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9

THREE
LETTERS

CONCERNING
SYSTEMATIC TASTE,

EXEMPLIFIED, IN

The CENTAUR not Fabulous :

LAICUS's Letter of *June 7th*, 1755.
London Evening-Post.

AND

The Bishop of LONDON's Second
Volume of DISCOURSES.

Calce Fleming

FAITH! MYSTERY! CHURCH!
Where Myſtery begins, Religion ends.

FOSTER.

LONDON:

Printed and Sold, by C. HENDERSON, under the *Royal*
Exchange, 1755.

Price One Shilling.

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To * * * * * Esq;

S I R,

THE plot of the Centaur not fabulous, is laid to remove infidel prejudice and reconcile to the revelation. But where the poetic genius disdains the confinements of reason, and scruples not to leap the bounds of nature, there will be copious matter of criticism.

Little more needs be said of Laicus, than that of his having caught the college infection, or his being educated in the art of railing at the unity of God, and reviling the unitarian. None with him can be found in the faith, who do not swallow absurdity, in deference to priestly authority; and are content to subscribe those creeds, which men have constituted the standards of orthodoxy. He who cannot subscribe the 14th Article of Pope Pius's creed, is no good churchman, viz. "I do admit the holy scriptures in the same sense that holy mother Church doth, whose business it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of them."

Both these writers speak of the Socinian, in terms of disagreeable distance. And because St. JOHN has given us descriptions of the divine mission of Jesus, delivered in the prophetic Style, in figures

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figures taken from heaven, ascending, descending, or coming down from heaven, used to signify, authority, dignity, power, and the changes of condition; they have concluded these tropes had a literal sense: and accordingly, will insist on the pre-existence of Christ, as an essential of the christian's faith. Tho' the sacred Books of the old testament, would have otherwise taught them; which use the phrase, of ascending into heaven, to denote, "a divine acquaintance with heavenly things, or a more perfect knowledge of the truths of God."

But it is of the nature of systematic taste, to interpret arbitrarily, and to determine confidently. which renders this consideration infinitely solacing, viz. that the God of our spirits has not left the fate of any man, at the capricious mercy of a fallible mortal, or to the destination of any number of them.

The third Letter was occasioned by some confusions, which shade the second Volume of the present Bishop of LONDON's discourses. That celebrated pen, has such strokes of inconsistency and contradiction, as present us with the malignant effects of systematic taste.

Doubtless, the prelatical eye may pour contempt, and the clerical sneer may proceed to damn an endeavour to expose mystery and priestcraft. This matters not, since we have full evidence, that their labours to close the human eye, and prejudice the conceptions

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conceptions of mankind, cannot reflect much honour upon them. And whatever may be the temporal advantage, the scenes of more perfect day can never approve such labours.

True it is they row with the tide, and have the rapid stream in their favour; but neither reason, nor religion, nor truth can promise them a final reward; because no man is religious, but by the use of his own understanding, and in the application of his own abilities to discern, canvas, and judge of evidence.

The systematic taste is vicious; whether of this, or that, or the other complexion: since it wou'd determine character, by opinion or faith; rather than faith or opinion, by character. The healthy, natural divine taste, estimates the soundness of a man's creed, by the regularity of his life. And determines him the genuine christian, whose spirit is benevolent, and whose deportment is just and friendly: "And who has no bias, but what he receives from truth."

To set men free from the delusions of popular prejudice; to alarm, if possible, the wild mystic, entrenched in the sable coverings of night and darkness; to repel the efforts of Enthusiasm, Churchism, and Rome, was the design of this publication. And to do one's utmost in this divine service, is, to prepare to quit these scenes with a full share of tranquility; having no reason of bitter

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ter remorse, throughout life's great and critical review.

In such reference, these Letters had their existence, and with much veneration they are thus thrown before you. But as they freely censure the popular prejudice, they neither ask, nor expect any quarter from the bigot.

I am, .

Sir

Yours, &c.



LETTER the First,
ON
SYSTEMATIC TASTE.



THE Author of *the Centaur not fabulous*, has, undoubtedly a claim to the public esteem, from his very benevolent *design* to lash the reigning vices of the age: for in his freedoms with the *great*, there is discoverable, a zealous endeavour to remove from the vulgar eye, illustrious examples of absurdity and crime. But notwithstanding the general spirit of the piece, there are very obnoxious sentiments and descriptions scattered in it; which not only admit, but require some animadversion.

His *Heroic* faith, which the SOCINIAN rejects, he pretends to shew the moral effects of; p. 25, 26.—“ from faith in these mysteries of a *trinity*, &c. man necessarily, and more
B justly

justly adores the incomprehensible majesty of God; and more justly and perfectly contemplates his own littleness, and disproportion of thought to those truths that are vouchsafed to his faith. hence he heartily renders to God a due honour for his testimony; and a due acknowledgment of his professed care of his Church; and a due thankfulness for the mercy of his revelation. he renders a due obedience to his proper government, as a Christian, that is, the authority of the Church; and a due assistance to the public peace, which is never safely built but on unity of judgment.”

