and truth, his impartial justice, and righteousness, and spotless purity; but above all, of his goodness and love to mankind, of which the Gospel contains and exhibits the most glorious and attractive discoveries and displays that were ever made to the world. The exceeding riches of the divine grace and mercy are represented in the most engaging manner. Pardon and salvation are freely offered upon the most gracious terms: the very chief of sinners are invited, and the strongest possible assurances given of God's readiness to receive them, upon their sincere repentance and reformation; and, at the same time, to prevent an abuse of this, the most striking representations are made of God's just wrath and displeasure against those that obstinately go in presumptuous sin and disobedience. It is especially the glory of the gospel, that the great realities of an unseen eternal world are there set in the most clear and open

light; there are clearer discoveries made, and far stronger assurances given, of that future life and immortality, than were ever given to mankind before.

As to the precepts of Christianity, they are unquestionably holy and excellent. The purest morality is taught in all its just and noble extent, as taking in the whole of our duty towards God, our neighbours, and ourselves.

As to piety towards God, the idea there given of it is venerable, amiable, and engaging; we are required to fear God, but it is not with a servile horror, such as superstition inspires, but with a filial reverence. We are directed and encouraged to address ourselves to him as our heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, the Son of his love, and in his name to offer up our prayers and praises, our confessions and thanksgivings, with the profoundest humility, becoming creatures deeply sensible of their own unworthiness, and yet with an ingenuous affiance, hope, and joy. We are to yield the most unreserved submission to God as our sovereign Lord, our most wise and righteous Governor, and most gracious Benefactor; to resign ourselves to his disposal, and acquiesce in his providential dispensations, as being persuaded that he ordereth all things really for the best; to walk continually as in his sight, and with a regard to his approbation, setting him before us as our great all-seeing witness and judge, our chiefest good and highest end. Above all, we are required to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and mind, and strength, and to shew that we love him, by keeping his commandments, by aspiring after a conformity to him in his imitable perfections, and by endeavouring, as far as we are able, to glorify him in the world. As to the external worship of God, according to the idea given of it in the New Testament, it is pure and spiritual, and hath a noble simplicity in it. The numerous rites of the Mosaical dispensation, which, though wisely suited to that time and state, were marks of the imperfection of that œconomy, are now abolished. The ordinances of Christianity, as prescribed in the gospel, are few in number, easy of observance, and noble in their use and significancy.

Not only doth Christianity give the most excellent directions as to the duty we more immediately owe to God, but a mighty stress is there laid upon social duties and social vir-

tues, which it hath a manifest tendency to promote and improve. The constant exercise of justice, and righteousness, and fidelity, is most expressly enjoined; the rendering to all their dues, and a diligent discharge of the duties of our several stations and relations, is bound upon us, not merely by civil considerations, but as a necessary part of religion. But what ought especially to recommend Christianity is, that a true and extensive benevolence is there carried to the noblest height; it strengthens the natural ties of humanity, and adds other sacred and most engaging ties to bind us still more strongly to another. We are taught to love our neighbours as ourselves, to rejoice in their happiness, and endeavour to promote it; to do good to all as far as we have opportunity; yea, even to extend our benevolence to our enemies themselves, and to those that have injured us; and to be ready to render good for evil, and overcome evil with good. It tends to discountenance and suppress that malice and envy, hatred and revenge, those boisterous angry passions, and malevolent affections and dispositions, which have done so much mischief in the world.

As to the exercise of self-government, Christianity is manifestly designed, to improve and perfect human nature. It teaches us not only to regulate the outward actions, but the inward affections and dispositions of the soul; to labour after real purity of heart, simplicity and godly sincerity, as that without which no outward appearances can be pleasing in the sight of God. It strikes at the root of all our disorders and corruptions, by obliging us to correct and regulate that inordinate self-love, which causeth us to centre all our views in ourselves, in our own pleasure, or glory, or interest, and by instructing us to mortify and subdue our sensual appetites and inclinations. It is designed to assert the dominion of the rational and moral powers over the inferior part of our nature, of the spirit over the flesh, which alone can lay a just foundation for that moral liberty, and that tranquillity of mind, which it is the design of all true philosophy to procure and establish. And whereas a too great love of the world, and its enjoyments, its riches, honours, or pleasures, is the source of numberless disorders in human life, and turns us astray in our whole course, it teacheth us to rectify our false opinions of these things, and not to seek happiness in them, but to set our affections principally on



things of a far higher and nobler nature, things celestial and eternal. And with regard to the evils of this present life and world, it tendeth to inspire us with the noblest fortitude, and to render us superior to those evils, as being persuaded that God will cause them to work together for our good, and will overrule them to our greater happiness. It provideth the best remedy both against our cares and fears, especially against the fear of death itself.

All that are acquainted with the New Testament know, that this is a true, though imperfect representation of the nature and tendency of the religion of Jesus; nor need I point to the particular passages that prove it. Indeed the excellence of the morals there prescribed is so evident, that the enemies of Christianity have been obliged to pretend that its precepts are carried to a too great degree of strictness, impracticable to human nature in its present state. But not to urge, that the rule set before us ought to be perfect, and that though perhaps none of us can in every instance fully come up to it, yet it tendeth to inspire a laudable ambition, and to put us upon a constant endeavour of going on towards perfection, that we may approach still nearer to the prescribed pattern of excellence; not to urge this, it deserveth special observation, that though morality is carried by our Saviour, both in his precepts and example to the height of purity and excellence, yet it is not, under pretence of extraordinary refinement, carried to unwarrantable extremes. It is not required of us to extinguish the passions, as the stoics pretended to do, but to govern and moderate them, and keep them within proper bounds. Christianity doth not prescribe an unfeeling apathy, or pretend to render us insensible to the evils of this present life; but directeth us to bear up under them with patience and constancy, supported by the considerations of reason and religion, and encouraged by the glorious prospects that are before us. We are taught to deny ourselves: but the intention is only that we should subject our inferior appetites to the nobler part of our natures, and that the pleasures and interests of the flesh and the world should be made to give way to interests of a higher nature, to the duty we owe to God, and to the love of truth, virtue, and righteousness, when ever they happen to come into competition. We are required not to make provision for the

flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof; but we are not urged to macerate our bodies with excessive rigours and austerities, or to chastise them with bloody discipline. We are to be heavenly-minded, and to set our affections upon the things which are above; but so as not to neglect the duties, businesses, and offices of human life; an attendance to which is expressly required of us in the gospel-law. We are not commanded absolutely to quit the world, but, which is a much nobler attainment, to live above the world, whilst we are in it, and to keep ourselves free from its pollutions; not wholly to renounce our present enjoyments, but to be moderate in the use of them, and so to *use this world* as not to *abuse it*. All drunkenness, and gluttony, and excesses of riot are forbidden, and we are required to exercise a regular sobriety and temperance in our food; but we are commanded to abstain from divers kinds of meats, and are taught that *every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer*. It is required of us, that we may be chaste and pure, keeping *our vessels clean in sanctification and honour, and not in the lusts of concupiscence*; and yet an undue stress is not laid upon virginity or celibacy, as was too much done in after ages, but marriage is declared to be *honourable in all, and the bed undefiled*. Polygamy, which was formerly in some measure tolerated, is no longer so under the perfect institution of our Saviour. And the gospel precepts in this respect, though exclaimed against as harsh and severe, are really most agreeable to the original intention of marriage, and the balance maintained by providence between the sexes. The Christian people are directed to pay a due reverence to their pastors, and to *esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*; but they are not commanded to yield a blind submission to them; and their pastors are forbidden to act as *lords over God's heritage*, or as having *dominion over their faith*, but as *helpers of their joy*. And finally, it is evident, that in the whole scheme of the Christian religion, as taught by Christ and his Apostles, there is not the least trace to be found of worldly ambition, avarice, or sensuality. Virtue is there placed on the best and most solid foundations; our duties are urged upon us in their proper order, they are traced from their true source, and directed to their proper end. We are taught

to aspire continually to higher degrees of holiness and virtue, and not to take up with a meaner felicity than that which ariseth from a perfect conformity to God himself, and the eternal enjoyment of him. In one word, Christian morality, or the duty required of us, is summed up by our great heavenly teacher, in love, love to God, and charity towards mankind, accompanied with real purity of heart and life. And all this is to be attended with an amiable humility. We must abound in good works, but not glory in them: when we have done our best, and aspired to the noblest attainments that we are capable of in this present state, all vain-glorious boasting, all confidence in our own righteousness or merits is excluded. On God and his grace we must place our dependence, and to this ascribe the glory.

What a lovely idea is here set before us of moral excellence ! And as the gospel-precepts are so pure, prescribing our duty in its proper extent, so the strength and power of the motives there proposed, if duly attended to, will be found answerable to the purity of the precepts. And in this all the moral systems that natural religion or philosophy can furnish, are very deficient. Our duty is bound upon us in the holy Scripture, by the express authority and command of God himself, which must needs give a mighty weight to the precepts and directions there prescribed. All the charms of the divine goodness, grace, and love, are represented to our view, to lead us to repentance and holy obedience. The most perfect models are set before us: God himself is exhibited to our imitation, as the great original of moral goodness and excellence; and the example of his well-beloved Son, who was the living image of his own love, goodness, and purity here below. Good men are honoured with the most glorious characters, and are invested with the most valuable privileges, that they may be excited and engaged to walk worthy of those characters and privileges, and of the *high calling wherewith they are called*. And for our greater encouragement, the most express assurances are given us of God's readiness to communicate the gracious influences of his Holy Spirit; not to render our own endeavours needless, but to assist and animate our sincere endeavours.—The important solemnities of a future judgment are displayed before us in the most striking manner, when every man must

give an account of himself to God, and must receive according to the things done in his body, whether good or evil. Nothing can possibly be more noble and more engaging than the idea that is there given us of a glorious resurrection, and of that eternal life that is prepared for good men in the heavenly world, which is represented to us, not merely as a paradise of sensual delights, but as a pure and sublime felicity, fitted to animate the most virtuous and excellent minds. And, on the other hand, the punishments that shall be inflicted on the obstinately impenitent and disobedient, are represented in such a manner as is most proper to awaken and deter presumptuous sinners, who will not be wrought upon by the beauty and excellence of virtue, and the charms of divine love and goodness.

Any man that impartially considers these things, if he be really and in good earnest a friend to virtue and to mankind, would be apt to wish the Christian revelation true, and to acknowledge the great advantage of it where it is heartily believed and embraced. For, must it not be a mighty advantage to have the great principles of religion, which are of such vast importance to our happiness, confirmed by the testimony of God himself?—to have our duty urged upon us in his name, and plainly set before us in express precepts, which must needs come with a far superior force, considered, as enjoined by a divine authority, than as the dictates of philosophers or moralists?—to have the most explicit declarations made to us in the name of God himself, concerning the terms upon which forgiveness is to be obtained, and concerning the extent of that forgiveness, with respect to which many anxious jealousies and fears might otherwise be apt to arise in our hearts? And finally, to be assured by express revelation from God, of the nature, greatness, and eternal duration of that reward, with which he will crown our sincere, though imperfect obedience: a reward, far transcending not only our deserts, but even all that we could expect, or were able to conceive!

