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LETTER

TO A

DEIST,

Concerning the

Beauty and Excellency of Moral Virtue,

AND

The Support and Improvement which it
receives from the Christian Revelation. 1827

23.7

By a Country Clergyman.

Balgvi Thibodauy

*Eas habere Vires Virtutem, tantumque in
omni re valere, quantum veteres Philosophi
crediderunt; nemo Sanus affirmaverit.*

Erasmus.

L O N D O N :

Printed for JOHN PEMBERTON, at the
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S I R,



Have again perused with fresh Pleasure, and fresh Concern, the Volumes of CHARACTERISTICKS which you was pleased to present me with some time ago. And I assure you, the Condition of Impartiality, which you imposed on me, has been punctually observed. I heartily wish the Noble Author had been as unprejudiced in Writing, as I was in Reading. If he had,

I am persuaded his Readers would have found double Pleasure, and double Instruction. It seems to me, that his Lordship had little or no Temptation to pursue any Singularities of Opinion by way of Distinction. His fine Genius would sufficiently have distinguished him from vulgar Authors, in the High-Road of Truth and good Sense; on which Account his Deviations seem the more to be lamented. The Purity and Politeness of his Style, and the Delicacy of his Sentiments, are, and must be acknowledged by all Readers of Taste and Sincerity. But nevertheless, as his Beauties are not easy to be overlooked, so neither are his Blemishes. His Works appear to be stained with so many gross Errors, and his fine Thoughts are so often mingled with Absurdities, that however we may be charmed with the one, we are forced to condemn the other.

It is but a small Matter that the Clergy are the constant Mark of his Satyr. They who are prejudiced against the Christian Religion, are naturally disgusted at its Ministers: Nor do I know, Sir, an Instance to the contrary, excepting your self. But considering what a general Affection for Mankind, what an universal Benevolence our great Author maintains, and recommends; it is somewhat difficult to account for that Rancour, that Keeness of Spirit, which

which appears in his Writings, whenever he touches upon our Profession. Any accidental Mention of it kindles his Displeasure, and brings us under Correction. Let but the Idea of our Function cross his Way; immediately he quits the Game he is in Pursuit of, and does us the Honour to hunt us for several Pages together. Nor does he think fit to single out Particulars, but levels and lets fly at the whole Order. Such a Proceeding as this needs no Remarks of mine; and they are still less necessary in writing to you, who as you never follow the Example, so you have too much Humanity and Justice to utter a Syllable in Defence of it. I shall therefore only observe how it would have looked, supposing he had laid it down in the Form of a Proposition, and inserted it into his Doctrine. It is natural and reasonable to shew Benevolence, and be well affectioned towards all Mankind, excepting the Ministers of the Gospel.

I am equally at a Loss, to account for that extraordinary way of Thinking, which appears in his *Essay on Wit and Humour*. To make *Raillery* the Test of Right Reason, and *Ridicule* the Touchstone of Truth, is to maintain something that far exceeds the Bounds of a Paradox. I must own I cannot but wonder, whenever I think of it, that so able and accurate a Writer could ever

ever take it into his Head, to advance such an uncouth, absurd Notion. All I can make of it is, that his Lordship had a mind to divert himself with some Speculation entirely new, and peculiar to himself: Such as no Man had ever entertained before him, and none would be likely to entertain after him.

It is neither my Intention, nor your Desire, that I should go through the *Characteristicks*, and point out whatever may seem liable to Objection. This is a Work, for which, at present, I have neither Time nor Inclination. I am glad therefore that you have confined me to the *Enquiry concerning Virtue*; where I shall find little more to do, than to tell you how much I admire it. I think it indeed, in the main, a Performance so just and exact, as to deserve higher Praises than I am able to give it: But notwithstanding this Acknowledgment, I cannot agree to every Particular contained in it. And you must give me leave to add, Sir, that the very Point with which you seem to be most pleased, appears to me the most exceptionable. I mean that low and disadvantageous Account he has given of those Religious Motives, which both Reason and Revelation set before us. I cannot but think he has carried the Notion of Disinterest too far, and am sorry to find that you seem to carry it still further.