Enough, of all conscience, to shew the moral effects of faith in mystery. but as certainly too much for a man endowed with *reason*, and in any degree consistent with himself. for, what or how is mystery concerned, in our adoration of the incomprehensible majesty of God? a trinity of persons, and the majesty, the peerless majesty of God, are, in nature and reason, irreconcilable. It will not, it does not help the adoration; but greatly forwards the confusion. how do we center our reverence in unity, when there is no unity, but a plurality? which way do we give God *all* the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, if there are three persons, *equal* claimants of the homage? and which way does the mystery conduce to a more just and perfect contemplation of our littleness, and disproportion of thought? not more aptly, than any other jargon, absurdity, or

or contradiction can tend to humble the sentiment.

And what can possibly be meant, “by rendering God a due acknowledgment of his professed care of his church?” This indeed is immediately explained, by our rendering a due obedience to our proper government, as Christians, that is, to the *Authority of the Church*—Here the secret bursts open, and though it is impossible the mystery of the *trinity* should ever have this moral effect, *viz.* to excite in us a due thankfulness for the mercy of a *revelation*; yet, the frankness, the unreservedness of the Author, lays us under no trifling obligation to him for not keeping us in suspense; but so seasonably removing the obscurity of his own ground of reverence for mystery: since we, at once, perceive the vast emolument of power and influence arising from it, which is, “an implicate obedience to the ecclesiastical *Authority*.”—and yet, when a Christian renders due obedience to his proper Government, as a Christian, that is, to the authority of the *Church*; I should imagine, this writer more precisely meaneth, his *parish priest*. forasmuch as p. 26: he saith, “It would be most reasonable in us to believe? unless we, who think it right to believe implicitly in those on whom our *fortune* depends, think it wrong to believe implicitly in HIM, on whom depends our *Salvation*.”

Some might be inclin'd to understand the singular pronoun, *him*, of JESUS CHRIST: but I am pretty confident, when the reasoning is examined, it will not appear to be—his sense. The *church*, the CLERGY is intended, the proper government; for Jesus Christ never once enjoins, or encourages any to believe implicitly on him. he requires, on the other hand, that men use their understandings, and exercise diligently their rational faculties, in all the articles of their religious credence. Besides, he was a *revealer* of truth. “and a mystery explained, is a mystery destroyed: for what is a mystery, but a thing not known.” p. 27.

There is one page however would seem an exception, wherein this writer speaking of the *joy celestial*, arising from a delightful hope of immortality, says,—“by our CHURCH, most properly stiled the *peace of God*.” p. 177. which inclines a reader to conclude, he could have almost fancied to intimate, by the *Church*, the new testament writings, or the sacred scriptures.—But even then, there is no less obscurity; thick clouds return upon us: for where does the Church, i. e. the *holy Scriptures* require an implicit faith in them? do they not expect every man, who wou'd be made wise to salvation, should search and examine for himself into their saving contents? yes, certainly they do.—How is it then, that our Church has stiled the celestial joys, *the peace of God*?—has any ecclesiastical

astical community, or constitution, the sole keeping of the sacred records? or, is there one such enclosure possessed of the celestial *keys*, that open the sense of these writings? Or, are the scriptures as able to make one man wise to salvation, as they are another? if the latter be the true stating, then *implicite* faith, or obedience to church authority, is quite apocryphal; and favours too much of the papal spirit: nay, in very fact, is no other than the language of adulterous ROME.—And yet methinks, this must be the sense of our Author, who will have it, “that a due assistance to the public peace, is never safely built, but on *UNITY* of judgment.”

For arguments sake, we will allow him to mean, by the *Church*, the English Ecclesiastical establishment; which requires an express assent and consent to her *thirty nine* articles of faith, as the qualification for her religious servants, or rather, consecrated officers.—But is there *unity* in these articles? is there any consistency found among them? or, is there any such thing as *unity*, in the judgment of the men who subscribe them? —Let us, for example, compare the opinions of this poetical, this passionate declaimer, and the doctrine of those articles, in one or two particulars.

Art. 9. “Original sin standeth not in the following of *Adam*, but it is the fault or corruption of every man, that *naturally* is engendered of the off-spring of *Adam*, whereby man
is

is — of his *own nature* inclined to evil——and this infection of *nature* doth remain; yea, in them that are regenerated”——

Art. 10. “ The condition of man after the fall is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling on God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will.”