And now, upon reviewing this scheme of religion, which is undoubtedly the scheme of Christianity, as set before us in the New Testament, it is a reflection that naturally offereth itself, that supposing God had thought fit to make an extraordinary revelation of his will to mankind, it can scarce be conceived,

than it could be fuller of goodness and purity, that it could contain more excellent precepts, or set before us a more perfect model and example, or be enforced by more powerful motives, or be directed to nobler ends. Could such a scheme of religion as hath been mentioned, be the product either of imposture or enthusiasm? Its whole nature, design, and tendency, manifestly shew, that it could not be the work of impostors; especially of impostors so wicked, as to forge a series of the most extraordinary facts; not merely a single imposture, but a chain of impostures, and solemnly attest them in the name of God himself, when they themselves knew them to be absolutely false. There is nothing in the whole contexture of this religion that savours of private selfish interests, or carnal views, or worldly policy. And is it consistent with the character of impostors, without any regard to their own worldly advantage, to expose themselves to all manner of suffering, reproaches, and persecutions, and even to death itself, for publishing a scheme of pure religion, piety, and righteousness, merely from a desire of promoting the glory of God, and the good of mankind? To which may be added, that the persons who, we know, first published this religion to the world, were absolutely incapable of inventing such an admirable scheme of religion as Christianity is. If they could have entertained a design of putting a religion of their own invention upon the world, it must have been, considering their notions and prejudices, very different in many things from that which is taught in the New Testament. Nor could they have had it in their power, if they had been willing, to have imposed such a series of facts in that age, many of them represented to be of a very public nature, if they had been false. And it is equally absurd to suppose this religion to have been the product of enthusiasm, as of imposture. Could enthusiasts produce such a beautiful and regular scheme, so consistent in all its parts, exhibiting such just and noble ideas of God and of religion, such a perfect rule of duty, in which moral excellence is raised to the highest degree of purity, without running to extremes, and is enforced by such engaging motives, so admirably fitted to the excellence of the precepts? Surely this, which is so vastly superior to any scheme of religion or morals taught by the most

wise and learned philosophers and moralists, could not be the work of enthusiasts, especially of such frantic enthusiasts as they must have been, if they really believed that the wonderful facts recorded in the gospels were done before their eyes, and that they themselves were endued with such extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, and performed the most stupendous miracles, when there was no such thing. And since the gospel-scheme of religion was neither the product of enthusiasm nor of imposture, it was not of human invention: and as it cannot be supposed to have had its rise from evil beings, superior to man, who would never lend their assistance to enforce and establish such an excellent scheme of religion, virtue, and righteousness, it followeth that the account given by the first publishers of it was true, and that they received it, as they themselves declared, by revelation from God himself.

Upon the whole, taking all these things together, there seems to be as much evidence of the truth and divinity of the Scripture revelation, as could be reasonably expected and desired, supposing a revelation really given. For, on the one hand, it hath the most excellent internal characters of truth and goodness in its nature and tendency, whereby it appeareth to be worthy of God, pure, holy, and heavenly, admirably calculated to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind, and the cause of righteousness and virtue in the world, and to prepare men by a life of holy obedience on earth, for the eternal enjoyment of God in heaven. On the other hand, it was accompanied with the most illustrious external attestations, such as carried the manifest proofs of a divine interposition, and which it cannot reasonably be supposed God would ever give, or permit to be given, to an imposture.

As to the Christian scheme of a Mediator, the prejudices which some have been apt to entertain against Christianity on that account, seem principally to have arisen from misapprehensions or misrepresentations of that doctrine. It has been represented, as if the notion of a mediator between God and man, supposed the supreme Being, the Father of the universe, to be in himself implacable and inexorable, and to have had no thoughts of mercy or pity towards sinners of the human race, till he was prevailed upon, contrary to his own inclinations,

by the solicitations of a powerful Mediator. But this is not the idea of the Mediator given us in the holy Scriptures. On the contrary, the very appointment of the Mediator is there represented as wholly owing to the free and sovereign grace and goodness of God, the Father of all; who being full of love and compassion, and determined to shew mercy towards his guilty creatures, fixed upon this way of doing it, by sending his own Son into the world, to recover him from their guilt, corruption, and misery, to holiness and happiness.

In what method it may please God to transact with guilty creatures, who have offended him by their transgressions and disobedience, and to dispense his acts of grace and favour towards them, we cannot take upon us certainly to determine, except he should please to reveal it. This dependeth upon what seemeth most becoming his own glorious majesty, and most meet to his infinite wisdom, for answering the great end, and reasons of his government; of which we cannot pretend, if left to ourselves, to be competent judges. But the making use of a Mediator in the way the gospel informeth us, through whom his benefits are conferred upon us, and in whose name our prayers and services are offered to his acceptance, seemeth to be admirably fitted for preserving the dignity of his supreme authority and government, and an awful sense and veneration of his infinite majesty and greatness, his righteousness and purity, in the minds of his creatures, together with an humbling sense and conviction of their own guilt and unworthiness, and the great evil of their sins and transgressions; and, at the same time, it greatly contributeth to dispel their guilty jealousies and fears, and to inspire them with ingenuous affiance in his grace and mercy, and a hope of his gracious acceptance.

Some notion of the propriety of a Mediator, through whom we have access to God, and his benefits are communicated to us, hath very generally obtained among mankind, which probably might have its rise in a tradition derived from the earliest ages. But this, like other principles of that most ancient primitive religion, became very much corrupted among the nations, who worshipped a great number of idol gods and idol mediators. Under the Jewish œconomy, the great Mediator was typified and prefigured, both by Moses, who was appointed to transact between God and the people, and espe

cially in the office of the high-priest, and the solemnities of the service he was to perform on their behalf on the great day of expiation. And there was also preserved amongst them, a notion and expectation of a glorious deliverer, described under the most divine character, who was to appear in the fulness of time, and who, according to the prophecies concerning him, was to *make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness*; though they afterwards perverted the true sense of those prophecies to accommodate them to their own carnal prejudices, and to their worldly hopes and views.

But in the gospel this part of the divine œconomy is brought into the clearest light; and the idea that is there given of the Mediator is the noblest that can be conceived; whether we consider the glorious dignity of his person, in which the divine and human nature is wonderfully united, or the offices ascribed to him, which are such as are admirably fitted to the great work upon which he was sent, the saving and redeeming mankind. What can possibly give us a higher idea of God's unparalleled grace and goodness, than that for us men, and for our salvation, he sent his own Son, to assume our nature, to instruct us as our great heavenly Teacher, and bring the clearest and fullest revelation of the divine will that was ever given to mankind; and to make a declaration in the Father's name, of his free grace and mercy towards sinners of the human race, and of the gracious terms upon which he will receive them to his favour, and give them eternal life; to guide and lead us by his own example, and exhibit in his own sacred life and practice the most perfect model of universal goodness and purity, and of every amiable virtue, for our imitation; to make an atonement for our sins by his most meritorious obedience and sufferings, that he might obtain eternal redemption for us; to give us a certain pledge and assurance of a blessed resurrection, and of the happiness prepared for good men in the highest heavens, by his own resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven, and exaltation to glory; to rule us as the great King and Head of his Church, by his holy and most excellent laws and ordinances; and to appear for us in the heavenly sanctuary as our great advocate with the Father, who ever continueth to interpose for sinful men, and in whose name we are to offer up our prayers, and to hope for the acceptance



of our services. Add to this, that he is constituted the great dispenser of spiritual benefits, through whom God is pleased to communicate the blessings of his grace, and the aids of his Holy Spirit, for assisting us in our sincere endeavours, and training us up by a life of holy obedience for eternal felicity. And, to complete the glorious scheme, this great Saviour and Mediator is appointed to raise the dead, and judge the world in the Father's name, and to dispense eternal retributions of rewards and punishments to men according to their deeds, the consideration of which must needs give a mighty weight to his authority and laws.

These are things great and astonishing, and which could not have entered into the human mind, if God had not revealed them. But now that they are revealed, they form a most grand and harmonious system, the several parts of which are like so many links of a beautiful chain, one part answering to another, and all concurring to exhibit an admirable plan, in which the wisdom, the grace, and goodness, and the righteousness of God, most eminently shine forth. So that, instead of being a just cause of objection against the Christian revelation, it rather furnisheth a new proof of its divine original, and that it was not a mere human invention, but came by revelation from God, himself. A most glorious and amazing scene is here opened, which tendeth to fill the believing mind with the highest admiration and reverence, love and joy. It is true, there are great difficulties attending the Christian scheme of the Mediator, and the doctrine of the Trinity which is connected with it. But there is nothing in it that can be proved to be contradictory or impossible, taking it in the simplicity in which it is delivered in holy writ, and not as it has been perplexed and obscured by the subtilties and rash decisions of men. And it would be a wrong and unreasonable conduct to reject a revelation of so excellent a nature, and such an admirable tendency, and enforced by so many convincing proofs and illustrious attestations, because there are some things in it of a high and mysterious nature, and attended with difficulties, which we are not well able to solve: for surely if we have good proof of its being a divine revelation, the authority of God is a sufficient reason for our receiving it, notwithstanding those difficulties. If we are resolved to admit nothing as true that hath great difficulties,

nothing but what we are able clearly to explain, we must renounce all religion, and have recourse to atheism, which yet, besides its shocking and horrid consequences, hath the most unsurmountable difficulties of all. What is there more certain, and yet harder to form a distinct and consistent notion of, than absolute eternity? The immensity of the Supreme Being, whatever way we take of explaining it, is attended with difficulties too great for the human mind. There is not any thing in all nature more evident than the characters of wisdom and design in the frame of the universe; and yet there are many particular things relating to it, the design of which it is scarce possible for us to account for in this present state, from whence persons of an atheistical turn have taken occasion to deny an infinitely wise presiding mind. The same thing may be said with regard to the goodness of God, which is established by the strongest proofs, and of which we feel the most lively sensations in our own breasts; and yet every one knows, who has carried his inquiries deep into these things, that there are many appearances which we find it extremely hard to reconcile to our ideas of goodness, and which probably never will be fully cleared, till we have a more extensive view of the plan of the divine administration than now we can attain to. There is nothing we are more intimately conscious of than human liberty and free agency, or which is of greater importance to the very foundations of government and morality; and yet, if we consider it metaphysically, no subject is attended with greater difficulties, as the ablest metaphysicians and philosophers in all ages have acknowledged. The same may be said of the notion of spiritual and material substance, and the infinite divisibility of the latter, and of many other things of the like nature. It is a principle, which hath been admitted by the greatest masters of reason, that when once a thing is proved by proper evidences, and arguments sufficient in their kind, we are not to reject it, merely because it may be attended with difficulties, which we know not how to solve. This principle is admitted in philosophy; it must be admitted with regard to natural religion; and why then should it not be admitted with regard to Christianity too?

As to the corruptions of Christians, and the abuses of Christianity, and the additions that have been made to it, which have

furnished the deists with their most plausible objections, it ought to be considered, that the Christian religion cannot in reason be made accountable for those abuses and corruptions. The proper remedy in that case is not to throw off all regard for the gospel, but to endeavour to recover men from their deviations from it. And in this, the pains of those that pretend to a true liberty of thinking might be profitably employed. If they have a true regard to the happiness of mankind, and to the cause of virtue in the world, the best way to answer that design is, not to endeavour to expose the scriptures to contempt, but to engage men to a greater veneration for those sacred oracles, and a closer adherence to them in doctrine and practice; not to attempt to set men free from the obligations of Christianity, but to do what they can, that the hearts and consciences of men may be brought under the power of its excellent instructions and important motives, and may be governed by its holy laws, which would be of the happiest consequence both to larger societies and particular persons.

To conclude: It is to be hoped, that the view that hath been taken of the attempts which have been made against Christianity among us, beyond the example of former ages, instead of shocking the faith of true Christians, will only tend to convince them that it standeth upon the most solid foundation, not to be shaken by the malice or subtilty of its ablest adversaries. The strange eagerness so many have shewn to subvert the credit and authority of the gospel, should awaken in us a well-conducted zeal for the interests of our holy religion, and should heighten our esteem for true uncorrupted Christianity as taught in the holy scriptures. We can never be sufficiently thankful to God for so glorious an advantage as that of the light of the gospel shining among us. This we should esteem the most valuable of all our privileges, and should regard every attempt to deprive us of it, as an attempt to deprive us of our happiness and glory, and to bring us into darkness and misery; to rob good men of their noblest joys and comforts, the most powerful helps, and the most animating motives to the practice of piety and virtue; and to free bad men from their apprehensions of the wrath of God and future punishment, and thereby remove the most effectual restraints to vice and wickedness. The cause of Christianity is the cause of God.

