



special  
collections  
DOUGLAS  
LIBRARY



QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY  
AT KINGSTON

KINGSTON ONTARIO CANADA





Henry Johnson. 1887.

Allen

May 2, 1887



2, 4, 6

12

10000

10000

10000





L E T T E R S  
TO THE  
PHILOSOPHERS AND POLITICIANS  
OF  
F R A N C E,  
ON THE SUBJECT OF  
R E L I G I O N.

*By* JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL. D. F. R. S., &c.

---

TANTAMNE REM TAM MEGLICENTER.

TERENCE.

---

LONDON:  
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD.

---

1793.

70. 100. 01

L E T T E R S  
ADDRESSED TO THE  
PHILOSOPHERS AND POLITICIANS  
OF  
F R A N C E.

---

L E T T E R I.

GENTLEMEN,

**T**HE representatives of your nation, zealous to distinguish themselves as the patrons of liberty, and the friends of the oppressed and persecuted, in every part of the world, have done me the honour of making me a citizen of France; and many of your departments, conceiving much too highly of me, and mistaking my talents, did me the farther honour of inviting me to take a seat in your Conventional Assembly. Though,

B

confcious

Ms. A. 306. 00  
Ms. A. 17  
Ms. A. 19  
Ms. A. 17  
Ms. A. 17

conscious of my incapacity to discharge the duties of this appointment, and unwilling to abandon a situation of some usefulness in this country, I declined *this* honour, I accepted with gratitude that of *citizenship* for myself, as well as for my son; and, willing to do every thing in my power for the country that has so generously adopted me, I shall run the risk of being less favourably thought of by some of you, by addressing you on a subject which I conceive to be of infinite importance to all mankind, though it appears to be too much overlooked, or grossly misunderstood, by the greatest part of the French nation. You to whom I particularly address these *Letters*, viz. the *Philosophers and Politicians*, will smile, and some of you perhaps will proceed no farther, when I say that this subject is that of *religion*.

I am well aware that the very term *religion* will give many of you disgust. Nor do I wonder at it, when I consider how much the thing has been abused, and how much the interested and artful have availed themselves  
of

of the ignorance and credulity of the rest of the world with respect to it, so that the grossest impositions have long passed for serious truth.

Such, however, you well know to have been the case with respect to philosophy, and especially chemistry, though the age of mystery and deception in this business is now over, and rational and useful science has taken place of solemn pretensions, absurd systems, and idle tricks. But because we now hear no more of the art of *transmuting metals*, or of the *elixir vita*, which were the great objects of the chemists of the last age, do we abandon every thing that bears the name of *chemistry*? Neither, then, ought we to discard every thing that bears the name of *religion*, because we have exploded superstition and priestcraft.

The objects of religion are unquestionably of infinite magnitude, compared to which every thing relating to philosophy and chemistry is as nothing. If there be a God, a

providence, and a future state, which are the objects of religion, it must be of the greatest consequence to men to be apprized of them. For besides that they are subjects of the greatest sublimity in themselves, and most deserving of our attention and contemplation as rational beings, our knowledge of them is of the greatest use to direct our practice, and enable us to secure our greatest happiness.

I am far, however, from being willing to dazzle your minds with a display of the magnitude, and interesting nature, of the objects that I would recommend to your attention. Be as much upon your guard against deception as you possibly can. It behoves you to be so, and the more, in proportion to the importance of the subject. But be upon your guard also against deep-rooted prejudices with respect to a subject that you must acknowledge you have not much considered. Take nothing for granted, either from your nurses, from bold atheistical writers, who abound among you, or from myself. But whatever means you apply to detect error, and investigate truth,

in other cafes, apply them here ; and admit nothing for true but when the reasons in favour of it fhall be fuperior to thofe againft it.

I will even put the matter on this fair iffue. I invite you to admit nothing but what fhall appear to be leaft contrary to *natural analogy*, and confequently to *probability*. For I maintain that, as unbelievers in revealed religion, you admit what is more contrary to common experience, and daily obfervation, than I do. I well know you laugh at the idea of *miracles* ; but I fay that it will be found, upon inquiry, that you believe in greater miracles than myfelf. This you muft acknowledge to be a fair iffue, and upon this I freely put every queftion between us.

I am, &c.

## LETTER II.

*Of the Being of a God.*

GENTLEMEN,

WHEN I say that there is a *God*, I mean that there is an intelligent author of nature, and I maintain that it is most agreeable to natural analogy to admit this. Because marks of *design*, which we universally consider as indications of *mind*, are as conspicuous in the works of *nature*, as in those of *art*.

Would any person, after considering the structure and obvious use of a *telescope*, maintain that it was made without any design, and not intended to give us a distinct view of remote objects, and therefore that it proves the existence of a mind in which that design was formed, previous to the construction of the instrument? Can the same person, then, consider the structure of the *eye*, and not say that



that it was a work of design also, its use being exactly similar to that of the telescope, and at least as well adapted to answer its end? Are not, also, hands, feet, and every other part of the human body, as clearly adapted to answer their several purposes? May not the same observation be made with respect to every part of nature? Is not every thing we see a part of one great whole? Does there not, then, exist a mind capable of comprehending this whole, and a cause that produced the whole? Is it not as absurd to say that the visible universe had no cause without itself, as that a telescope had none?

Whatever difficulty may attend the farther question, *what was the cause of this cause*, thus far we proceed on the clearest grounds, following the most indubitable analogies; and difficult as it may be to conceive that this great cause of all things exists, and has existed, *uncaused* from all eternity, it is not so difficult as to believe that any thing could begin to be without any cause; for this you cannot but acknowledge to be an absolute impossibility.

possibility. For if ever there was a time when nothing had existed, nothing could have existed. The actual existence, therefore, of such a world as this of which we make a part, a world which bears every possible mark of the most exquisite design, is an irrefragable proof that there exists, and has existed from all eternity, a Being possessed of a mind capable of comprehending it, and that must be deemed the proper author of it.

That we do not *see* this great Being, is no evidence of his non-existence. For as many things do not affect some of our senses, which are the inlets of all our ideas, others may elude them all. Nor is it of any moment whatever in what kind of *substance* the attributes of power and intelligence, which we must ascribe to the author of the visible universe, reside. In fact, we know nothing of any *substance*, having no idea of any thing but what we call *properties*, which, as we say, inhere in, or belong to, the several things, or substances, that we are acquainted with. It is enough for us that there are evident marks of  
design

design in what we see, to infer the existence of a *designing cause*, whatever that cause be, and whether, with respect to its substance, it be visible or invisible, tangible or intangible, &c. &c. &c.

I am, &c.

### LETTER III.

*Of the Attributes and Providence of God.*

GENTLEMEN,

**A**DMITTING the being of a *God*, or a *principle of intelligence* in the Universe, we must judge of the *designs* of this Being as we would of those of any other, viz. by the character of his works. And the works of nature, I think you cannot but admit with me, are the works of a *benovolent* author; all percipient creatures being formed capable of enjoyments suited to their nature, and furnished with the means of procuring them, and also of avoiding, or mitigating, the evils to which they are necessarily exposed.

The

The more we see into the œconomy of nature, the more sensible we are that all evil is subservient to good, and, as far as we can judge, inseparable from it; so that, for any thing that appears, the most benevolent Being would not have constituted the universe otherwise than it is. That we should not be able to see the uses of all particular evils, and should not be able to comprehend the whole of so immense a system as that of the universe, cannot appear surprising, when one man is not always able, without particular instruction, to comprehend the works of another man.

It is also most agreeable to analogy to ascribe the whole universe to *one author*, on account of the uniformity that is evident through the whole, and the subserviency of one part to another, immense as this great whole is, and incomprehensible as the great Author of it must be. If it would be unreasonable to suppose that one being formed the head of a man, another the hands, and others the remaining parts of the body, equally unreasonable would

it be to suppose that one being formed the earth, another the plants, another the fowls, and others the land and sea animals belonging to it; since they are all intimately related to, and connected with, each other, and in fact are only parts of *one whole*. If we carry our views farther, we shall see the reasonableness of concluding that the earth and the moon, the sun and the planetary system, nay the systems of suns, and every thing comprised in the whole universe, had but one and the same author; since the same law of gravitation, and probably many other laws, connect them all.

Farther, as no intelligent being does any thing without some view, or design, we must conclude that every thing in nature has its specific and proper uses; that nothing was formed in vain; the most inconsiderable article, as it may appear to us, being as essential to the whole as the larger and more prominent parts. And as the laws of nature must be intimately known to the Author of them, he must foresee every thing that can come to pass, and must have planned every thing that  
comes

comes to pass from the beginning, so that nothing can ever oppose his design. This is what we call the doctrine of an universal and particular *Providence*, or the adaptation of all things, and of all events, to the designs of that great Being who planned, and who presides over, the whole. This is a truth no less clear and indubitable, than it is sublime, and confounding to our understandings.

I frequently read the writings of your atheistical philosophers, that I may clearly understand, and enter into, your views and feelings. I wish you would do the same with respect to our writings. In your endeavours to exclude the idea of a designing cause from the universe, I perceive much embarrassment and contradiction, when you would substitute the term *Nature* for that of *God*. You are struck with the manifest wonders of nature, and look no farther. I see the same wonders, but they lead me to revere the great Author of nature, that *mind* which comprehends the whole. You see nothing in nature but *effects*. I revere the *cause*. What you  
ascribe

ascribe to a blind undefining principle, something that bears no analogy to what we call *mind*, or *person*, I ascribe to a proper intelligent Being, a Being, whom I consider, and am happy in considering, as ever present with me, and attentive to me, and to all things; who brought me into being for the most benevolent purposes, and who will conduct me through all the stages of it. You see nothing around you but something to gaze at. I look beyond all this, to a Being, or a person, that I can speak to, the object of my gratitude, my attachment, and my confidence.

Acknowledge then, that whatever else you may think of my sentiments, they make me happier than yours can possibly make you; especially when it is added, that, in my ideas, the present life is by no means the whole, nay, but the very infancy of my existence, and that the great Being who made me, and who has placed me in a school of discipline here, will not leave me in the grave, but produce me again, in circumstances much more favourable than the present.

Here,

Here, I am sensible, you will smile again; but attend to what I shall observe on this subject in my next Letters.

I am, &c.

#### LETTER IV.

*Of the Evidence of the Miracles performed in Attestation of the Jewish and Christian Religion.*

GENTLEMEN,

**A**DMITTING the being of a God, and his constant Providence, you ask me what evidence I have of a *future state*. I answer (and I beg you will not revolt at my language, but have the patience to hear me out) the express declaration of God himself, that he will raise men from the dead at a future period, and that he will then render unto them according to their works; and you cannot doubt the power of the Author of nature to do this.

If you ask me the evidence of this, which I know you will think a strange assertion, I answer,



answer, that this has been declared by men who were commissioned by God for the purpose, and who proved their mission from him by such works as God only, the Author of nature, could perform, viz. real *miracles*, an evidence of a power that could controul the laws of nature.

Again, the proof that such miracles have been wrought is such *testimony* as cannot be denied without admitting still greater miracles, viz. that numbers of persons, the best qualified to judge of them, and who had no motive to impose upon others, attest their reality. Since, to suppose that all those persons were either deceived themselves, or concurred in a scheme to impose upon others, would be more evidently contrary to the known course of nature respecting mankind (who we must take for granted have been the same in all ages) than the reality of the miracles which they attest; this, when all the circumstances of the case are attentively considered, being a more manifest violation of the established laws of nature, than the other, and for no rational end.

For

For example, that the whole nation of the Jews, consisting at that time of six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, should believe that, after seeing many miracles performed in Egypt, they all walked through the Red Sea, while the waters divided to make them way; that they all heard the distinct articulate pronunciation of the ten commandments from mount Sinai; that after continuing in the wilderness forty years, during which they were witnesses of several other miracles, they all went through the river Jordan as they had through the Red Sea; that they should observe the Passover, and other annual customs, in commemoration of those events, and preserve among them to this day books containing a distinct narrative of these events, universally, and at all times, believed to be written at the time while the events were recent, are facts of this nature.

Jews are *men*, and they were by no means previously disposed to believe any thing of the kind above mentioned, or to practise the religious rites enjoined upon them in consequence  
of

of them. And therefore that their minds should be universally impressed with this belief, without a sufficient cause, in the reality of the events, would be a proper miracle, nay a complication of miracles, of the most extraordinary nature. And what makes the case more extraordinary still, it would be a series of miracles wrought for no end; whereas the miracles recorded in the books of Moses had a great and worthy object, viz. to impress the minds of the Jewish nation, and through them those of other nations, with the firm belief of the supremacy of one true God, the maker of all things, and of his providence in conducting the affairs of men.

Also, the miracles performed by Christ, the great object of whose mission was the revelation of a future state of rewards and punishments, are less extraordinary, and less contrary to the common course of nature, than the firm belief of so many thousands of persons, previously disposed as they all were, that such miracles were wrought; when they had every opportunity, and every

C

motive,

motive, that men could have to satisfy themselves concerning their truth, on the supposition that no such miracles were wrought. And the reality of their belief cannot be questioned, since they sacrificed every thing that men hold dear to them in life, and many of them life itself, to their belief.

The miracle, for so I must call it, of so many persons deceiving themselves and others, could not have been calculated for any other purpose than that of *mere delusion*, without any rational object whatever. Whereas the miracles on which the belief of Christianity is established had the greatest and most glorious object that can be conceived, viz. the giving mankind a just idea of their future destination, shewing them that this life is but the infancy of their being, and that they are to be educated for an immortal life hereafter. The full persuasion of these great truths gives an unspeakable dignity to the human character; it adds greatly to the true enjoyment of this life, and in a manner annihilates all its pains and troubles, as well as tends to prepare them for their future state.

This

This was an object worthy of the author of the human race, and could not have been accomplished by any other than supernatural means; no appearances in nature giving us any rational ground to expect that we shall survive the grave. Nothing, however, could be better calculated to produce this belief than such miracles as Christ wrought, and himself, the great preacher of the doctrine, dying in order to exemplify in his own person, that resurrection which he was authorised to promise to all. Had the most incredulous of mankind been asked what evidence of a future life would satisfy them, they could not have demanded any thing more than this; nor, as I have distinctly shewn in my *Discourse on the Resurrection of Jesus*, could they have demanded any stronger evidence of any fact, than that which divine Providence has actually provided for *this*; so that its credibility should be stronger, especially in remote ages, and to the end of time.

I am, &c.

## LETTER IV.

*Cautions against superficial Reasoning on this Subject.*

GENTLEMEN,

**I**T is not my intention in these *Letters* to enter into a detail of the evidences of revealed religion. This I have done, in a great measure, in other publications; but only to give you what I apprehend many of you have not at present, viz. some idea of the importance of the subject, and the nature of the evidence, in order to induce you to make farther inquiries concerning it; and I wish you to do this with the diligence and rigour that the case requires.

Be persuaded, then, to examine with due care and impartiality the evidence of the facts on which revealed religion is founded, as you would do with respect to any other interesting facts of the same historical nature. It is  
 acknow-

acknowledged that the facts recorded in the books of scripture are not analogous to any that now fall under our observation, and that, therefore, they require a proportionably stronger evidence. But then you will find the evidence to *be* proportionably stronger than that for ordinary facts; no other facts recorded in history being nearly so well attested. Circumstanced as the primitive Christians were, we cannot doubt but that both they, and their enemies, felt themselves deeply interested in ascertaining the truth with respect to them. In consequence of this situation, we may be well assured that no other facts whatever underwent a thousandth part of the scrutiny that, from the nature of the case, these *must* have done; and while they were *recent*, so that the examination was the most easy. Both the *persecuted* and the *persecutors* would do every thing that their opposite interests could suggest to prove, or to disprove, the miracles appealed to. And we see that after a contest of three centuries, when Christianity had all the powers of the world, and all the learning of it too, to con-

tend with, it prevailed, and established itself. What could this be owing to but the power of truth? for it had no other advantage whatever.

Do not content yourselves with saying that  
 “ mankind have always been the dupes of  
 “ imposition, so that there is no occasion to  
 “ trouble yourselves with inquiring by what  
 “ means they were imposed upon in this, or  
 “ any other particular case.”

Credulity is an affection of the human mind that well deserves to be considered by philosophers. Like other *effects*, this must have a fixed *cause*. And the only reason why men become disposed to believe without much inquiry, is an idea, acquired by themselves, or received from others for whose opinion they have a respect, that strict inquiry was not necessary; the thing to which their assent is demanded being so analogous to other undoubted events, that a slight evidence is sufficient. This, however, supposes that the credibility of some events to which these are  
 analogous



analogous was originally well established. Consequently, the too easy belief of extraordinary events affords a pretty strong presumption, that, though not the events in question, yet that others similar to them, were well authenticated.

If we see any person, by his knowledge of philosophy, chemistry, sleight of hand, or any other means, do things that astonish us, we give the closest attention to the facts, and do not admit them at first without very particular evidence. But having seen them, or been by any other means fully satisfied of their reality, we do not think it necessary to make the same strict examination of similar facts, reported to be performed by the same person, by those in connexion with him, or by similar means. They are then considered as common events, being agreeable to a new analogy of things.

The readiness, therefore, with which the reports of miracles said to be wrought by your saints in the dark ages, in which there is rea-

son to suspect gross mistake, or imposition, will afford a philosopher an argument for believing that, in some preceding age, real miracles had been wrought, and that the credit of them had been well established. For such would be the necessary effect of the reality of the miracles of Christ and of the apostles. These being admitted, the credulity of the Christian world with respect to subsequent miracles followed of course, but not upon any other supposition.

In a similar manner I account for your incredulity with respect to all miracles. You have given no attention to the evidence of the original and well authenticated miracles, but only to that of the subsequent and fabulous ones; and seeing reason to disbelieve *these*, you have been led by a false analogy to suspect *all*. But without considering the present state of things, you should place yourselves in the situation of a philosopher at the time of the promulgation of Christianity, and examine the circumstances of the original miracles, the credit of which procured the too  
easy

easy belief of the fabulous legends, at which you so justly revolt.

Many unbelievers, viewing things very superficially, think to satisfy themselves and others with saying, that *ancient traditions* are never to be depended upon; that there were Egyptian and Grecian fables, as well as Jewish and Christian ones, but that now men of sense pay no regard to any of them.

But they do not attend to the obvious and important distinction between *tradition* and *history*, between opinions taken up a long time after a supposed event, and written records of transactions coeval with them; and this is precisely the difference between the fabulous histories of Egypt and Greece, and the Mosaic and Christian histories. For it is as certain that the books of Moses were written and published to the whole of the Hebrew nation in his life-time, and the history of the evangelists and the Acts of the Apostles in the age in which the transactions were recent, as that the histories of Thucydides and

Tacitus

Tacitus were written and published in the same circumstances; because the people among whom they were published equally received them as genuine, and thereby gave their testimony to the general truth of their contents. And at no period of time would it have been more easy to procure them the reception they obtained in the one case, than in the other.

As human nature was the same at all times that it is at present, we may form a judgment of the difficulty of imposing upon any nation, or people, such histories as those of the scriptures by a supposition respecting ourselves. Let any person then endeavour to persuade the people of this country, that their ancestors, in some remote period, passed from Calais to Dover, by walking through the sea, which divided to make them way, and let him produce *books* containing a circumstantial account of the event, as written at the time. Would he be able to procure any credit to the narrative? He would certainly be laughed at for his pains. In fact, it would be no less  
difficult

difficult for him to do this, than to divide the sea, as he had related. He would find the one to be as really impossible, as much contrary to the established course of nature, as the other.

In like manner, let any person produce books similar to those of the New Testament, and see if he can gain such general credit to them, as to induce thousands of all descriptions of men to undergo the greatest hardships, and even lay down their lives, for their faith in them, even in circumstances far more favourable to his purpose than those in which the evangelists wrote; he would find it as easy to raise the dead, as to effect any such thing.

It requires only a due attention to *facts*, such as no person who has any faith in history can deny, and to the well known principles of *human nature*, to perceive this. But few unbelievers in revelation have been disposed to pay this due attention to either; and in consequence of this they really believe things more extraordinary in their nature, and  
therefore

therefore more truly *incredible*, than the Jew or the Christian.

Study, then, with particular attention the history of the times in which Christianity was promulgated. The narrative is as circumstantial, and as open to inquiry, as that of Cæsar and Pompey, or that of any other period of antiquity; and you will find indubitable facts, and innumerable of them, absolutely inconsistent with your hasty and random hypothesis.

You will find men of all descriptions, and of all nations, many of them as cool and sensible as yourselves, and who had as much at stake, with respect to character, or fortune, as you can have; men who had every means of informing themselves on the subject, and who evidently spared no pains in doing so; so impressed with the persuasion of the reality of the great events on which the truth of Christianity is founded, that they persisted through life in giving the fullest evidence of their conviction.

And

And it is particularly to be observed, that this was not a persuasion concerning *metaphysical opinions*, of which few persons are competent judges, but things that were the objects of the senses; such as the instant cure of disorders well known to be the most incurable, raising the dead to life, and other works equally miraculous and stupendous, in which there could be no suspicion of fallacy, and of which all persons are equally judges.

But some of your writers have given so little attention to this subject, though it is merely an historical one, that they have denied the very existence of Jesus Christ, have asserted that the very term *Christ* was borrowed from some Eastern language, having the same origin with *Christnou*, one of the gods of Hindostan, and that Christianity is only a particular modification of the worship of the sun.

Serious as the subject is, it is not possible to forbear smiling at such palpable ignorance. I shall expect that the same writers will soon attempt to allegorize the history of Julius

Cæſar, and maintain that no ſuch perſon ever exiſted. For there is not a hundredth part of the evidence for the exiſtence of Julius Cæſar, that there is for that of Jeſus Chriſt. Hereafter the hiſtory of France itſelf may be allegorized, the very names of *Lewis*, *Demourier*, and *Pethion*, may be derived from ancient languages, and the preſent war of your republic againſt the deſpots of Europe, may be ſaid to mean nothing more than the war of the elements of nature.