What saith our author, supposed to be in *priest's orders*, “ Reason and virtue are the sole beauty and sole salvation of all. Thro’ all her realm creation groans without it. The Deity is all reason in his nature, conduct, and commands. The great, invariable, eternal alternative throughout his creation, is, OR REASON, OR RUIN.” p. 107.

And again, “ highly reverence thy own nature; more profoundly adore the divine. and thus to glad all heaven, assert, rescue, ennoble, and with bliss eternal crown thy self: for without thee, in the constituted order of things, heaven is unable to do it——without thee, thou great being! (pardoned be the word so bold) there is impotence in heaven.” p. 292.

Neither

Neither are these to be deemed hasty starts, or noddings and trippings of the judgment, the meer effects of an absent or interrupted hour : for p. 324. “ a maxim most true and useful it is, no man ever thought too highly of HIS NATURE, or too meanly of himself.”

Passages full to my purpose, which prove to a demonstration, there is no unity, no agreement between the articles, and the fixed judgment of this son of the church. for the article affirms, the *nature* of man corrupt and depraved ! this writer affirms, the *nature* of man is such, as demands to be highly revered ! and that no man has ever thought too highly of *his nature*. — The article affirms, the imbecility of man, that he has no power to do good, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will. This writer affirms, that reason and virtue are the sole beauty and sole salvation of all—the great alternative, throughout his creation, is, OR REASON, OR RUIN. Nay, to glad heaven, he exhorts and enjoins, that we assert, rescue, ennoble, and with blifs eternal *crown ourselves* : for without us, in the constituted order of things, heaven is *unable* to do it. without us, there is *impotence* in heaven.—

Do not the sentiments clash and militate extremely ? nay, do they not irreconcilably oppose ? and where then is the UNITY of
judge-

judgment, necessary to the public peace?—But alas! altogether as inconsistent is this declaimer with himself, as he is with the articles of his own church: since in the point of mystery and implicate faith, already noticed, for which he so warmly contends, he confronts that noble declaration, “of reason and virtue being the sole beauty and sole salvation of all. The Deity is all reason in his nature, conduct and commands.” *Mystery* is thus nothing in all the realm of creation: because, *reason*, she groans without. all the while, *mystery* gives faith all her figure, and determines all her significance.

One thing more has sullied the face of *the Centaur not fabulous*; I mean, the grave arrogance; the solemn presumption of the pen, that could dare to write the following lines, “None ever fully complied with these (the moral precepts,) but was easily reconciled to the mysteries of the Gospel.” He does not mean the revealed mysteries of the Gospel, but what he himself has called mysteries. and he brands the *socinians* as heretics, who have, in a manner, rejected them all. p. 24. And yet, “*faith* in these mysteries, *he’ll tell you*, is more acceptable to God, than faith in less abstruse articles of our religion; because it pays that honour which is due to his testimony; and the *more incredible* the matter is which we believe, the more respect we shew to the RELATOR.”—

Could

Could the imagination of man, the most accustomed to *resveries* and ravings, ever have given so extravagant a representation of religious faith? whatever this Author may be able to say, he will never, upon his principle, discountenance the infallibility of *Rome*, or, explode the mad whim of *transubstantiation*. It, on the contrary, bids fair, upon his axiom, to do the most honour to God; “because the more incredible the matter is which we believe, the more respect we shew to the relator.” Let him, if he can, give us a sample of his skill, or sagacity, in dislodging the enemy from this *redoubt*, he has built for him with his own hands. I call it so, because it has all its strength or defence in its front.—He may rally all his force, and feed all his fire with what *pabulum* he pleases; his attempts will be no better than striking the Oak with the Osier, or putting his finger at the foot of the mountain, in order to its dislodgment.

Allow him his notion of religious faith, the plain and simple, the infinitely interesting and important articles of our religion, lose all their glory; they vail to the mummerly of non-sense and absurdity. Such a *faith* is surely more fit for fools and madmen, than for the rational, the sensible and sober parts of God’s creation.—for I ask, what possible idea can be fixed to the terms? —“it pays that *honour* which is due to the testimony.”—what is the honour I pay any being, in giving credit to a testimony, because the matter is

incredible, do I not, in doing so, discover the most irrational frenetic use of all my powers? or, the extremely perverse application of them! *To believe a matter, because it is not to be believed*; is a very strange and unaccountable way, of doing honour to any testimony.—Such indeed seems to be the case of *transubstantiation*, and some other like sort of mysteries, which contain mathematical contradictions: but who, in his senses, ever could once discover the least *honour* done to God, in such a ridiculous, such a romantic faith?

What is the definition he gives of *faith* “ It is a submission of our understandings, an oblation of our *idolized* reason, to God; which he requires so indispensably, that our whole will and affections, tho’ seemingly a larger sacrifice, will not, without it, be received at our hands.” p. 16.