Let us therefore take the most effectual methods in our power to maintain and to promote it. And this calleth for the united endeavours of all that bear the glorious name of Christians. A great deal has been done in this age in a way of reason and argument. But this, however proper and laudable, is not alone sufficient. For it is a thing which cannot be too much inculcated, that a mere notional and speculative belief of Christianity will be of small avail; and that the principal care of those who profess it should be, to get their hearts and lives brought under the governing influence of its divine doctrines and excellent precepts, that it may not be merely an outward form, but a living principle within them. Among the many unhappy consequences which have arisen from the disputes that have with so much indecency and eagerness been carried on against our holy religion, this is not the least, that it hath carried men's minds too much off from the vital part of religion, and hath led them to regard it as a matter of speculation and dispute, rather than of practice. But this is to forget the very nature and design of Christianity, which is not a bare system of speculative opinions, but a practical institution, a spiritual and heavenly discipline, full of life and power, all whose *doctrines, precepts, ordinances, motives*, are manifestly intended to form us to a godlike temper, to real holiness of heart and life. And those good men who are not able to do much for it in a way of argumentation, may yet effectually promote its sacred interests, by walking according to the excellent rules of the gospel, and shewing the advantageous influence it hath upon their temper and conduct, and thus making an amiable representation of it to the world. And though it highly becometh those, whose office it is to teach and instruct others, to be well furnished with divine knowledge, so as to be able by sound reason and argument to convince, or at least to confute the gainsayers; yet one of the most essential services they can do the Christian cause, is, by their doctrine and by their example, to lead the Christian people into the practice of all holiness and goodness. This would tend more than any thing else to stop the mouths of adversaries, and would probably, as it did in many instances in the first ages of the Christian church, gain them over to a good opinion of that religion, which is fitted to produce such excellent fruits.

These are reflections which naturally arise upon this subject. But I shall not insist farther upon them at present; especially as I shall have occasion to resume some of them in an address to Deists and professed Christians, which I shall here subjoin as a proper conclusion of the work.

I am, dear and worthy Sir,

Your most affectionate and obliged

Friend and Servant,

JOHN LELAND.

THE  
CONCLUSION,

IN AN ADDRESS TO

DEISTS AND PROFESSED CHRISTIANS.

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*These are inexcusable who reject Christianity at a venture, without due Examination—Deistical Authors unsafe Guides, and shew little Sign of a fair and impartial Inquiry—Several of their Objections such as cannot be reasonably urged against Christianity at all—Those Objections only are of real Weight which tend to invalidate its Proofs and Evidences, or which are drawn from the Nature of the Religion itself, to shew that it is unworthy of God—The Attempts of the Deists on each of these Heads shewn to be insufficient—An Expostulation with them concerning the great Guilt and Danger of their Conduct, and the ill Consequences of it, both to themselves and to the Community—Those professed Christians highly culpable, who live in an habitual Negligence and Inconsideration with regard to Religion, or who slight public Worship and the Christian institutions, or who indulge themselves in an immoral and vicious Practice—A wicked Christian, of all Characters, the most inconsistent—Advice to those who profess to believe the Gospel—They should be thankful to God for their Privileges—They should labour to be well acquainted with the Holy Scriptures—And above all, they should be careful to adorn their profession by a holy and virtuous Life—A Christian acting up to the obligations of Christianity, forms a glorious Character, which derives a Splendour to the most exalted Station—This illustriously exemplified in a great Personage of the highest Dignity—The vast Importance of a careful Education of Children, and the bad Effects of neglecting it—And here also the same eminent Example is recommended to the Imitation of all, especially of the great and noble.*

**H**AVING endeavoured to give as clear a general view as I was able of the principal deistical writers of the last and

present age, and having made large and particular remarks on the two most noted authors who having appeared of late among us in that cause, I shall now, as a conclusion of this work, take the liberty to address myself, both to those that take upon them the character of deists and free-thinkers, and who reject the Christian revelation; and to those who are honoured with the name of Christians, and who profess to receive the religion of Jesus as of divine authority.

The former may be ranked principally into two sorts. They are either such as, taking it for granted that Christianity has been proved to be an imposition on mankind, reject it as a venture, without being able to assign a reason for rejecting it, or at most take up with some slight objections, and content themselves with general clamours of priestcraft and imposture, without giving themselves the trouble of making a distinct inquiry into the nature of the religion itself, or examining its proofs and evidences; or, they are such as pretend to reject Christianity, because, upon a due examination and inquiry, they have found it to be destitute of sufficient proof, and have discovered in it the marks of falsehood and imposture, which convince them that it cannot be of divine original. There is reason to apprehend, that the greater part of those among us who pass under the name of deists, come under the former of these characters. But the conduct of such persons is so manifestly absurd as to admit of no excuse. For what pretence have they to glory in the title of Free-thinkers, who will not be at the pains to think closely and seriously at all, even in matters of the highest consequence? There are few therefore who are willing to own that this is their case. Whether they have really given themselves the trouble of a free and diligent examination and inquiry or not, they would be thought to have done so, and not to have rejected the Christian revelation without having good reasons for their unbelief. It is therefore to such persons that I would now address myself.

Of this sort professedly are those that have appeared among us under the character of deistical writers. They have made a shew of attacking Christianity in a way of reason and argument. But, upon the view which hath been taken of them it may, I think, be safely declared, that whatever they have of-

ferred that had the face of argument, hath been solidly confuted, the evidences of Christianity have been placed in a fair and consistent light, and their objections against it have been shewn to be vain and insufficient. Though there never were writers more confident and assuming, or who have expressed a greater admiration of themselves; and contempt of others, it hath been shewn, that, taking them generally, they have had little to support such glorious pretences: That no writers ever acted a part more unfair and disingenuous: That though they have set up for advocates of natural religion in opposition to revealed, yet many of them have endeavoured to subvert the main articles, even of natural religion, and have used arguments which bear equally against all religion, and tend to banish it out of the world: That they have often put on a shew of great regard for genuine original Christianity, whilst at the same time they have used their utmost efforts to destroy its evidences, and subvert its authority: That instead of representing the Christian religion fairly as it is, they have had recourse to misrepresentation and abuse, and have treated the holy Scriptures in a manner which would not be borne, if put in practice against any other ancient writings of the least reputation, and which is indeed inconsistent with all the rules of candour and decency: That with regard to the extraordinary facts by which Christianity is attested, they have advanced principles which would be accounted perfectly ridiculous if applied to any other facts, and which really tend to destroy all moral evidence; and the credit of all past facts whatsoever: And finally, that never were there writers more inconsistent with themselves and with one another, or who have discovered more apparent signs of obstinate prepossession and prejudice. And should not all this naturally create a suspicion of a cause which stands in need of such management, and of writers who have been obliged to have recourse to arts so little reconcileable to truth and candour? And yet it is to be apprehended, that many of those who laugh at others for relying upon their teachers, are ready to resign themselves to their deistical leaders, and to take their pretences and confident assertions, and even their jests and sarcasms, for arguments.

Many of the objections which have been produced with



great pomp, and which have created some of the strongest prejudices against Christianity, are such as cannot be properly urged against it with any appearance of reason at all. Such are the objections drawn from the abuses and corruptions which have been introduced, contrary to its original design, or from the ill conduct of many of its professors and ministers. For whilst the Christian religion, as taught by Christ and his apostles, and delivered in the holy Scriptures, may be demonstrated to be of a most useful and admirable nature and tendency, whilst the proofs and evidences of it stand entire, and the truth of the facts whereby it was attested is sufficiently established, the reason for embracing it still holds good: and to reject a religion in itself excellent, for abuses and corruptions, which many of those that make the objections acknowledge are not justly chargeable upon true original Christianity, is a conduct that cannot be justified, and is indeed contrary to the dictates of reason and good sense. The same observation may be made with regard to some other objections which have been frequently urged against the Christian revelation, and particularly that which is drawn from its not having been universally promulgated. For if the evidences which are brought to prove that Christianity is a true divine revelation, and that this revelation was really given, are good and valid, then its not having been made known to all mankind will never prove, that such a revelation was not given. And such a way of arguing in any other case would be counted impertinent. It is arguing from a thing the reasons of which we do not know, against the truth and certainty of a thing that we do know, and of which we are able to bring sufficient proofs.

The only objections therefore, or arguments, which can really be of weight against Christianity, are those which either tend to invalidate its proofs and evidences, and to shew that the divine attestations which are given to it are not to be depended upon, or which were drawn from the nature of the revelation itself, to shew that it is absurd and unworthy of God. And accordingly both these have been attempted. But whoever will impartially consider the writings of the deistical authors, and compare them with those of the advocates for Christianity, will find how little they have advanced on either of these heads that is really to the purpose. The attestations

given to Christianity are of such an extraordinary nature, and carry in them such manifest proofs of a divine interposition, that few, if any, have ever owned the truth of those facts, and yet denied the divine original of the Christian revelation. Its adversaries therefore have chiefly bent their force to destroy the credit of the facts. But they have not been able to invalidate the arguments which have been brought to prove that those facts were really done: it hath been shewn, that the evidence produced for them is as great as could reasonably be expected and desired for any past facts whatsoever: that never was there any testimony, all things considered, more worthy of credit than that of the original witnesses to those facts: and that those accounts have been transmitted to us by a conveyance so sure and uninterrupted as can hardly be paralleled in any other case. This has been evinced by a clear deduction of proofs, to which little has been opposed but conjectures and suspicions of fraud, and general clamours against moral evidence, and human testimony, without taking off the force of the proofs that have been brought on the other side.

As to the arguments urged against the Christian revelation from the nature of the revelation itself, these must relate either to its doctrines or laws. With respect to the laws of Christianity, it cannot reasonably be denied, that its moral precepts are pure and excellent, and have a manifest tendency to promote the practice of piety and virtue in its just extent, and the peace and good order of the world. And they are enforced with the most powerful and important motives that can possibly be conceived, and the best fitted to work upon the human nature.

When the moral precepts of Christianity could not be justly found fault with, a great clamour has been raised against its positive precepts and institutions. And yet it is capable of being proved—it hath been often clearly proved, that these positive institutions, taken in their primitive purity, and according to their original design, are admirably fitted to promote the great ends of all religion, and to strengthen our obligations to a holy and a virtuous life. And this some of the most noted deistical writers have not been able to deny.—And it has been lately fully acknowledged by Lord Bolingbroke.

The only objection, therefore, which properly remains is against the doctrines of Christianity. And before this objection can be properly brought to bear, two things are to be proved. The one is, that the doctrines objected against are doctrines of the true original Christian religion as taught by Christ and his apostles, and delivered in the holy Scriptures. The other is, that these doctrines, as there taught, are really absurd and contrary to reason. For a doctrine may be attended with great difficulties, very hard to be accounted for, and yet may be really true, and not contradictory to reason: which is evidently the case with respect to several important principles of what is called natural religion. The difficulty attending any doctrine in our manner of conceiving it, is not a proper argument against its truth, if we have otherwise sufficient evidence to convince us that that doctrine is true: and its being plainly asserted in a revelation, proved to be divine, is a sufficient evidence. For to acknowledge a divine revelation to have been given, and yet receive nothing upon the credit of it, nothing but what we can prove to be true, or at least highly probable, independently of that revelation, is a most absurd and inconsistent conduct. It is to make a divine testimony pass for nothing, and to pay no greater regard to a thing on account of its being divinely revealed, than if it had not been revealed at all. In this case, what is said by a person who cannot be supposed to be prejudiced in favour of Christianity appears to be very reasonable; which I shall here beg leave to repeat, though I had occasion to take notice of it before, *viz.* that “when persons have received the Christian revelation for genuine, after sufficient examination of its external and internal proofs, and have found nothing that makes it inconsistent with itself, nor that is repugnant to any of those divine truths, which reason and the works of God demonstrate to them, such persons will never set up reason in contradiction to it, on account of things plainly taught, but incomprehensible as to their manner of being; if they did, their reason would be false and deceitful, they would cease to be reasonable men \*.” And elsewhere, after having observed that

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 384.

we cannot be obliged to believe against reason, he saith, that when a revelation hath passed through the necessary trials, " it is to be received with the most profound reverence, with the most entire submission, and with the most unfeigned thanksgiving. Reason has exercised her whole prerogative then, and delivers us over to faith. To believe before all these trials, or to doubt after them, is alike unreasonable \*."