Before

Before I trouble you with my Reasons, it may be very fitting to make the following Concessions. I can by no means approve of that Doctrine which resolves all Morality into Self-Interest : A Doctrine that not only debases Virtue, but sinks it to a Level with the most indifferent Actions. Whenever these happen to be equally profitable, they become, according to this Opinion, equally eligible. Are there then no Propensities, no Inclinations in our Nature, drawing us, as it were, out of our selves, in behalf of our Fellow-Creatures, even to the Neglect of what we call Self-Advantage? Is there likewise no intrinsic Goodness in Virtue to ascertain its Superiority, and determine our Preference? Suppose it in any Instance unprofitable; suppose it prejudicial, would it cease to be Virtue? Would the eternal and immutable Relations of Things be hereby destroyed? It might be said indeed, in such a Case, that its Obligations were suspended or overruled; but still, its Nature would remain the same, nor would it lose any thing of its own intrinsic Worthiness. We may be supposed to be placed in such Circumstances, as to be incapable of practising it; and such a Supposition may shew how much it wants to be supported by Rewards: but these Rewards have no Influence, no Effect upon Virtue itself, whatever Effects they may have upon us.—— I look upon it as a certain

certain Truth, that nothing can be more binding upon reasonable Creatures than Reason; and that a good Law obliges as much, if not more than the Legislator himself. God has no Superior to prescribe Laws to him, and yet is eternally bound by the Rectitude of his own Nature; that is, the Rules of right Reason. These are so many Laws to him, which he perpetually and inviolably observes: They strictly and formally oblige him, nor can the Obligation be ever dissolved: And yet no Profit, no Advantage arises to him from thence, as being incapable of receiving any. Whoever affirms that God's Goodness to his Creatures is, in any Respect, serviceable to himself; must also affirm, that he is more happy since the Creation than he was before, and that the Creation was necessary to compleat his Happiness; which being evidently impossible, it follows that the Goodness of God is entirely independent on Self-Interest, and has not the least Connection with it. And since his Goodness is most perfect, does it not also follow, that the more ours resembles his, the nearer it approaches to Perfection; and by Consequence the more disinterested, the more perfect? Very true; but then we must remember the infinite Disparity of Nature and Condition. If ours be such, that it will not suffer us in many Cases to practise this most perfect Virtue,

tue, we must be content with that which is less perfect. And if we pursue this as far as we can, we shall have no Reason to complain, or be dissatisfied. But to return, I think it appears from what I have said, that nothing can tend more to the Disparagement and Diminution of Virtue, than to found it thus on Self-Interest. Whatever may be said of some other Kinds of Virtue, yet Social Virtue, or Benevolence, must stand upon another Foot, or fall to the Ground. For no Services, no Acts of Beneficence to our Fellow-Creatures can be Virtuous, while we are destitute of all Affection for them, and mean nothing but the serving of our selves. Were it otherwise, it would follow, that Human Virtues were nothing more than so many Modifications of Self-Love. And upon the same Supposition, Human Goodness would be of a quite different Nature from Divine Goodness, as appears from what I have just now observed; which is as much as to say, that it would be no Goodness at all.

But after all, though Interest can never enter into the Nature and Constitution of Virtue, yet why may it not be allowed to accompany and stand beside her? Notwithstanding all that has been granted, I can see no Reason why Virtue, and the Rewards of Virtue must needs be separated,

and set at Variance. Its Excellencies and Advantages seem by God and Nature to be joined together, and why should Man attempt to put them asunder? Let Virtue be decked in all her Charms; let her be painted as lovely a Form as is possible; there is no Danger of the Pictures out-doing the Original. But still, what Reason can any Man have to strip her of her Dowry, and present her empty-handed? The Royal Moralist has represented her otherwise; and in Conformity to his Description, why may she not be set forth as holding temporal Advantages in one Hand, and a blessed Immortality in the other?

You say, that Views and Intentions of Self-Good, in Proportion to the Extent of their Influence, are destructive of Virtue. And I grant, if they destroy Benevolence, they destroy Virtue. Or if they diminish the former, they in Proportion diminish the latter. But I am not able to discover that they do either the one or the other.

—A certain Person believes nothing either of Providence or a Future State; but yet has a considerable Share of Benevolence: And this Benevolence prompts him to suitable Acts of Kindness and Beneficence. Suppose him afterwards convinced of those great Truths, what Effect would they have upon him? Would they take

away, or lessen his Benevolence? I see no Reason to suppose it. For how should a Man's aiming to procure himself Happiness in another World, render him either disaffected, or less kind to his Brethren in this? Since that Happiness is supposed common to all that will qualify themselves for it, there can be no interfering, no Competition of Interest to occasion Contention, and impair Benevolence. And what else should do it, I cannot conceive. You will say perhaps, that though his Benevolence do remain the same, yet that he is not equally influenced by it. That the new Motives which his Conviction has introduced, must affect his Determinations, and proportionably detract from the Merit and Virtue of his good Actions. To which I answer, that however the new Motives may operate, they cannot hinder the Efficacy of the old one. Whatever Good they may produce over and above, (as indeed much may be expected from their Conjunction with the former Principle) yet still the Benevolence being supposed, the same in Degree must, I think, remain the same in Force and Influence. But let us hear what the Author of the *Characteristicks* says about this Matter,