If I had not ſeen ſo much of the power of prejudice, I ſhould wonder that ſo many men, of unqueſtionable good ſenſe among you, and even able writers, ſhould have given ſo little attention as they have done to *natural probability*, in judging concerning an hiſtorical ſubject.

The letter of Pliny the younger is well known to all the learned, and its genuinenefs was never called in queſtion; and yet one would think that ſome of your writers againſt Chriſtianity had never heard of it. He wrote  
about



about A. D. 106, between seventy and eighty years after the death of Christ. In it he asks advice of the emperor Trajan how to act with respect to the Christians who were brought before him; and, speaking of the progress that the new religion had made in his province, Bythinia, he says, “ Many of  
“ every rank, and of both sexes, are accused,  
“ and will be accused; nor has the contagion  
“ of this superstition seized cities only, but  
“ lesser towns also, and the open country.  
“ Nevertheless, it seems to me that it may  
“ be restrained, and corrected. It is certain  
“ that the temples, which were almost forsaken,  
“ begin to be more frequented, and  
“ the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission,  
“ are revived. Victims are every  
“ where bought up, where for some time  
“ there were few purchasers.”

Could Christianity have made this amazing progress in so short a time, without force, and against every possible mode of opposition, if there had been no such person as Jesus Christ, or if there had been no truth in  
the

the evangelical history. Bythinia was not very far from Judea, where it originated; and as both countries were within the same empire, there could not have been wanting any opportunity of making inquiry into the truth of the facts. And it is remarkable, that the nearer we approach Jerusalem, as at Antioch in Syria, where the imposture, if there had been any, must have been more evident, the more Christians we find. That this should have been the case without there being such such a person as Jesus Christ, or any truth even in the miraculous part of his history, would be more extraordinary than any thing that is related by the evangelists; the admission of which makes all the rest perfectly easy and natural.

Mr. Lequinio, a later writer than Mr. Volney, does not deny the existence of Jesus Christ, but what he says of him is more improbable than even *this*. He represents him as the wisest and best man that ever lived, which he certainly was; “ one who was ac-  
 “ tuated by the most sincere good will to all  
 “ the

“ the human race, teaching the great principles of moral equality, and the purest patriotism; braving all dangers, opposing the great, despising alike glory and fortune, equally temperate with respect to himself, beneficent to others, and sympathizing with all; hated by the powerful, whom he provoked, persecuted by the intriguing, whose artifices he exposed, and put to death by a blind and deceived multitude, for whom he had always lived. This generous philanthropist,” he says, “ who wholly sacrificed himself to the public good, who gave his whole existence to the unhappy, and even to his persecutors, never lied but to teach virtue.”—*Prejugés détruits*, p. 286.

Was ever a character in romance more unlike any thing in nature than this? And yet this was an ordinary Jewish carpenter, who had no advantage of education or knowledge of the world. This man, Mr. Lequinio supposes, without any thing supernatural about him, to have acquired this most extra-

D

ordinary

ordinary super-human disposition, a generosity and magnanimity exceeding that of all the heroes and philosophers of antiquity, to have converted thousands of his countrymen to the belief not only of his being a prophet, or a man inspired of God, but even *the Messiah*, whom before this they had universally expected would be a king and a conqueror, and that, after dying in the most public manner, he rose from the dead, as he declared beforehand he should do, in confirmation of his divine mission.

If a person of so excellent a moral character could be a mere impostor; if a man with so few natural advantages could deceive so many of his countrymen, all previously disposed to reject his claim, and enable them to deceive so many more, of all nations, we must say that nature, neither before nor since that time, ever produced such men, either to deceive or to be deceived. It is not however a little extraordinary, that Mr. Lequinio should express this high admiration of a man who directed his whole life, and finally died, to establish

establish that very *prejudice* which he himself is labouring to destroy. He certainly did not judge of the feelings of Jesus Christ by his own.

Some of you may be disposed to arraign the conduct of Providence in not superseding the use of miracles, by such a general plan of things as should render them unnecessary for the moral instruction and improvement of man. But, besides that it might be sufficient in reply to this to say, that it is not our business to dictate to the Author of nature, we may easily perceive that if an attention, on the part of man, to the Author of nature be of any use to us, as it evidently is, this end is much better gained by occasional deviations from the laws of nature than by a rigorous adherence to them.

Such is the constitution of human nature, (which we must take for granted is the best,) that things of constant occurrence, and perfectly regular in their appearance, do not easily excite particular attention. Who of

the bulk of mankind asks the reason why the sun rises, why plants produce their proper seeds, or seeds their respective plants? But unusual appearances excite universal attention, and we cannot be satisfied without knowing why they happen. It is very possible for a nation of men to pass their whole lives in the view of all the wonders of nature, without ever inquiring after the Author of nature. But let their attention be excited by prodigies or miracles, and they will be led to reflect upon the subject, and thus come to revere God in all his works, those of common providence, as well as those of an extraordinary nature; and thus a respect for Him and his laws may possess their minds, and influence their conduct. And no person is authorized to say that this great end can be equally answered without miracles; or occasional deviations from the regular laws of nature.

Let me advise you, in a more especial manner, to read with the greatest attention the historical books of scripture, and see whether they

they bear any marks of forgery. If your minds be truly unprejudiced, you will be satisfied that no books were ever written with so much ingenuofness, or that have so many internal marks of truth. But do not expect that, with regard to composition, and accuracy in other things, they should be without faults. Consider the manners, opinions, and prejudices of the times in which they were written, and make due allowance for them. A tincture of these is an argument of their genuineness. For all that is pretended by well informed Christians is, that the books that are usually termed *sacred*, were written by pious and honest men, well acquainted with the facts which they relate, but that they reason about them in such a manner as it was natural that persons in their circumstances would do. Different writers also, like all other genuine original historians, relate facts with the same variations, with respect to order, and less important circumstances, when they agree in every thing of real consequence.

Consider also that no writer is properly re-

sponsible but for what he relates as of his own knowledge, or the events, and transactions, of his own times. The history of Moses, for example, properly commences with the Exodus. The whole of the book of Genesis must have been collected from tradition, and his account of the creation was such as appeared to him, and other persons of his age, to be well founded. He no where says that he was divinely inspired in what he wrote on that subject.)

That the books of scripture were written by particular divine inspiration, is a thing to which the writers themselves made no pretensions. It is a notion destitute of all proof, and that has done great injury to the evidence of Christianity; as also have other absurd opinions, and various superstitious practices, adopted by Christians of later ages, though from the influence of the circumstances in which they were.

In my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* you will find an account of all, or the principal,



principal, of those opinions and practices, and of the causes which gave rise to them. I beg your attentive perusal of that work, as well as of my *History of the Christian Church to the Fall of the Western Empire*. You will there, I flatter myself, see a natural account of the rise and progress, as I hope you will also see the termination, of those monstrous corruptions of Christianity which justly shock you so much, and which have indisposed so many persons of good sense to all inquiry into the subject.

I mean particularly such doctrines as those of the trinity, transubstantiation, vicarious suffering, and eternal torments; and, above all, the usurpation of all power temporal and spiritual by the Popes, and other ecclesiastical persons, with the horrid cruelties committed by some Christians upon others on account of religion; and that most unnatural union of civil and ecclesiastical authority in all the civil establishments of Christianity in this country, as well as lately with you, from which circumstance alone religion has been enabled to do so much mischief in the world.

These, and many other absurd doctrines and practices, I disclaim as much as you can do. They are far from being countenanced in the scriptures, though, from gross mistake, and from motives of interest and ambition, they have been represented as essential parts of it. You have been taught from your earliest years to consider them in this light; and hence, when you come to reflect, your rejection of the whole system, as manifestly absurd, but without taking pains to examine whether the things at which you revolted were really parts of Christianity, or not. You may also have been insensibly influenced in your rejection of Christianity by a prejudice, natural to men of sense, against whatever is commonly received by the vulgar.

A real philosopher, however, will endeavour to divest his mind of *this*, as well as of every other *prejudice*, and to see things as they really *are*. And I flatter myself, that when your infidelity, which has been produced by the civil establishment of a corrupted Christianity, shall have contributed to the  
overthrow

overthrow of that system, that which is genuine will meet with a candid hearing, and a cordial reception among you. True religion, not enjoined, or salaried, by the state, but the choice of the individual, you will find a valuable support of public virtue and public spirit; and a great security to your liberty. On this account, among others, I shall rejoice if, by any means, you can be induced to give to this important subject the attention which it deserves, and I shall then have double pleasure in subscribing myself

Your fellow citizen,

J. PRIESTLEY.

## LETTER V.

GENTLEMEN,

**I**N the preceding *Letters* I have addressed you as *philosophers* and as *men*, interested in the discovery of important truth, and acquainted with the methods of investigating it. If I were to address you as *politicians* on the subject of *religion*, it would be in the language of the French merchants to your famous Colbert when he asked them what the government could do in favour of trade, *laissez nous faire, let us alone*. It is a business with which, as statesmen, you have nothing at all to do, and in which you can never interfere with any advantage either to *religion*, or to the *state*.

Naturally, there can be no more connexion between *religion*, and *civil government*, than between *philosophy*, *medicine*, or any other branch of knowledge and civil government ;  
the

the objects of both being essentially different. The proper object of civil government is the security of men's persons and property, which requires the union of force; but it has also no respect to any thing beyond the present life. Whereas religion consists of peculiar doctrines and practices, which relate to men, personally and not collectively, considered, with respect to which no union of force can be of any advantage to them; and the great object of it is the happiness of men, not as members of society, but as individuals, and in a future state, to which the power of civil governors does not extend.

With much more reason might the state interfere in directing what *medicines* should be administered to the members of the state, and who should administer them; because it might be said, that the strength of the state depends upon the health and vigour of the citizens. But whatever be men's opinions concerning a future state, and the means of preparing for it, or whether they have any belief in a future state or not, care may be taken by good laws,  
and

and a wise administration of them, to prevent their injuring one another in this life.

As far as religion comes in aid of good morals, it can only be by giving men an idea of its being their duty, from a regard to God, and a future state, to behave well and to befriend their neighbours. But this depends upon the sincerity of their belief in religion, which no power of the state can enforce. Temporal punishments, or worldly emoluments, which are all that civil government can hold out to men, cannot make them *believers*. It can only make them *hypocrites*. And therefore there are more conscientious men among sectaries, who are not favoured, but frowned upon by the state, than among the members of establishments. Are not the Protestants among you at least as good members of society as the Catholics, many of them only nominally so; though the former, besides bearing the whole expence of their own religion, contribute their share to that of the state? It is time that they be relieved, if not indemnified, for this extraordinary expence.

The

The same may be said of the Dissenters in England.

To suppose that Christianity cannot support itself without the aid of civil government, is the greatest reflection upon it, and contradicted by the clearest facts in history. Not only did this religion establish itself in the world without the aid of civil power, but during three centuries, while all the civil powers in the world were hostile to it. And after Christianity had considerable countenance from the Roman emperors, the salaries of Christian ministers arose from the voluntary contributions of the laity, and there was no such thing as *tythe*, or any thing in the form of a *tax*, for its support, for more than a thousand years after the Christian æra.

Nay the wealth of the church, without the aid of the state, grew exorbitant, and often required to be checked. This more than sufficient provision for the clergy, from the superstition of ignorant ages, occasioned such a redundancy in that order of men, that all  
Christian

Christian countries soon groaned under the burden; and an independent subsistence, secured to them by private donations, and the laws of the state, took from them all restraint upon their conduct; so that in many countries they became vicious and abandoned in the extreme, a great cause of the corruption, not of the reformation, of morals.

In this state of things, religion being a mere trade, its doctrines, from causes that I have elsewhere explained, exceedingly absurd, and the practices enjoined by it a miserable superstition, men of good sense and little inquiry, and especially those who were disposed to be licentious, easily became unbelievers. This has been remarkably the case with you, and begins to be so with us. But as all evils, in the course of divine providence, tend to cure themselves, this infidelity, which has been produced by civil establishments of religion, will I hope be the means of overturning them; and then rational Christianity, without any aid from the state, will recommend itself to all thinking and serious men, and the world will be *rechristianized*.

I shall



I shall not trouble you, or myself, with the recital of all the evils that have arisen from civil establishments of Christianity. Almost the whole of the long catalogue of complaints of philosophers, and politicians, against religion have had no other source than this. All religious *persecution*, and the hatred of one sect to another, has been owing to exclusive privileges granted to some sects. In North America, where there is no civil establishment of any form of Christianity, the members of all Christian societies, however discordant, live upon the best terms with one another, and the state is at no expence on account of any of them.

With us the case is widely different, and the consequences are sufficiently apparent. We, who are Dissenters from the establishment, all lie under civil disadvantages, and many of us are not even tolerated by law. In these circumstances every attempt to obtain any relief from our burdens, nay all our endeavours, by means of the press, to enlighten the minds of our countrymen on the  
subject

subject of religion, and especially on the evil of establishments, excites the greatest hatred and animosity against us. This is perfectly natural with men interested in the continuance of the abuses by which they subsist.

What a glorious example would you set the Christian world, if you could relieve civil government of all concern about religion, and leave men to provide for it as they should think proper themselves. No person who has a real value for his religion could complain of this. On the contrary, he would think his religion disgraced by any support from the state. If the zeal of its friends will not provide for its support, it ought to fall. The Protestants among you have not suffered their religion to fail for want of sufficient funds; and do the Catholics think less highly of their religion, or have they less zeal for it than the Protestants have shewn for theirs? I believe not.

I do not mean, in these *Letters*, to do any thing more than to suggest a few hints to lead

lead your thoughts to the subject of *religion*, and its relation to the state, so as to make it appear as worthy as I conceive it to be of your most serious attention. In several of my publications I have considered it much more at large. If you wish to know which of them I would more particularly recommend to your notice, I would take the liberty to mention my *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*, *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, and the *Discourse on the Resurrection of Jesus*, besides the *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, the *History of the Christian Church to the Fall of the Western Empire*, and the *History of early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ*, noticed before. These relate to the subject of religion in general, and the evidence of it. The subject of *civil establishments of Christianity*, I have considered in my *Essay on the first Principles of Civil Government*, in my *Letters to Mr. Burke*, and my *Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*.

With my earnest wishes for your prosperity, and especially for the speedy and happy  
E settlement

settlement of your civil constitution; trusting that it will be favourable to your best interests, by leading to *virtue* and *happiness* (with respect to which I cannot help considering *religion* as of the most eminent use) and with sincere gratitude for the honour you have conferred upon me; while in my native country, which I have faithfully endeavoured to serve, I have found neither protection nor redress, I am

Your fellow citizen,

Clapton, Jan. 21, 1795.  
Of the French Republic 2.

J. PRIESTLEY.

THE END.

AN  
ANSWER  
TO  
Mr. PAINE'S AGE OF REASON,  
BEING A  
CONTINUATION OF LETTERS  
TO THE  
PHILOSOPHERS AND POLITICIANS OF FRANCE,  
ON THE  
SUBJECT OF RELIGION;  
AND OF THE  
LETTERS TO A PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

---

---

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F. R. S.

---

---

WITH A PREFACE BY THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, A.M.

---

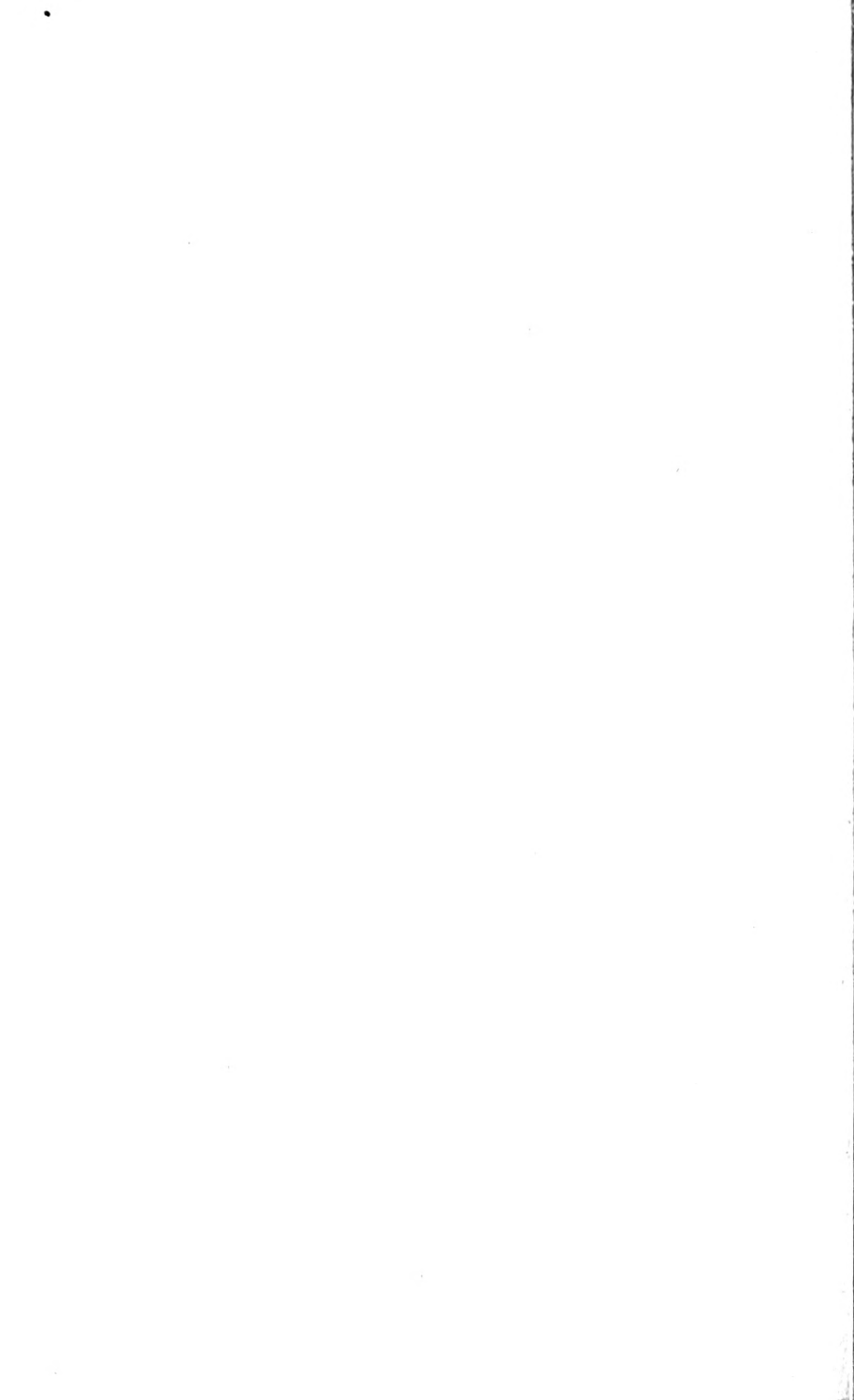
NORTHUMBERLAND TOWN, AMERICA,  
PRINTED IN 1794.

---

L O N D O N :  
REPRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

---

M. DCC. XCV.



---

---

## PREFACE.

**T**HIS pamphlet consists of two tracts, or rather it is the continuation of two different works, which, because they both relate to the same general subject, I publish together. When the works to which they belong shall be reprinted, they will, of course, be separated.

The turn that infidelity has lately taken in France is not a little remarkable; but it promises well for the cause of religion. Whether the belief professed by the National Assembly in the being and attributes of God, and in a future state, be sincere, or not, it shews

the sense they entertain of the *importance* of this faith, to the good conduct and happiness of men, as members of society. And as a comparison of the evidences of *natural* and *revealed* religion, will soon convince all reasonable persons, that the latter is much more free from difficulty than the former, I am persuaded that when the prejudice which is now conceived against christianity, on account of the shocking corruptions and abuses of it, shall begin to wear off, it will be embraced first by philosophers, then perhaps by the French nation in general, and lastly by the world at large; when I have no doubt, it will be found to be infinitely better calculated to answer the purpose not of *moralists* alone, but even of *politicians*, than the principles of mere natural religion.

We must not, however, be surpris'd if infidelity should continue to prevail to a much greater extent than it has done yet. The same general causes, which,

in



in a late publication, I have endeavoured to point out, and which have produced what we now see, must continue to operate some time longer, and the prophecies of scripture, lead us to expect the same. Consequently, the faith of intelligent christians, will be so far from being shaken, that it will be confirmed, by the present appearance of things, though all that is gained by the most rational and effectual defences of christianity, be little more than an increased attachment of the few who are truly serious and considerate.

How exceedingly superficial and frivolous are the hacknied objections to christianity, and how entirely they arise from the grossest ignorance of the subject, will appear from my animadversions on Mr. Paine's boasted work. He would have written more to the purpose, if he had been acquainted with the writings of Voltaire, and other better informed unbelievers. But he

seems entirely unread on the subject, and thereby to be unacquainted with the ground, on which either the friends or the enemies of christianity must stand. Had he been better acquainted with the scriptures, which are a constant subject of his ridicule, he might have made a much more plausible attack upon them.

This, it must be owned, leaves but little merit to the best answerer of Mr. Paine. But it is proper that when, from whatever circumstances, any work is likely to make an unfavourable impression on the minds of men, endeavours should be used to counteract the effects of it. I may also be allowed to make the same apology for my frequent defences of revealed religion, that Voltaire did for his infinitely varied attacks upon it, *viz.* that different works fall into different hands, and provided the great end be answered, repetitions are not useless. For my own part, so sensible am I of the unspeakable value of revealed religion, and of the

I

sufficiency

sufficiency of its proofs, that I think no man can employ his time better, than in giving just exhibitions of them, and in diversifying those exhibitions, as particular occasions call for them.