And now, upon such a view of things, you will allow me, gentlemen, seriously to expostulate with you, and to beseech you to reflect whether, in rejecting and endeavouring to expose Christianity, you act a wise and reasonable part, and what is like to be the effect of your conduct, both with regard to yourselves, and to the public ?

And first, with regard to yourselves. Consider that the case now before you is not merely a matter of indifference, or of small importance. Your own most essential interests are nearly concerned. If the gospel be true and divine, to reject it will involve you in the greatest guilt, and will expose you to the greater danger. The best that can be said of your case upon such a supposition is, that it is infinitely hazardous. If, in fact, it should be found, that you have rejected a true divine revelation, which God himself hath confirmed with the most illustrious attestations ; that you have refused the testimony which he had given of his Son, and have poured contempt on the Saviour whom he hath, in his infinite wisdom and love provided for us ; that you have slighted the authority of his laws, and the offers of his grace, and have despised all his glorious promises ; and set at nought his awful threatenings ; this cannot possibly be a slight guilt, and therefore you have reason in that case to apprehend the severe effects of the divine displeasure. Whatever favourable allowances may be made to those who never heard of the gospel, or had no opportunity of being instructed in it in its original purity, it is plain, from the whole tenor of the gospel-declarations, that those to whom it is clearly published, and who have its evidences plainly laid before them, and yet shut their eyes against the heavenly light, and despise its offered salvation, are in a very dangerous state. And though it may be said, that this

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 279.

is immediately to be understood of those who lived in the age when the gospel was first published, yet it holds in proportion with regard to those in after-ages, to whom that revelation and its evidences are made known, and who yet wilfully reject it. For since God designed that revelation, not merely for the age when it was first delivered, but for succeeding ages; and since accordingly it was so ordered, that both the revelation itself, its doctrines and laws, and an account of the divine attestations that were given to it, have been transmitted to us in such a manner, as layeth a just foundation for our being assured, that this is the true original revelation, and that these facts were really done; then the obligation which lies upon those to whom that revelation is made known to receive and submit to it, and consequently the guilt of rejecting it, still subsists. Examine the revelation itself. Could you possibly expect a revelation given for nobler purposes, than to instruct us to form the most worthy notions of God, of his perfections, and of his providence, to set before us the whole of our duty in its just extent, to instruct us in the terms of our acceptance with God, to assure us of his readiness to pardon our iniquities, and to receive us to his grace and favour upon our unfeigned repentance, and to crown our sincere, though imperfect obedience with the glorious reward of eternal life? Could any revelation be expected, whose precepts are more pure and excellent, or enforced by more weighty motives, or the uniform tendency of which is more manifestly fitted to promote the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world? Or, could any revelation, supposing a revelation really given, be attended with more illustrious attestations? Will it be an excuse fit to be offered to the great Ruler and Judge of the world, that you did not yourselves see the miracles that were wrought, nor were witnesses to the attestations that were given? This is in effect to demand, that all these facts should be done over again for your conviction, or you will not believe them. But how unreasonable is this, when the accounts of these facts are transmitted with a degree of evidence sufficient to satisfy any unprejudiced mind, an evidence which must be admitted, except no past facts at all are to be believed, and which you yourselves would account sufficient in any other case! Or, will it be accepted as a just excuse, that it contains some doctrines

which are attended with great difficulties that we are not able to account for, and which relate to things that transcend our comprehension, when, at the same time, it cannot be denied that there are several things, both in religion and philosophy which the most wise and considering men think it reasonable to believe, though they are liable to objections which they cannot give a clear solution of \*? Or, is the true reason of your rejecting the gospel your aversion to its holy laws, and that purity of heart and life that is there required? But is this a reason fit to be pleaded before God, or proper to satisfy your own consciences? *This is the condemnation*, saith our Saviour, *that light is come into the world, but men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.* If this should be found to be really your case, and the true cause of your opposition to the gospel, your guilt is of a very aggravated nature! It is to hate and oppose the light that should convince and reform you, and to make the very excellence of the gospel a reason for rejecting it. The best and wisest men in all ages have owned the necessity of keeping the appetites and passions within proper bounds, and in a just subjection to the dominion of reason. And this is the great design of the Christian law. And yet its precepts are not carried to an unreasonable rigour and austerity: it is not designed to extinguish the passions, but to moderate them, and allows them to be gratified within the bounds of temperance and innocence. Its precepts, if reduced to practice, would both tend to the true dignity and perfection of our nature, and lay a just foundation for an inward tranquillity and satisfaction of mind, and for a true moral liberty, the noblest liberty in the world; as no-slavery is to be compared to a moral servitude, which consisteth in a vassalage to the vicious appetites and passions. A life led in conformity to the gospel precepts, is, whatever you may think of it, the most delightful life in the world. It tendeth to improve and enlarge the social affections, to inspire an universal benevolence, to render men good and useful in every rela-

\* One of the most subtle writers that have of late appeared against Christianity, says that no priestly dogmas ever shocked common sense so much "as the infinite divisibility of matter, with its consequences," which yet has not hindered the ablest mathematicians from believing it to be demonstrably true. And he gives some other instances of the like kind. See Hume's *Philosophical Essays*, p. 3. 46, 347.

tion, and to restrain and govern those furious and malignant passions of envy, hatred, and revenge, which carry torment and bitterness in their nature. It directs us to a rational piety and devotion towards God, and tends to produce a noble and ingenuous confidence in him, and an entire resignation to his will, and to refresh and cheer the soul with a consciousness of the divine approbation. To this add the satisfactions and joys arising from all the wonders of the divine grace and goodness, as displayed in the gospel, from the charms of redeeming love, and the great things Christ hath done and suffered for our salvation, from the glorious promises of the new covenant, and the gracious aids and influences of the Holy Spirit, and from the ravishing and transporting prospects that are before us. A blessed resurrection and immortal life! You will be ready perhaps to charge this as enthusiasm: But I see no reason for it, except the noblest emotions of the human mind, and the exercise of our best affections upon the best and most excellent objects, must pass under that name. Consider, I beseech you, what valuable privileges, what divine satisfaction, what ravishing prospects, you deprive yourselves of by your infidelity! and what have you in exchange, but perplexing doubts and uncertainties, gloomy prospects, and what you will hardly be able to get entirely rid of, anxious suspicions and fears, enough where they prevail, to mar the comfort and satisfaction of life!

But let me now, in the next place, desire you to reflect upon what may be the consequences of your conduct with regard to the public. There are great and general complaints, and it were to be wished that there was not a just foundation for them, of a dissoluteness of manners which seems to be growing among us. This is a matter in which the interests of the community are very nearly concerned. When once the corruption spreads through all orders and degrees of persons, those in higher and in lower stations, it must needs be attended with a perversion of all public order, and sap the very foundation of the public glory and happiness. In proportion as vice and dissoluteness prevail, it produces a neglect of honest industry, trade consequently decays, fraud and violence increase, the reverence of oaths is lost, and all ties and bands that keep society together are in danger of being dissolved. Machiavel himself has decided, that a free government cannot be long

maintained, when once a people are become generally corrupt. All true friends, therefore, to the public order and liberty, must wish, that virtue may flourish, and that men's vicious appetites and passions may be kept under proper restraints. And nothing is so fit to answer this end as religion. If the influence of religion were removed from the minds of men, and there were no fear of God before their eyes, civil laws would be found feeble restraints. This the ablest politicians have been sensible of, and never was there any civilized government that did not take in religion for its support \*. And it may be easily proved, that never was there any religion so well fitted for answering all these purposes as the Christian. The two latest writers who have appeared against Christianity have made full acknowledgments of the great usefulness of religion, especially that part of it which relateth to future rewards and punishments, to public communities; though both of them have most inconsistently endeavoured to subvert that doctrine of future retributions, the belief of which they own to be necessary for preserving public peace and order. Mr Hume, speaking of the received notion, that "the Deity will inflict punishments on vice, and infinite rewards on virtue," says, that "those who attempt to disabuse them of such prejudices, may, for aught he knows, be

\* Lord Bolingbroke observes, that "the good effects of maintaining, and bad effects of neglecting religion, were extremely visible in the whole course of the Roman government—That though the Roman religion established by Numa was very absurd, yet by keeping up an awe of superior power, and the belief of a providence that ordered the course of events, it produced all the marvellous effects which Machiavel, after Polybius, Cicero, and Plutarch, ascribes to it." He adds, that "the neglect of religion was a principal cause of the evils that Rome afterwards suffered. Religion decayed, and the state decayed with her \*." And if even a false religion, by keeping up an awe of superior power, and the belief of a providence, had so advantageous an influence on the prosperity of the state, and the neglect of religion brought such evils upon it, can they possibly be regarded as true friends to the public, who take so much pains to subvert the religion professed among us, a religion established upon the most rational and solid foundations, and to set men loose from the awe of a superior power, and the belief of a providence ordering the course of events, and the manifest tendency of whose attempts and endeavours is to leave us without any religion at all?

\* *Lord Bolingbroke's Works*, vol. iv. p. 428.



“good reasoners, but he cannot allow them to be good citizens and politicians; since they free men from one restraint upon their passions, and make the infringement of the laws of equity and society, in one respect, more easy and secure\*.” Lord Bolingbroke, speaking of those who “contrived religion for the sake of government,” observes, that they saw that the public external religion would not answer their end, nor enforce effectually the obligations of virtue and morality, without the doctrine of future rewards and punishments †.” And he says, “the doctrine of rewards and punishments in a future state has so great a tendency to enforce the civil laws, and to restrain the vices of men, that reason, which, as he pretends, cannot decide for it on principles of natural theology, will not decide against it on principles of good policy ‡.” And it is certain, that no religion placeth those future retributions in so strong and affecting a light as Christianity does. The last mentioned author goes so far as to say, that “if the conflict between virtue and vice in the great commonwealth of mankind was not maintained by religious and civil institutions, the human life would be intolerable §.” And now, I think, I may justly expostulate with those gentlemen, who do what they can to propagate infidelity among us. What real good to mankind, what benefit to the society or community, can you propose by endeavouring to expose Christianity, its ministry, and ordinances to contempt, and to subvert its divine authority, and thereby destroy its influence on the minds and consciences of men? Can you propose to assert and promote the cause of virtue, by taking away its strongest supports, and those motives which have the greatest tendency to engage men to the practice of it? Or, can you propose to put a check to abounding licentiousness, by removing the most powerful restraints to vice and wickedness? If it be so hard to restrain the corruption of mankind, and to keep their disorderly appetites within proper bounds, even taking in all the aids of religion, and the amazing power of those motives which Christianity furnisheth, what could be expected, if all these were discarded, and men were left to gratify their passions without the dread of a su-

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 231.

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 60. ‡ Ib. vol. v. p. 322. § Ib. p. 227.

preme governor or judge? Surely then, however unfavourable to Christianity your private sentiments might be, you ought, for the sake of the public, to conceal them, if you would approve yourselves true lovers of your country, and zealous for the liberty and prosperity of it, and not take pains to propagate principles, which, in their consequences, must have the worst influence on the peace, the welfare, and good order of the community. If what Lord Bolingbroke saith is true, that “no religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind as the Christian religion, considered as taught by Christ and his apostles\* ;” with what face or consistency can these pretend to public spirit, or to a concern for the public happiness, who use their utmost efforts to subvert it, and represent its important motives as vain bugbears? Especially, how can such persons pretend to be real friends to the present constitution and government, which is founded on an attempt to maintain Christianity in its purity, as delivered in the holy scriptures, a zeal for which will always prove its greatest security?