* — Nor can Fear or Hope consist in Reality with Virtue, or Goodness, if it stand as a considerable Motive to any Act, of which some better Affection ought alone, to have been a sufficient Cause. Again: † In this Religious Discipline (viz. of Hope and Fear) the Principle of Self-Love which is naturally so prevailing in us, being improved and made stronger every Day by the Exercise of the Passions in a Subject of more extended Self-Interest, there may be Reason to apprehend, lest the Temper of this Kind should extend it self in general through all the Parts of Life. For if the Habit be such, as to occasion in every Particular, a stricter Attention to Self-Good, and Interest, it must insensibly diminish the Affections towards Publick Good, and introduce a certain Narrowness of Spirit. Whether by this, the Author did not mean to shew, or insinuate the Inconvenience and Damage that Virtue sustains, from the future and invisible Motives of Religion, let the Reader judge. My Business is to shew, if I can, that these *Apprehensions* are groundless; and that in some Cases, a *strict Attention to Self-Good*, is of great Service to the Publick. — If I be not very much deceived, the Motives of Religion are so far from weakening or lessening Benevo-

* Vol. II. Pag. 58.

† Ibid.

lence, that they naturally tend to increase and strengthen it. By these Motives I mean the *positive* Rewards which we believe Revelation has set before us, added to those Advantages and Enjoyments which *naturally* flow from Virtue. That is, that complex Good, which is meant by a blessed Immortality, of whatsoever Ingredients it may consist. Let it then be considered, what Effects the Expectation of this great and endless Happiness is like to have on the Minds of Men. Now I think it naturally tends to give them great Peace and Tranquillity of Mind, and to make them habitually well pleased and joyful, in proportion to the Strength of their Hopes. The Question then is, Whether this Tranquillity and Joy do not as naturally tend to increase and cherish Benevolence; and by Consequence contribute to that *Goodness of Temper* which our Author requires. This I own is no Question with me: However, I am willing it should be determined by Experience and Observation. Recollect, Sir, what you have seen and known, and tell me whether, *cæteris Paribus*, those Men be not most benevolent and kindly disposed, who are best pleased with their Hopes and Prospects. Do not compare this to those Mechanical Affections, which rise and fall with our Spirits, and depend on the little Accidents and Events of Human Life. For

as this is regular and constant as the Cause which produced it, so it is aided by Reason, and strengthen'd by Reflection.—When Men consider how their Labours here will be recompens'd and crown'd hereafter, and what an inexhaustible Fund of Happiness God has provided for them in the next Life; their Minds are fill'd not only with pleasing Expectations of their own Bliss, but with a grateful Sense of his Bounty and Goodness: And since they cannot possibly make him any Requital, their Gratitude naturally flows out in Streams of Kindness upon their Fellow-Creatures. This, I say, is not only natural, but highly agreeable to Reason, and even Revelation. — Again, how must it endear Good Men to one another, to consider themselves as Persons design'd for a perpetual Cohabitation hereafter? Members of an immortal Society, and Friends and Companions for ever! Here are Bonds of Love, and Principles of Benevolence, which only Religion can furnish; and which entirely depend on the Rewards of Futurity. — On the other Hand; if we suppose Mankind without any Hope, any Prospect in another World; expecting nothing more, than as soon as this Life was done, to perish and be extinct; such a Thought, such a Belief as this, would be sufficient to damp every good Design, and strike all Virtue dead.

dead. Upon this Supposition, how few would give themselves Trouble to do good Offices either for others, or themselves? Who would think it worth his while to exert himself vigorously in the Service of the Publick, if he knew that in a few Years, both he and they were to lose their Existence, and sink together into utter Oblivion? Men would then almost give themselves up to sad Thoughts, and gloomy Reflections; and in such a dejected, disconsolate State as this, what Room, what Encouragement to cultivate virtuous Dispositions? Surely Benevolence must, at least, thrive ill in such a Soil. — In short, to prescribe and preach up Virtue without a Future State, appears to me no otherwise than as a Sort of Religious Knight-Errantry. However Men may gaze or listen for a while, they will never be influenced by a Doctrine that is carried so high, as to be above the Principles of Human Nature.

Upon the whole, what our Author's real Opinion was concerning Futurity, he has not thought fit to inform us, nor shall I presume to determine. He often throws out oblique Hints against *Infinite Rewards*; and as often speaks in Favour of *common and natural Virtues*: But what to conclude from hence, perhaps you, Sir, may know better than I do. I shall therefore leave these

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these Ambiguities and Uncertainties, and proceed to something that is clearer. — He has expressly granted, that the Principle of Rewards and Punishments, *how mercenary or servile soever it may be accounted, is yet in many Circumstances a great Advantage, Security, and Support to Virtue* *. And since you seem to be so far of a different Opinion in respect of Rewards, as to make Virtue its own sufficient Reward, and to think it depreiated by any other; I must desire you to peruse and weigh what the Author has added about this Matter. In the mean Time, give me leave to offer you the following Considerations.