But the more I attend to this subject, the more sensible I am, that no defence of christianity can be of any avail till it be freed from the many corruptions and abuses which have hitherto incumbered it; and this must particularly strike every reader of Mr. Paine's *Age of Reason*. The exposing of these corruptions, I therefore think to be the most essential preliminary to the defence of christianity, and consequently I shall omit no fair opportunity of reprobating in the strongest terms, such doctrines as those of *transubstantiation*, the *trinity*, *atonement*, &c. &c. &c. to whatever odium I may expose myself with such christians as, from the best motives, but from ignorance, consider them as essential to the scheme. That these doctrines, and others which are still generally received even by protestants,

*are* corruptions of christianity, and were introduced into it from the principles of heathen philosophy and the maxims and customs of heathen religions, I have demonstrated in various of my writings, especially in my *History of the corruptions of christianity*, a third edition of which will soon be published in this country. Here we happily enjoy the greatest freedom of discussion, as well as the freest exercise of religion, without the interference of the state. Here, therefore, we may expect the natural happy effect of true freedom, in the gradual prevalence of truth, and the manifold desirable consequences of it.

I am well aware that I shall be blamed by many sincere friends of christianity, who may approve of my zeal, and even the ground of my defence of our common principles in other respects, that I so frequently introduce what is offensive to them, with respect to my ideas of christianity. But it is in the nature of things impossible to separate the defence

of christianity from a view of what I deem to be its true principles, and which alone I can undertake to defend. The persons who object to me on this account, are equally at liberty to defend christianity on *their* peculiar principles, though they introduce things offensive to me. Free discussion will in time enable us to demonstrate the truth of christianity, if it be true, and also to ascertain the genuine principles of it, whatever they be. May the God of truth lead us into all truth!

Northumberland Town, Pennsylvania,  
October 27, 1794.

---

**N. B.** *Some Observations on the Causes of Infidelity*, printed in America, is the Publication referred to above, p. v. l. 1.



## PREFACE

BY THE EDITOR.

**T**HE well known author of this tract will ever rank high, as one of the very few, in different ages, distinguished of heaven, who, by superior powers of mind, and the virtuous and indefatigable exertion of them, has extended the \* limits of

\* Some being ignorant of, and others having affected to depreciate Dr. Priestley's merits, I shall insert his character in this respect, as given me in the year 1787, by a common friend, Mr. Kirwan, certainly a most competent judge. See "An Address to the Students of Oxford and Cambridge, p. 68."

"To enumerate Dr. Priestley's discoveries would be, in fact, to enter into a detail of most of those that have been made within the last fifteen years. How many invisible fluids, whose existence evaded the sagacity of former ages, has he made known to us? The very air we breathe, he has taught us to analyze, to examine, to improve: a substance so little known, that even the precise effect of respiration was an enigma till he explained it. He first made known to us the proper food of vegetables, and in what the difference between these and animal substances consisted. To him pharmacy is indebted for the method of making artificial mineral waters, as well as for the shorter method of preparing other medicines; metallurgy, for more powerful and cheaper solvents; and chemistry, for such a variety of discoveries as it would be tedious to recite: discoveries, which have new modelled that science, and drawn to it, and to this country, the attention of all Europe. It is certain, that since the year 1775, the eye and regards of all the learned bodies in Europe, have been directed to this country by his means. In every

of human knowlege, and advanced the useful arts and comforts of life; and who, at the same time, by his various researces and writings, has contributed to the virtue and happiness of mankind, especially by helping to dispel the mists of ignorance and superstition, which had stifled and well-nigh extinguished the revelation which the benevolent Creator had made of his will to them, and of the way to his favour for ever.

Still actuated by the same desires, and engaged in the same pursuits, to serve others, driven now from his native land, by a revival of those High-church persecuting principles, which peopled the desarts of America, in the days of the Stuarts, he has found an asylum, and been welcomed with honour into that country, which had lately to contend for its own liberty and independance; and which is glad, and able to receive into its capacious bosom, all the sufferers from religious or civil tyranny throughout the world.

As every event whatsoever, every circumstance of the life of every man, is ordained and over-ruled, by the infinitely wise and good Creator, for the virtuous improvement, and present and final happiness of the universe, and of each individual in it, we may be fully persuaded, that where man intends evil, God intends and brings forth good, and that the best purposes of the divine government will be promoted by the means of those unworthy passions;

every philosophical treatise, his name is to be found, and in almost every page. They all own that most of their discoveries are due, either to the repetition of his discoveries, or to the hints scattered through his works."

which



which compelled this eminent person to take refuge in America. Nay, already they have begun to shew themselves, in the reception which has been given to Dr. Priestley, and in the general estimation in which he is held, notwithstanding the base arts which have been used, (of which more hereafter) to poison that people's minds, and turn them against him.

I find also from the accounts of others, besides his own letters, that a very general curiosity is excited about him and his writings. Many of these have already found their way to that continent; and cannot but conduce, in a variety of ways, to the improvement of its inhabitants; and must, in one instance particularly, be of most essential service, in a country, where, from various causes, from the inhabitants mixing so much with the subjects of Great Britain, and their intimate connexion with the French officers who assisted them in combating for their liberties, a very general scepticism has taken place, especially in the Southern States. Dr. Priestley's invaluable works, the Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion, his History of the Corruptions of Christianity, together with the Letters to Unbelievers, by which some of our best writers have since profited, cannot but be of infinite use.

It was natural for Mr. Paine to send over, and for the Americans to be inquisitive after his famous work, "The Age of Reason," which had reached the country before Dr. Priestley's arrival in it, and  
was

was much extolled and circulated. He soon found that it was desired and expected, that he should make some reply to it, and undertake a cause, which he was held so well able to defend.

Mr. Paine is very far from being a contemptible adversary, as he possesses the talent, perhaps above all other writers, of arresting the attention of his readers, and making them pleased and desirous of going on with him, which, with many, is one step towards convincing them.

Without disparagement to the learned and ingenious replies, which others have made, to this popular work against revelation, he has here met with an opponent, who has most thoroughly confuted, if he has not done something even toward converting him. Here are no expressions of astonishment at any of his assertions, however strange and singular; no accusations of his writing with bad views, or that he is to be blamed for writing against the Bible, if he disapproves or thinks it a bad book. But with that candour and mutual respect, which becomes men canvassing important points, and seeking after truth, Dr. Priestley frankly acknowledges those gross errors among christians, which Mr. Paine justly reprobates, whilst he detects and plainly shews him his mistakes in every thing of importance, which he has advanced against real christianity, and that it stands firm and secure against his objections, as against all others.

The continuation of the Doctor's letters to the French politicians and philosophers, which constitutes the first part of the present publication, is admir-

admirably contrived, like those which have gone before, to recover them to the belief of christianity, which they have discarded. And his efforts, with those of others, whom Providence shall hereafter raise up, will, I hope, be effectual, to plant again the gospel, which had been really lost, in that country. For the christian religion, as they had metamorphosed and corrupted it, and in the state in which it remains in Italy, Naples, &c. and in Spain and Portugal, the dire abodes of the Inquisition, had actually generated and tends to generate, that infidelity and atheism into which a great part of the French nation had fallen, and which was becoming universal. And as many of our own countrymen, from various, long-substisting causes, that might be pointed out, and not a few among the younger part of the learned professions, from the reading of this work of Mr. Paine's, and from the profelyting zeal of some \* *minute philosophers* lately risen among

\* Persons of no mean abilities, and of acknowledged worth and probity, the fruits, not of their philosophy, but of the christian religion in which they were educated, and the early habits they had derived from it; yet surely, *very minute philosophers*, and blind, who can argue as if there was no God; who can maintain that the eye was not made for seeing; who, in the face of day and of the sun, can behold this fair fabric of the world, with marks of wisdom in every part, and not perceive it to be the work of an intelligent creator.

Hear however the verdict of true philosophy. "I had rather believe all the fables in the *Legend*, and the *Talmud*, and the *Alcoran*, than that this universal frame is without a mind. And therefore God never wrought miracles to convince Atheism, because his ordinary works convince it. It is true, a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to Atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth mens minds about to *Religion*. For while the mind of man looketh upon  
second

among us, are said to be hastening into the same dreary gulph, it is not too much to expect, that a due attention to this work of Dr. Priestley's, and to his other writings, may save them from it.

What now could raise up such a storm against so respectable a character, as to constrain him to retire a voluntary exile from his country, to which he was so singular an ornament, to whose benefit his whole life and studies had been dedicated, and where he was so justly loved and esteemed by the good and the liberal, and by some of the most exalted characters?

In the number of these, to confine myself to this metropolis only, and to such of them who have finished their part, and left this stage of human life, I shall begin with one of the first characters of our times, one of the most amiable and benevo-

second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no further: but when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate and linked together, it must fly to Providence and *Deity* †."

I would add, that not to worship this beneficent parent of the universe, would stop the current of those affections which belong to him, and which are as natural as those to our fellow-creatures, and make no small part of our happiness; and would, by degrees, extinguish all thought of him, and lead to doubt, if not to deny, his very existence, with all its immoral consequences; especially, if the fashionable system be taken up when young, before any better habits are formed. A subject, this, not sufficiently considered by the ingenious author of the "*Memoirs of Planetes*," who in the compass of a few lines, (p. 113.) wipes away all application to God by prayer, not reflecting, how poor a support he leaves for *the practice of justice and benevolence to our fellow-creatures*, which he rightly makes *the road to happiness*, but surely not the *only* road.

† Bacon's Essays.

lent of human beings, Dr. Price, whose life was spent in learned labours for the good of his country and of mankind, and who, by his writings still continues to instruct and serve them: with him Dr. Priestley lived in long and uninterrupted friendship, cemented by the similarity of their studies and pursuits, though differing to the last in some points, which are held to be considerable and important.

That generous, public spirited person, Sir George Savile, his country's guardian and delight, ever held him in high honour and esteem for his uncommon abilities and virtues, and for his skill in the arts and philosophy, which he loved; and was always happy when he could see him, and particularly to be his hearer at the chapel in Essex-street, where he himself attended.

With Mr. Lee, the late Attorney General, a man of fine talents, quick discernment, unbounded candor and goodness of heart, being near him in age and place of birth, he had an intimate friendship, till the death of the former dissolved it. As no man was a better judge, no one in general more admired and prized Dr. Priestley's moral, theological, and political writings; and among the latter, his Letters to Mr. Burke, occasioned by his "Reflections on the Revolution in France, &c." These Letters were considered by him as a masterpiece in their way, interspersed with fine strokes of wit and humor, and the truest eloquence, and a full confutation of the false reasoning, and dangerous arbitrary principles, advanced in that celebrated work. Only he was apprehensive, that he might hurt his usefulness, and increase the prejudice of many against him, by his well-meant,

but injudicious predictions of the fatal consequences that would ensue from the neglect of a timely reformation.

At Mr. Lee's house in Lincoln's-inn-fields, for near twenty years, we were wont to spend the Sunday evenings together, whenever they were in town; happy nights of chearful pleasantry, and free discussion of all subjects, (for two men, more formed and furnished for social converse are rarely found) the recollection of which will be always profitable and pleasing, never, alas, now to return! But all does not end here: for there is an assured hope of living again, and conversing with virtuous friends, in a more durable and still happier state.

I must not omit two prelates, truly to be revered, as being singularly free from the narrow prejudices attached to their order, who were not ashamed of professing themselves the friends of Dr. Priestley; the accomplished Bishop Shipley, the friend also of Dr. Franklin and of America, with whom he was long acquainted; and the venerable Bishop of Carlisle, Dr. Law, who was in perfect accord with him in his sentiments on most subjects.

This short list will, for brevity's sake, finish with one more name, ever to be honoured. To shew on what terms of mutual affection and high esteem, Dr. Priestley conversed with that true patriot, christian, scholar, and philosopher of the first rank, Dr. John Jebb, there needeth only to mention the Dedication to him, of his Treatise on the Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity. In that beautiful, and luminous composition, proceeding from the fulness of the heart, and conviction of the truth of that glorious principle in which they both agreed, you  
read

read the true character of the men, what excellent creatures they were, and what all may become, who are under the like influences.

Dr. Priestley however had one quality, an ardent, active zeal for the reformation of things confessedly wrong and hurtful, which was not calculated to procure a general love and esteem, but often the contrary, in the present state of things, and imperfect condition of mankind.

Penetrated with the most absolute conviction of the reality of the Divine Unity, and of the connection which the belief of it had with the virtue, the peace, and happiness of mankind, he beheld with deep regret, the whole christian world, the protestant part of it by no means excepted, sunk in idolatry, and so far gone from the idea of the Divine Being, taught by the jewish lawgiver, and reinforced by Jesus Christ, as to make the same Jesus, his messenger, the supreme God himself, and to worship him equally with the Father of himself and of the universe. He therefore hesitated not, in his immortal writings, from the press, in the smallest size, and to the level of the lowest capacities; as also in larger and more learned volumes; from the pulpit also on public and proper occasions, (for otherwise his discourses were on things that related to a virtuous life and practice) to maintain and defend, that there was no God but the Father; and that the worship of Jesus, by protestants, was equally idolatrous with the worship of his mother Mary, by the papists.

He was also much grieved with the nicety and reserve, which some professed unitarians shewed, in not publicly owning their principles, in still

frequenting the public established worship, which to them was idolatrous; and in scrupling to call it such.

But perhaps in nothing did Dr. Priestley give more offence, or more excite the ill-will of many against him, than by those freedoms which he took in censuring, what he held above all other things the most baneful to true religion and the gospel, *the interference of the civil power in the things of religion, all usurpation upon conscience, wherever lodged, or by whomsoever exercised.* This question he was called forth to discuss on many occasions, in defence of himself, and of all Dissenters from the State-religion; but particularly in a work, at first published separately, in the form of Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham, now printed together in one volume.

An ordinary person would have sunk under the means that were used to asperse and depreciate his character. But conscious of his own upright views and abilities, and of the falshood of the charges brought against him, and of the goodness of the cause he had undertaken, he, with perfect ease and composure, repelled the attacks of his adversaries: for he was by no means the aggressor. With a continual vein of pleasantry, he plays with the arguments urged against him, in refuting them; and if his remarks are sometimes severe and cutting as a razor, the reader will judge, whether there was not a cause. Swift's Draper's letters certainly had not more true humour, nor were more plain, and adapted to every understanding. Some may be pleased with  
the



the sample of his stile and manner, which I have put in the margin \*, and perhaps be diverted with it.

Bishop Hurd, in the life of his friend and patron, Bishop Warburton, lately published, has thought fit to declare, in very strong terms, his condemnation of Socinians in general, and of Dr. Priestley in particular. Evidently alluding to and in contrast

\* "A good lady, who wrote me an anonymous and scolding letter, on the idea, as she said, that, being unworthy of the castigation of any *man*, the pen of a *woman* was more properly employed, began her curious letter with saying, that I "seized on Mr. Madan as a cat seizes on a mouse." But if she had recollected that both Mr. Madan and Mr. Burn were the *aggressors*, in this controversy, she would have seen that they considered themselves as the cats, and me as the defenceless mouse. However if they have found themselves mistaken, and see reason to think, with my anonymous correspondent, that I am the cat and they the mice, I hope they will be satisfied that, though I have played with them a little, I have done them no material injury, (such as they would have done to me) but have taught them for the future not wantonly to provoke other animals of prey, more savagely disposed than myself.

"It is true, I am an avowed enemy to the *church establishment* of this country, but by no means to any who belong to it. I write against Calvinism, but have the greatest respect for many Calvinists, and wish to make them exchange their *darkness* for my *light*. I am also an enemy to Atheism and Deism, but not to Atheists or Deists. I have a particular friendship for many of them in this country and other countries, and I write in order to inform and reclaim them. There is nothing personal in all this. They think as unfavorably of my *system*, as I do of *theirs*. Let all points of difference be fairly discussed. Truth will be a gainer by it. But let us respect *one another* as we respect *truth* itself; love all, and wish the good of all without distinction. This is true candour, and consistent with the greatest zeal for our particular opinions." *Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, p. 186.

with him, he mentions the dissenting ministers, with whom Bishop Warburton was acquainted, as men " who did not then glory in Socinian impieties, or indulge themselves in rancorous invectives against the Established Church." p. 112.

Again, p. 119. speaking of Bp. Warburton, he says: " Next to Infidels professed, there were no set of writers he treated with less ceremony, than the Socinian; in whom he saw an immoderate presumption, and suspected not a little ill faith. For, professing to believe the divine authority of the scriptures, they take a licence in explaining them, which could hardly, he thought, consist with that belief.—In short, he regarded Socinianism (the idol of our self-admiring age) as a sort of infidelity in disguise, and as such he gave it no quarter." One cannot help lamenting that Bp. Hurd in his very advanced years, in writing the life of his friend Bp. Warburton, should feel it either necessary or right, to try to enhance his character, by traducing a whole body of christians, neither destitute of learning, nor small in number, and of well known *probity*, (having nothing to gain but perfection) though he call it in question: and this for holding sentiments, which they certainly think they derive from the teachings of their divine master Christ, and for which they give their reasons, which are before the public, and which surely Bp. Hurd ought rather to have endeavoured to confute, and set them right, instead of merely railing against and giving them bad names.

If we may judge of Bishop Hurd from his theological writings, he appears to have given  
more

more of his application to philology and the *belles lettres*, than to the study of the scriptures, which may have prevented his attending to the importance of exhibiting them to the English nation as genuine and correct as possible. For otherwise he could not have spoken so degradingly\* of the labors of a learned prelate, Dr. Lowth, much his superior in his own, and in every way; nor have endeavoured to throw cold water on the noble design of a new translation of the Bible, which Bishop Lowth had so much at heart, and strove to promote.

Happy would it have been, if Bishop Hurd had been disposed, at the time, to give attention to the weighty "Considerations" addressed to him by Dr. Priestley, in the conclusion of the second volume of his "History of the Corruptions of Christianity." He might thereby have been happily influenced to what would have turned out to the honor and furtherance of the Gospel, as well as for the benefit of the State. But he had taken his ply, and the close of the scene is too near to look for a change, on this side the grave.

There was however always a large number among the clergy, and members of the church of England as well as the Dissenters, throughout the kingdom, though few in comparison of the large mass, who were not backward in testifying, nor some of them in publicly declaring, their value for Dr. Priestley's exalted character and extraordinary merits, and their obligations to him

\* Life of Bishop Warburton, p. 94.

for the benefits they received from his writings. At the time, when a panic was spread through the nation, and too generally credited, of secret plots and conspiracies to destroy the king and the constitution, and to level all ranks and property, and multitudes thronged to court to testify their loyalty, and no obloquy and abuse were thought too gross to be vented against the Dissenters, and Dr. Priestley by name, who were held forth to the public as accomplices in the nefarious design: indignation at the sight of such imposition and easy credulity on the one side and on the other, and the mean adulation of many, but not springing from any disrespect to the prince on the throne, drew from a genius of superior order, the following strains addressed to Dr. Priestley, which Milton himself might have been proud to own :

Stirs not thy spirit, Priestley, as the train  
 With low obeisance and with servile phrase,  
 File behind file, advance, with supple knee,  
 And lay their necks beneath the foot of power?  
 Burns not thy cheek indignant, when thy name,  
 On which delighted science lov'd to dwell,  
 Becomes the bandied theme of hooting crowds?  
 With timid caution, or with cool reserve,  
 When e'en each reverend Brother keeps aloof,  
 Eyes the struck deer, and leaves thy naked side  
 A mark for power to shoot at? Let it be.  
 " On evil days though fallen and evil tongues,"  
 To thee, the slander of a passing age  
 Imports not. Scenes like these hold little space  
 In his large mind, whose ample stretch of thought  
 Grasps future periods.—Well can't thou afford

To give large *credit* for that debt of fame  
 Thy country owes thee. Calm thou can't consign it  
 To the slow payment of that distant day,  
 If distant, when thy name, to freedom's join'd,  
 Shall meet the thanks of a regenerate land.

Dec. 29, 1792.

The *Times*, and other ministerial prints, kept no bounds in throwing their malignant aspersions upon Dr. Priestley, after the burning of his house, library, &c.; with a view to represent him, as having brought down this vengeance justly upon himself, for his pretended republicanism and hostility to government; on the principle, no doubt, of the Italian assassins, the injurer never forgives.

It was asserted in this paper of the 19th of July, 1791, that at the dinner, on the preceding 14th of July, to celebrate the French Revolution, one of the first toasts that was drank, was, *Destruction to the present government*, and, *The King's Head upon a charger*. And it was immediately spread through the kingdom, that it was Dr. Priestley, who gave this toast, although he was not present on the occasion. This rumour was at the time publicly contradicted, and proved to be false, yet the story still continues to have credit with many persons, who probably never saw the fact truly stated. This Paper, with some others, seem to have had a standing order to calumniate Dr. Priestley at all seasons, under the notion that some of their dirt must stick.

One other instance only of their scandalous behaviour to Dr. Priestley, first openly exposed a few weeks ago, I shall transcribe, from one of the public prints, that it may not die away, but remain a monument of their inventive faculty.

A pa-

A paragraph inserted in the *True Briton*, and the *Sun*, of the 11th of December, 1794,

“ There is a gentleman living in Leadenhall-street, who went over to New York in the same vessel with Dr. Priestley. He says nothing could surpass the chagrin and disappointment of the Doctor on his arrival there, at the dearness of provisions, the cool manner in which he was received, and the difficulty there is for a European to settle himself to his mind. Two young men from Birmingham, whom he had brought up *Unitarians*; whom he had clothed, educated and fed; whose passage he had paid, to that Land of Promise, on condition of their serving him there, quitted their master the third day after their arrival, saying, that they were free to do as they liked, and that they would serve him no longer. The Doctor found no invitation to preach in any of the churches in that Country, which likewise was mortifying; for it appears they do not like a *political gospel* from the pulpit there. A Mr. Lyon, a rich farmer, who went over at the same time, and bought an estate, sold it soon after on account of the manners of the people; his workmen, in smock frocks, would dine with him, and bring their companions with them: In short, the traits of rustic democracy are extremely laughable, at the same time that it is clear, they must render America intolerable to any man accustomed to live as we do in England. America is only good for the stout-working-man, who labours himself, but not at all for the rich Farmer or Manufacturer. The idea of emigrating  
6 there

there will soon cease; and there are now at New York numbers of English who would return, but their money is all gone, and they have not the means."