I hope, gentlemen, you will forgive the freedom of this expostulatory address, which is not designed to reproach you, or to return railing for railing, which our holy religion forbids, but proceeds from an earnest concern for your happiness, and for promoting your best interests here and hereafter; as well as from a desire, as far as my ability reaches, to serve the public, the welfare of which is very nearly concerned in the consequences of your conduct.

I shall now beg leave to address myself to those who profess to value themselves upon the name of Christians; a name truly glorious, expressive of the most sacred obligations and engagements, the most valuable privileges, and the most sublime hopes. But the bare name of Christians will be of little advantage, without the true spirit and practice of Christianity. And it is impossible for any friend to religion and to mankind to observe, without a very sensible concern, what numbers there are of those who would take it ill not to be called and accounted Christians, that yet take little care to act suitably to that sacred and honourable character.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 291.

Many professed Christian there are, who scarce ever bestow a serious thought upon those things which it is the great design of the gospel to inculcate on the hearts and minds of men. Let me desire such persons to reflect a little what an inconsistent conduct they are guilty of. To profess to believe that God hath sent his Son from heaven with messages of grace to sinful men, and to bring discoveries of the highest importance, in which our everlasting salvation is very nearly concerned, and yet not to allow these things a place in their thoughts, and to prefer the veriest trifles before them! Will you dare to say in words, that you do not think it worth your while to attend to what God thought fit to send his own Son to reveal? Why then do you act as if you thought so? No pretence of worldly business, though it is our duty to be diligent in it, can excuse an utter habitual inconsideration and neglect of these things, which, by professing to believe Christianity, we profess to believe to be of the greater importance.— Much less will a hurry of diversions be allowed to be a sufficient excuse. And yet how many are there whose time is taken up in low trifling pleasures and amusements, and who make that which at best should only be the entertainment of a vacant hour, the very business of their lives! It is to be lamented, that this is too often the case with persons distinguished by their birth, their fortunes, and figure, in the world. As if all the advantage they proposed by those shining distinctions, was only the privilege of leading idle unmeaning lives, useless to themselves, and to the community. Can reasonable creatures think, that by such constant trifling away their precious time, they answer the end of their beings, the end for which they had the noble powers of reason given them? As if they were sent into the world only to divert themselves. Much less can Christians believe, that they were formed for no higher and more valuable purposes. How often are the duties of the church and closet, those of the social relations, the care of children and of families, the kind offices and exercises of a noble and generous benevolence towards the poor, the indigent, the afflicted, and disconsolate, neglected and postponed, for the sake of the most trifling amusements; an immoderate fondness and attachment to which, tends, even when it is least hurtful, to produce a disinclination to serious thought, and to

impair the relish for that which is truly good, excellent, and improving!

But this is still worse, when what are called diversions, tend to lay snares for virtue and innocence, and open the way to scenes of dissoluteness and debauchery. Or, when what is called play and amusement is carried to such an excess as to hurt and squander away fortunes, which might be employed to the most valuable and useful purposes, and thereby disables persons of distinguished rank from the duties they owe to their families and to the community, from the exercise of generous charity and benevolence, and even of justice too.— To which may be added, the tendency it often hath to excite and exercise unworthy and disorderly passions, and to produce the habits of fraud, falsehood, and a base illiberal thirst after gain.

If our own observation and experience did not convince us of it, one would scarce think there could be persons who profess to believe the gospel, and to acknowledge its divine authority, and yet live in an habitual neglect of its public worship and sacred institutions. But that such a neglect is becoming general among us, beyond the example of former times, cannot escape the notice of the most superficial observer. There scarce ever was an institution more wisely and beneficially calculated for preserving and promoting the interests of religion and virtue in the world, than that of setting apart one day in a week from worldly businesses and cares, for the solemnities of public worship, and for instructing the people in the knowledge of religion, and exhorting them to the practice of it; and yet many there are that would take it ill not to be accounted Christians, who seem to affect an open neglect, or even contempt of it. But it is not easy to conceive, what reasonable pretence or excuse can be alledged for such a conduct. Will they, in good earnest, aver, that they look upon it to be a reflection upon their sense, or unworthy of their quality, to pay their public homage to their Maker and Redeemer; and to make open professions of their regard to that religion, which yet they would be thought to believe? Or, have they such an aversion to the exercises of religion, that the spending an hour or two in solemn acts of adoration, in prayer and thanksgiving, and in receiving instructions and admonitions from his holy

word, is a weariness which they cannot bear? But what is this, but to avow the great degeneracy of their own minds, and their want of a proper temper and disposition for the noblest exercises, which best deserve the attention of reasonable beings? Or, do they pretend a high regard for moral virtue, as an excuse for neglecting positive institutions? But will any man, of the least reflection, who knoweth the true state of things among us, take upon him to declare, that the growing neglect of the ordinances of religion hath contributed to the promoting the practice of virtue? Or, that men's morals are generally mended, since they became more indifferent to those sacred solemnities? Nothing is more evident to any one, who impartially considereth the nature of those divine institutions and ordinances, which are appointed in the gospel, than that a due observance of them according to their original institution, besides its being a public avowal of our religious homage, and of our faith in God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, hath a manifest tendency to promote our moral improvement, and to exercise and strengthen those good affections and dispositions which naturally lead to a holy and virtuous practice.

And as there are too many professed Christians, who openly neglect the institutions of religion, there are others who seem to flatter themselves that a mere outward attendance on divine ordinances, and the keeping up a form of religion, will be alone sufficient, though they at the same time indulge themselves in a practice contrary to the rules of virtue and morality. But all expedients for reconciling the practice of vice, of dissoluteness, or dishonesty, with the faith and hope of the gospel, are visibly absurd and vain. The most inconsistent of all characters is a wicked and vicious Christian, which to any one that is acquainted with the true nature and design of Christianity, seems to be a kind of contradiction in terms. For nothing is more evident than that a bad and dissolute life is the most manifest contradiction to the whole design of the gospel-revelation. What a strange inconsistency is it for persons to profess themselves the disciples of the holy Jesus, and yet to counteract the very end he came into the world for! To profess to hope for salvation from him as promised in the gospel, and yet to neglect the necessary terms,

without which, we are there assured, salvation is not to be obtained! To believe that he came to destroy the works of the devil, and yet allow themselves in those works which he came to destroy! What an unamiable representation do such persons make of Christianity, if a judgment were to be formed of it from their conduct and practice! You would perhaps conceive a horror at the thought of blaspheming Christ, and openly renouncing all hope of salvation from him, and yet the plain tendency of your practice is to harden the hearts of infidels, and to give occasion to the enemies of Christianity to blaspheme. And should not you tremble to think of being charged as accessory to the indignities and reproaches cast on that venerable name into which you were baptized, and on that excellent system of religion, whose divine original you profess to believe? Surely then it highly concerneth you, for your own sakes, and that of the gospel, to set yourselves heartily to reform a conduct so irreconcilable to all the rules of reason, and to your own most evident interests. Implore the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, and the assistances of his grace, which shall not be wanting to the truly penitent, and shew yourselves Christians, by endeavouring to get your souls effectually brought under the influence of our holy religion, the natural tendency of which, wherever it is sincerely believed and embraced, is to inspire an ingenuous hope, confidence, and joy.

I shall conclude therefore with laying a few advices before those who take upon them the name of Christians, and who profess to receive the gospel as of divine authority.

And, 1. Let us be thankful to God for our glorious privileges. It is our unspeakable advantage, that we are not left merely to the uncertain lights, or unfeeble conjectures of our own unassisted reason in matters of the highest importance. We have God himself instructing us by his word concerning his own glorious perfections, and his governing providence, as extending to the individuals of the human race, displaying all the riches of his grace and goodness towards perishing sinners, setting our duty before us in its just extent, and animating us to the practice of it by the most exceeding great and precious promises, and assuring us of the aids of his Holy Spirit to assist our weak endeavours. We are raised to the most glorious hopes and views.

A happiness is provided for us as the reward of our patient continuance in well-doing, transcending all that we are now able to express, or even to conceive. These things certainly call for a devout admiration and adoring thankfulness, and for all the returns of love and gratitude that are in our power. Our civil liberties are justly to be valued, but our privileges as Christians are of a yet higher and nobler nature.

*2dly*, Another thing which naturally follows upon this is, that we should consider and improve the revelation we profess to believe, and that we should endeavour to be well acquainted with it, especially as it is contained in the holy Scriptures. There those discoveries are to be found which God was pleased to make of his will at sundry times and in divers manners, by the mouth of his holy prophets; but especially there is that last and most perfect revelation he gave by his well-beloved Son. We are ready to think they had a mighty advantage who saw our Saviour in the flesh, who heard his excellent discourses, and were witnesses to his holy life, and to the miracles he performed. And in the sacred writings we have all these things faithfully recorded. Those very discourses which he delivered are there transmitted to us, with an account of the wonderful works he did, his most holy and useful life, and most perfect example. What a strange inconsistent conduct would it be, to profess to believe that there is a revelation given from heaven relating to matters of the highest moment, and that this revelation is contained in the holy Scriptures, and yet to suffer the Bible to lie neglected by us, as if this, which is the most worthy of all our attention, were the only book that deserved no attention at all! Let us therefore search the Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation. And if we meet with difficulties there, as may justly be expected in such ancient writings, and which relate to a great variety of things, some of them of a very extraordinary nature, let not this discourage us. For besides that by a careful considering and comparing the Scriptures themselves, and making a proper use of the helps that are afforded us, we may have the satisfaction of having many of those difficulties cleared up to us, it must be observed, that those things that are most necessary to be known, and which are of the greatest importance, are there

most plainly revealed, and frequently inculcated: and these things we should especially labour to get impressed upon our hearts and consciences.

But that which should be our principal concern, is to take care that our whole conversation be such as becometh the gospel of Christ, worthy of our glorious privileges and sublime hopes. He must be an utter stranger to Christianity who is not sensible that it lays us under the most sacred obligations, and gives us the greatest helps and encouragements to a holy and virtuous practice. Let us therefore, as we would secure our own salvation and happiness, and would promote the honour of our blessed Redeemer, and of the revelation he brought from heaven, endeavour to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour by all the virtues of a sober, a righteous, and godly life. A mere form of godliness will not be sufficient: the power, the energy, the beauty of religion, must appear in our whole temper and conduct. This is in a peculiar manner expected of those who are honoured with the office of the holy ministry. But the gospel is not designed merely for any particular order of men, but to extend its influence to persons of all orders and degrees. And how amiable is the idea of a Christian acting up to the obligations of Christianity!

Consider him in the exercise of piety and devotion towards God, diligent in attending on the ordinances of religion, filled with a profound reverence of the divine Majesty, with a devout admiration of the supreme original Goodness and Excellence, his soul rising in grateful emotions towards his sovereign Benefactor, exercising an unrepining submission and resignation to his will, and a steady dependence on his providence, rejoicing in Christ Jesus as his Saviour and Lord, in the beauties of his example, and in the wonders of his love.

But the religion of a real Christian is not confined to immediate acts of devotion. It influenceth and animateth his whole conduct. It teacheth him to render unto all their dues, to be strictly just and generously honest, to behave suitably in every relation, the *conjugal*, *parental*, and *filial* relation, and to fulfil the duties of the *civil* and *social* life. It tendeth to suppress the bitter and malevolent affections, and to diffuse a sweetness and complacency through his whole behaviour. It maketh him ready to bear with the infirmities of others, to rejoice in



their happiness, and endeavour to promote it, and instead of *being overcome of evil, to overcome evil with good.*

Behold him in another view, as exercising a noble self-government, keeping his appetites and passions under a proper discipline, and in a regular subjection to the laws of religion and reason, disdaining to dishonour and defile his body and soul with unclean lusts, and vicious excesses, yet not unreasonably austere, but allowing himself the moderate and cheerful use of the innocent pleasures and enjoyments of life, and every enjoyment heightened by the glorious prospects which are before him. To which it may be added, that religion tends to inspire him with a true sense of honour, as that signifieth an abhorrence of every thing base, false, unjust, and impure, and with a real greatness of soul, and a noble constancy and fortitude, not to be *bribed or terrified* from his duty.