Let it be observed then in the first Place, how small a Proportion of Mankind are capable of discerning in any considerable Degree, the inward Beauty and Excellence of Virtue. In the *Characteristicks* we find *a good Taste* required for this Purpose; and whether that Taste be derived from Nature or Education, there is little Reason to expect it should be found in the Bulk of Mankind. Nor will even that *Moral Sense*, which an excellent Writer has of late contended for in another *Enquiry* †, prove much more effectual. For suppose it to

* Vol. II. Pag. 60.

† Enquiry into the original Ideas of Beauty and Virtue.

be as real and extensive as he represents it, yet if it be not kept up and cherished by Care, Attention, and the Practice of Virtue, it must soon grow dull, if it be not almost extinguished. How then can it be imagined, that in respect of the Generality of the World, it should be sufficient for the Support of Morality, and the Maintenance of Virtue? I need not further observe how little probability there is of their arriving at such a Knowledge by abstracted Reasonings and Speculations. To expect indeed any way that the greatest Part of Mankind should have just Ideas of Virtue, and understand its worth; is to expect that the greatest Part of Mankind should become Philosophers —. But supposing the Excellence of Virtue were in a good Measure perceived by them, how would they be affected by it? What slight hold would such intellectual Beauties take on the Understandings of the Vulgar; and how feebly would they operate upon them? It must be something more substantial that can make any considerable Impression on their gross Minds: Something that can either strike their Senses, or work upon their Passions. And what can be fitter for this Purpose than Rewards and Punishments? These excite their strongest Passions, and work upon Mankind more powerfully than any thing else could do. Most certain it is, that whenso-

ever these fail to bring Men to their Duty, nothing would be sufficient; nothing, I mean, less than Compulsion, which is inconsistent with our Nature. The Wisdom and Goodness of God are very conspicuous therefore in this Provision for our Security. Such strong Sanctions were absolutely necessary: And however vicious Men may be with them, they would have been infinitely more so without them.

But further; to discover the Necessity of these Motives, we ought to consider a great Part of Mankind as deeply engaged in sinful Courses. It is reasonable to think, that regard must be had to the reclaiming of these. To facilitate the Conversion of Evil Men, you will allow, Sir, to be an Intention worthy of infinite Goodness. Is then the Excellence of Virtue to be looked upon as a Cause adequate to such an Effect? Was it proper that the Reformation of the Wicked should be wholly left to their own Reason; or, if you will, to that *Moral Sense* before spoken of? Alas! their Reason is exceedingly darkened and depraved; and their Moral Sense must be grown very languid, if it be not quite lost. Represent to a vicious Man the Beauty of Virtue, you speak to him in a Language that he does not understand. Let Virtue her self plead her own Cause, and set forth her own Merit, he will not so much as *bear the Voice of*
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the Charmer. His Eyes, his Ears, his Heart are fixed upon quite different Objects; insomuch that all Attempts from this Quarter are utterly lost upon him. But let him be told that the Paths in which he is engaged lead to his Ruin; that he is incurring endless Misery, and forfeiting eternal Happiness: This may probably work upon him, if he be not quite incorrigible. Such forcible Arguments will prevail, if any thing can: In short, a strong Attachment to Sin produced by Inclination, and confirmed by Custom, all Men allow is hard to be broken. I would only ask then, whether your Principle taken alone, or reinforced by Gospel-Motives, be more likely to do it. I believe you will be so reasonable, and so ingenuous as to say the latter.— But perhaps you will add, that Converts thus made, are not Converts to Virtue, as being acted and swayed merely by Considerations of Interest. — I have already told you why I cannot agree to such a Conclusion: But here I must reject it upon another Account. He who removes out of the Ways of Vice into the Ways of Virtue, wholly from a Regard to his own Safety and Welfare, may, and probably will, if he continue therein, be influenced afterwards by higher Considerations, and become virtuous at last even upon your own Principle. This is a natural Supposition: The Author of the *Characteristicks*

takes notice of it; and I doubt not but it is often verified in Fact. And indeed what wonder if a Man, who embraces Virtue upon any Principle, discover the Beauty and Excellency of it sooner than he who is wallowing in Sin and Sensuality? And this, if I mistake not, clearly shews the Usefulness and Advantage of the Motives that I am defending. They draw Men out of their evil Courses, which no other Inducements have Power to do; and then commit them into the Hands of Virtue, to be taught and instructed by her ever after. And thus having so fair an Opportunity of discovering her Worth, it is not to be imagined that they will long continue strangers to it. Be reconciled then, Sir, to those Motives which you have hitherto disapproved; if it be for no other Reason, than that they manifestly support and strengthen your own Principle.