---

## A REPLY TO THE ABOVE.

A paragraph having appeared in the papers (the True Briton, and the Sun) of the 11th of December, 1794, stating the disappointment of Dr. Priestley, and Mr. Lyon, on their arrival in America; the latter, being now returned to this Country for a short time, declares the whole to be false; and though the Doctor's character stands too high, both there and here, in the estimation of every well wisher to the human race, to need Mr. Lyon's defence, he thinks it but justice, in the Doctor's absence, to blunt the point of an Assassin's dagger. If Addresses from all the different Societies, (the Tories excepted) and deputations waiting upon him in all the principal Towns through which he passed, congratulating him upon, and welcoming his arrival in their country, and the offer of the Professorship of Chemistry in Philadelphia, are marks of the cool reception he met with, it must be allowed the assertions are true. As to the two young men, mentioned as coming from Birmingham, who shewed so much ingratitude to the Doctor, the fact is, there was no person whatever on board the ship from that place, nor any other person, to whom the assertion is applicable. That the Doctor received no invitations to preach, is equally without foundation. A general

neral dislike to political doctrine from the Pulpit, shews the good sense of Americans, and this country, by holding it in proper contempt, would do well to copy after them. As to Mr. Lyon, he never purchased any estate, of course could not sell it with loss, neither had he any servants there; if he had, he can have no hesitation in saying, he should have been as well served by them, as he was in England, and with as much proper attention and respect. The Country is not a good one for idle and debauched characters to emigrate to, because they will find nobody coming under that denomination will get employment; but Mr. Lyon defies the proof of a single instance of any person, not answering the above description, wishing to return to England, except like himself to prepare for a final removal and settlement there. Servants, and labourer's wages are more than double what they are here, notwithstanding the Farmers and Graziers profits are great in proportion. Masons, both stone and brick, Carpenters, Cabinet-makers, Mill-wrights, Wheel-wrights, Blacksmiths, Shoemakers, and Taylors wages are two thirds higher than in this Country.'

The same bad spirit which persecuted Dr. Priestley at home, produced an infamous and formal attack upon him from the Press, after his retreat to America; the title of which was, "Observations on the Emigration of Dr. Joseph Priestley, and on the several Addresses delivered to him, on his  
his



his arrival at New York. Philadelphia, printed: London, reprinted. 1794.

In this piece, the writer represents Dr. Priestley as a firebrand, an open and avowed enemy to the constitution of his country; whose property had indeed been destroyed by a mob for those very principles, but that he had received ample reparation for his losses, notwithstanding his whining lamentations every where to the contrary, &c. &c.

I shall not enter into the question, whether the pamphlet was first conceived and originated in America, or in England, though not a few incline to think it, in a great measure, of English growth. From whatever quarter it issued, it is the work of a man who sheweth himself void of truth, and of every moral principle, if he were an Englishman; if an American, a gross and ignorant calumniator.

I am happy, however, to be able to speak from knowledge, that in America, this libellous publication, which was designed to calumniate, and instigate the country against Dr. Priestley, on his first arrival, had quite the contrary effect, and instead of answering the vile purpose, did really recommend him more than a laboured panegyric on his character could have done. For the Americans were not wholly ignorant (what civilized country in the world is ignorant) of his writings, of his being one of the first philosophers of the age, and an eminent defender of true religion.

But what still most of all helped to give credit to, and to spread this atrocious attack on the most virtuous of men, was the Review of it, made by the British Critic, for the month of November,

1794, and the giving it the seal of their approbation.

Be the original author of the pamphlet who he will, and whatever the degree of his guilt, their's is of much deeper die, who could coolly and deliberately adopt and recommend it, as they could not but know it to be a tiffue of abominable calumnies.

The Reviewer sets out with great solemnity; and with rhetorical art and studied malice, strives to lift up his little pamphlet to the rank and dignity of larger volumes, on account of the importance of the testimony it gives concerning Dr. Priestley; and for that end labours to prove it of American origin. Let the reader judge of the complexion of the piece by the pompous stile of the very first sentence in it.

*“ We sometimes elevate a pamphlet, on account of its importance, to a rank among our primary articles, and this honour is peculiarly due to a stranger, who comes forward to give his decision as an umpire, on points wherein the passions of Englishmen may be supposed sufficiently interested to bias their judgment.”*

The rest of the review is taken up, with a crafty selection of the most atrocious accusations at full length, with short innuendos, that they forbear \* to quote some passages out of concern for the Doctor, but really to excite the greater attention to them; giving, in their comments throughout,

\* “ We shall not insert the conjectures that follow, because we *hope* they are too severe.”

a force and sting to the vilest insinuations, which they would not otherwise have had.

Did these Reviewers never hear, that Dr. Priestley has been an eminent Tutor of youth, a teacher of the gospel, beloved and esteemed by all to whom he has borne these relations; a philosopher of some note? How can they then paint him merely as a monster that delights in blood and confusion; for nothing else can their readers gather from their exhibition of him and his character.

If you had looked, Gentlemen, into his numerous writings, would you not have perceived, for he is plainness and simplicity itself, that he had been from early youth devoted to God, and to virtuous pursuits; that he has never been influenced by views of interest and mean ambition, but earnestly sought the truth, and openly professed what he discovered, for which he has been a sufferer from very early life to this hour that he is persecuted by you.

If you would take his character from his enemies and opposers, who have *openly* owned themselves as such, and not from such assassins in the dark, whom you chuse to trust; do you find that they ever allege against him any thing mercenary, or cruel or deceitful, or charge him with any crime, but a too vehement zeal and ardor for a reformation in church and state, which he believes would save both, but they say, would throw all things into confusion and desolation? And is he for this to be frowned upon by men in power and the governors of his country; to have his house, noble library, philosophical apparatus, and valuable

able manuscripts, burnt and destroyed, and his life endangered, and to be jeered and insulted when he complains of the heavy loss? Is he for this to be hunted down, like a wild beast, from his native land, to which he has been the greatest benefactor, to be pursued across the great ocean, and not be suffered, as far as ye could prevent it, to have a friend to compassionate him, or a place where he could lay his head in peace and safety?

I spare to say, to whom vulgar report ascribes the direction of your periodical publication, especially on theological subjects, and what relates to men's civil and religious rights. But this is an ill specimen of the discharge of the office ye have undertaken, a very honourable one in itself, to form the public mind and taste, to enable your readers to make a right judgment of the truth and falshood of the things and characters that come before them.

O moral degradation! O shame to science! when its votaries can lend their rare abilities, heaven's gift for better purposes, to please the great, and gain their favour, who are far from being the most virtuous; and to lower and depress eminent virtue, and hinder others from reaping advantage from that example and those writings, by which they might be formed to goodness, and excellence, and happiness for ever!

A COPY of the present work was very lately put into my hands, by a gentleman who had brought it from America, when I resolved to make it public  
and

and print it immediately, having been much inquired after, the subject also being very seasonable and important. It soon occurred, that it would be desirable, and proper for me, if I could acquit myself in it in any tolerable manner, to take the opportunity that offered, of saying something in behalf of an honoured and beloved friend, that might remove or soften the violent prejudices entertained against him, in this country, and in this country only; for in all others, his fame is great, and his character revered.

It is a fact too well known, and of every day's experience, that these prejudices here run so strong, that, in general, in promiscuous public companies, among the clergy, nobility, men of fortune, those that are already raised high, or that look for preferment in the different learned professions, all who are connected with ministers of state, it is an affront to mention the name of Priestley, and to commend his writings would be followed with a dead silence, if not a rebuke. I have therefore endeavoured, in the foregoing sheets, to vindicate his fair fame, and to indicate the causes of this antipathy, and mean, unmanly conduct, which can only injure the persons themselves, by keeping up an aversion to this eminent person, and his writings, by which they might be benefited and improved; but cannot hurt him now, who is out of the reach of all personal insult.

Unquestionably, the severe truths Dr. Priestley delivered, irritated the minds of some against him, who are against all reformation in church and

state; but he has chiefly suffered by the spirit and temper of the times being changed, since the period that the venerable Hoadly went off the stage, who would have embraced our author with affection and esteem, and protected him. This spirit, much increased within a few years, has not only vented itself against him, but has caused continual migrations of most valuable persons among the different classes of Dissenters, to seek for that peace and liberty in a foreign land, which they could not enjoy at home.

Dr. Priestley's enemies, however, by their ignorant, malevolent detraction, cannot make him unhappy, but only hurt themselves. Changing his country, he changes not those habits, which form the virtuous, the holy, the benevolent, the upright character. These constitute happiness, these accompany a man wherever he goes, of which no malice or violence can deprive him. In his passage to America, which was unusually long, upwards of eight weeks, he was happy, as all such ever will be, in contemplating the new scenes of nature, which presented themselves to view, which he describes in his letters, and speaks of observations made by him, that suggested various experiments, which he should prosecute, when he could get his apparatus at liberty. Ever intent also upon sowing the good seed of truth and virtue, at all seasons, and in all places, in trust that something of good might spring up afterwards, as no virtuous effort is ever lost, he found opportunity for this most pleasing employment, which would be the more likely

likely to succeed, as he is always chearful, and the farthest possible from all religious gloom, nor disposed ever unseasonably to obtrude advice or instruction. Mentioning in his first letter, the variety of characters that were in the ship, some that did not trouble themselves much about religion, but "a number of serious persons, universally Calvinists, though the majority were moderate, as you will suppose," says he, "on their applying to me to perform divine service to them. This I did with much satisfaction, when the weather and other circumstances would permit, several others of the passengers joining us." These things are not mentioned as being peculiar or extraordinary, but to shew his bent and disposition.

Never was any one's bias and turn more mistaken, than in his being reckoned a political character; although, like Locke and Newton before him (at the time of the Revolution) he would have been ready to stand forth, at any hazard, when properly called out, and his country's liberties in danger. What he says of himself, in a letter soon after his arrival in America, speaks the truth concerning him, in this respect. "As I am much attended to, and my writings, which were in a manner unknown, begin to be inquired after, I propose to get my small pamphlets immediately printed. I shall carefully avoid all the party politics of the country: for I have no other objects besides religion and philosophy.

I cannot conclude better than with an extract from his last letter, which shews his views and

designs to be the same which they have been from early life.

It is dated the latter end of February, from Northumberland town, upon a branch of the Susquehanna, the place of his residence.

“ You are concerned, as I apprehended you would be, at my fixing in this place, so much out of the world as you actually take it to be. But had you been here, you would not, I think, have advised me to do any other than I have done, distant as it is from my original views.”

Then follows a large satisfactory detail of his reasons for declining the invitation to the Chemical Professorship at Philadelphia, which was made to him in the handsomest manner, and was not for some time after, if it be now filled up, with a hope that he might change his determination. He then goes on:

“ As to my usefulness in other respects, I really think it will *eventually* be greater in consequence of not immediately forcing myself into a more public situation. My writings which are now much inquired after, and were not known or thought of before, will prepare the way for my preaching in Philadelphia, which I am determined upon, about two months the next winter. In the mean time I shall have a small congregation here, all the more intelligent people in the place having agreed to join in building me a place of worship. We shall first build a smaller place, which may afterwards serve for a dwelling house, or a library-room, which we talk of establishing, and afterwards to erect a place of some elegance; the  
ground



ground for which I have already secured. This town not only will be, but even is, a place of greater resort than you may imagine. And if we establish a College here, I do not think that I could any where be fixed to more advantage; especially if it be considered, that I have here the leisure for my pursuits that I could not have in a populous town, and the climate, &c. much superior to any thing near the coast in several important respects."



# The CONTENTS.

LETTERS addressed to the Philosophers and Politicians of France.

	LETTER vi.	
Of the best Method of communicating moral Instruction to man	- - - -	1
	LETTER vii.	
Of Historical Evidence	- - - -	9
	LETTER viii.	
Of the Evidence of a future State	- - - -	15

Letters to a *Philosophical Unbeliever*.

## PART III.

	LETTER i.	
Of the Sufficiency of the Light of Nature for the Purpose of moral Instruction	- - - -	27
	LETTER ii.	
Of the Nature of Revelation, and its proper Evidence		38
	LETTER iii.	
Of the Object of Christianity, and of the History of Jesus	- - - -	46
	LETTER iv.	
Of the proper Origin of the Scheme of Christianity, and Antiquity of the Books of the New Testament	- - - -	63
	LETTER v.	
Of Mr. Paine's Ideas of the Doctrines and Principles of Christianity	- - - -	77
	LETTER vi.	
Of Prophecy	- - - -	89
	LETTER vii.	
The Conclusion	- - - -	96



# LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO THE

PHILOSOPHERS *and* POLITICIANS

OF

FRANCE.

---

## LETTER VI.

*Of the best Method of communicating moral  
Instruction to Man.*

MY FELLOW CITIZENS,

I HAVE read with pleasure, and even with enthusiasm, the admirable *Report of Robespierre* on the subject of *morals and religion*, and rejoice to find by it, that so great and happy a change has taken place in the sentiments of the leading men of France, since the year 1774, when I was in your country. Then, excepting Mr. Necker, who was a Protestant, every person of eminence to whom I had access, and, as I saw reason to think, every man of letters almost without exception, was a professed atheist, and an unbeliever in a future state on any principle whatever. At present your whole National Assembly have professed

B

their

their belief in the being of a God, and also in a future state, on the principle of the *immortality of the soul*, as highly useful, if not necessary, to the observance of those moral duties, which are essential to the well being of society.

Taking it for granted, that these are now *your* sentiments, as well as those of the National Assembly, many of whose members rank with philosophers, as well as politicians, give me leave freely to expostulate with you on your rejection of christianity, which has no other than the same object, and the principles of which appear to me to be much better calculated to answer your great purpose. The laws of morality, whether they respect the Supreme Being, our fellow creatures, or ourselves, such as the obligation of oaths, the duties of justice and humanity, those of men in the relations of magistrates and common citizens, of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants, and the rules of sobriety and moderation in the government of all our passions, are taught with infinitely greater clearness and authority in the scriptures, as the voice of God, the common parent of the human race, than they are by the mere light of nature.

The sufficiency of the light of nature is the frequent boast of unbelievers in revelation; but the deduction of moral and religious truths,  
speculative

speculative or practical, from mere appearances in nature, is, in many cases, far too difficult for the bulk of mankind. That by the mere light of nature mankind in general would ever have attained to the idea of a God, an intelligent author of nature, is by no means probable. Appearances which are constant and invariable, as I have observed before, seldom draw the attention of the bulk of mankind. They see that stones, and other heavy bodies, always fall to the ground; they see the sun, moon and stars, rise and set every day; they see summer and winter succeed one another every year; they perceive in themselves various powers of action and enjoyment; but, without attending to the causes, or reasons, of these things, or, contenting themselves with the most absurd and insufficient reasons. It is enough for them that the appearances are uniform, so that they can always depend upon them, and act accordingly.

The most sublime and fundamental doctrines of religion, are those of the unity of God, of the immensity of creation being the work of one great agent, governed by one superintending providence, and tending to one great end, viz. the happiness of the percipient, and especially the rational, part of the universe. But these are so far from being deductions easily drawn by the bulk of mankind, that, after being in

possession of them, they have appeared to be too great to be retained by them, and have always eluded their grasp. The doctrine of a multiplicity of gods, gods of different provinces, powers, and characters, some aiming to do good, and others evil, has always forced itself on mankind, and has never failed to be followed by the most absurd and mischievous superstitious practices, calculated, as was imagined, to obtain the favour of these various deities. This has ever been the case, with Heathens, Jews, and Christians, and it has only been by repeated revelations, that men have been brought back to the belief of the unity of God, and the important practical consequences of that belief.

The precepts of universal benevolence, and impartial justice, are allowed to be the most important in the whole system of morals; but nature, without a superior interpreter, does not teach them, with sufficient clearness and uniformity; because we see many evils, and many of them such, as the most innocent persons are involved in, take place in the usual course of nature, and therefore, no doubt, according to the will of the author of nature. That all natural evils are ultimately subservient to good, I have no doubt, but it is far from being *apparently* so; and kings and conquerors, who spread undistinguishing havoc wherever they come, might plead that they



they imitate the Almighty, in his storms and tempests, in his plagues, pestilences, and famines.

It is possible, however, that by much reflection, and frequent observations on the general order of nature and providence, intelligent persons might arrive at the belief that all evil will ultimately produce good. But this will not give them the full satisfaction which all christians have from believing, that men inspired by God have, in so many words, assured them, that *all things will work together for good to them that love him*, that they may safely rejoice in all tribulation, and even cheerfully die in a good cause, depending upon a happy resurrection, and an abundant recompence being made to them in the life to come. It is impossible that the mere contemplation of nature should give men this full confidence, which is the parent of habitual devotion, and of the most heroic action.

That men are the offspring of God, and therefore, that he is our parent, are ideas sufficiently natural, pleasing, and useful; but they are only realized, and felt, when God actually calls us his children, and encourages us to address him as our *Father who is in Heaven*.

What nature teaches us with respect to the manner in which we should conduct ourselves in life, is not in words, intelligible to all men, but must be deduced by way of *inference* from

appearances, which one man will interpret in one way, and another in a different one; and every man being necessarily biased by his own prevailing inclination, he will generally conceive that his own favorite pursuit is not forbidden by it; so that most men will live much as they please, and yet all imagine that *they live agreeably to nature*. But in revelation, God, the author of nature, speaks in a language, that, with respect to every thing of importance, can never be misunderstood, and which must ever command respect. It is equally the language of a parent, and of a sovereign, anxious for the happiness of all his children.

All that you can make of *nature* is a figurative personage, whom you may address as you would the heavens or the earth, which are parts of it; and of God, considered merely as the *author of nature*, (but who has never discovered himself except in visible objects, such as the sun, moon, and stars, the earth, or the plants and animals with which it is stocked,) you cannot form such an idea as you do of a *person*, approaching more nearly to a human being, of whose feelings you have a perfect knowledge, and to whom, by the principle of association, sentiments of veneration and love, which lead to obedience, are intimately united. The idea of the mere author of nature, whom you can see only in his works, will not make such

such an impression on the mind of man, as is made by that of a real person, who, besides being conceived to be intimately present to you, can, if he pleases, speak to you, and permit you to speak to him, and to whom you can always address yourselves with a certainty of being heard, and being attended to by him. The promises and threatenings of such a being as this will be respected as those of a magistrate or a parent.

The God of the Scriptures is apprehended in this light, as the experience of all Jews and Christians witnesses. The God who appeared to Abraham, who delivered the law from Mount Sinai, who spoke by the prophets, and who displayed his power, and signified his will, by Christ and the apostles, will be considered, and behaved to, as a real person, the object of the highest reverence, and the most sincere attachment; one to whom men will naturally pray, and in whom they will put confidence. And the commands of such a Being, delivered by his authorized messengers, will be obeyed as those of a real sovereign, whose favour will be desired, and whose displeasure will be dreaded; and consequently, as these commands had no other object than the duties of morality, this system of *revelation*, which you disclaim, is far better adapted to promote your great object, than the system of mere *natural religion*.

So much more are men impressed by any thing approaching to *humanity*, that there was the greatest wisdom and propriety in the Divine Being, condescending not only to make use of articulate sounds, such as constitute human speech; but to exhibit appearances of the human form in his first communications with man, as was probably the case with Adam, and perhaps with Abraham; though afterwards, as men attained more just and sublime ideas of the Supreme Being, those appearances were withdrawn. That there is nothing in reality revolting to the human mind in the idea of the Divine Being condescending to manifest himself to men in this familiar manner, however it may now be objected to, is evident from universal history, which shews that all men, in early ages, expected, and readily believed in, such appearances. Nor was this the case with the vulgar only: for Socrates himself, sensible of the darkness in which he, and the rest of mankind, were involved, with respect to truths of the greatest importance, expressed his earnest wish for some divine instructor.

I am, &c.

L E T-

## LETTER VII.

*Of Historical Evidence.*

GENTLEMEN,

HISTORICAL evidence, on which the belief and authority of revelation must necessarily rest, has been greatly undervalued by the advocates for the sufficiency of the light of nature. But the experience of all mankind is against them; since there are no truths which more readily gain the assent of mankind, or are more firmly retained by them, than those of an historical nature, depending upon the testimony of others. It is a kind of evidence to which all men are most accustomed, so that it is quite familiar to them; and it is peculiarly adapted to the great bulk of mankind, who are unused to abstract speculation. The authority of a parent or of a tutor, we see to have the greatest weight with young persons and others who have not been used to think for themselves. They naturally take it for granted, that what they have been taught by *them* may be depended upon; and from their own natural love of truth, they acquire a general confidence, that

that when men who are even strangers to them, have no interest in their deception, they will not deceive them.

Hence it is that we have, in fact, no firmer persuasion concerning any thing, than we have of the existence of many things which we have never seen ourselves, nor ever expect to see, and of the truth of facts, which we know only from the information of others, as that there are such places as Constantinople and Peking, and that Charles I. of England, and Lewis XVI. of France, were beheaded; and no distance of time sensibly diminishes the force of this persuasion, when the facts have been fully ascertained. Who, that is at all acquainted with ancient history, entertains the least doubt of Julius Cæsar having been killed in the Roman senate house, of Xerxes having been defeated in his attempts to conquer Greece, or Babylon having been taken by Cyrus?