What now is the apostolic definition of *faith*? “ It is the substance of things hoped for; and the evidence of things not seen.”—i. e. it converseth with the evidence of invisible things. Thus it is said, “ that the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”—How very contradictory these definitions? one, sacrificeth the understanding and reason of man, and absolutely dischargeth them from any religious function or operation: the other, requires their most vigorous activity and constant energy, in conversing with evidence; in directing and animating the volitions and resolutions

solutions of the human heart. The one definition would suppose, an utter suppression of all the efforts of reason and understanding, in order that the will and affections may become an acceptable oblation: the other, would insist on their utmost liberty and freedom, in all their enquiries and examinations; in order that the compliance of the will, and the approbations of the heart, may constitute a reasonable, or an acceptable service.—

Dr. *Whichcot* was certainly much nearer the truth, than this *Divine*, when he said, “ we have nothing to give to God, but our consent, our will, or volition.” This he thought the only sacrifice. whilst this writer imagines, “ that the understanding and reason being sacrificed, give all the value and virtue to the volitions.” I cannot conceive of it, as either the more or the less absurd, than it is to suppose, that God having given us abilities of discerning, examining, and distinguishing objects, in order to a determination of our judgements, and a choice about them; he will only approve us if we first put out our eyes, discharge or dismiss these discerning powers of and from all their offices; and then, in the dark, play the fool at blind man’s buff, and run our heads against a wall, or a post.

This seems to be a just illustration of that definition of *faith*, which says, “ it is a submission of our understandings, an oblation of

our idolized reason, to God ; which he requires so indispensably, that our whole will and affections, tho' seemingly a larger sacrifice, will not, without it, be received at our hands."

A reader will take no offence, at the repetition of such singular declarations. for every time one takes a review, they administer fresh occasion of astonishment! and carry along with them, marks of a lively GENIUS, in their very fabrication. It is owing to this, that we can, at any time, dwell on that other entertaining romance, which gives us the adventures of DON QUIXOTTE, and his man SANCHE.—

An oblation of our idolized reason to God.—What can be the idea? an oblation of idolized reason, would seemingly be *an idolatrous oblation*. The terms naturally lead to this conclusion. But I am as much puzzled to conceive, in what power and ability of the human mind, *faith* has its inherence or residence, whilst the understanding is thus submitted, and the idolized reason thus offered; and whilst the seemingly larger sacrifice of the whole will and affections, are thus distinguished, as having no manner of hand in these exercises of faith.

Mystical writers surely must have mystical powers and faculties, quite different to those we are favoured withal, who have no higher abilities of perception, than the intelligent and rational ones.

ones. They must: since we are told, "the sufficiency of human reason is the golden calf which these men set up to be worshipped, and in the frenzies of their extravagant devotion to it, they trample on venerable authority". p. 14.

Did this writer but distinguish, and preserve any consistency, we might allow him some meaning: e. g. when any presume to exclude all divine information being given to the understandings of men; supposing, "that he who at first gave the rational powers, to the human mind, could not reveal himself, as well by inspiration continued or repeated, as he did by the first inspiration:"—such may surely be chargeable with the frenzies of an extravagant devotion, as they trample upon a venerable authority. But should he again desire to be understood, to intend, by venerable authority, that of the *Church*, in his sense of the word, there will be unnumbered difficulty in supporting his opinion.

The sufficiency of human reason, for the purposes of human virtue and of human happiness, may not be denied, without infinite hazard and danger; because, in all parts of the habitable globe, it is the only ability in man of using those varied means of information, which are the allotment of different climes and countries. For has God left himself without witness, of his benevolence to any? and to what does his testimony appeal, if not to human reason?

Neither

Neither the foot-steps of Deity, in his works, ways, or word, can be either seen or understood, as such, but by the exercises and operations of human reason. what else enables man to distinguish divine inspiration, from imposture? or the genuine lines of divine truth and love, from the assumed airs of church authority? what else can enable us to distinguish between the compassions of Deity, and the contrivances of priestly care and commiseration? e. g. would one be able to do other, than to look grave at the absolution of MANDRIN, the late famous french Robber, if reason, human reason did not lend her aid; and enable one to rally the delusion?—To the bar of human reason, the divine Jesus made his appeal, when he said, *ye believe in God, believe also in me.—believe me for the very works sake. If I do not the works of my father, believe me not. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin.*—Evident appeals are made to human reason; and the faith of men, in his mission, expected only from the fulness of the evidence, *He that has ears to hear, let him hear.* not he who has resigned his understanding, and made an oblation of his reason; but he, who has in lively use, all his rational powers; he is the man, who is expected to receive the doctrine of this heavenly teacher.—On the contrary, no possible honour can be done to God, by the scheme of faith, that rises in mystery, and sets in obscurity. *He is light, and the father of lights.*—The darkness of night, is, for the roaming of beasts
of

of prey ; not for the aid of human labours : rather, for the cessation of them.