Such a character, even in a low condition, as far as it hath an opportunity of exerting itself, cannot but attract the approbation and esteem of those that observe it. But when it is found in conjunction with *nobility of extraction, dignity of station, splendour and affluence of fortune*, what a glory does it diffuse! And it gives a real pleasure to every friend to Christianity among us to reflect, that of this we have an illustrious instance in a *person* of the most exalted dignity, but who is still more distinguished by her *princely and Christian* virtues, than by the *eminency* of her station. We have here a shining proof, what a just and general esteem and admiration, solid rational piety, a well-regulated zeal for Christianity, and a life amiably conducted by its sacred rules, in a condition so elevated, has a natural tendency to create, and what a *splendour and beauty* it adds to the highest *titles and dignities*. And if persons distinguished by their *rank and figure* in life were more generally careful to copy after so *bright* a pattern, it is to be hoped, this might happily contribute to reform the licentiousness of the age; and that the influence of their authority and example would extend to those inferior stations, and have a general good effect: particularly that it would tend to cure that *false and vicious shame*, which has so often discouraged persons from openly avowing their regard and adherence to that which is the ornament and glory of our nature, religion and *vir ue.*

It is proper to observe, in the last place, that those who have any true zeal for Christianity, and who really believe it to be the most excellent religion, are bound by every obligation to endeavour to promote it in their own families, by carefully training up their children to an early acquaintance with this holy religion, and veneration for it. It is of great consequence to endeavour to season their young and tender minds with its important principles, and to inspire them with a just reverence of things sacred, with a love of goodness and virtue, and an abhorrence of what is base, false, vicious, and impure. The necessity of an early good education, and the benefits arising from it, have been acknowledged by the best and wisest men in all ages. And we have certainly a mighty advantage this way, who enjoy the light of the gospel-revelation. And therefore it highly concerneth Christian parents to do what they can, that their children may be by times *acquainted with the holy scriptures*, and may have the *word of Christ dwelling richly* in them. Minds which are early filled and possessed with the great objects of religion, and with the noble and sublime hopes of the gospel, carry about with them the most effectual preservation against the vanities and follies, the corrupt customs and practices, of a sinful world, and the most animating motives to the practice of every amiable virtue, and universal righteousness. And yet this, which is the most important and most essential part of a good education, seems to be that which is least attended to. For want of this it is, that, notwithstanding the advantages we enjoy, many among us, tho' they call themselves Christians, are shamefully ignorant of the nature and design of Christianity, and even of the first principles of the oracles of God. And indeed the general neglect of the education of children, and of family-order and religion, is one of the most unhappy symptoms of the great degeneracy of the present age, and which gives us the most melancholy prospects of the succeeding one. For what can be expected from those who are bred up under parents, that take no care to instil worthy principles into their minds, and in families where they see no signs of religion or the fear of God? Unnatural parents! who seem to make the real welfare and happiness of their children, the least of their concern; or, if they take some care to adorn their bodies, and form their outward behaviour,

neglect the culture of their better parts, their minds, or at least take no care to train them up to a just sense of religion and morals, or to a taste for what is truly laudable and excellent! Unhappy children! in whom, for want of proper early instruction and discipline; irregular appetites and passions, and evil habits; are daily gathering strength, till at length they are turned out, unfurnished with good principles, or worthy sentiments of things, into a world full of temptations and snares. Is it to be wondered at, if such persons become an easy prey to wicked and impious seducers, and are soon drawn into profaneness and infidelity, and into dissoluteness and debauchery, which, where it prevails, tendeth to corrupt or to extinguish true probity and public spirit, and every noble and generous affection and sentiment? And in that case, the higher their condition is, and the greater their affluence of fortune, the more pernicious is the contagion of their example; and those who otherwise might have been the ornament and support, become the disgrace and pest of the community.

On the contrary, how agreeable is it to behold well-regulated families, children bred up in the fear of God, their minds early principled with just notions of things, and good affections, and worthy habits, carefully cherished and improved! Those of the one sex, formed under the influence of religion to a just and delicate sense of purity and virtue, and to that modesty and gentleness of manners and behaviour, which hath been always esteemed one of their loveliest ornaments: those of the other, trained up by a proper institution and discipline to a rational piety, and the government of their appetites and passions; and to a just and manly sense of what is truly honourable, virtuous, and praise-worthy. And here again the same great example presenteth itself, of a most *eminent personage* of the highest *dignity*, who, amidst all the pomps and splendours of a court; hath esteemed it one of her most pleasing employments, to inspect the education of her *illustrious offspring*, and to this hath applied her princely cares and personal attendance. And surely it must be the earnest wish of every good mind, that she may have the sincere and noble satisfaction of seeing them grow up under her tender and watchful eye, in every virtue and excellence, which may render them *public ornaments* and *blessings*, and diffuse a beneficial and extensive influence of great use in

the present age, and the effects of which may be transmitted to succeeding generations.

How happy would it be for these nations, if, in conformity to an example so justly admired, the *great* and *noble* would look upon the care of their children and families to be one of the worthiest objects of their attention and concern! This could scarce fail to have a good effect upon those of the lower rank. Then might we hope to see religion and virtue flourish, and a new and hopeful generation springing up among us, the surest earnest of national glory and happiness. For it is a maxim of undoubted truth, as well as of great importance, That a careful education of children will lay the best foundation for well ordered families, as these will contribute the most of any thing to the peace and good order of the community.

I shall conclude this address with the admirable words of St Paul: *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

I have now finished the design I undertook, and which hath been carried on to a much greater length than I at first designed. God grant that what hath been offered in this and the preceding volume, may answer the end for which it was sincerely intended, the serving the cause of important truth, piety, and virtue in the world, and especially in these nations, in which such open insults have been offered to religion, and particularly to the holy Gospel of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For myself, what I desire above all things, is, that I may feel the power and influence of that excellent religion upon my own soul, animating and regulating my conduct in life, supporting and comforting me in death, and preparing me for that better state which we are raised to the hope of by the gospel.

# A P P E N D I X,

CONTAINING

REFLECTIONS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF THINGS  
IN THESE NATIONS.

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*There is a great and growing Corruption in these Lands, notwithstanding the signal Advantages we enjoy—This Corruption not justly chargeable on our Religion as Christians and Protestants, but on the Neglect or contempt of it—The unaccountable Eagerness that hath been shewn in spreading the principles of Infidelity, of very ill Consequence to the Public—The Tendency of Irreligion and Vice, to bring Misery and Ruin upon a People, both in the natural Course of Things, and by the just Judgments of God—Many things in the late and present Course of God's Dispensations have an alarming Appearance—Repentance and Reformation, and a strict Adherence to the Faith and Practice of Christianity, the properest Way of averting the Tokens of the divine Displeasure, and promoting the national Prosperity—The happy State of Things which this would introduce.*

**T**HOUGH the following Considerations do not directly and immediately relate to the *View of the Deistical Writers*, yet they may perhaps come in not improperly as an Appendix to it, and will, I hope, not be thought altogether unsuitable to the general nature and design of the preceding work.

It was with great satisfaction that I read the order for a *General and Public Fast*, to be religiously observed by all his Majesty's subjects in these kingdoms, and which is drawn up with great seriousness and solemnity. It is there acknowledged, that *the manifold sins and wickedness of these kingdoms have most justly deserved heavy and severe punishments from the hand of Heaven*. We are called upon to *humble ourselves before almighty God, and in a most devout and solemn manner to send up our prayers and supplications to the divine Majesty,*

*to avert all those judgments, which we most justly have deserved, to continue his mercies, and perpetuate the enjoyment of the Protestant religion among us, and safety and prosperity to his Majesty's kingdoms and dominions.*

Having so great an authority to hear me out, I shall add some reflections, which have made a deep impression upon my mind, with reference to the present state of things among us.

We have been eminently distinguished above most other nations by happy privileges and advantages. Providence hath blessed us with an abundance of those things, which are usually thought to contribute to the public prosperity and happiness. Never had any people a fuller enjoyment of liberty; a profusion of wealth has flowed in upon us by our wide-extended commerce. We have had great advantages for improvement in the arts and sciences, and every branch of useful knowledge: especially that which is the most valuable and important of all others, the knowledge of religion in its truth and purity. The light of the glorious gospel of Christ, freed from the absurdities, the superstitions, and idolatries with which it hath been incumbered in many other countries professing the Christian Faith, hath long shone among us. The holy Scriptures are not locked up in an unknown tongue, nor confined to the studies of the learned, but are put into the hands of the people: so that all men may have access to that sacred rule of faith and practice, the original standard of the Christian religion. The treasures of knowledge are opened, and the public instructions so frequently and freely dispensed, that it may be said, that *wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets.*

It might be expected, that a people so distinguished by advantages for religious and moral improvement, should also be remarkably distinguished by the knowledge and practice of piety, wisdom, and virtue, and by a zeal for our holy religion. But though it is to be hoped there are many among us, who are unfeignedly thankful for our inestimable privileges, and careful to make a right improvement of them, yet it cannot be denied, that a great corruption hath spread itself, and seems to be growing among all orders and degrees of men. This is a very disagreeable subject; but the first step to a proper remedy is to be duly sensible of the true state of our own case.

Our wealth and plenty hath been abused to an amazing luxury, and our liberty to a boundless licentiousness. Many act as if they had no other way of shewing that they are free, but by casting off all restraints, and setting themselves loose from all the ties of religion and virtue. Atheism hath appeared almost without disguise; or, which in effect comes to the same thing, the disbelief of a *Providence, of God's moral attributes and government, and of a future state*. The most virulent reproach and contempt hath been cast upon the adorable Jesus, and the methods of our *redemption and salvation* by him. All that part of our duty, which more immediately relateth to the supreme Being, seemeth to be regarded by many as a matter of indifference. And the slightest observation may convince us, that there is a growing neglect of *public worship*, as if the properest way of shewing our gratitude to God, for the glorious privilege we have of worshipping him according to the dictates of our own consciences, were not to render him any public homage or religious worship at all. That *holy day*, which is by divine appointment, and by that of our own laws, set apart from worldly businesses and cares, for the purposes of religion, for receiving public instructions, and for attending on divine worship, hath been treated with great contempt. And in this too many of those who, by their authority and influence, should set a good example to others, have unhappily led the way. Can there be a greater contempt cast upon it, than to hold *gaming assemblies* on that day? And when this is done by persons of *rank*, can it be wondered at, that by the lower kind of people it is often the worst employed of any day in the week, and devoted to idleness and vice? And it cannot but give concern to every good mind, that an *institution*, so admirably calculated for the advancement of religious knowledge, piety, and virtue, and for promoting good order in the community, should be so strangely perverted and abused.

Having mentioned the practice of *gaming*, I cannot help observing, that among other unfavourable symptoms of the growing corruption among us, this is not the least, that that practice is of late years become more general, and carried to a greater excess, than has been known before in these kingdoms. The wisest men of all nations have been so sensible, both of the

pernicious effects of this vice to particular persons and families, and its ill influence on the community, that it would fill a large volume barely to recite the laws which have been made against it, both in former and latter ages. Our own laws have fixed a brand upon it, and in effect declared the gain made by it to be dishonourable and infamous; yet is the being instructed in the mysteries of it become a necessary part of education, whilst the seasoning the tender minds of young persons with principles of religion and just sentiments of things, and forming them to the worthiest practices, is, it is to be feared, in a great measure neglected.