Such a faith as *this* we see, in fact, to be as sufficient a foundation for *action*, as faith of any other kind whatever. Consequently, that God may chuse to signify his will to men, that these men may prove their divine mission by *miracles*, or such works as God, the author of nature, could alone perform, and that the performance of such miracles may be attested by proper evidence, so as to be entitled to our fullest credit, are things easy of belief to mankind in general. Indeed all men, in all ages,  
have

have been disposed to believe these things, and only a few sceptical persons have entertained doubts respecting the credibility of miracles, or the propriety of the Divine Being having recourse to them, in order to communicate his will to men. It is not from *suppositions*, but from actual *facts*, that we are to learn what mode of instruction, or what kind of evidence, is best calculated to impress the minds of men. The Great Being who made man, and who best knows him, will, no doubt, employ the best method for this purpose; and it seems to be agreeable to the general plan of his providence, to make use of men for the instructors of men.

Rousseau, who received the morality, and even the divine mission of Jesus, though, inconsistently enough, without admitting the *miracles* recorded in the books of scripture, appears not to have given sufficient attention to the nature and force of historical evidence, when he asks the following questions; (*Emile, liv. v.*)

“ God, you say, has spoken. But to whom  
“ has he spoken? To men. But why, then,  
“ have I heard nothing of it? It would have  
“ been no more trouble to him, and I should  
“ then have been secure from deception. How  
“ has the mission of the messengers from God  
“ been proved? by miracles? But where are  
“ those miracles? In books. Who have writ-  
“ ten those books? Men. And who have seen  
“ those

“ those miracles? The men who attest them.  
 “ What, always human testimony? Always  
 “ men who tell men, what other men have re-  
 “ lated? How many men between God and  
 “ me!”

He might have asked just the same questions with respect to all facts in ancient history, or any thing else that he himself had not seen; and yet, like other men, he certainly entertained no more doubt with respect to many things of this kind, than if he had seen them himself.

As to the evidence of *miracles*, it is precisely of the same *nature* with that of other facts. It is only requisite that it be *stronger*, on account of their want of analogy to other facts. But if the evidence of any facts, miraculous or natural, be sufficient to satisfy those who saw them, it may be made equally satisfactory to those who did not see them. If the persons, who themselves saw the miracles, were in sufficient numbers, and sufficiently unbiassed, we can have no doubt but that (since those persons were constituted in the same manner as we are) had we been in their place, *we* should have been as well satisfied as they were. Nay, in many cases, men are even better satisfied with the evidence of other persons than they are with their own, from a distrust of their own senses and judgment.

I would



I would also observe, that if other histories, though written in ancient and unknown languages, can yet be made credible to the unlearned, so may the history of the Bible; and it cannot be denied, that mere French and English readers have as firm faith in the histories of Greece and Rome, as those who are acquainted with the Greek and Roman languages.

Christianity, more than any other religion, is calculated for the use of plain and unlearned persons; and tho' the learned only can read the scriptures in the original tongues, the most unlearned have sufficient means of satisfying themselves, by comparing different translations, &c. with respect to the fidelity with which the *general sense* has been conveyed to them; and this is all that they are interested in. This or the other particular book of the Old or New Testament, or particular parts of books may be spurious; but if the general history of the Jews, as contained in the books of Moses, and the most general account of the life of Jesus, of his principal miracles, his death, and his resurrection, as related by any of the Evangelists, be true, we have sufficient reason to regulate our lives by the precepts of christianity, from the firmest faith in that resurrection to an immortal life, of which it gives us the fullest assurance.

In

In order to form a judgment concerning the reality of prophecies and miracles, which are the proper proofs of a divine mission, Rousseau (*ib.*) says, “ We must know the laws of chance, and probabilities, to judge whether a prediction can be accomplished without a miracle : we must know the genius of ancient languages, in order to ascertain what is a prediction in those languages, and what is only a figure of speech ; what facts are within the order of nature, and what are not ; and lastly to say, why God has chosen, as an attestation of his having spoken, methods which have themselves so much need of attestation ; as if he sported with the credulity of men, and as if he purposely avoided the true means of persuading them.”

But if this writer would avoid what he himself (*ib.*) considers as an intolerable inconvenience, viz. that “ there should be as many miracles as natural events,” it is absolutely necessary, that they should not be exhibited to all men, but only to some men, and on particular occasions, and that the persons who were witnesses of them, should transmit their knowledge of them to others, in the usual, but what are found by experience to be sufficient, methods.

In some cases, no doubt, it may be difficult to distinguish a prediction from a fortunate guess,

guels, and also a miracle from an event within the compass of nature. But in many cases, and especially such as occur in the scripture history, there is no difficulty at all. With respect to these, the most sceptical of men cannot pretend that there could be any doubt of the reality of the prediction, or of the miraculous nature of the fact, if the appearances were such as the historians describe. Was it possible, for example, to have been by means of any natural disease, that the first born, and the first born only, of all the Egyptians, and the first born of their cattle, as well as of their men, should all die in one night, and that those of the Israelites should entirely escape, and that those of the Israelites should entirely escape, and after an express and unequivocal prediction, that it would be so? Could any power in nature, that we are now acquainted with, divide the Red Sea, and the river Jordan in such a manner, as that some millions of people should walk through them as on dry land?

With respect to *prophecy*, could it have been by any natural sagacity, that Moses predicted the fate of the Israelitish nation to the end of the world; or, leaving out what is yet to come, could he have described their situation so exactly as all history shews it to have been, till this very time, and as we ourselves now see it to be? Or could our Saviour have foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, and the total demolition

molition of the temple, as events that should take place in that very generation, when it is evident, that no other Jew of that age had the least apprehension of any such thing? It requires no more knowledge of philosophy, or of human nature, than all men are possessed of, in order to avoid deception in such clear cases as these.

I am, &c.

---

## LETTER VIII.

*Of the Evidence of a future State.*

GENTLEMEN,

THE principles on which you maintain the doctrine of a *future state of retribution*, are much more liable to be called in question than those of revelation. Philosophers will never approve of them, and their opinions will have weight with those who are not philosophers; and no authority of laws can prevent this. It is not your national assembly decreeing that the belief of the being of a God, and of the immor-

tality of the human soul, are the principles of religion with Frenchmen, that will make them be *believed* by the people of France, or of any other nation. The proper authority, on which any speculative principles, which are the foundation of all practice, are founded, must be the *reasons* alleged in their favour; and it will be said, that admitting there is a God, or an intelligent author of nature, where is the evidence of man surviving the grave?

Men are not, in reality, actuated by any other *principles* than those of other animals. Our faculties differ from theirs only in *degree*, and by no means in *kind*; and those of some brutes approach very near to those of some men; and as men live, so they die, in the same manner as brute creatures. Consequently, if it be any thing in the natural constitution of man, on which you found your expectation of the immortality of the thinking principle within him, you must have the same expectation with respect to every brute creature, and even every insect.

When men cease to breathe, they cease to think, and also to shew any signs of perception, just as brutes do; and you commit both in the same manner to the earth, when every principle of which they consisted, is either dissolved, and dispersed by the process of putrefaction, or affords nourishment to other animals,

mals, so as to sustain life in some other form. What appearance, then, or what natural evidence of any kind, is there, that any part of the dead man, or the dead animal, escapes? Or, if any thing invisible to us should escape at death, what evidence is there of that part of man retaining all the powers of perception and thought?

If while a man lives, his faculty of thinking is deranged by a blow on the head, or a disease of the brain; or if when he is thrown into a state of sound sleep, his faculty of thinking be suspended, how can he perceive, or think, when his brain is infinitely more disordered, or when he has no brain at all? Certainly there is no analogy in nature that can lead us to form such a conclusion. Had we had no knowledge of men but in a state of death, it would have been no more rational to suppose that *they* were possessed of the power of thinking, than that so many logs of wood had the same power.

If you say that it is impossible to conceive *how* the properties of perception and thought should result from any organization of mere matter, I say it is equally impossible to conceive how the properties of gravitation, of magnetism, or of electricity, should result from the substances which we find to be endued with them. The connection between the substance and the properties is equally unknown in all  
the

the cases. Besides, what do we know of *immaterial substances* more than we do of those that we call *material*? We have, in fact, no proper idea of any *substance*, but only of the *properties* by which they affect our senses, and which we say inhere in, or belong to them; so that to the mere terms *material* or *immaterial*, as expressive of *things* or substances, and exclusive of their *properties*, which we say belong to them, we equally annex no ideas at all. Consequently our difficulty with respect to the cause of perception and thought, is not at all removed by supposing that they belong to an immaterial substance, which is invisible to us, and which escapes when a man dies.

If you say that there must be something in man which is immortal, in order to his receiving a just recompence for his actions in this life, it will be asked, what reason have you to expect that men will receive from the author of nature, any other recompence than they do in this life? You can only judge of the *designs*, as well as of the *power* of God, from what you see of his works and his providence; and if you see that men actually *do* die in their crimes, without receiving any proper punishment, the fair inference is, that the author of nature, who is the author of life and of death, did not intend that they should receive any. If you **form** any other idea of God, he is a Being of

your own imagination, and therefore nothing that you can suppose such a being as *he* ought to do, or to provide for, can be the ground of any real expectation whatever.

I cannot help observing that *Monf. Robespierre*, in his excellent *Report* on the subject, gives no reasons whatever for his belief in the immortality of the soul, besides the importance and use of the doctrine; and *Mr. Paine*, who in his *Age of Reason* professes the same belief, contents himself with saying, page 10, that “The power which gave him existence is able to continue it, and that it appears to him more probable that he shall continue to exist hereafter, than that he should have had existence, as he now has, before that existence began.” But he gives no reason whatever *why* this appears to him to be probable. Before he had any existence at all there were numberless millions to one, that he never would have existed. For exactly such a person as *Mr. Paine* was but *one* of an infinite variety of beings, that might have been produced, and therefore, consistently enough with what he has advanced, there may be many millions to one against his existence after death. That the power which gave him existence is *able* to continue it, is no proof at all that he *will* continue it; since there is, no doubt, an infinite number of things within the  
power



power of the Almighty, that never actually take place.

The more attention you give to this important subject, the more satisfied, I am confident, you will be, that no principles besides those of christianity can ensure the firm belief of a future state, as necessary to that doctrine of *future retribution*, which you wish to establish. In the principles of christianity, there is nothing metaphysical or dubious. That man will survive the grave, christianity assures us, not on the principle of the immateriality, or immortality, of any thing invisible belonging to a man, which death cannot affect, but on the actual resurrection of the whole man in a future period; and this upon the positive word of him that made man, and who, no doubt, has power, though in a manner which we cannot comprehend, to restore the life which he first gave.

That the Divine Being *has* given men this assurance, is confirmed by such evidence as no person can reasonably object to. For in the nature of things, stronger evidence could not have been given, or even imagined; as I presume I have sufficiently proved in my *Discourse on the resurrection of Jesus*, to which I take the liberty to refer you. What could the most incredulous of men have required more, than that a man, commissioned by God, and

evidencing his mission, by unquestionable miracles (some of which were raising of dead persons to life) should not only assert the doctrine, on the authority of those miracles, but, as an ultimate proof of it, should exhibit himself as an example of it, by announcing his own death and resurrection within a limited time, being put to death by his enemies, in the most public manner possible. The certainty of his resurrection was also evident from the conduct and miracles of the apostles, acting in his name afterwards.

Evidence of this kind is far better adapted to the nature of man than any arguments that can be alleged in favour of the immortality of the human soul, which, it is well known, never, in fact, produce any considerable effect, so as to induce men to *live* and to *act*, and still less to *die*, in the full persuasion of its truth; and it cannot be denied, that this has been unquestionably the case of thousands and tens of thousands, with respect to the christian doctrine of a resurrection. What real influence had the doctrine of the immortality of the soul upon any of the ancients? And it is well known, that the little appearance there was of the belief of it, had vanished before the time of Christ. It is sufficiently evident that even Cicero, who with great ingenuity collected, and stated, all the arguments he could find  
in

in favour of this doctrine, did not himself lay any stress upon them.

The deists of the last century in England began indeed, with professing, as you do, their belief in the immortality of the soul, as well as in that of the being of a God, and of a providence: but it was not retained by their disciples. Few persons have had an opportunity of being better acquainted with the unbelievers of my own age and country than myself; and I can assure you, that I have hardly ever known one of them, who had the least expectation of a future life, and some of them have publicly maintained, that the belief of it, as well as that of the being of a God, has done much harm in the world. If, therefore, you wish to establish the belief of a future state, as a security for good morals, you must not discountenance the christian doctrine of a resurrection, and rely on a principle which has never yielded it any solid support.

Simple unitarian christianity invites your particular and serious attention. What you have hitherto seen of christianity, has been little more than the shocking abuses and corruptions of it, which have made it subservient to the mischievous policy of kings and priests. Be persuaded to examine for yourselves, and you will find, that none of those things which have given you so much just offence, are at

all authorized by the pure gospel of Christ. On the contrary, his doctrines are most favourable to the *liberty and equality of man*, and to every thing else that contributes to his dignity and happiness. In the gospel, men of all ranks and descriptions, Jew or Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, or free, as the apostle Paul expresses himself, are considered as *brethren*, being equally children of God, and heirs of immortality. They are represented as having different parts to act on the great theatre of the world, but as entitled to an equal reward, if they act them well. So far is there from any preference being given to the rich and great, that their chance for future bliss, is always represented as less than that of the poor, who, on that account, are pronounced most happy.

In the original institutions of Moses, there was no provision for a *king*, tho' all the neighbouring nations were governed by kings, and in the most arbitrary manner; and when the Hebrews wished to imitate their neighbours in this respect, as they did in every other, the prophet Samuel, speaking by authority from God, described to them the fatal consequence of adopting that form of government, in as earnest and as emphatical a manner as you yourselves could now do it, viz. as leading to oppression and every species of abuse.

So far is the gospel from being a system of ecclesiastical tyranny, which is the use that has been unhappily made of it, that nothing is so strongly inculcated by Jesus as the virtue of humility, and that all pre-eminence is founded on usefulness. Having called his apostles together, on two of them discovering some symptoms of ambition, he said, Matth. xx. 25, &c. “Ye  
“ know that the princes of the Gentiles exer-  
“ cise dominion over them, and they that are  
“ great exercise authority upon them; but it  
“ shall not be so among you. But whosoever  
“ will be great among you, let him be your  
“ minister, and whosoever will be chief among  
“ you, let him be your servant; even as the  
“ son of man came not to be ministered unto,  
“ but to minister, and to give his life a ransom  
“ for many.” The very stile made use of by the pope, who gradually usurped all power in heaven and in earth, clearly points out this original maxim of the gospel, for he calls himself *the servant of the servants of God*.

Originally all christian churches were nothing more than voluntary associations of christians who appointed officers for the use of the society, and displaced them whenever they pleased; and it was their first custom, to appoint a number of the same rank, to manage all their concerns, not one of whom, as the *bishop* in after times, had any more power than

than another. In short, nothing could be more favourable to the principles of *equal liberty* than the genuine maxims of the gospel, and the uniform practice of the primitive ages of christianity.

Still more evident is it, that ministers, in christian churches, had originally nothing at all to do in civil matters. In what manner they acquired the power of which we find them possessed afterwards, and what use they made of it, ecclesiastical history abundantly shews. But in no other case will you plead for the total disuse of any thing, on account of the abuses to which it has been subject.

Hoping that in the present very critical and interesting situation of your country, and of all Europe, you will take these things into your serious consideration, I am, with my sincere wishes for the perfect establishment of your liberty, and the disappointment of all your enemies, your highly honoured fellow citizen,

J. PRIESTLEY.

*Northumberland in America,  
Vendredi 7. De la République Française,  
Ann. 3.*

LET-

# L E T T E R S

TO A

*PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.*

---

P A R T III.

---

L E T T E R I.

*Of the Sufficiency of the Light of Nature for the  
Purpose of moral Instruction.*

DEAR SIR,

CONSIDERING how distinguished and important a part Mr. Paine has acted on the theatre of the political world, and the eagerness with which his writings have been read, not only in America and England, but, by means of translations, in all parts of Europe, I do not wonder that you are apprehensive that his virulent attack upon revelation, in his late work entitled *The Age of Reason*, should make an unfavorable

favorable impression upon many persons. And as I have been happy enough, in the former part of our correspondence, to have given you some satisfaction with respect to the writings of Mr. Gibbon, and other modern unbelievers, you request my perusal of this work, and my opinion of the strength or weakness of the arguments contained in it.

I agree with you in thinking, that this work shews the same vigor of mind and strength of expression, that distinguish the other writings of Mr. Paine. But I hope to satisfy you, and others who are sufficiently candid, that he had not the same previous knowledge of the subject of which he treats; and without this knowledge of his subject, the greatest mental ability and command of words only enable a man to impose upon the ignorant and unwary; who will naturally presume that when a man writes with great confidence in his own opinion, and contempt of that of others (which are undisguised in this work of our author) he has taken pains to make himself master of his subject, and that he feels the ground on which he stands. There can be no doubt but that Mr. Paine thought so. But let us examine the foundation of his confidence, beginning with what he says of the sufficiency of the light of nature for moral instruction.

“ What



“What more,” says he, page 70, “does  
“man want to know, than that the hand, or  
“power that made these things, is divine, is  
“omnipotent? Let him believe this, with the  
“force it is impossible to repel, if he permits  
“his reason to act, and his rule of moral life  
“will follow of course.” Speaking of the  
*creation*, he says, p. 66. “It preaches to all  
“nations, and to all worlds, and this word of  
“God reveals to man all that is necessary for  
“man to know of God.”

Now, much more is necessary to be known  
by man, than that the hand, which made him,  
and all things, is omnipotent. For all the rules  
of moral conduct by no means follow from this  
scanty knowledge. A being may be omnipo-  
tent, and yet malevolent. For though the idea  
of a devil has, I believe, no archetype in nature,  
it is possible in itself, and universally thought  
to be so. Nay, whole nations have believed in  
an originally evil principle, as well as an origin-  
ally good one.

Indeed, forgetting what he had said about  
the idea of the mere *omnipotence* of the author  
of nature, being sufficient to lead men to the  
knowledge of all moral duties, Mr. Paine calls  
to his aid the marks of *benevolence*, which are  
impressed on the face of nature, supposing the  
author of it to say to man, p. 86, “Learn from  
“my munificence to all, to be kind to each  
“other.”

“ other.” There are, no doubt, marks of benevolence, as well as of power, in the constitution of nature, and the conduct of providence, sufficient to enable a reflecting mind to conclude that the author of nature is supremely benevolent, and that the great end of all his works is the happiness of his creatures. But this is not so *apparent*, but that many have drawn a contrary conclusion; and there are appearances in nature which would seem to justify the generality of mankind, who are unable to take enlarged and extensive views of things, in drawing it. At least, we see in these appearances the natural causes of their mistake. For it cannot be denied, that there is much evil as well as good in the world, much pain as well as pleasure; and that the introduction of the evil was with a view to the production of more good, and not the pleasure which the introducer of it took in the thing itself, is not always evident.

Men naturally judge of the thoughts and designs of other intelligent beings by what they experience in themselves, and observe in those about them. Now, whatever be the cause, there certainly are persons who really delight in mischief, and take a pleasure in the sufferings they occasion to others. It is no wonder, therefore, that men have supposed that there are beings above them, and at whose mercy they  
are,

are, who take pleasure in tormenting them; and though they should form an idea, that *one Being* was the author of the various and seemingly contradictory appearances in nature (which, however, is more than mankind have ever in fact attained to themselves) they might suppose that this great Being was of a variable disposition, sometimes rejoicing in good, and sometimes in evil. To learn of him, therefore, and to imitate his conduct, they might think was occasionally to indulge themselves in a little mischief; as, they might say, the author of nature did, by storms and earthquakes, or when he sent war, and pestilence, and famine among men. Men, therefore, left to the mere light of nature, might say, that, since, in these cases, there is an evident violation of all the rules of justice, as well as of mercy and goodness, there was no reason why men should be bound by laws by which the Supreme Being did not bind himself.

Agreeable to this, it is well known, that in the very worship which the heathens paid to their gods, they indulged both their lust and their revenge without the least restraint. They even inflicted the greatest tortures upon themselves as well as upon others, as the surest way to gratify the inclinations, and secure the favour of the objects of their worship; and absurd as we now justly think those practices to have been,

been, it was not the wisdom of man, but the preaching of that gospel which Mr. Paine treats with so much contempt, that brought men off from them. This despised instrument did more for mankind in this important respect in a few years, than all the learning of the Egyptians, and the philosophy of the Greeks were able to do in many centuries. In fact, this learning and philosophy, and all the light of nature, shining on the most improved of human minds, effected no real change at all; not one of the most absurd of the popular superstitions, having been corrected by them.

That nature teaches the duty of *prayer* to God, Mr. Paine is so far from asserting, that he ridicules the idea of it. "What," says he, p. 63, "is the amount of all his prayers, but "an attempt to make the Almighty change his "mind, and act otherwise than he does?" And yet men when left to nature, have universally had recourse to prayer. How, then, does Mr. Paine's theory and the practice of mankind agree? It is, however, evident to me, that mankind in general have, in this respect, judged and acted more naturally than Mr. Paine. The generality of mankind, judging of other intelligent beings, and consequently of the Supreme Being, from what they experienced in themselves, and observed in those with whom they had intercourse, would naturally suppose  
that

that his feelings bore a resemblance to their own, and that his conduct would be directed by the same principles. As, therefore, they had been accustomed to apply for what they wanted, to their earthly superiors, they would naturally apply to the Supreme Being for such things as they imagined *he* alone could give. Their believing that he knew all their wants, and was well disposed towards them, would not prevent their applying to him; since, judging from their own conduct towards their children and dependants, they might think that he would defer his bounty till they applied for it; as that would be an expression of the sense they had of their dependance upon him, and their obligation to him.