Faith is fanciful, as it is poetical. fitted to perform the most wonderful exploits, only in Egyptian, palpable darkness. affrighted at the scattered rays of light ! with the *mole*, instantly burrows again ; and returns to the impenetrable paths of deep concealment. And yet, in truth, and fact, *Faith* is a non-entity without evidence. *faith* in any report, that reproaches reason, is not, cannot sustain any degree of religion. I know not of one being it could possibly suit, unless a CENTAUR ; some unnatural, some imaginary production : for, “ reason and virtue are the sole beauty and sole salvation of all. Thro’ all her realm, creation groans without it. and the Deity is all reason in his nature, conduct and commands. And because the great, invariable, eternal alternative, throughout his creation, is, *or reason, or ruin!*” hence the believing mystery or things incredible, is an outrage committed, a real insult on God’s nature, conduct and commands. And will dreadfully expose the human mind to darkness, and the dismal dreary glooms of delusion.

This writer would do well to review his address to infidels ; he should as POPE said of YOUNG, reverse his night-thoughts ; for these are not likely lines to draw the wanderer from his distance, and recover him to his duty. much, I fear, of the offence at christianity, is
from

from the antic Church-dress ; the very quaint features, which squint a thousand ways, here delineated, as the *eye of faith*. And is there not extreme vanity in the *end* to be served by it? namely rendering due obedience to proper government, i. e. *church authority*. will not the *Infidel* ask, and reasonably ask too, the meaning? what has the great and good God put my salvation into the hands of any man, and made it depend on an implicate belief in him? what notion must I have of divine wisdom, what of divine benignity and goodness, in the delegation of such spiritual power in fallible men? surely it is impossible, when reason and virtue are the sole beauty, and the sole salvation of all. and when the Deity is all reason in his nature, conduct, and commands.—Prune then, in the name of truth, prune these exuberances, lop off these excrescences from the *Centaur not fabulous!* and restore to your lucubrations the primitive features of faith and religion. In the zeal of your heart for God, *lie not for him*. In the zeal of your heart for the reformation of the world, lay aside the rooted prejudice that warps your scheme, and spoils all its consistency. In other words, *correct your systematic TASTE*.

Nor let the pious writer imagine, these, the remarks of a carping *Infidel*.—They are made by one who religiously believes *that Jesus is the Christ*; and who is solicitous for the rights of private judgment, in all matters of faith and practice. one, who, as cordially as he can do, wisheth

wiseth the reformation of the age : but cannot desire it may be attempted by mystery and nonsense. They are made by one that knows, the systematic pen can never be consistent. that the systematic pen is rarely or never catholic. —for the man who holds opinions reverse to the current orthodoxy, must be arraigned, and sentenced as immoral : because not reconciled to mystery. “ None ever fully complied with the moral precepts, but was easily reconciled to the mysteries.” An amazing association of ideas ! q. d. A man’s heart cannot be honest, sincere and holy, unless his faith be *heroic* ; i. e. unless the matter he believes be incredible ; and the more incredible the better his faith. poor SOCINIAN ! how unhappy thy condition ! how fatal thy doom ! destined to destruction, consigned over to perdition for want of a romantic faith, that would convert a windmil into a Giant ; or that can transmute mathematical falsehoods into theological truths ! But alas ! thou hast no humility, for thou doest not render due obedience to proper government, the *Authority* of the Church ; neither doest thou lend assistance to the public peace ; because with thee and the Church, there is no *unity* of judgment. Hence thy want of conformity to the precept, even because of this obstinate unbending to *mystery*. —But in spite of all thy rationality, *one shall be no less than three ; and three shall be no more than one*. The credit given to this single article, the matter of which is superlatively incredible, pays the honour due

to *Church testimony*; the safe and short way to Church-favour, and to Church-salvation. But if thou choosest to open thine eyes, and to reason on the matter or object of thy faith, thou art spiritually proud, and vainly daring! and because not heroical, from that moment thou commencest *heretical*; and art in the high road to damnation.

Thou art verily in this tremendous condition, tho' reason and virtue are the sole beauty, and sole salvation of all. and the Deity is all reason in his nature, conduct, and commands. Ay; and tho' the great, invariable, eternal alternative, throughout his creation, is,
OR REASON OR RUIN.——

How unfathomable the deeps of *churchism*! how impenetrable her mysteries! and how much more than supremely adorable, her authority! she has the faculty of creating contradictions in consistence. and of consecrating absurdity and falsehood. what omnipotence cannot do, she has done: and we have the testimony of one of her most pathetic striking pens, to conciliate our reverence of her supreme supremacy, and our credit to her super-almightiness.——

If, after all, we should make the bold adventure of with-holding the homage she claims of an *heroic* faith; we must e'en be content to be
damn'd

damn'd by the Church, for the sake of having salvation only from him whose nature, conduct, and commands are all reason.—

On this rock, *Honoured Sir*, let you and I build our expectations of the felicity, that is final.