Another Proof how useful these Motives are to Virtue, and how necessary to support it, may be drawn from a State of Suffering; and more especially from the Case of Persecution. A considerate Mind that is at ease, unmolested by Want, or Grief, or Pain, may be supposed capable of observing the Excellence of Virtue, and of receiving suitable Impressions from it. He is at leisure to reflect upon it without Distraction, and the more he reflects, the more
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reason he will find to approve and admire it. But when a Man is sunk into Adversity, and has various Hardships to struggle with; especially when these Hardships are occasioned and brought upon him by his adherence to Virtue; will he not then want some further Support than Virtue is able to give him? What Consolation can she pour into an afflicted and sorrowful Breast? What Remedies can she administer to heal his Grief, and sooth him in his Sufferings? She may still appear lovely in his Eyes; still display her Beauty, and shine out with her usual Lustre: But is this sufficient to mitigate his Pains, or dispel the thick Gloom that hangs over his Heart? — — Extol Virtue, Sir, as much as you can; exhaust your Eloquence in her Praise: Yet after all, Truth will oblige you to acknowledge, that she is impotent in the Day of Adversity, and not capable alone of supporting Men in Distress. The *Stoicks* indeed denied this with great Resolution and Obstinacy; but their boastful Declarations on this Head, were in reality only so many Insults upon human Nature, and Contradictions to common Experience — —. Most certainly nothing can support a Man under the Pressure of any great Evil, but the Hope and Prospect of succeeding Good: And if he suffers in the Cause of Virtue, 'tis plain that something is wanting to make

up her Deficiencies, and compensate his Sufferings. So that here again we perceive the great Usefulness of those Rewards and Encouragements which Heaven has annexed to Virtue, and entailed upon her Votaries. Here is more than an Equivalent for the most grievous Sufferings; a Comfort administred, that has Strength and Substance capable of bearing up the most dejected Spirits, and *sustaining* all their *Infirmities*. — But this Observation will still appear to have greater Weight, if we extend it to the Case of Persecution. Let us consider a Man suffering Martyrdom, and behold him led by Truth and Virtue to a Stake: In this Extremity how is he to be supported; whither can he turn for relief? What can bare Virtue do for him, in the Height of Torture, and the Agonies of Death? Would he not naturally fly out into *Brutus's* Exclamation, and loudly complain that Virtue had betrayed him? Would you expect to support and comfort him in his last Moments, by a lively Representation of her Charms? Alas! it would avail no more at that Juncture, than the Contemplation of some fine Picture. Whereas, let but Religion step in to his Aid, and lift up his Eyes to those Joys and Glories that she has prepared for him above; he is comforted at once; his Torments are in a manner forgotten: The Flames have lost their Force, and

and *Death* its *Sting*, and he passes triumphant into another World.

I desire, Sir, you will not look upon this as a Flight of Enthusiasm, or a fanciful Description carried beyond the Bounds of Truth. The History of our Religion furnishes us with a Multitude of Vouchers, and sets before us many Instances of the Power and Efficacy of those Motives against which you object; and that in such Circumstances as I have been speaking of.— And the same might be observed in Respect of the Temptations incident to Prosperity, which would be more powerful and prevailing than they are, if it were not for the Influences of another World.—

Does it not appear then from the foregoing Considerations, that these Motives greatly befriend Virtue, and strengthen her Interests? We plainly see she is not self-sufficient; and how could her Defects be better supplied, than by those Rewards which Revelation has offered Men? I desire no more, than that they may be looked upon as her Auxiliaries; and such, I think, upon an impartial Enquiry, you must discover them to be.

I might further observe, that Mankind is much indebted to these Motives, as they occasion the doing of much more Good in the World, than otherwise would be done. Much Disorder, much Mischief is hereby
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prevented; and many Actions performed, highly beneficial to the Publick, as well as advantageous to private Persons. And supposing such Actions were in no Case, and in no Degree, truly Virtuous; yet since so much Benefit redounds from them, and they so much conduce to the Welfare of Mankind; that Principle from whence they spring, must be allowed to be very useful. Were we to substract from the Good that has been done in the World, that Share which was owing to Prospects of Advantage, and Views of Interest; the Remainder, in all likelihood, would not be very considerable. And yet this Remainder would have been the Whole, if we suppose Virtue stripped of all Advantages, and left to her self. — As Man is a reasonable Creature, he is capable of discovering and admiring the intrinsic Excellence of Virtue; but nevertheless, as he is conscious of his own Indigence and Infirmitiy, he cannot well pretend to neglect those Appendages of Interest that belong to her. 'Tis Vanity and Presumption in him to slight those Advantages which are so necessary to his Well-Being. On the other Hand 'tis mean, and mercenary, to pursue these Advantages alone. To prevent both, God has closely connected our Duty and Interest, and interwoven them together. And this Conjunction has been of great