In an advanced state of human nature, I can conceive that *petition* may be an unnecessary part in prayer. We may perhaps even see an impropriety of any mode of direct address to the Deity; and rejoicing in the full persuasion that we have of the benevolence and wisdom of the Supreme Being, indulge no sentiments but those of gratitude and joy. But that *petition*, as well as *thanksgiving*, is adapted to the present state of human nature, and human life, and that it becomes even the most intelligent of men to join with the vulgar in that practice which Mr. Paine so much ridicules, I have the fullest persuasion.

Prayer is a necessary step in the intellectual and moral improvement of man. That habitual regard to God, which does not imply any direct address to him, but (as Dr. Hartley has admirably and philosophically explained the process) eminently contributes to exalt and purify the mind, cannot be attained without it. As good and as pious a man as Mr. Paine may be (and on this, no doubt, he founds the hope he expresses to have p. 8, of happiness beyond this life) I am confident he would have been more pious, and consequently more virtuous, if he had made conscience of daily prayer, tho' it may be too late for him to make the experiment of having recourse to it now.

If we form our judgment of the light of nature, not from the practice of the bulk of mankind, even in all ages, and all nations, but from the avowed principles, and conduct of those who, in opposition to the friends of revelation, make the greatest boast of it, we shall see reason to form no high idea of the sufficiency of it; since the most celebrated of modern unbelievers have defended practices which are evidently unjustifiable.

If there be any thing of a moral nature that is indisputably right, as a branch of perfect *integrity*, it is, that a man's professions should correspond to his real sentiments, and his conduct to his professions; so that both by his  
words

words and his actions, he should lead others into no mistake concerning his principles. In this Mr. Paine perfectly agrees with me. “ It is impossible,” he says, p. 10, “ to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society. When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind, as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime. He takes up the trade of a priest for the sake of gain, and in order to qualify himself for that trade, he begins with perjury. Can we conceive any thing more destructive to morality than this?”

This instance of immorality, Mr. Paine sees in its just light, when christians are guilty of it. But unbelievers, who have professed the greatest attachment to the light of nature, have not only been habitually guilty of the same enormity, but have defended their conduct with respect to it. Rousseau, who first solemnly abjured the protestant religion, in which he was educated, and afterwards as solemnly renounced the catholic religion without pretending to have changed his opinion, says (*Emile*, liv. iv.) “ In the uncertainty in which we are, it is inexcusable to profess any other religion than that in which we are born, and falsehood,

“ not sincerely to practise what we profess.” Voltaire always professed himself a catholic christian, and on his death bed he made a confession of his faith, in which he declared, that he died in the catholic religion, in which he was born. \* Mr. Hume, Mr. Gibbon, and the generality of unbelievers in England, always wrote under the mask of christianity, and attacked it not directly, but only in an artful insidious manner. Not so, the apostles, the primitive christians, and the protestant martyrs. It is only among the believers in revelation that we shall find the noble heroism of dying, rather than profess what is believed to be a falsehood. Many unbelievers have not scrupled to throw away their lives in duels, or to destroy themselves through disappointment, or *ennui*. But how much more noble is it to die for important truth?

Another virtue of the greatest importance to the good order of society is chastity, or an adherence to the rules which have been laid down by all the civilized part of mankind to restrain the commerce of the sexes. But unbelievers, who profess to live according to nature, have in general, made little account of this virtue. Rousseau professed to think himself the very best of his species, though he made no scruple of his criminal connection with a  
great

\* See his life written by Condorcet.



great variety of women. He was not married, till late in life, to the woman by whom he had several children, all of whom he sent to the foundling hospital, without taking any care of their education. He also speaks in the highest terms of the sublime virtue of a woman, with whom himself, and, according to his account, many others in their turns had the same connexion. Surely, then, the positive command of God was highly expedient, if not absolutely necessary to restrain those irregularities eventually so hurtful to society, and destructive of its peace. The authority of the great and wise parent of mankind was required to guide the conduct of his children, before their own reason would have discovered the true rule of life, and the way to happiness.

I am, &c.

## LETTER II.

*Of the Nature of Revelation, and its proper Evidence.*

DEAR SIR,

IT must be allowed by all persons, that the only proper evidence of revelation, is a *miracle*, or something out of the usual course of nature. For no other than the author of the laws of nature can controul them, and depart from them. “ But, says Mr. Paine, p. 136,” “ Un-  
 “ less we know the whole extent of the laws,  
 “ and of what are commonly called the powers  
 “ of nature, we are not able to judge whether  
 “ any thing that may appear to us wonderful  
 “ or miraculous, be within, or be beyond, or  
 “ be contrary to, her natural power of acting.”

To this it is easy to reply, that though no man knows the whole extent of the powers, or laws of nature, we are sufficiently well acquainted with *some* of them. Not to mention, the case of the death of the first born, and of the first born only, both of men, and of cattle, throughout the whole land of Egypt, in one hour  
 of

of one particular night, and that distinctly announced beforehand; or the dividing the Red Sea or the river Jordan, so that a whole nation could march through them at their leisure, which are facts in the Old Testament history: will Mr. Paine himself say, that the instantaneous cure of all kinds of diseases, not excepting those that require the longest medical treatment, such as dropfies, palsies, and insanity, by a word speaking, was within the usual course of nature; or that a man could walk on the sea, and still a tempest, by command, without a miracle. Still less will he say that a man who had been crucified on Friday, and left alone in a sepulchre, could walk about and converse on the Sunday following, as if nothing had been done to him, without a miracle. Admitting the facts to be, as they are represented in the gospel history, he would surely say, that little as we know of the whole compass of nature, such things as *these* are clearly beyond it, and unquestionably *supernatural*.

It is mere burlesque writing, and unworthy of this serious subject, to say (*on* the supposition of miracles being employed to prove a divine mission) as Mr. Paine does p. 139, “ It is degrading the Almighty into the character of a showman, playing tricks to amuse and make the people stare and wonder;” when,

in the nature of things, miracles were necessary to engage the attention of mankind, and to convince them of the power and presence of God.

He says, (*ib.*) “ That whenever recourse is had to show for the purpose of procuring belief (for a miracle under any idea of the word is a show) it implies lowness, or weakness, in the doctrine that is preached.” But might not Mr. Paine with just as much reason say, that the exhibition of the works of nature is only another kind of show; and therefore that no doctrine can be taught by *it*? But there are doctrines which, to man at least, absolutely require the aid of miracles to their proof; as that of a resurrection from the dead at a future period, which it is impossible for us to learn from any appearances in nature; but which we may firmly believe on the express word of our Maker, ascertained in the only way in which it possibly can be ascertained, viz. by a miracle.

But Mr. Paine thinks that, admitting the possibility of miracles, the reality of them can never be made *credible*. “ Is it more probable,” says he, p. 141, “ that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie? We have never seen in our time nature go out of her course; but we have good reason to believe that millions of lies have been told in the same time. It is, therefore,  
“ at

“ at least millions to one that the reporter of a  
“ miracle tells a lie.”

This is by no means the true state of the case, as it respects the miracles recorded in the scriptures. Should, indeed, any single person, especially a stranger, come and tell me that he saw a man, who was unquestionably dead, suddenly rise up, walk about, and converse as in perfect health, I should, no doubt, conclude either that he was deceived himself, or that he designed to impose upon me; this being more probable than the truth of the fact. But when I find that thousands, and tens of thousands of persons, who had the best opportunity of informing themselves concerning a fact of this miraculous nature, and who had every motive that men could have to scrutinize the evidence with the greatest rigour, shew their full persuasion of the truth of it, by relinquishing every thing dear to them in life, and even life itself, rather than give up their belief of it; the question to be considered is, whether it be more probable that such a number of persons, circumstanced as these were, could be imposed upon, or the thing itself be true; and especially if a great and good end was visibly answered by the truth of the fact, which is the case with respect to those miracles which established the belief of christianity. And what a christian says, is, that to suppose all these persons, who  
had

had the perfect use of all their senses, and who were as capable of judging as he himself could be, and as much interested in ascertaining the truth, to be deceived, would, in reality, be more extraordinary, and therefore, properly speaking, more miraculous, than the fact in question.

It is, no doubt, true, that millions of lies have been told by men; but if only ten or a dozen men of Mr. Paine's own acquaintance, should, independently of one another, tell him the same thing, as equally seen by themselves, and he should not be able to discover any motive that they could have to wish to deceive him, I am persuaded that, like any other man in the same circumstances, his incredulity would be staggered.

It is upon the idea of the utter incredibility of miracles, that Mr. Paine, speaking of them, makes the following extraordinary assertion. "It is," says he, p. 139, "the most equivocal sort of evidence that can be set up. For the belief is not to depend on the thing called a *miracle*, but upon the credit of the reporter, who says that he saw it, and therefore the thing, were it true, would have no better chance of being believed than if it were a lie." The credit of the reporter, is, no doubt, necessary to my faith in the miracle which he reports. But this being established, the miracle is a just foundation of my belief in a  

divine

divine interposition, because none can work a miracle but God only.

It is upon the same supposition of the absolute incredibility of miracles, that he says, p. 138, “ Since appearances are so capable of deceiving, “ and things not real have a strong resemblance “ to things that are, nothing can be more in- “ consistent than to suppose that the Almighty “ would make use of means, such as are called “ miracles, that would subject the person who “ performed them, to the suspicion of being an “ impostor, and the persons who related them “ to be suspected of lying, and the doctrine “ intended to be supported thereby, to be sus- “ pected as a fabulous invention.” But the suspicion of imposture, does not necessarily arise from the relation of a miracle, but upon various circumstances attending the narrative; and in these cases, one person might entertain a suspicion, when another had none at all. History unquestionably proves that Mr. Paine’s reasoning on the absolute incredibility of miracles is not well founded. Since he cannot deny that credit has been given to miracles by men of all nations, in all ages; it is evident that they *are* adapted to gain credit with men, and that by having recourse to them, the Supreme Being has not made use of an improper instrument for gaining his purpose.

The

The following is another truly curious, and I believe a quite original argument of Mr. Paine's on this subject. "It is," says he, p. 13, "a contradiction in terms and ideas, to call any thing a *revelation*, that comes to us at second hand, either verbally, or in writing. Revelation is necessarily limited to the first communication. After this it is only an account of something which that person says was a revelation made to *him*, and though he may find himself obliged to believe it, it cannot be incumbent on *me* to believe it in the same manner, for it was not a revelation made to me, and I have only his word for it, that it was made to *him*."

On this principle, it is not incumbent on Mr. Paine to believe what any person may tell him, and he may give credit to nothing but what he sees himself, in which case his faith will be reduced to a very small compass indeed. His pretence to a *contradiction in terms* is a mere quibble. We do not say, that the revelation made immediately to Moses, or to Christ, is strictly speaking a revelation to *us*. But if we see sufficient reason to believe that the revelation was made to *them*, we are properly speaking believers in revelation; and if the revelation, whatever it be, relate to the whole human race, as well as to the person to whom it was immediately made, all mankind, Mr. Paine himself included,



included, will find themselves under an equal obligation to respect it.

Mr. Paine's observation on the insufficiency of human language, to transmit the knowledge of revelation, is trite, but as little to the purpose. "Human language," he says, p. 85, "is local and changeable, and is therefore incapable of being used as the means of unchangeable and universal information. As to translations," he says, p. 64, "every man who knows any thing of languages, knows that it is impossible to translate from one language into another, not only without losing a great part of the original, but frequently mistaking the sense." But the truth of revelation does not depend upon niceties of ideas, which it is difficult to express, or upon the niceties of any particular language, which it is difficult to transfuse into another language. What mistake has ever arisen, or can possibly arise, from the translation of the *ten commandments*, or the *Lord's prayer*, into all the languages in the world? Mr. Paine might as well say, that the great facts in the Roman History, such as the conquest of Carthage or the death of Julius Cæsar, could never be credible, because they are recorded in human language, which is local and changeable, and the translation of it uncertain, as that the Mosaic or christian history is incredible on that account. If  
there

there be such a thing as *cavilling*, unworthy of a serious writer, it is such reasoning as this. Indeed, I do not think, I have any where met with more confident assertions, or a looser mode of arguing, than in this tract of Mr. Paine's.

I am, &c.

---

LETTER III.

*Of the Object of Christianity, and of the History of Jesus.*

DEAR SIR,

YOU will not much wonder that a person so occupied as Mr. Paine has been, and so usefully occupied, in matters of civil policy, should not understand *every thing*; though his extraordinary success in writing on some subjects, might lead him to think himself equal to any other. But you are now, I am persuaded, convinced, that distinguished as his abilities are, he has not given sufficient attention to the subject of *revelation*, that he has totally misconceived the object of it, and especially the nature  
of

of its *evidence*. His ignorance of this subject, (arising, I suppose chiefly, from his contempt for it,) is more apparent in what he says concerning christianity in particular; the origin of which, as lying within the compass of well known history, it was much easier for him to make himself acquainted with.

What is more remarkable still, Mr. Paine admits things that are manifestly inconsistent with one another. For, according to him, nothing can be more truly amiable and excellent than the character of Jesus, the founder of christianity, or more upright and disinterested than his views in founding it, and yet nothing more detestable than the real spirit and tendency of it. Indeed he himself says, p. 57, speaking of the New Testament, “ Out of the  
“ matters contained in those books, together  
“ with the assistance of some old stories, the  
“ church has set up a system of religion very  
“ contradictory to the character of the person  
“ whose name it bears.”

“ He was, he says, p. 18, a virtuous and  
“ amiable man. The morality that he preach-  
“ ed and practised was of the most benevolent  
“ kind, and tho’ similar systems of morality  
“ had been preached by Confucius, and by  
“ some of the Greek philosophers, many years  
“ before, by the Quakers since, and by many  
“ good

“ good men in all ages, it has not been exceeded by any.”

“ The church, he says, p. 57, has set up a religion of pomp and of revenue, in the pretended imitation of a person, whose life was humility and poverty. Jesus, he says, p. 22, preached the most excellent morality, and the equality of man ; but he preached also against the corruptions and avarice of the Jewish priests, and this brought upon him the hatred and vengeance of the whole order of priesthood.” “ All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, he says, p. 9, appear to me to be no other than human invention, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.”

Here, then, is an extraordinary circumstance, which requires a little investigation. The founder of the christian system was confessedly the most unambitious of men, and yet his religion (for he does not say, the corruptions or abuses of it) was, “ an invention set up to enslave mankind, and to monopolize power and profit.” If the apostles and not Jesus, were the founders of this religion, as Mr. Paine seems to intimate ; they were peculiarly unfortunate in their choice of a patron, and very unsuccessful with respect to their object. For none of them

them acquired any share of power or profit; and in general, after living wretched lives, subject to every mode of persecution, died violent deaths. If this scheme of "enslaving mankind, and monopolizing power and profit," had any later origin, it cannot be ascribed to christianity itself, but to something that arose out of it, and for which it is not answerable; and all history, though Mr. Paine may be unacquainted with it, proves that this was the very fact.

But before I consider Mr. Paine's account of the origin of the system to which he so much objects, I shall attend to what he farther says concerning *Jesus* himself; and this, like his account of the object of his religion, is a strange mixture of truth and falsehood. That such a person as Jesus Christ existed (a thing not admitted by Mr. Volney, Lequinio, and other philosophers in France,) Mr. Paine, p. 22, does not deny. He farther says, "that he was crucified, which was the mode of execution at that day, is an historical relation strictly within the limits of probability. Most probably, he says, p. 78, he worked at his father's trade, which was that of a carpenter, and he does not appear to have had any school education, for his parents were extremely poor." This the evangelical history confirms; but when he adds, that "The

E

" pro-

“ probability is that he could not write,” he certainly had no foundation for it at all. If the general account of the history of Jesus, which Mr. Paine does not call in question, may be depended upon, he read in a Jewish synagogue, and the probability is, that a man who can read fluently, as reading in public requires, could also write. In one incident recorded of *him*, John viii. 6, he wrote, or made some kind of characters, on the ground. Mr. Paine says, p. 19, “ Jesus wrote no account of himself, of his birth, parentage or any thing else. Not a line of what is called the New Testament is of his writing. The history of him is altogether the work of other people.” But such was the case with Socrates, and yet it was never inferred from that circumstance, that he could not write.

That Mr. Paine was very little acquainted with the real character, and even the common history of Jesus, is evident from his saying, p. 23, “ It is not improbable that the Roman government might have some secret apprehension of the effects of his doctrine, as well as the Jewish priests. Neither is it improbable, that Jesus Christ had in contemplation the delivery of the Jewish nation from the bondage of the Romans. Between the two, however, this virtuous reformer and revolutionist lost his life.”

Certainly

Certainly there is no appearance of any thing like this in the evangelical history. On the contrary, Jesus not only carefully avoided giving any umbrage to the Roman government, but he declined giving his opinion on any political subject whatever. When he was applied to about the division of an estate, he said, Luke xii. 14, *Who made me a judge, or a divider over you?* When he was appealed to about the lawfulness of paying tribute to the Romans, he cautiously answered, *Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.*

When Pilate, who certainly would not have been so much disposed to favour him, as he evidently was, if he had suspected him of any designs against the government, asked him if he was a king, he acknowledged it, indeed, but added, that *his kingdom was not of this world,* and that he was *sent to bear witness concerning truth.*

When the common people would more than once have placed him at their head, and have actually made him a king, he always rejected the proposal with indignation, so that at length they ceased to importune him on the subject. If he had had any scheme of this kind, but did not chuse to trust the common people, he would naturally have consulted with the great men of his nation; and this might have recommend-

ed him to them. Whereas so differently did they conceive of his views, as most hostile to theirs (whose wish, as their whole history shews, was to emancipate themselves from the yoke of the Romans) that they thought there was no safety for themselves but in putting him to death, which accordingly they contrived and executed.

This, however, certainly shews, that Jesus was a very conspicuous character. Else, why all this alarm? He had no advantage of birth, or connexions, that could make him formidable. He does not appear to have been a man of very extraordinary natural talents; and according to Mr. Paine, could not even write his name. Why then were the rulers of the Jewish nation so much afraid him? Why take away the life of a poor illiterate carpenter, and, not content with their own forms of judicature, contrive to get him condemned by the Roman governor himself, and crucified by his order?

But Mr. Paine says, “ The manner in which  
 “ he was apprehended, shews he was not  
 “ much known at that time, and it shews also  
 “ that the meetings he then held with his fol-  
 “ lowers were in secret, and that he had given  
 “ over, or suspended preaching publickly. Judas  
 “ could no otherwise betray him, than by giv-  
 “ ing information where he was, and point-  
 “ ing him out to the officers, who went to ar-  
 “ rest



“rest him; and the reason for employing and  
“paying Judas for this, could arise only  
“from the causes already mentioned, that of  
“his not being much known, and living con-  
“cealed.”

This difficulty, however, is easily removed. The apprehension of Jesus was to be in the night, and by the common officers of justice; and it is very possible that, let a man be ever so well known in the day time, such persons as these might neither be able to find him in the night, nor distinguish his person at that time without some assistance. Besides, why did the Jewish rulers think it necessary to use the precaution of apprehending Jesus in the night, but because he was so popular at that time with the common people, that the apprehending of him in the day time was thought to be too hazardous? That the preaching of Jesus was then, and at all times, most public, his whole history clearly shews; and when he was seized in the night, he himself said, Mark xiv. 48. *Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple, teaching, and ye took me not.*”

Mr. Paine says, p. 1. “The idea of the  
“concealment of Jesus, not only agrees very  
“ill with his reputed divinity, but associates  
“with it something of pusillanimity; and his

“ being betrayed, or in other words, his being  
 “ apprehended, on the information of one of his  
 “ followers, shews that he did not intend to  
 “ be apprehended, and consequently that he  
 “ did not intend to be crucified.”

It would be of material consequence to the cause of infidelity, that what Mr. Paine here asserts should be true, viz. that Jesus had no apprehension of the violent death to which he was exposed. But the whole of his history shews, that he knew from the beginning that he was to die in consequence of his undertaking, and by a public crucifixion; and though for some time he chose to withdraw himself from the persecution of his enemies, it was only till the proper time was come for his throwing himself into their hands.

Some time before his last journey to Jerusalem, it is said, Matth. xvi. 21. *from that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples how that he must go up unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.* At the same time, and on other occasions, he plainly forewarned his followers, that they must be ready to suffer as he did; language which was ill calculated to favor any conceivable purpose of an impostor. When Peter on this occasion rebuked him, saying, *Be it far from thee, Lord! This shall not be unto thee.*

*He*

He turned and said unto him, *Get thee behind me, Satan. Thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that are of God, but those that be of men.* He then said to his disciples, *If any man is willing to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me; for whosoever shall save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.* If they were to die in his cause, what prospect could they have of gaining any thing by their attachment to him?