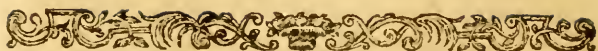
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Yours &c.



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A Second



A Second LETTER,
ON
SYSTEMATIC TASTE.

S I R,



Letter in the London Evening Post, of June 7th 1755. signed LAICUS, tho' void of reasoning, was declamatory. It is not very uncommon for writers, to study the art of alarming the passions. They fasten on these, the more effectually to abuse and mislead the human understanding: especially, should religion, or politics furnish the theme.—In traffic or commerce, the measure would be obnoxious: men would merit universal contempt, who should affect to affix names to things, without any sort of agreement.

And can it be less criminal in any, to create prejudices against persons or opinions, by an arbitrary and groundless association? Such as that of classing together, *Jews, Atheists, Deists and Socinians*? Were we to ask LAICUS the reason of this assortment? it would be no great presumption to conclude him unable to assign a more plausible reason, than that, “ he had heard or read of these different
appell-

appellations given to men of different opinions." But after all, he never knew a man of common sense, pretend an affinity between them. For, a *Jew*, is confessedly one who owns the existence of a God ; and is of opinion, that the Mosaic Dispensation does yet remain unabolished. A *Deist*, in modern phrase, is one who believes in the being of a God, but denies any express divine revelation, or a particular providence. An *Atheist* holds opinions which deny a God and a providence. A *Socinian* believes in one God, and owns both a divine revelation, and a providence. Thus various and inconsistent, are the systems of these several denominations.

As well might *Laicus* have thought of uniting fire and water, and of establishing a communion between light and darkness. nevertheless, with him, they are alike the enemies of truth ; and at much the same remove from the christian faith. They are all of them dangerous to the Constitution. But if any has the lead, in its formidable tendency, it is that of the *Socinian*. " Religion, however the Church, would be exposed to certain destruction, if once the administration of a Christian Kingdom should fall into such hands."

Bigotry thus amazingly blinds the eye, and manacles the reason of man. Had *Laicus* ever used his understanding, or made any extensive enquiry into history, he must have known, that
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in CHARLES the II^d's time, [one of his favourite princes,] *William Penn*, the constituted Governour of Pensylvania, obtained this first article in the *Charter of Privileges*, March 4th, 1680. "That all persons living in this province, who confess and acknowledge the one almighty and eternal God, to be the Creator, Upholder, and Ruler of the world: and that hold themselves obliged, in conscience, to live peaceably and justly in civil society, shall in no ways be molested or prejudiced for their religious persuasion, or practice in matters of faith or worship; nor shall they be compelled at any time to frequent or maintain any religious worship, place or ministry whatever.—And all persons who also profess to believe in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, shall be capable, (notwithstanding their other persuasions and practices in point of conscience and religion) to serve this Government in any capacity, both legislatively and executively, he or they solemnly promising, when lawfully required, allegiance to the King as sovereign, &c." —compare laws agreed upon in England, april 25, 1682. or *the Charter of Liberty to the people of Pensylvania*, to the same purpose; respecting the universal toleration, and the unrestrained rights of conscience.—

If a government of such complexion, could suppose this plan most conducive to the benefit of an infant Colony, and the proper basis of its
growth

growth and advancement to perfection and glory; *Laicus* is as blind as a beetle, if he does not see his own absurdity, in supposing religion at all exposed to danger, by the administration of a Kingdom falling into the hands of a *Socinian*: unless he was able to shew, that the *Socinian* tenets have more tendency to abridge men of the rights of conscience, than the *Athanasian*, or the *Arian*. But if, on the other hand, it should be manifest, that of all the distinguishing opinions, that of the *Unitarians* bids the fairest for encouraging an universal toleration, and an unlimited freedom of mind in all religious profession and practice; then, his apprehensions are all chimerical, and his panic childish and fanatical.

If any *evils* could arise, to the just and equal measures of civil government, from an *universal toleration*; there was more reason to apprehend it in a COLONY, remote from the center of supreme power, and to be peopled from various nations and Kingdoms.—But PENN was sagacious and discerning; he aimed at the standard of reason and nature, in the first principle of the constitution: and he found the advantage, unknown to unreasonable and intolerant states and communities, where the system throws in, besides negative discouragements, other tokens of capricious power; or rather, the weaknesses of rule and sovereignty.—