great Service to Mankind at all Times, and upon all Occasions. — I believe it may be said, that from this complicated Principle have flowed all those great and illustrious Actions that make such a Figure in History, and have been the Delight and Admiration of all Ages. Many of the antient Heroes of *Greece* and *Rome* had a lively Sense of Virtue, and were especially famous for the Love of their Country, and an inviolable Attachment to the Interests thereof: But was this the only Principle that prompted them to act so heroically, and deserve so well of Mankind? Were they not also excited and animated by an ardent Thirst after Glory? Did they not expect to immortalize their Names, and perpetuate the Fame of their Actions? When *Socrates* fell a Sacrifice to Truth and Virtue, did he not propose to please God and procure his Favour? A nobler View indeed than the other; but yet it was a View of Interest, though such a one as Virtue can never be ashamed of. A Desire to please the supreme Being, and obtain his Approbation, is so wise and worthy an Intention, so just a Principle of Action, so agreeable to the Dictates of right Reason, and the genuine Inclinations of human Nature, that it may seem to rival the purest and most disinterested Love of Virtue, or at

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least to claim a Place very near it. In *Socrates* they were joined together, as indeed they always ought to be. His exalted Mind saw, what only Revelation could teach others; that to disunite Virtue and Interest, and follow either separately, was to act contrary to Nature, and the Rules of sound Wisdom: And while others devoted themselves to the Pursuit of earthly Fame and human Praise, that Shadow of Honour; he found out and followed the Substance; striving to recommend himself to that Being, in whose Approbation consists the Perfection of all Glory. In short, that he left this World with so much Indifference, or rather Inclination, was owing to the strong Hopes he had of the Joys and Glories of another. — Of his Character and Conduct (perhaps the best in all the Heathen World,) I have taken more particular Notice, that it might dispose you to hear with less Prejudice what is expressly owned concerning the great Founders of our Religion; or at least, to obviate such Exceptions as you might otherwise be apt to make. When it is said, that the one *had respect to the Recompense of Reward*, and that the other *endured the Cross, and despised the Shame, for the Joy that was set before him*; this is abundant Authority for us Believers, and fully as-

tures us, that the mixed Principle before-mentioned is perfectly right. We are hence throughly convinced, that Interest may be regarded and proposed, without any Diminution of Virtue, or Derogation from it; and in short, that they are and ought to be indissolubly united. As you disown this Authority, I am content to refer you to the Reason of the Thing; only desiring, as I justly may, that what was never objected against *Socrates*, may not be objected against *Moses* and *Christ*.

Having complied with your Request, and laid before you my Sentiments, though briefly, concerning a Book that you think fit to call your *Oracle*; and that is esteemed and studied by you accordingly: Let me intreat you in my Turn, to resume and re-examine with the same Impartiality that you required from me, that Book which we believe to be truly and strictly *Oracular*: Bring along with you that Veneration for Morality and Virtue which you profess, and try whether you cannot find in the *New Testament* the noblest Precepts and sublimest Paterns that you ever met with. As you may there discover the Reasonableness, the Fitness, the Usefulness of those Motives which I have been contending for; so you may observe notwithstanding, the most exalted Benevolence both taught

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and exemplified. — You may there have the Pleasure of perceiving all human Duty resolved into the Love of God and Man. You will also find Self-Love made the Rule of our Love for others; and all Behaviour, all Proceedings towards others forbidden, except such as we judge to be reasonable towards our selves: You will find real Affection and unfeigned Good-Will essentially constituting Christian Charity; and all outward Acts of Beneficence declared to be ineffectual and worthless, that do not proceed from that inward Principle: You will find Benevolence and Kindness laid down as the Rule by which Men will be finally judged; and those represented as most deserving, who do the most good in proportion to their Abilities: But what I would more particularly point out to your Observation, is the Extent and Diffusiveness of Christian Benevolence, which comprehends, as you would wish it to do, the whole Species, and spreads itself over the Face of the whole Earth. Instead of that partial Love, those contracted Affections, whether for Kindred, Neighbours, Friends or Country, which both *Jews* and *Gentiles* were too apt to run into, and even make their boast of; Christianity requires us to love all without Distinction, and opening our Arms as wide as possible, embrace Mankind with an universal

versal Good-will. How will you be able to forbear admiring the Nobleness and Generosity of those Precepts, which throwing down the narrow Limits and Boundaries of Affection which had been at any time set up, enlarge and draw it out to the utmost; and will have nothing less than the whole human Kind to be the proper and adequate Object of human Love? Not that the Gospel intends to loosen the Ties of Nature, or dissolve the Obligations arising from any of the Relations before-mentioned; but to fix them in their proper Order, and make them subordinate to that Obligation, which of all others is the strongest and most natural. And very fitting it was, to rectify the Mistakes of those, who had so far inverted the Duties of Benevolence, as to degrade that, which next to the Love of God, is the highest of all: And it was well if some went not so far, as even to discard it.