In one of the public discourses of Jesus, in which he compared himself to a shepherd, he said, John x. 15. *I lay down my life for the sheep, and therefore does my father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.*

On his last journey to Jerusalem, he said Mat. xvii. 22. *The son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again;* when we find the disciples, to whom this language was addressed, as was natural, *exceedingly sorry.*

That Jesus went to Jerusalem at this time with a fixed purpose to die there, is evident from what he said when he was told that Herod sought to kill him, Luke xiii. 33. *I must walk to day and to morrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet perish*

*out of Jerusalem. As they were travelling, Mat. xx. 17. he took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the gentiles, to mock and to scourge him; and the third day he shall rise again.*

When Jesus was arrived at Bethany, and was at supper there, he said, by way of apology for Mary who had anointed him with some valuable ointment, John xii. 7. *Let her alone, against the day of my embalming has she kept this.* When he was discoursing in the temple, a few days before his death, he said, alluding to it, v. 24. *Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.* That he not only apprehended his death at this time, but that he was most sensibly affected with the idea of it, appears from what he added on this occasion; *Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour! But for this cause came I unto this hour.*

But nothing shews the steady purpose of Jesus to give up his life in his undertaking, whatever it was, more clearly, than his solemn institution of the eucharist the very night in which he was betrayed, expressly, as a memorial of his death,

death, the bread representing his body, which was to be broken, and the wine his blood, which was to be shed. All his discourses to his disciples recorded in John xiv. xv. and xvi. and his solemn prayer, ch. xvii. as they went to the garden of Gethsemane, were calculated to comfort them with respect to his approaching death, and his temporary separation from them, John xvi. 16. *A little while, and ye shall not see me, and again a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice, and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. Ye now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.* In his last prayer, he says, John xvii. 11. *Now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee.* What did he mean by this, but that he was going to die? In the garden he appears to have felt what I believe any man of equal sensibility, would have felt in the same circumstances. But though he wished, if it had been possible, to have avoided his painful and ignominious death, and therefore prayed, saying, Math. xxvi. 39. *O my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; he added, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

As Jesus knew from the beginning the purpose of Judas, why, if he did not mean to be  
appre-

apprehended, did he go to the place where he expected to meet him, and why did he not endeavour to make his escape, which, when they who came to apprehend him (probably overawed by his presence and manner of speaking) *fell to the ground*, John xviii. 6, he had an opportunity of doing? When he was in the presence of his jewish judges and of Pilate, did he behave like a man who wished to avoid the fate that he could not but see was impending over him? Had he recourse to any mean submission, or apologies, to save his life? Nay, did he not shew as great marks of presence of mind, and calm intrepidity, as any man ever shewed in the face of certain death?

If all the circumstances of the apprehension, the trial, the crucifixion of Jesus, be duly attended to, we shall no where find an example of true fortitude, accompanied with the most perfect benevolence, and the most entire resignation to the will of God; especially if we consider his extreme sensibility, discovered in his agony in the garden. To die with a spirit of revenge, and to bear torture with rage against a man's enemies, is a common and low attainment, compared to dying with that spirit of perfect meekness and forgiveness which was discovered by Jesus, when he prayed for his executioners. This argues a mind of a superior and extraordinary cast.

Mr.

Mr. Paine, not considering that the great use of the death of Christ was to prepare the way for the most satisfactory evidence of the resurrection, says, p. 52. "The christian mythologists tell us that Christ died for the sins of the world, and that he came on purpose to die. Would it not then have been the same if he had died of the fever, or small pox, of old age, or of any thing else?" But it is obvious to observe, that had Christ died of any disease, and of course in *private*, among his friends, it would always have been said by unbelievers, that he never had been actually dead; whereas this could not be said of a man, who was condemned to death by his enemies, and publicly crucified.

Mr. Paine's account of the resurrection of Jesus, shews that he was but little acquainted with the circumstances of that part of the history. "A small number of persons," he says, p. 21, "not more than eight or nine, are introduced as proxies for the whole world, to say they saw it; and all the rest of the world are called upon to believe it. But it appears that Thomas did not believe the resurrection; and, as they say, would not believe without having ocular and manual demonstration himself, so neither will I; and the reason is equally as good for me, and for every other person, as for Thomas."

"mas.

“ mas. It is in vain to attempt to palliate  
“ or disguise this matter. The story, so far  
“ as relates to the supernatural parts, has  
“ every mark of fraud and imposition stamped  
“ upon the face of it. Who are the authors  
“ of it, it is as impossible for us to know,  
“ as it is for us to be assured that the books  
“ in which the account is related, were written  
“ by the persons whose names they bear.  
“ The best surviving evidence we now have,  
“ respecting this affair, is the Jews. They are  
“ regularly descended from the people, who  
“ lived in the time that this resurrection and  
“ ascension is said to have happened, and they  
“ say it is not true.”

Instead of eight or nine, the eleven apostles, and several other persons, saw Jesus repeatedly after his resurrection, and he met the great body of his disciples in Galilee by particular appointment. Paul says, 1 Cor. xv. 6. that “ he was seen by more than five hundred at once, the greater part of them being then alive;” and it is easy to observe, that if the evidence of five hundred persons, none of whom had any interest in deceiving, or being deceived, was not deemed sufficient to establish the truth of any fact, which requires nothing more than the evidence of the *senses*, that of five thousand, or any other number, might be objected to as insufficient. And so far is this  
story



story from bearing any mark of fraud, or imposition, that I challenge Mr. Paine, or any other person, to propose any other circumstances that would have made it more credible than it now is at this distance of time. This I think I have sufficiently shewn in my *Discourse* on this subject, though I do not expect that Mr. Paine will think it worth his while to look into it.

If by the *Jews* who say that the story of the resurrection is *not true*, Mr. Paine means the Jews of this age, or the Jewish Rulers, and the majority of the Jewish nation, at the time, it is acknowledged. But their unbelief is much more easily accounted for, on the supposition of the story being true, than the belief of the many thousands of Jews who entertained no doubt of it at the time, on the supposition of its not being true. For these must have had as strong a prejudice against the belief of it as any other Jews; and no prejudice of which we have any account in history could be stronger than this.

Had the Jewish nation in general, in consequence of their believing this fact, become christians, Mr. Paine would have had much more to object to the story than he now has; as he would, no doubt, have said that the Jewish priests and rulers were in the secret, and must have had it in their power to contrive and execute

cute the scheme of a resurrection, or any thing else which they had thought proper for their purpose; that there does not appear to have been any motive for a rigorous inquiry into the truth at the time, and that it is too late now.

Mr. Paine may require the same evidence for the resurrection of Jesus that Thomas did, and he may require the same evidence of any other fact, and believe nothing but what he himself sees. But it satisfies me, that persons as incredulous as Thomas evidently was, and as much so as Mr. Paine himself could have been, persons as capable of judging in the case, and as much disposed rigorously to examine into the truth, were convinced of it. The evidence that satisfied such persons as these, and a sufficient number of them, would, no doubt, have satisfied me, if I had been in their place. It is not expected that facts in the christian history, or those in any other history, will be believed by the violently prejudiced. It is enough that they gain the assent of persons of competent judgment and candour, and whose minds are in a proper state to be impressed by reasonable evidence.

I am, &c.

L E T-

## LETTER IV.

*Of the proper Origin of the Scheme of Christianity, and Antiquity of the Books of the New-Testament.*

DEAR SIR,

MR. PAINE's account of the origin of what he calls christianity, is the most curious romance I have ever met with. He does not deal in dates, any more than in quotations, writing wholly from his memory, and as he acknowledges, without having even a Bible at hand. But he should have told us about what time he supposed the christian system, which gives him so much offence, was formed. He owns it is unjustly ascribed to Christ himself. We may, therefore, suppose that the æra to which he refers it, was either the time when the books of the New Testament were written, or when they were collected and arranged as they now are. But as they were collected and kept together, almost as soon as they were written, those two dates cannot be far distant from one another; and indeed, he himself makes no great distinction between them; but having no knowledge of history, he refers the writing of these books to a period even some centuries later than

than the true one, as acknowledged by all other enemies of christianity.

“ The writings ascribed to the men called  
 “ Apostles, he says, p. 73, are chiefly con-  
 “ troversial, and the gloominess of the subject  
 “ they dwell upon, that of a man dying in  
 “ agony on the cross, is better suited to the  
 “ gloomy senses of a monk in a cell, by whom  
 “ it is not impossible they were written,  
 “ than to any man breathing the open air of  
 “ the creation.”

Now it is well known that nothing of the system of monkery existed, or was thought of, in the time of the apostles; and the great maxims of their writings condemn every thing that leads to it. Let Mr. Paine point out any passage in the New Testament that, in the most distant manner, intimates that God is pleased by the mortifications and torments that men inflict on themselves, or that it is their duty, or at all acceptable to God, that they should shut themselves up from the world, and decline the active duties of life. On the contrary, if he will condescend to look into his Bible once more (but from the contempt with which he speaks of it, it is not probable he ever will, or that he could read it without prejudice if he did) he will find that the great duties which he himself would say are most incumbent upon men as members of society,

society,

society, are those which are chiefly insisted upon there, and that nothing is more strongly inculcated in the scriptures, than that men are to shew their love to God, their common parent, by kind offices to his children, and their brethren.

Mr. Paine is of opinion, p. 58. "that the passages in the New Testament on which the whole theory or doctrine of what is called the redemption is built, have been manufactured and fabricated, on purpose to bring forward the secondary and pecuniary redemptions of the church of Rome. Why," says he, "are we to give this church credit, when she tells us that those books are genuine in every part, any more than we give her credit for any thing else she has told us, or for the miracles she says she has performed? That she could fabricate writings is certain, because she could write, and the composition of the writing in question is of that kind, that any body might do it; and that she did fabricate them is not more inconsistent with probability than that she should tell us, as she has done, that she could, and did, work miracles."

Here Mr. Paine is guilty of the grossest anachronism, since it is well known, that the system of *pecuniary redemptions*, was not established till many centuries after the writing of

the books of the New Testament, which it is evident, contain nothing that could lead to it. To say that the church could, or that it was willing to invent books, with any particular view, is nothing to the purpose, when all history shews, that the books actually existed long before the church had any such views. Besides, if some persons were interested in forging books, were not others as much interested in detecting the forgery? Or will Mr. Paine say, that the apostles, and other primitive christians, had any advantage in point of literature, or superior understanding, which could enable them to impose upon the whole world, and so much to their injury, as Mr. Paine pretends? This *church* must have been a most extraordinary personage, to have done all that Mr. Paine ascribes to her. She must have been a very great knave, and the world a very great fool. But all knavery has not been confined to churchmen, nor all folly to the rest of the world. History shews that both these articles have been pretty equally divided between them both.

Writing, as Mr. Paine evidently does, without the least knowledge of the scriptures, or indeed of history, his work may make an impression on those who are as ignorant as himself. But what scholar will not smile at his account of the influence which he asserts the progress

gress of christianity had on *the progress of knowledge*. “ However unwilling,” he says, p. 96, “ the partizans of the christian system may be “ to believe, or acknowledge it, it is nevertheless true, that the age of ignorance commenced with the christian system. There “ was more knowledge in the world before that “ period, than for many centuries afterwards. “ Had the progression of knowledge,” p. 98, “ gone on proportionably with the stock that “ before existed, that chasm,” (meaning what are generally called the *dark ages*) “ would “ have been filled up with characters rising “ superior in knowledge to each other; and “ those ancients, we now so much admire, “ would have appeared respectably in the “ back ground of the scene. But the christian system laid all waste.”

He farther says, p. 92, “ The fetters up “ and the advocates of the christian system of “ faith could not but foresee, that the continually progressive knowledge that man “ would gain by the aid of science, of the “ power and wisdom of God manifested in “ the structure of the universe, and in all the “ works of the creation, would militate “ against and call into question, the truth of “ their system of faith; and therefore, it became necessary to their purpose to cut learning down to a size less dangerous to their “ project;

“ project ; and this they effected by restricting  
 “ the idea of learning to the study of dead  
 “ languages.”

In all this Mr. Paine must have written from documents existing in his own brain only, the real state of things is so much the reverse of what he describes. No real progress had, in fact, been made in any thing that Mr. Paine himself would call *useful science*, for several centuries before the christian æra. The only pursuits to which men of leisure and letters devoted themselves, related to the arts of speaking and writing. In the knowledge of moral duties it is certain, that no real progress was made ; nor do I think that Mr. Paine will say that in all this period any considerable improvement was made in the science of government ; and for about three centuries after the christian æra every thing of this kind went on just as it had done before, without any obstruction, but without any real progress. How then does it appear that in this respect, “ the christian system laid  
 “ all waste ?”

Christianity was promulgated in a state of the world, the most enlightened, the most favourable to the progress of knowledge, and consequently the most unfavourable to any scheme of imposture, of any from the beginning of the world to that time. All the civilized part of the world was then at peace, and the ruling nation had been for some time enamoured with  
 such



such science as then prevailed. Christianity, though at first embraced chiefly by the unlearned, soon made converts of the learned; and in consequence of this, the heathen writers became fewer, and the christian writers more numerous; and there was certainly no appearance of the learned among the christians discouraging literature. This was so far from being the case, that in a very short time the christians published more books than the heathens had ever done, till at length we hardly find any heathen writers at all, but christian writers without number. And this continued to be the case till the invasion of the Roman Empire by the northern barbarians; and this circumstance, not christianity, was the thing that *laid all waste*.

As to the deep scheme that Mr. Paine ascribes to the “*setters up of the christian faith*,” in consequence of the umbrage they took at the progress of knowledge, viz. their contriving that all learning should consist in the study of dead languages, I will venture to say it never existed but in his own single imagination, no other writer, at least, having ever entertained such a notion. The apostles and other early christians, whom Mr. Paine may call the *setters up* of christianity, were in general unacquainted with any language but their own, except that some of them understood Greek. This, however,

was so much the language to which all persons who could read were most accustomed, that it was necessary that all the books of the New Testament should be in that language; and in all the eastern parts of the world, nothing was written in any other language by christians or heathens.

At Rome, and in the western parts of the empire, the christians as well as the heathens wrote only in Latin, and few of them appear to have known any thing of Greek. There were then no dead languages to study, except *Hebrew*, with which, only a few of the more learned christians were acquainted. But those who were, and those who in any other respect distinguished themselves by their application to literature, as Origen, Jerom, Pamphilus of Casarea, and Eusebius, were held in the highest esteem on that account. How then did christianity lay all things waste?

On the irruption of the northern barbarians, (which is well known to have been the commencement of that age of darkness which Mr. Paine ascribes to christianity) all the books, and the literature which then existed were preserved not by the heathens, but by christians; and had Mr. Paine been living at that time, he must have looked for every thing of this kind in cathedral churches, but more especially in monasteries, where it was the occupation of many

many of the fraternity to transcribe ancient books; and without this it is probable we should not now have had any of the writings of those ancients, of whom our author (without knowing perhaps so much of them as he does of the scriptures) speaks with so much respect. What was done for the remains of Roman literature by the christian monks in the west, was done for the Greek literature by those in the east.

In those times, and at the revival of letters, all books being in Greek or Latin, the knowledge of those languages became absolutely necessary, and without any concurrence of the priests, and much less of the setters up of the christian faith, who had all been dead many centuries, it was the only source of knowledge, and almost the whole of literature was, in their circumstances, reduced to the study of them. Such is the *deep scheme* laid by the setters up of christianity, to confine all learning to the study of languages. How a plain tale, as Shakespeare says, will sometimes put a man down?

Mr. Paine's account of the compiling of the canon of the New Testament, is sufficiently of a piece with his account of the origin of christianity. "How much," he says, p. 35, "or

" what parts of the books now called the New  
" Testament were written by the persons

“ whose names they bear, is what we know  
“ nothing of; neither are we certain in what  
“ language they were originally written.”  
Now there is, I may venture to say, a hundred times the evidence of the books of the New Testament having been written by the persons whose names they bear, than there is of Virgil or Ovid having been the authors of the poems ascribed to them, or Julius Cæsar of his *Commentaries*; and there never was the least doubt as to the language in which any of the books of the New Testament was written, except with respect to the gospel of Matthew, which some said was written in Greek and others in Hebrew, and which was probably written in both.

In proportion as any subject is more interesting, the more pains men will naturally take to ascertain the truth; and the Christians who made so much use of the books of the New Testament, and who valued them so highly, were from the beginning exceedingly careful in distinguishing those that were genuine from those that were spurious. Eusebius divides those that were not spurious into two classes, those that were universally received, and those of doubtful authority; and the former contains all the historical books or those which record facts, and likewise the epistles which bear the name of Paul. Indeed, as these epistles were  
mosty

mostly written to whole churches, it was absolutely impossible that an imposition with respect to *them* should not have been detected.

The only books of the genuineness of which the christians in the early ages had any doubt are very few, and those of the least consequence. There never was any more doubt of the epistles of Paul being really written by him (though Mr. Paine, without giving any reason for it, supposes p. 56, that even these may be spurious) than that the epistles of Cicero were written by that Roman orator. The internal evidence is also as strong in the one case as in the other. Let any person read Mr. Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*, and be of a different opinion if he can. I will add, that for these epistles (to say nothing of the other books of the New Testament) to be written so early, and to be received as they were, and the facts referred to in them not to be true, is absolutely impossible, if human nature was the same thing then that it is now.

Mr. Paine farther says, p. 33, “ When the  
“ christian mythologists established their sys-  
“ tem, they collected all the writings they  
“ could find, and managed them as they pleased.  
“ It is a matter altogether of uncertainty to us,  
“ whether such of the writings as now appear  
“ under the name of the Old or the New Tes-  
“ tament, are in the same state in which those  
“ collectors say they found them, or whether  
“ they

“ they added, altered, abridged, or dressed them  
“ up. Be this as it may, they decided by vote,  
“ which of the books out of the collection they  
“ made should be the word of God, and which  
“ should not. They rejected several, they voted  
“ others to be doubtful, such as the books  
“ called the *Apocrypha*, and those books which  
“ had a majority of votes were voted to be the  
“ word of God. The book of Luke was car-  
“ ried by a majority of one only. Had they  
“ voted otherwise, all the people since, calling  
“ themselves christians, had believed otherwise.  
“ For the belief of the one comes from the vote  
“ of the other. Who the people were that did  
“ all this we know nothing of, they called  
“ themselves by the general name of the *church*,  
“ and this is all we know of the matter.”

This may be all that Mr. Paine knows of the matter. But any person who will take the trouble may easily know a great deal more, and that the fact was the reverse of what Mr. Paine describes. The greater part of the books of the New Testament (and I have no occasion to look any farther) were unquestionably written, while the facts recorded, or alluded to in them, were recent, and they were received with full credit by those who were deeply interested in their contents. They were written not in concert, or at one time, but separately, and by different persons, as particular occasions called  
for

for them. Having relation to the same great subject, they were, as might naturally be expected, collected and kept together, as the Jews did the different books of their scriptures. But all persons using their best judgment and opportunities, some collected more, and others fewer of them.

In this state things continued near four hundred years; when as these books, written by apostles or apostolical men, were appealed to in the decision of controversies, it was thought proper to have a standard collection; and the bishops met in council at Laodicea, *Anno Domini*, 373, did this as well as they could, but by no means to the satisfaction of all. For, with respect to some of the books, there are different opinions even to this day. What books should be taken into this collection, and be deemed *canonical*, was of course decided by vote; but if, as Mr. Paine says, those bishops had managed the business *as they pleased*, and not to the satisfaction of the christian world in general, (then, and from the beginning, divided into many parties, some of whom were sure to object to what had been done by others) their decision would have signified very little.

As to the gospel of Luke being carried by a majority of one only, it is a legend, if not of Mr. Paine's own invention, of no better authority whatever. For my own part, I must say,

say, that I never heard of it before; and on the same authority, I doubt not, he might have added, if he had so pleased, that the gospel of Matthew was carried by two votes, that of Mark, by three, and that of John, by four. The gospel of Luke, and the *Acts of the apostles* written also by him, are unquestionably among the oldest books of the New Testament. They were evidently written before the destruction of Jerusalem, and their authenticity was never called in question by any person, Christian, Jew, or Heathen; so that it never was in the power of any council, by any voting, to shake their established credit. He might just as well say that it is in the power of any assembly of literati to vote *Rapin's history of England*, or *Ramsay's of the American Revolution*, to be authentic, or not.

Mr. Paine says the christian mythologists established their system at the time that the canon of the books of the New Testament was formed, though this was near the close of the fourth century, long after the Roman Empire became christian. Will Mr. Paine say, that there was no christianity in the world before that time? Others will say that its best days were then over, and that a corrupted kind of christianity had then begun to take its place. And it was not till long after that time, that, from causes easily traced, it came to be that system of  
 priest-



priestcraft and oppression, which Mr. Paine so ignorantly confounds with christianity itself.

I am, &c.

---

LETTER V.

*Of Mr. Paine's Ideas of the Doctrines and Principles of Christianity.*

DEAR SIR,

YOU have seen, and I dare say have been surprized at the ignorance of Mr. Paine, on the subject of revelation in general, and of the *evidence*, as well as of the *spirit* of christianity, in particular. But his ignorance, real or affected, (for I own, I suspect the latter) of the *doctrines and principles* of it, is not less. He loads the system with all the absurdities, which he might easily have known, have long been discarded by intelligent christians. But such a view of its doctrines as he has given best answered his purpose, which was to discredit revelation, by  
turning

turning it into ridicule. Indeed, the greatest part of his book consists of little else than this kind of scurrility, of which I shall only give the following specimen.

“ Putting aside,” he says, p. 89, “ the outrage offered to the moral justice of God, by supposing him to make the innocent suffer for the guilty, and also the loose morality, and low contrivance of supposing him to change himself into the shape of a man, in order to make an excuse to himself for not executing his supposed sentence upon Adam; it is certain, that what is called the christian system of faith, including in it the whimsical account of the creation, the strange story of Eve, the snake and the apple, the amphibious idea of a man God, the corporeal idea of the death of a God, the mythological idea of a family of Gods, and the christian system of arithmetic, that three are *one* and *one three*, are all irreconcilable, not only to the divine gift of reason God has given to man, but to the knowledge that man gains of the power and wisdom of God by the aid of the sciences, and by studying the structure of the universe that God has made.”

As Mr. Paine is far from being deficient in understanding, he might, with a little pains, have satisfied himself, that the doctrines of

*atone-*

*atonement, incarnation and the trinity\**, to which he here alludes, have no more foundation in the scriptures, than the doctrines of transubstantiation or transmigration. He might have added all the peculiar doctrines of the church of Rome, and the discordant doctrines of all other churches nominally christian.

Mr. Paine, either from art, or for want of better information, uniformly takes it for granted, that every thing which has been ascribed to revelation, even by the most absurd of the Catholics, really belongs to it; and it is sometimes amusing to follow him, in his observations on subjects, concerning which he is wholly ignorant. On that of *mystery*, as well as on that of *miracles* and *prophecy*, which I shall presently consider, he enlarges much to his own satisfaction, and, as, no doubt, he thought, to the instruction of his readers.