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I will endeavour to point out the origin of the *Bigotry*, by the assistance of *Monsieur Bayle*; who, if I understand him aright, has finely rallied the MYSTIC, in the reasons he has assigned for the admission of mystery in religion. “The speculative mysteries of religion, *sais he*, are little troublesome to the people; they will, indeed, tire a professor of Divinity very intent upon them in order to explain them, and answer the objections of the Heretics. some other studious men who examine them with great curiosity, may be also troubled by the resistance of their reason; but all other men are at perfect ease about it: they believe; or fancy they believe, all that is said of them, and quietly rest in that persuasion. wherefore he would not be far from fanaticism, who could imagine that citizens and peasants, soldiers and gentlemen, would be freed from an heavy yoke, if they were dispensed from believing the *Trinity*, and the *Hypostatical union*. They like much better a doctrine that is mysterious, incomprehensible, and above reason: they are more apt to admire what they do not comprehend; they form to themselves an idea of it more sublime, and also more comfortable.”*

Thus artful are the mystics. they have the address to manage the weaknesses, and sooth the vanities and extravagancies of mankind. The
scheme

* See his note (H) on Socinus.

scheme of policy, suits with the great aim of popularity: for the more the glare of these consecrated meteors, their visionary preternaturals, the more certain the infatuation. so that mystery in religion, is of the very essence of *witchcraft*, *forcery*, or incantation; as it bereaves a man of his understanding, deludes his senses, and accustoms him to those irrational and wild exercises of the mind, which will prepare him for the extraordinary services of the *priest*, or for those of the *prince*, who would gladly exercise a sovereignty over his faith and his conscience.

The footsteps of *Bigotry*, in all its strange and astonishing effects on the human soul, may, perhaps, be thus traced with more certainty to its source, than any other way. The plausible pretence, is, “that God, out of his infinite wisdom has accommodated himself to the state of man, by mixing darkness with light in his revelations.” † But what if CESAR said this, it is not the nearer to truth, for being his opinion.—One much more wise and knowing than *Cesar*, has contradicted the apothegm, by assuring us, “that so far from being worthy of any revelation from God; no rational man would so much as *light a candle in order to put it under a cover, or bushel.*” But would not this be chargeable on a *revelation*, if darkness was designedly mixed with its light? or will any say, that darkness can be designed to guide the operations

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† Bayle *ibid.*

ons of the human mind, or assist any of its labours? Those who walk by it, will necessarily stumble. and their condemnation must be this, “they chose it rather than light.” Thro’ an affected indolence, and a vicious stupidity they fancied rather to amuse themselves with the imagery of nightly visions, than with those objects which court the examination of open day.

The mystic system will necessarily have a favourable glance from the LADY, who had adopted this maxim, “We esteem those men most, the extent of whose ability we know not; for we always presume the best of what we see but by half.” † A maxim worthy the pen of *Madam de Sablè*, or of any other woman, who is most delighted with the *refveries* of imagination. But, by no means, does it agree with the operations of reason, which are slow, gradual, cool and sober. which suppress the fallies, and restrain the flights of the roving fancy: and which gives rules, too rigid and severe for such lively spirits, much happier in their wild excursions, and who only enjoy themselves in their extatic transports!—We, nevertheless, justly venerate men, as well as do confide in them, from the excellencies we actually discern in them; and not because of what we guess may possibly be their accomplishments, but are absolutely hidden from us.—the latter may best suit the taste of a fine Lady, whose erudition has been in *Novel* and *Romance*; or
whose

† Bayle *ibid.*

whose devotions have been in visions, raptures, and abstractions; but the former will ever guide the honours, which are paid by reason and judgment.

I am almost constrained to cite a paragraph, from a brother of his, of *Brazen Nose*, Oxford;—"Mysteries would undoubtedly never have been revealed, unless they were designed to be enquired into; but then, as they are mysteries, that should be sufficient to admonish us, such inquiries should always be attended with reverence, and profound humility: wherefore it may and often does happen, where the unlearned is satisfied and content with a general account, that his conception of a divinely revealed truth is clearer than that of the more learned, who will not rest easy without diving for conviction into particulars."*

I should imagine, this doughty defender of mystery, mistook BAYLE; in his intending to make such an application of, and improvement upon him. But how much like *Shakespeare's* baseless fabric? how extremely ridiculous the account of mystery? "which would never have been revealed, unless designed to be inquired into. And yet, those who are satisfied and content with a *general* account; in other words, those who enquire not at all, have clearer conceptions than they who do enquire."—

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* *Eccles's* sixteenth Sermon. p. 16. 1755. printed by *Meres*.

this is what he has virtually said, and is nearly the very same thing with BAYLE's saying, "speculative mysteries of religion are little troublesome to the people: they will, indeed, tire a *professor of Divinity* very intent upon them, in order to explain them, and answer the objections of the Heretics."—