But to return; how just, how fine an Explication of the Precept concerning the Love of our *Neighbour*, will you find couched under the Parable of the *Good Samaritan*? How beautiful appears the Action, how amiable the Character? In Opposition to those who understood the Word *Neighbour* in too literal and narrow a Sense, our Saviour has here informed us, in a most

most lively and elegant Manner, that it is not to be restrained to nearness of Situation, Familiarity, or Acquaintance; but that every Human Creature, whatever be his Country, his Manners, his Religion, is to be reputed our *Neighbour*, and treated as such. Had a Foreigner of some remote Country been represented as the Person in Distress, or as the Person who relieved him, the finest Part of the Illustration had been lost. But the Object of Compassion is a *Jew*, and Succour is brought him by a *Samaritan*; who breaking through the National and Religious Prejudices that possessed and mutually inflamed the Minds of those People against each other, runs to his Relief, and treats him with as much Humanity and Tenderness of Affection, as if he had been not only his Neighbour, but his Brother. The generous *Samaritan* considers him only as a Man in Distress: This was enough to excite his Compassion, and quicken his Care. All Animosities are laid asleep and forgotten, and he extends his Arms, and opens his Purse, for the Preservation of a Life that would otherwise have been lost. What a Pattern of true Benevolence is here! a Pattern that our Saviour has commanded us to imitate; and which you, Sir, must allow to be highly worthy of our Imitation.——Let me
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only observe further, by the Way, that whoever through Party-Prejudice, or Contrariety of Sentiment, stifles his Pity, or withholds Relief, upon lesser Occasions than this; is so far only a Christian in Name. By such a Violation of Humanity, he doubly violates Christianity; which, I venture to assure you, is only Humanity sublimated and refined, and brought nearer to Perfection.

It has been objected against our Religion, that it takes so little Notice of *Friendship*, as neither prescribing it, nor recommending it to Men's Choice and Approbation. But how unjust and groundless is this Objection? If Men reckon Friendship among their Privileges, yet why must they insist upon its being made a Duty? As a Privilege, is it not enough that it is permitted, and no where prohibited; Or however, is it not sufficient, that Christ has countenanced it by his own Example, in taking one of his Disciples into his Bosom, and admitting him into a superior Share of his Familiarity and Love? But as to his Silence on this Subject, whoever rightly considers the Matter, will find little Reason to wonder at it. It was not his Intention to straiten Mens Affections, which perhaps were too much straitened already; but to widen
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and enlarge them. He did not aim to collect the Rays of Mens Love, and center them upon single Objects, to the Prejudice of others; but rather strove to spread them far and wide, and make them as diffusive as possible. If he saw, as probably he did, that while Men warmed their Breasts with private Friendships, they grew in Proportion cooler towards the Publick; was there any Reason to add Fuel to such a Flame? We may suppose him willing rather to check this Inclination, than to cultivate it. However, since he neither expressly approved, nor condemned Friendship, this at least ought to content us. As his great Design was to promote universal Love and Charity, it may rather be wonder'd, that he should even connive at those particular Unions that might seem to interfere with it, than that he should pass them over in profound Silence. — But let me add, that how little soever he has thought fit to promote the Love of Friends, he has not only encouraged, but strictly enjoined the Love of Enemies: A Duty but little known, and less practised, before his Appearance. This shows, that he was more solicitous to supply Defects, than to prune away Redundancies. The Excellency of this Doctrine, the Agreeableness of it to un-

uncorrupt Reason, and the Improvement it brings to Morality, are Subjects too copious to be insisted on at this Time.

I proceed therefore to observe, that as our Saviour did not enjoin Friendship, though he thought fit, as he safely might, to practise it himself; so the same may be said of a higher Attachment; I mean the Love of our *Country*, which has been so much and so often celebrated by other Moralists. Though he has set Men a bright Example of it, I do not remember that he has given any express Precept concerning it. And the Reason I take to be the same in this Case, as in the former. Man's Love of his Country is doubtless a noble Affection; and if it were always regularly entertained and pursued, too much Countenance and Encouragement could never be given it. But if through Mens Imprudence and Folly, it contributes to weaken or dissolve higher Obligations; if it tends to contract their Minds, and alienate their Affections from the rest of Mankind, 'tis no longer Praise-worthy, but inglorious and detrimental. — If the *Jews* fell into such a Partiality; if they were disaffected to other Nations, and too fond of themselves; it must be owned they had a better Excuse than any other People could pretend

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end to. They were fenced about by Divine Laws, and a strong Partition was thrown up between them and the rest of the World; to prevent the Infection of Idolatry, which they were so prone to catch.