But what affordeth the most melancholy apprehensions is, the great corruption and depravity of manners which is so generally and justly complained of.—The most blasphemous abuse of the name of God, by shocking *oaths* and *imprecations*, and the most corrupt and wilful *perjuries*, *drunkennesses*, and excesses of riot, but especially by the excessive drinking of *distilled spirituous liquors*, the *health*, *morals*, and *religion* of the laborious and useful part of these kingdoms are well-nigh destroyed. Fired with this infernal poison, they are spirited to perpetrate and execute the most bold, daring, and mischievous enterprizes, and, shaking off all *fear* and *shame*, become audaciously impudent in all manner of *vice*, *lewdness*, *immorality*, and *profaneness*, in defiance of all laws human and divine. But it doth not stop here; its malignant influence reaches to the children yet unborn, who come half burnt-up and shrivelled into the world, and who, as soon as born, suck in this deadly poison with their mother's or nurse's milk: so that if this worst of all plagues be suffered to go on, it will make a general havock, especially amongst the *soldiers*, *sailors*, and *laborious* part of the nation, who are manifestly degenerated from the more manly constitutions of preceding generations\*. Besides an amazing dissoluteness and impurities of all kinds, even those that are most *unnatural*, and which are not fit to be

\* See *Distilled Spirituous Liquors the Bane of the Nation*, 8vo, 2d edit. 1736, London. Dr Stephen Hales's *Friendly Admonition to the Drinkers of Gin, Brandy, and other Spirituous Liquors, which are so destructive of the Industry, Morals, Health, and Lives of the People*—a new edition with Additions, and an Appendix; and is in the catalogue of the books distributed by the Society for promoting Christian



named amongst Christians. To which may be added the horrid crime of *self-murder*, not only frequently practised, but pleaded for: a practice deservedly rendered infamous by our laws, as being a murder committed by a man upon his own person, in opposition, not only to the most sacred obligations of religion, and the rights of the community, but to the strongest instincts of the human nature, wisely implanted in us by the great author of our beings, as a bar to such monstrous practices.—To all which may be added, that barbarous practice of men's murdering one another, upon a pretended *point of honour*, as it is called, for the most slight and trivial offences, below the cognizance of our laws:—A crime inexcusable in a civilized country, and which yet generally passes unpunished, and thus leaves the guilt of blood upon the land, crying aloud for vengeance.—It is impossible for a thinking man, that has a true zeal for the honour of God and the interests of religion and virtue, and who hath the welfare and happiness of his country really at heart, not to be deeply affected with such a view of things, and solicitous what the consequence may prove.

Knowledge, London.—This worthy divine and excellent philosopher (whose whole life has been usefully employed in promoting the honour of God and the welfare of mankind), in a treatise upon the distilling of sea-water, and the use of ventilators, &c. just published, speaking of distilled spirituous liquors, says—  
 “How much therefore does it behove all, who have any concern for the honour  
 “and dignity of their own kindred species, any indignation at its being thus de-  
 “based and disgraced, any bowels of pity for the vast multitudes, not less perhaps  
 “than a million, that are yearly destroyed all over the world, by the moral, as  
 “well as natural, and therefore worst of all evils, that ever befel unhappy man;  
 “to use their utmost endeavours to deliver mankind from the *pest*! But not-  
 “withstanding this astonishing ravage and destruction of the human species, yet  
 “the unhappy unrelenting nations of the world seem as unconcerned about it, as  
 “if only so many *thousands*, nay *millions*, of *caterpillars* or *locusts* were destroyed  
 “thereby. Was there ever a more important occasion to rouse the indignation  
 “of mankind? Can we be calm and undisturbed, when this *mighty destroyer* rears  
 “up its envenomed head? The most zealous advocates for *drams*, even the un-  
 “happy besotted *Dramists* themselves, the prolonging of whose lives, and whose  
 “real welfare both *here* and *hereafter*, is hereby sincerely intended, cannot find  
 “fault with this well-meant remonstrance, in defence of them and of all man-  
 “kind, against this universal destroyer, from *one* who has long been labouring,  
 “and that not without success, in finding means to preserve multitudes of lives,  
 “by various means.”

And now it is a natural inquiry, what can this be owing to? Whence can it be, that nations so happily privileged, and favoured with so many advantages for the knowledge and practice of religion should have sunk into such an amazing corruption and degeneracy? Can this be consistently charged on religion itself, either the Christian religion or the Protestant, which is the religion of Jesus as taught in the holy scriptures, and freed from the abuses and corruptions that have been brought into it? The deists have pretended the first, the enemies to the reformation the last. The answer to both is in effect the same. Can that be the cause of corruptions among Christians, which, if steadily adhered to, is the best remedy against those corruptions? Can that occasion an abounding in vice and wickedness, which, if really believed and seriously considered, exhibiteth the most powerful dissuasives from it that can enter into the human mind? Can the furnishing the people with the means of knowledge, and bringing them to an acquaintance with the holy Scriptures, which are able to make us *wise unto salvation*, and are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*, can this have any tendency to encourage them in vice and dissoluteness? Such a supposition is contrary to the plainest dictates of common sense. The corruption therefore complained of can never be the natural effect or product of our advantages, and especially of the religion we profess. On the contrary, the best and surest preservative against this growing corruption, and the most effectual way of recovering from it, would be to have a high esteem for those divine oracles, to read and consider them with attention, and to lay to heart the excellent instructions and directions which are there set before us.

There is a far more natural account to be given of that corruption of manners, that vice and wickedness which so much aboundeth among us. It is owing, not to the knowledge or belief of religion, but to the neglect or contempt of it; to a strange indifference towards it in some, whilst others use their utmost endeavours to traduce and expose it under the vilifying characters of superstition, priestcraft, or enthusiasm. Great numbers of impious books have swarmed among us, both formerly and

of late ; some of which are not only levelled against Christianity, but strike at the foundations of all religion, the attributes and providence of God, and a future state of retribution. The manifest tendency of them has been to banish the fear of the Deity, to confound the moral differences of things, to degrade the human nature to a level with the brutes, and thereby extinguish every noble and generous sentiment, to deprive good men of the blessed hope of immortality, and to free bad men from the fears of future punishments, and the apprehensions of a supreme Governor and Judge. These principles, and the books that contain them, have been propagated with great eagerness and industry, both in these kingdoms and in our plantations abroad, and sometimes at a considerable expence. This preposterous kind of zeal for infidelity may, to a considerate observer, seem to be an odd phænomenon, of which no reasonable account can be given. One may, in some degree, account for a man's being hurried away by the violence of his appetites and passions, to do what his own mind disapproves and condemns : But that any man should coolly take pains to set other men loose from all the restraints of religion and conscience, and thereby, as far as in him lies, attempt to dissolve the bands of society and public order, and encourage men to gratify and fulfil their appetites and passions without controul, the natural consequence of which would be to introduce universal confusion, in which he himself may be a great sufferer, is absolutely unaccountable on any principles of good sense or sound policy ; so that if we did not see frequent instances of it, we should be apt to think it scarce possible that any men in their senses should act so strange a part.

One very pernicious consequence of such open attempts against religion is, the spreading profaneness and dissoluteness of manners among the *lower* kind of people, who easily catch the contagion, when once men of *higher degree*, or at least that pretend to a superior sagacity, have set the example. And who can, without deep concern, observe, that this is very much become the case among us at present? Great numbers of those who belong to what ought to be the most industrious body of the people, are sunk into irreligion and vice : and in proportion as these prevail, they become averse to all honest labour and industry, and prone to the most flagitious

crimes, which have the worst effect imaginable on the peace and good order of the community. And it is easy to see what mischief and confusion must thence ensue. A sober and industrious populace is the strength, the riches, the glory of a nation; but when those, that should be the labouring hands, become vicious and dissolute, they are prepared for every kind of wickedness and disorder. As, from their rank and education, they have, for the most part, little regard to the appearances of honour and decency, if at the same time they have cast off the ties of religion, and the fear of God, and a regard to the powers of the world to come, and are abandoned to their appetites and passions, what are they not capable of? It is an observation which hath generally held, and is verified by the experience of all ages, that *righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin* (i. e. abounding vice and wickedness) *is a reproach unto any people*, (i. e. it bringeth disgrace and misery upon them,) Prov. xiii. 10. When once a neglect of religion and a corruption of manners become general, they have a natural tendency to dissolve and enervate a nation, and to extinguish true public spirit and a manly fortitude. Nor have any people long maintained their liberties, after having lost their probity and virtue.

Thus it is in the natural course of things, and thus it also is by the just judgment of God, and according to the stated rules of the divine procedure towards nations or large communities. God may indeed, in his great wisdom and goodness, long bear with a degenerate people, and may even continue to pour forth many blessings upon them when they are in a corrupt state, especially if there be a considerable remnant of good men still to be found among them. But when their iniquities are grown up to such a height, and have continued so long, that he doth not see fit to bear with them any longer, the measure of their iniquities is said to be full; the time is come for executing a severe vengeance upon them, and the punishment falls heavier for being so long delayed.

Whosoever duly considereth these things will be apt to think, that, according to the ordinary method of God's providential dealings towards backsliding nations and churches, we have too much reason to apprehend his righteous judgments.

The present situation of things hath an alarming appearance, and, if we be not bitterly stupid, must tend to awaken us out of our security. Scarce ever, was there a time in which it might be more justly said, that *God's judgments are abroad in the earth*. I need not enter into particulars: they are very well known, and fresh in our remembrance. There have been, to use our Saviour's emphatical expressions, *commotions and great earthquakes in divers places,—distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring: men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that shall come upon the earth*. Luke xxi. 9, 11, 25. Of so vast an extent have the amazing concussions been reaching to many parts of Europe, Africa, and America, at a great distance from one another, and in divers places have produced such dreadful effects, even to the subversion of great and populous cities, that it looketh as if God were about some great and remarkable work of judgment, *to punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquities*, as the prophet expresseth it, *Is. xiii. 11*. Surely every man, who believeth that there is a Providence which extendeth its care to mankind, must believe that it hath a special concernment in events of such a nature, which so nearly affect nations and large communities, and on which the lives and fortunes of so many thousands depend. Though second causes are admitted, still it must be considered, that they are all under the direction and superintendence of God's sovereign providence, which so ordereth and over-ruleth the circumstances of things, and the course of natural causes, as to subserve the ends of his moral administration with regard to his reasonable creatures, and to execute his purposes towards them, whether in a way of judgment or of mercy. And, in every such case, we should fix our views, not merely, or principally, on second causes, but should look above them to the supreme Disposer, and endeavour to comport with the designs of his infinite wisdom and righteousness. Calamitous events of a public nature are not to be considered as concerning only the particular persons or people that immediately suffer by them. They have a more extensive view, and are designed and fitted to give instructive lessons to all mankind that hear them. The natural tendency of all such dispensations is to awaken in the minds of men a holy fear of the divine Majesty, and to give them a most affecting conviction of the vanity and in-

stability of all worldly hopes and dependencies. The prophet Isaiah, after having described in a very lively manner the striking impressions that should be made upon the hearts of men because of *the fear of the Lord, and the glory of his Majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth*, very properly adds, *Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?* Is. xi. 20, 21. Of what avail in such a time of awful visitation, are the arts of human policy, the pomp of courts, or the power of mighty armies, or the riches, and grandeur of the most populous and magnificent cities? The plain voice of such dispensations, a voice intelligible to all mankind, is this: *Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him*, Psal. xxxiii. 8. *The Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting King: at his wrath the earth shall tremble; and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.* Jer. x. 10. Surely we should be ready to cry out on such occasions, *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who would not fear thee, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy. For all nations shall come and worship before thee: for thy judgments are made manifest.* Rev. xv. 3, 4. The great use which is to be made of such awful dispensations, is well expressed by the prophet Isaiah, xxvi. 9. *When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness*, i. e. they ought to do so; and it is the natural tendency of such judgments to engage them to do so. The calamities inflicted upon others should be regarded by us as solemn warnings and admonitions, which it highly concerneth us to improve. The language of such dispensations to all that hear of them, is the same with that of our Saviour to the Jews, when speaking of those persons on whom the tower of Siloam fell, and of those whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, *Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.* Luke xiii. 3, 5. How inexcusable shall we therefore be, if, instead of laying these things seriously to heart, we continue careless and unaffected still, and go on in a thoughtless round of gaieties and pleasures, like those the prophet mentions, Is. v. 12. *The harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation*

*of his hands.* Against such persons a solemn woe is there denounced. And elsewhere, speaking of some who continued to indulge themselves in luxury and riot, and all kinds of sensual mirth, at a time when the circumstances of things called for deep humiliation and repentance, he saith, *It was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts,* Isa. xxii. 12, 13, 14.