“ Having shewn,” he says, p. 129, “ the  
“ irreconcilable inconsistencies between the  
“ real word of God, existing in the universe,  
“ and that which is called the word of God,  
“ shewn to us in a printed book that any

\* “ Christian mythology,” he says, p. 107, “ has five  
“ deities. There is God the Father, God the Son, God  
“ the Holy Ghost, the God providence, and the goddess  
“ nature.” On what authority Mr. Paine asserts this, is  
best known to himself. He might just as well have said,  
that christians had fifty, or five hundred, deities.

“ man

“ man might make, I proceed to speak of  
 “ three principal means, that have been em-  
 “ ployed in all ages, and perhaps in all coun-  
 “ tries, to impose upon mankind. Those  
 “ three means are *mystery*, *miracle* and *pro-*  
 “ *phesy*. The two first are incompatible with  
 “ true religion, and the third ought always  
 “ to be suspected.” Then, after some just  
 “ but obvious remarks upon the subject, he says,  
 p. 231, “ though every created thing is in one  
 “ sense a mystery, the word mystery cannot be  
 “ applied to moral truth, any more than obscurity  
 “ can be applied to light. The God in whom  
 “ we believe is a God of moral truth, and not  
 “ a God of mystery or obscurity. Mystery is  
 “ the antagonist of truth, &c. Religion, there-  
 “ fore,” p. 132, “ being the belief of a God,  
 “ and the practice of moral truth, cannot have  
 “ any connection with mystery.”

Mr. Paine, I suppose, did not know that in  
 many of his observations on this subject, he  
 was writing like a rational christian. He had  
 never, I believe, heard, that Dr. Foster, one the  
 most intelligent and most zealous of christians,  
 and who wrote in defence of revelation, dis-  
 tinguished himself by saying, that *where mystery*  
*begins, religion ends.*

If we look into the scriptures we shall find  
 that the word *mystery* is never used in the sense  
 that Mr. Paine affixes to it, viz. of something  
 which

which it is impossible to understand, or comprehend, but only something that was unknown till it was revealed, or explained. It was in this sense that the word was used by all christians for several centuries before the doctrines of the trinity and transubstantiation were known; and this was also the common use of the word in the English language. Thus the *mysteries of any trade* did not mean any thing incomprehensible in that trade, but only the *secrets* of it, which every master was obliged to make known to his apprentice. The *great mystery* that the apostle Paul speaks of, was the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews, which, though unknown and unsuspected by the zealots among the latter, there was no difficulty in understanding.

As to any other kind of mystery in religion, such as the doctrine of incarnation, that of the trinity, or transubstantiation, we disclaim them as much as Mr. Paine can do. We also agree with Mr. Paine in acknowledging that there are some things which we cannot help believing, though we cannot comprehend them. He acknowledges the belief of a God to be in this sense mysterious or incomprehensible. For certainly we can have no conception how the universe should require a cause, and yet that the cause of the universe should require none. But we find ourselves compelled to believe it, be-

cause we should otherwise involve ourselves in a still greater difficulty, viz. that the universe must have begun to exist without any cause at all. Consequently, something *must* have been uncaused. The christian doctrine of a resurrection is not more mysterious in this sense than Mr. Paine's belief of an immaterial and immortal soul, which evidently does not think without the body, and the brain, and which it is therefore philosophical to suppose incapable of thinking without them, and yet is taken for granted to continue to think when the body and brain are totally destroyed.

Mr. Paine strangely enough supposes, that we are to look for the origin of christianity in that system of *heathenism*, to which it is most hostile, and which in the end, it completely overthrew. "It is not difficult," he says, p. 16, "to account for the credit that was given to the story of Jesus Christ being the son of God. He was born at a time when the heathen mythology had still some fashion and repute in the world, and that mythology had prepared the people for the belief of such a story. It is curious," he farther says, p. 17, "to observe how the theory of what is called the christian church, sprung out of the tail of heathen mythology. A direct incorporation took place in the first instance, by making the reputed founder to be celestially

“lestially begotten. The trinity of gods  
“that then followed, was no other than a re-  
“duction of the former plurality, which was  
“about twenty or thirty thousand. The statue  
“of Mary succeeded the statue of Diana of  
“Ephesus. The deification of heroes changed  
“into the canonization of saints. The  
“mythologists had gods for every thing,  
“the christian mythologists had saints for  
“every thing. The church became as crowded  
“with the one, as the pantheon had been  
“with the other, and Rome was the place  
“of both. The christian theory is little else  
“than the idolatry of the ancient mytholo-  
“gists accommodated to the purposes of  
“power and revenue, and it yet remains to  
“reason and philosophy to abolish the am-  
“phibious fraud.”

In all this, Mr. Paine, for want of better information, or affecting to want it, has most evidently confounded, as indeed he does perpetually, the corruptions of christianity, and even those of a very late date, with christianity itself. The former, it is acknowledged, arose from the principles of the heathen philosophy, and the heathen religion, as myself and many others have clearly proved. Mr. Paine should have shewn, that these doctrines of the incarnation, of a trinity of gods, and a multiplicity of objects of worship, were authorized

by the scriptures; because otherwise it makes nothing for his argument. But it was more convenient for his purpose not to make this obvious distinction. He must have known that there are many christians, who believe nothing more of the things that he here objects to than himself.

Mr. Paine is perpetually introducing the Mosaic account of the creation, as a necessary part, nay the very foundation of the system of revelation, and yet he himself says, p. 37, "that Moses does not take it on himself, by introducing it with the formality that he uses on other occasions, such as that of saying, *The Lord spake unto Moses, saying.*" After giving an account of the ancient mythologists, and the war of the giants against Jupiter, he says, p. 24. "The christian mythologists tell that their satan made war against the Almighty, who defeated him, and confined him afterwards, not under a mountain, but in a pit. It is here easy to see that the first fable suggested the idea of the second. For the fable of Jupiter and the giants was told many hundred years before that of satan. Thus far the ancient and the christian mythologists differ very little from each other. But the latter have contrived to carry the matter much farther. They have contrived to connect the fabulous part of  
" the



“ the story of Jesus Christ with the fable ori-  
“ ginating from Mount *Ætna*, and in order  
“ to make all the parts of the story tie toge-  
“ ther, they have taken to their aid the tradi-  
“ tion of the Jews. For the christian mytho-  
“ logy is made up partly from the ancient  
“ mythology, and partly from the Jewish tra-  
“ dition.”

From what we have already seen of Mr. Paine, we have no reason to expect from him much accuracy with respect to history and chronology. If he supposes, as he evidently does, that the fable of *fatan* was subsequent to that of *Jupiter* and the giants, and borrowed from it, he ought to produce his authorities for so novel an opinion. For I believe it is universally allowed that the books ascribed to *Moses* are at least a thousand years older than any others that are extant. But the history of *fatan*, though found at full length in *Milton*, where Mr. Paine probably learned it, is not found in the writings of *Moses*, who does not so much as mention *fatan*, or the devil, in any part of his writings. Both the idea and terms were probably introduced from the oriental philosophy, in which there was a *principle of evil* opposed to a *principle of good*. But by *Satan* or the devil, it is most probable that the sacred writers meant only an allegorical, not a real person. Our Saviour calls *Judas a devil*,

and Peter *Satan*, because their thoughts were improper, arising from something that was evil, or amiss, within them.

“The most extraordinary,” Mr. Paine says, p. 142, “of all the things called miracles, “related in the New Testament, is that of “the devil flying away with Jesus Christ, and “carrying him to the top of a high mountain, “and to the top of the highest pinnacle of “the temple.” But the probability is, either that all this scenery was a vision, or a figurative account of what passed in the mind of Jesus; representing all the trials to which he would be exposed in the course of his public ministry, trials arising from ambitious or interested views.

The story of the *miraculous conception* of Jesus could not escape a person, whose object it was to turn christianity into ridicule. So much does Mr. Paine consider this miracle as essential to the christian scheme, that he says, p. 19, “the account given of his resurrection and “ascension was the necessary counter-part “to the story of his birth.” Now Mr. Paine might have known, that there have been in all ages, christians, who never professed to believe the miraculous conception. The Jewish christians in general, who may be presumed to be the best judges in the case, never received it. Their Gospel, which was that of Matthew, had not

not the two first chapters; and though there is not the same external evidence of the spuriousness of the two first chapters of the Gospel of Luke, there is great internal evidence of it, and some of an external nature, as may be seen in my *History of early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ*. However the truth of christianity does not rest upon any miracles performed in secret, such as that of the miraculous conception, or the temptation of Jesus, if the literal account of it be true, but upon facts of the most public nature, which were open to the examination of great numbers of persons, such as his miracles wrought in the face of the whole country, in the presence of his enemies, his death, and his resurrection. If these facts were true, there can be no doubt of the divine origin of christianity, whatever we may think of particular circumstances relating to it.

The most extraordinary account of the nature and tendency of christianity, that I believe was ever given by any man, and the farthest from every appearance of truth is, Mr. Paine's representing it as nearly allied to *atheism*. "As to the christian system of faith," he says, p. 74, "it appears to me as a species of atheism, a sort of religious denial of God. It professes to believe in a man rather than a God. It is a compound made chiefly

“ up of manism, with but little deism; and is  
 “ as near to atheism as twilight is to darkness.  
 “ It introduces between man and his maker  
 “ an opaque body, which it calls a redeemer,  
 “ as the moon introduces her opaque self  
 “ between the earth and the sun; and it pro-  
 “ duces by this means a religious, or an irre-  
 “ ligious eclipse of light. It has put the  
 “ whole orb of reason into shade. The effect  
 “ of this obscurity has been that of turning  
 “ every thing upside down, and representing  
 “ it in the reverse, and among the revolutions  
 “ it has thus magically introduced, it has made  
 “ a revolution in theology.”

This is such random wild assertion as re-  
 quires no particular refutation. With much  
 more reason did Mr. Paine assert, that christi-  
 anity is nearly allied to paganism; for what  
 he conceives christianity to be, abounds with  
 objects of worship, superior and inferior, just  
 as the Pagan religion did. In imitation of Mr.  
 Paine, I shall not attempt to reason on this  
 subject. Let any man read the New Testa-  
 ment, and say whether Jesus and the apostles  
 were atheists, or whether they taught what had  
 any tendency to make them so. It looks as if  
 Mr. Paine was pre-determined to load christi-  
 anity with every term of reproach that occurred  
 to him, however inconsistent with one ano-  
 ther. To complete the inconsistency, this  
 same

same christianity, which is so nearly allied both to *atheism* and *polytheism*, has, according to Mr. Paine, in my last quotation from him, a little of *deism* in it.

I am, &c.

---

L E T T E R VI.

*Of prophecy.*

DEAR SIR,

MR. PAINE'S account of *prophecy*, intended to turn the subject into ridicule, is, I believe, quite peculiar to himself, and by no means corresponds to what may be collected concerning it in the scriptures.

“ All the parts of the Bible,” he says, p. 48,  
“ generally known by the name of *the prophets*, are the works of the Jewish poets, and  
“ itinerant preachers, who mixed poetry, anecdotes and devotion together. The word,”  
he says, p. 44. “ was originally a term of  
“ science, promiscuously applied to poetry and  
“ to music, and not restricted to any subject  
“ upon which poetry and music might be exercised. Deborah and Barak are called  
“ prophets, not because they predicted any  
“ thing, but because they composed the poem  
“ or

“ or song, that bears their name in celebra-  
 “ tion of an act already done. David is ranked  
 “ among the prophets, for he was a musi-  
 “ cian, and was also reputed to be, though  
 “ perhaps very erroneously, the author of  
 “ the Psalms. But Abraham, Isaac, and  
 “ Jacob, are not called prophets. It does not  
 “ appear, from any account we have, that  
 “ they could either sing, play music, or make  
 “ poetry. We are told of *the greater and*  
 “ *lesser prophets*. They might as well tell us  
 “ of the greater and lesser God, for there can-  
 “ not be degrees in prophesying, consistently  
 “ with its modern sense. But there are degrees  
 “ in poetry, and therefore the phrase is re-  
 “ conciliable to the case, when we understand  
 “ by it the greater and lesser poets.”

It is truly curious to observe, how completely  
 Mr. Paine supposes he had obviated every  
 thing that can be advanced by the friends of  
 revelation on the subject of prophecy, by his  
 new definition of the term. “ It is altoge-  
 “ ther unnecessary,” he says, p. 45, “ after  
 “ this, to offer any observations upon what  
 “ those men stiled *prophets* have written.  
 “ The axe goes at once to the root, by shew-  
 “ ing that the original meaning of the word  
 “ has been mistaken, and consequently, all  
 “ the inferences that have been drawn from  
 “ those books, the devotional respect that has  
 “ been

“ been paid to them, and the laboured commentaries that have been written upon them, under that mistaken meaning, are not worth disputing about.”

No doubt, the prophets generally delivered themselves in elevated language, such as is said to constitute *poetry*; but if Mr. Paine had not forgotten the contents of his Bible, he would have recollected, that the Jewish prophets, in the plainest of all language, predicted many important future events, so as to be entitled to the name of *prophets* in the strictest, and what he calls the modern sense of the word. These predictions he ought to compare with the events predicted. It is not his arbitrarily changing the signification of a word that can avail him any thing.

Any person who only looks into his Bible, must smile at Mr. Paine's palpable mistake of the meaning of the term *greater and lesser prophets*; for it has no relation whatever to what they wrote, or to the manner of their writing, but only to the quantity of it. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, whose books are comparatively large, are, on that account, called *the greater prophets*. Whereas, Hosea, and eleven others, who wrote but little, are therefore called *the lesser prophets*.

As Mr. Paine triumphs not a little on this subject, I shall quote what he farther says upon it.

it. “ The original meaning of the words *pro-*  
 “ *phet* and *prophecying*, he says, p. 82, has been  
 “ changed, and a prophet, in the sense in which  
 “ the word is now used, is a creature of mo-  
 “ dern invention; and it is owing to this  
 “ change in the meaning of the words, that  
 “ the flights and the metaphors of the Jewish  
 “ poets, and phrases and expressions now  
 “ rendered obscure by our not being acquainted  
 “ with the local circumstances to which they  
 “ applied at the time they were used, have  
 “ been erected into prophecies, and made to  
 “ bend to explanations at the will and whim-  
 “ fical conceits of sectaries, expounders, and  
 “ commentators. Every thing unintelligible  
 “ was prophetic, and every thing insignificant  
 “ was typical. A blunder would have served  
 “ for a prophecy; and a dish-clout for a type.  
 “ If by a prophet, we are to suppose a man  
 “ to whom the Almighty communicated  
 “ some event that would take place in future,  
 “ either there were such men, or there were  
 “ not. If there were, it is consistent to be-  
 “ lieve that the event so communicated would  
 “ be told in terms that could be understood,  
 “ and not related in such a loose and obscure  
 “ manner as to be out of the comprehension  
 “ of those that heard it, and so equivocal as  
 “ to fit almost any circumstance that might  
 “ happen afterwards. It is conceiving very  
 “ irreverently



“ irreverently of the Almighty, to suppose  
“ that he would deal in this jesting manner  
“ with mankind. Yet all the things called  
“ *Prophecies*, in the book called the Bible,  
“ come under this description.”

“ But it is with prophecy as it is with mi-  
“ racle. It would not answer the purpose,  
“ even if it were real. Those to whom a  
“ prophecy should be told, could not tell whe-  
“ ther the man prophesied or lied, or whe-  
“ ther it had been revealed to him, or whe-  
“ ther he conceited it; and if the thing that  
“ he prophesied, or pretended to prophecy,  
“ should happen, or something like it, among  
“ the multitude of things that are daily happen-  
“ ing, nobody could again know whether he  
“ foreknew it, or guessed at it, or whether it  
“ was accidental. A prophet, therefore, is  
“ a character useless and unnecessary, and the  
“ safe side of the case is, to guard against being  
“ imposed upon, by not giving credit to such  
“ relations.”

By Mr. Paine's own account, he has not read his Bible lately, and probably will never look into it any more. But I appeal to any person who is in the habit of reading it, whether *his* account of prophecy, or that which I shall give, be the more just. Prophets, in the scripture sense of the word, were men to whom God communicated whatever he intended to be delivered to others. Some of these com-  
munications

munications were moral admonitions, but others were distinct, unequivocal annunciations of future events, to take place, either very soon, or at distant periods. Such are the prophecies of Moses, now in a state of fulfilment, concerning the future history of the Israelitish nation, their settlement in the land of Canaan, their expulsion from it, and their dispersion into all parts of the habitable world, previous to their final restoration to it; those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others, concerning many particular definite events, which happened in their own time, as well as the future glorious state of their nation, and the peaceful and happy state of the world in general; those of Daniel concerning the succession of the four great monarchies, and those of our Saviour concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Let any person of common discernment peruse these prophecies, and say whether they could have been written so long before the events by *guess* or by *accident*. If not (which such a person must pronounce to be the case) the language could only be dictated by that great Being who sees all events in their most remote causes, and therefore are proofs of divine communication.

Some parts of the book of Daniel, and also of the Revelation, are written in such a manner, that it is probable we shall not understand

stand them completely, till we can compare them with the events to which they are to correspond. But it is very possible we may then be satisfied, that only he who can see the end from the beginning, could have described them even in that obscure manner so long beforehand; and the reason of the obscurity of those particular prophecies, concerning events which are yet to come, is pretty obvious. For as these prophecies are now in the hands of those who respect them, it might have been said that they contributed to their own fulfilment, by the friends of revelation endeavouring to bring about the events predicted. However, though some intermediate steps in the great train of events be thus obscure, both the great outline of the whole, and the catastrophe, are most clearly expressed. Obscure as is the language of these prophecies, they plainly enough indicate a long period of great corruption in christianity, especially by the rise of a persecuting power within itself; but that this power, together with all the temporal powers of this world, in league with it, is to be overthrown; and that this will be a season of great calamity, such as the world had never experienced before; that after this, Christ will come in the clouds of Heaven, when there will be a resurrection of the virtuous dead, and a commencement of a glorious and peaceful state of the world in general.

general. After this will be the resurrection of all the dead, and the general judgment. Is it conceiving irreverently of the Almighty, and supposing that he jests with mankind, when he clearly announces to them events of this great magnitude, in which they are so nearly interested?

I am, &c.

---

## LETTER VII.

### *The Conclusion.*

DEAR SIR,

IT is amusing to observe how differently the same things impress different persons. Mr. Paine, speaking of the Bible in general, says p. 38, “ When we read the obscene stories, “ the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and “ torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the “ Bible is filled, it would be more consistent “ that we called it the word of a demon, than “ the word of God. It is a history of wicked-  
“ nefs,

“ nefs, that hath served to corrupt and  
“ brutalize mankind, and for my own part I  
“ sincerely detest it, as I detest every thing  
“ that is cruel. We scarcely meet with any  
“ thing, a few phrases excepted, but what de-  
“ serves either our abhorrence or our contempt,  
“ till we come to the miscellaneous parts of the  
“ Bible.”

The probability is that I am much better acquainted with the Bible than Mr. Paine, and I read it daily in the original\*, which is certainly some advantage, and one to which Mr. Paine will not pretend. Now I can truly say that I read it with increasing satisfaction, and I hope with much advantage in a moral respect. I do not consider it as written by divine inspiration; but it consists of books relating to the most important of all subjects, the historical parts being written by persons well acquainted with the events which they relate, and the prophetic parts by persons who had communications with God, so as to deliver the most solemn admonitions, or the most important predictions in his name. There are the most unequivocal marks of the most exalted piety,

\* It should seem as if, for a moment, Mr. Paine had forgotten that the Bible was not written in English; since as a proof, that some parts of it are “in poetical measure,” he quotes our common version. See the Note, p. 40.

and the purest benevolence, in the writers of these books; so that the perusal of them cannot fail to warm the heart by exciting the same generous sentiments, with every thing that is truly great and excellent in man.

The Bible contains the history of a most remarkable people, through whom it has pleased God to make his principal communications to mankind; and being a truer history than any other, it exhibits a faithful account of the vices, as well as the virtues, of the most distinguished persons in that nation, as well as of some in other nations; but with the strongest disapprobation of those vices, so that those particulars in the narrative are as instructive as any others.

In the writings of Moses and the prophets, in the discourses of Christ, and in the epistles of the apostles, there is a dignity and an authority to which nothing in the writings of any of the heathens approaches. Even Socrates and Plato are cold and dry, when compared with them. The writings of the ancient philosophers contain but little of what man is most interested to know. Whereas the scriptures leave nothing unknown, that is of much importance for man to be acquainted with. They give the most satisfactory view of the whole conduct of providence with respect

spect to this life, so as to enable men under all events, prosperous or adverse, to live with satisfaction, and to die with confidence and joy, in the firmest belief of a future state of retribution. Whereas all that Mr. Paine says, p. 150, is, “ that the power which gave him  
“ existence is able to continue it, and that it  
“ appears more probable to him that he shall  
“ continue to exist hereafter, than that he  
“ should have had existence, as he now has, be-  
“ fore that existence began,” which certainly affords him no real ground of expectation at all. For what was the probability of his receiving existence before he had any ?

Upon the whole, there are, in my opinion, no writings whatever, that are at all comparable to the scriptures for their moral tendency, in giving just views of the attributes and providence of God, or in adding to the dignity of man, fitting him for the discharge of his duty in this life, and making him a proper subject of another and better state of being, of which it gives him the clearest information and the most satisfactory evidence. I own, I am at a loss for words to express my veneration for those books for which Mr. Paine expresses the greatest contempt. Let those who are best acquainted with them judge between us.

I shall

I shall be happy if these observations on this work of Mr. Paine's gives you any satisfaction, and am,

Dear Sir,

Your's sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

Northumberland in America,  
*October 27, 1794.*

THE END.

1787