— The *Greeks* and *Romans* had the same Partiality for themselves, without any such Pretence; and they covered it under the specious Names of Love, Piety, and Zeal. And in Truth, it had very beneficial Effects at Home. It worked them up to an unusual Pitch of Industry and Vigor, and produced many great Actions, and splendid Enterprizes. But after all, it had an ill Aspect on the Nations round about them, who were often great Sufferers by it. They were not only called, but considered as *Barbarians*, and almost looked upon as Creatures of another Species: Insulted upon every Occasion, and treated with great Cruelty and Scorn. That strong Passion for their Country, which possess'd the Minds, and influenced the Counsels of those polite Republicks, made them frequently act like true *Barbarians*. It gave them a Right in their own Imaginations, to carry their Conquests, and extend their Dominions as far as they could: To invade the Territories of those who had never injured, never provoked them; and put Chains about the Necks of innocent Kings
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and Princes.——See, Sir, the Effects of a misguided and preposterous Benevolence, and confess that it stood in need of those wise Regulations which Christianity brought along with it. Here we learn, that the Love of Mankind ought to be the ruling and predominant Affection; and by Consequence, that no other ought to interfere with it, but every Thing give way to it. That whatever other Passions we entertain, we must take Care to keep them subordinate to this, without which they can neither be laudable nor innocent. In short, we may, and ought to be as kind and serviceable as we can to our Neighbours, Friends, and Country; but our Affections must not stop there, nor be suffered to terminate on these Objects: For our Religion has commanded us to love all Men as Neighbours, as Countrymen, as Friends, as Brethren.

I need not extend this Observation to Mens Affection for their *Kindred*, which must needs be subject to the same Rules and Regulations. Whenever this natural Bias becomes too strong, it ought to be checked and counter-poised. For no Inclination, no Affection must be suffered to rival that supreme Principle, which you call the Love of Mankind, and we Christian Charity.——And how, Sir, can you re-

tain any Prejudice against a Religion that holds forth such a sublime System of Morality? That contains Rules and Precepts, so excellent, and so divine? Examine the Wisdom of the Ancients; look through the Productions of all Ages; and if in any, or in all of them, a Scheme of Doctrine can be found, more just and glorious in it self, or more conducive to the Welfare and Perfection of Mankind; that better answers all wise and good Purposes, whether Human or Divine: instead of recommending the Gospel to you any more, I shall earnestly intreat you to embrace that in the Room of it, and adhere to it while you live.

When you have impartially considered the Principles of Christianity, let me desire you to cast your Eye upon that illustrious Example, that perfect Pattern of Virtue and all Goodness which our Saviour has set Men. Since you are so smitten (as well you may) with the Beauties of Virtue, and the Charms of Benevolence; behold here the highest Instance of it, that ever appeared among the Children of Men! Feast your Mind with the Contemplation of a Character that is entirely made up of Love; such Love, as no Eye, till then, had *seen*, nor Ear had *heard*, *neither had it enter'd into the Heart of Man*

to conceive. Examine with the most critical Exactness ; mark its Features, and observe its Proportions ; and tell me if the Result be not perfect Beauty : If it be not infinitely amiable and excellent from first to last.——That the Son of God should Veil his Glory, come down from Heaven, take our frail Nature upon him, and that under *the Form of a Servant*, making a low and obscure Appearance, and cloathing himself in the humblest Circumstances : That he should endure a sad Variety of Misery, and undergo all manner of Shame and Contempt, Contradiction and Calumny, Pain and Persecution : That he should submit to be outraged, insulted and abused by the meanest of Mankind ; bearing it with invincible Patience, Meekness, and Constancy ; and striving at the same Time to do all possible Good, even to those very Men, who thus maliciously and impiously treated him : In a word, that he should live a laborious and wretched Life, and after that die a painful and ignominious Death : And all this for us Men, and for our Salvation ; Rebels against Heaven, and Apostates from our Duty : This, I say, is a Scene of so astonishing a Nature, and every Thing in it is so Great and Divine, as to be above the Power of Words, and the utmost Reach of Expression. Such a Sublimity of Goodness

ness can no more be described, than it can be imitated. I content my self therefore with admiring it in Silence, and recommending it to your serious Contemplation: Not without Hopes, that such an unparalleled Example, added to such excellent Precepts, will be able to scatter those Prejudices that cloud your Mind, and obstruct your Belief; which is the earnest Wish of,

S I R,

Your most Humble Servant, &c.



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