Whosoever carefully observeth the course of the divine dispensations towards us for some time past, will be sensible that we have had many warnings given us. A pestilence amongst the cattle in England for many years past, and though abated, still continues in some parts of this country. But a few years ago the sword of war raged in one part of the united kingdom of Great Britain, and was near penetrating to the centre of it, and threatened the subversion of that constitution, on which the preservation of our religion, laws, and liberties, in a great measure dependeth: but, through the great goodness of God, our fears were, after some time, happily dispelled. More lately encroachments have been made upon our possessions and plantations abroad, in which our national safety and prosperity is very nearly interested. And now it is not many weeks since a most dreadful calamity hath befallen a kingdom, so very nearly connected with us in interest and alliance, that the calamity may be regarded as, in a considerable degree, our own. And, in fact, we have been, and are great sufferers by it. Many lives have been lost of his Majesty's subjects belonging to Great Britain and Ireland, and many more there are, who, by the sudden subversion, have either been totally, or in a considerable degree, deprived of their worldly substance, and reduced to circumstances of distress. A present stop is put to the course of a most advantageous commerce. The springs of our wealth are obstructed; a great blow is struck at our trade, in which we are so apt to place our confidence: and this at the very time when we seem to be entering upon a war with a mighty nation, a war that threatens to be very hazardous, and which must needs put us to a vast expence, which we are not very well able to bear. That particular judgment, under which some of the neighbouring nations have so severely suffered, and which is one of the most dreadful of all others, hath great-

ly threatened us. It is but a very few years since that great city, which is the metropolis of these kingdoms, and the centre of our wealth and commerce, felt an alarming shock, though, through the great mercy of God, it did little more than threaten and terrify. Since that time, and very lately, there have been several very unusual phenomena among us, of such a nature as to have a threatening aspect: extraordinary agitations of the waters both on our coasts and within land, and shocks of an earthquake felt in several parts of Great Britain and Ireland, and of his Majesty's dominions abroad.

Thus the divine judgments seem to be advancing upon us, and have gradually begun to operate. But such is the mercy, and forbearance of God towards us, that he seems loth to inflict upon us the fierceness of his anger, or to pour forth all his wrath. He is pleased to give us previous warnings, to awaken and rouse us out of our security, that by a timely repentance, and by humbling ourselves under his mighty hand, we may prevent the necessity of inflicting severer punishments. His hand is lifted up, but the awful stroke seemeth to be suspended for a while, as if he were unwilling to proceed to extremities with us. Upon considering these things, that most affecting expostulation comes to my mind, which God condescended to make by his prophet Hosea, with regard to his people Israel, when in a very dangerous backsliding state. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee up, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim: For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee.* Hos. xi. 8, 9. Yet we find at length, upon their obstinately persisting in their disobedience and ingratitude, and abusing the methods of his indulgence, and even growing more and more corrupted, he saw it necessary, to execute his awful judgments upon them, even to the utter subverting of that kingdom, and subjecting it to a foreign yoke. God forbid that this should be our case! Let us therefore make a right use of the divine forbearance. We have hitherto had reason to *sing of mercy as well as of judgment.* Let us not, by our abuse of his goodness, provoke him to pour forth upon us the full vials of his



penal wrath. With an ingenuous sorrow and self-abasement we should acknowledge our aggravated transgressions, our neglect and abuse of the privileges and advantages we have so long enjoyed, the contempt that hath been cast on his glorious gospel, and the profaneness and dissoluteness of manners, which hath so much prevailed. On these accounts, let us humble ourselves deeply before God, and implore his mercy, and contribute, as far as in us lieth, to the carrying on a work of national repentance and reformation. It is undoubtedly our duty, in the present conjuncture of affairs, when we seem to be entering upon an hazardous and expensive war, to exert our utmost efforts for assisting and supporting the government, and to apply ourselves to the use of all proper means which human prudence may suggest. But still we must get this fixed upon our minds, that whatever projects may be formed for procuring national advantages, and promoting the public prosperity, all other expedients to make a people flourish, without reformation of manners, and without the knowledge and practice of religion and public virtue, however they may seem to have an effect for a while, will, in the issue, prove ineffectual and vain.

The most proper way we can take to avert impending judgments, to preserve and maintain our valuable privileges, and promote the public welfare and happiness, is not to express a clamorous zeal for liberty at the same time that we abuse it to an unrestrained licentiousness, than which nothing hath a greater tendency, both through the righteous judgment of God, and in the nature of the thing, to deprive us of our liberties; but it is to endeavour to make a just and wise improvement of our advantages, to maintain a strict regard to *religion, probity, and purity of manners*, and to guard against *vice, libertinism, profaneness debauchery*. This, and this alone, will preserve us a free, a flourishing, and happy people. God grant that this may be the blessing of these nations to the latest posterity; that we may long enjoy the light of the glorious gospel of Christ shining among us in its genuine purity, and the inestimable advantage of a freedom to profess it, and to worship God according to the directions of his word, and the dictates of our own consciences, without being exposed to persecuting rage and violence! Happy nations that we still

are ! if we be but duly sensible of our happiness ! and careful to make a right use of our privileges ! What a glorious face of things would soon appear among us, if, as we have the best religion in the world, we took care to govern ourselves by its sacred rules, and to act under the influence of its divine instructions and important motives ! Virtue, supported and animated by the glorious hopes of the gospel, would appear in its genuine sacred charms, and in its lovely beauty and excellence.— Love, the true spirit of Christianity, would prevail, and produce a mutual forbearance to lesser differences, at the same time that there would be a happy agreement in matters of the highest importance ; there would be a zeal without bigotry, a liberty without licentiousness. The natural consequence of all this would be peace and harmony in larger and lesser societies. Such would be the face of things among us, as far as could be expected in this state of imperfection, if the religion of Jesus were firmly believed, and duly considered, and men would be more generally persuaded to give up themselves to its divine conduct. This would render persons in *high stations* signally useful to the public, and *ornaments*, as well as *supports* to their country. And, at the same time, *sobriety, industry, temperance, and good order*, would spread among the body of the people. Nor would *true bravery and fortitude* be wanting. For though *superstition* tendeth to produce *mean and unmanly fears*, *true religion*, and a *steady belief* of a *wise and righteous Providence*, hath a tendency to fortify and establish the mind, and to produce a real *courage and greatness of soul*, which will enable a man to meet death with a calm intrepidity in a noble and just cause, and stand the shock of the greatest terrors.

It is a reflection which hath frequently occurred to my mind, especially on occasion of the late dreadful judgments of God, how different, under the apprehension or pressure of an amazing calamity, must be the state of *one* that firmly believeth Christianity, and endeavoureth to govern his practice by its excellent rules, from that of the atheist and unbeliever, or of the man who, though he professeth to believe the Christian religion, liveth in a plain contradiction to its sacred obligations. The former, however black and disastrous the face of things may appear to be, which naturally tend to create fears in the human

mind, yet is persuaded, that all things are under the direction of infinite wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, and that we live in a world where every thing, above, beneath, and on every side of us, is in the hand of God, and under the direction of his Providence; who, as he can arm all his creatures against us, and make them the instruments of his just displeasure; so, if we be careful to please him, and approve ourselves in his sight, can make the whole creation around us to be as it were in a covenant of peace and friendship with us. Or, if a good man be involved in the same outward calamities with others, as must often, without a miracle, be expected, in calamities which happen to large communities, still he hath this to support him, that the great Lord of the universe is his Father and his Friend, and will cause those outward evils to turn, in the final issue, to his greatest benefit. Death itself, if this shall befall him, shall prove a real gain to him, and shall introduce him to a better world, and a nobler society. It is justly observed concerning the *man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments, that he shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.* Psal. cxl. 1. 7. Not only may he say, upon good grounds, with the Psalmist, *The Lord is on my side, I will not fear: what can man do unto me?* Psal. cxviii. 6. And again, *Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; tho' war should rise against me, in this will I be confident,* Psal. xxvii. 2. But he may break forth into that noble strain of triumph, *God is our refuge, and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; tho' the waters thereof roar and be troubled, and though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof,* Psal. xlvi. 1, 2, 3. On the other hand, the wicked and ungodly man, continuing such, hath no proper resource, no solid comfort or support in a day of calamity, when all things seem black and dismal about him. For either he looketh upon them to be the effects of a *wild chance*, or *blind necessity*, which cannot possibly be the object of a rational trust and confidence, and which leaves no room for hope, but in that which nature hath an abhorrence of, an utter extinction of being: or, he apprehendeth them to be the just judgments of the wise and righteous governor of the world.

whom he hath offended by his sins. And vain it is to brave it against the wrath of heaven. Not to fear creatures like ourselves, in a just cause, argueth a noble and manly fortitude : but not to fear God, the Almighty Lord of the universe, is not courage, but madness. The only proper thing which remaineth for such persons to do, and it is what reason, as well as scripture directeth to, is to humble themselves deeply under the mighty hand of God, and to flee to his infinite mercy, through Jesus Christ, in a hearty compliance with the most reasonable and gracious terms which he hath appointed, for obtaining an interest in his grace and favour.

Upon the whole, the best thing that can be wished for the honour of God, for the happiness of mankind, and for the real welfare of our country, is, that a hearty zeal for the knowledge and practice of our holy religion may have a revival among us ; and that persons of all orders and conditions may join in contributing to promote its sacred interests. And, notwithstanding the corruption too justly complained of, there are many, I am persuaded, among us, and may the number of them daily increase ! who are earnestly desirous to do this. Every man hath it in his power to contribute something towards it, at least by endeavouring to *walk in a conversation becoming the gospel*. But there are some persons who have peculiar advantages for doing honour and service to Christianity. Those especially that are distinguished by their *high rank*, their *fortune*, and *quality*, should make use of the influence this gives them for recommending and promoting true religion and virtue, which will add a lustre to their *titles* and *dignities*, and is one of the best ways they can take to shew their regard to the public happiness. Magistrates should account it their duty and their honour to employ the authority they are invested with, for serving the interests of religion, and discountenancing vice and wickedness ; since for this purpose they are appointed, that *they may be for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well*. And it is then that their authority will have its proper influence, when it is strengthened by that of their own good example. But, above all, they who are honoured with the character of the *ministers* of the holy Jesus should make it the very business of their lives to spread and promote real vital Christianity, to instruct the people in its

important doctrines, and build them up in their most holy faith, and to enforce upon them the excellent duties it enjoins, by all the powerful and most engaging motives which the gospel sets before us. And that their instructions may have the proper effect, it highly concerneth them to keep themselves free from the *fashionable vices* and *follies* of the age, and to endeavour to be ensamples to their flocks, by a well-tempered zeal, piety, and charity, and the virtues of a holy life. Thus will they not only do the highest service to religion, but procure the greatest honour to themselves, and the most just veneration for their sacred character, which, where it is not disgraced by a conduct unworthy of it, naturally demandeth the esteem and regard of all the true friends to religion and virtue.

For these valuable and excellent purposes, may the God of all grace pour forth his Holy Spirit upon all orders and degrees of men in these nations, that, as they bear the honourable name of Christians, they may *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*; and, *being filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing; being fruitful in every good work.*

I may be thought perhaps to have insisted too largely upon these things. But I cannot but think, that one of the principal things which ought to be proposed in books written in defence of Christianity, should be, not merely to promote the speculative belief of it, but to engage men to that which is the main design of its excellent doctrines, as well as precepts—a holy and a virtuous practice.



# I N D E X

TO THE

## VIEW OF THE DEISTICAL WRITERS.

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N. B. *The subjects treated of in the "Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History," are not mentioned in this Index, as there is a copious Table of Contents preceding that piece, vol. ii. p. 263, &c.*

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