I should suppose, *Laicus* had his sentiments from *Bayle*. Yet, what is a mystery revealed? what is it, but a mystery opened, explained and done away; all its obscurity being removed? And if it be, the difficulty of knowing what it means, is no more; and the unlearned may understand it full as well as the learned.—No, but says the same *Oxonian*, "Mysteries were revealed to be enquired into, and embraced, but not to be discovered or comprehended, for then they would cease to be such; neither are they the *less* important for being obscure, as our adversaries would insinuate, but sometimes the *more* so upon that very account."—*

So inconsistent are these *trinity* defenders; for before, he gave the preference to the unlearned; because satisfied and content with a general account, and as having *clearer* conceptions than the learned enquirer. whereas now it should seem, that the more a learned enquirer can puzzle the subject, the more obscure he can make it, sometimes it will be the *more* important.—No doubt, the very learned *University*, was extremely honoured and divinely edified,
by

* Ibid. p. 17, 18.

by the matchless reasonings and heavenly instructions of this preacher !

What, in the name of truth, do these *mystics* aim at ? would they again involve us in the darkness of Egypt ! and spread the sable veil of popery once more over us ? There is, in the defence and illustration of mystery, so much of the effrontery of a presuming spirit ; and always so much censoriousness, with so little charity, or benevolence, that one would be inclined to reject the tenet, from the very spirit of the advocate. *Socinus* and *Arius*, with all their followers, are appointed their portion in outer darkness, by these very confident sons of mystery.

It is beyond measure astonishing ! that persons who consult the sacred teachings of Jesus and his Apostles, should ever once imagine, “ that any *truth* can be held in righteousness, which is not held in charity.” Christian *faith* and *love* can no more be separated in the moral, than light and the meridian ray of the sun, can be in the natural world. No criterion of *truth* is so convincing as that of *goodness*. Love is the end of the commandment. So that to want benevolence, is to fall short of the *grace* of the Gospel. The Bigot should tremble, whilst he reads his new testament. how heavy, how tremendous the weight of judgment, that hangs over the censorious spirit ! since, *with what measure he meteth, it shall be measured to him again !*

These

These systematics plead very speciously for *unity* in the faith; but never conceive of the *unity*, as having no other tenure, than *the bond of peace*. So surely is the systematic taste, a vi-
 ciated one; that either corrupts the truth, or
 else holds it in unrighteousness: i. e. with bit-
 terness, wrath, envy, and malice; with evil-
 speaking and calumny, and with injurious usage
 of persons and characters. And, without con-
 troversy, that zeal is unhallowed, which is not
 of the charitable and benevolent complexion to-
 wards all men.

The late Dr. *Jeremiah Hunt* has finely and ef-
 fectually exposed Bigotry and Priestly power,
 in an aphorism or two.—“Of all the rights of
 men, none are so sacred as those of conscience.
 —God is the only moral governour of the uni-
 verse; if we could give up these *our* rights, it
 would be great impiety to dispose of *his*.—All
 affectation of dominion over the consciences of
 men, is absurd and wicked. all submission to
 such unrighteous usurpations, is base and ser-
 vile.”—See Sermon. Vol. IV.

To return from this digression, to the Letter-
 writer. *Laicus*, as if aware of his inability of
 reasoning, would gladly give weight to his no-
 tion, by making it the basis of religion and of
 the *Church's* safety. And in his panic cries out,
 “ruin! destruction! if ever the administration of
 a Christian Kingdom should fall into the hands

of *Atheists, Socinians or Jews.*" Strange, he should be under apprehension from the *Jew*! But alas! there once was a Bill for rendering easy their Naturalization.—*Laicus* is not less terrified from the scheme of the *candid Disquisters*? which led me to resemble him to an infamous *Divine*, I once heard curse them, in one of our city-pulpits. I mean, the man whom *Orator Henley* did very pertinently represent, as having advanced the absurdity of *MUGGLETON*, in his *Self-existence of Jesus*.—a man of this cast will rail and ramble, abuse and calumniate, without any remorse. *Jews and Atheists, Deists and Socinians*, are, with him, men of the very same religious complexion:—and yet, poor wretch! there is no man who useth his understanding, and has formed any just ideas of opinions, and of the nature and reason of things, but would prefer even atheism itself to *his* christianity.—Nor is there the least danger of mistake, when we affirm, that to such extravagant spirits, bloated with vanity, unsufferable vanity, the divine and rational Scheme of the Gospel, has been made obnoxious to the *sneer* of the indolent superficial enquirer. But this will be the case, whilst men choose to form a judgment of christianity from church-men, from human systems, or from popular names; rather than from the Gospels themselves.—

Religion, that of the christian, has nothing at all to do with the fancies, dreams, and whimsies of men, whose heads are giddy with mystery, with notions of spiritual domination, and with

with civil emoluments of title, rank, and revenue. Such clergy, would contend as earnestly for the peculiar notions of *Arminius*, as of *Calvin*; for those of *Socinus* as of *Athanasius*; if the temporalities did but happen to be annexed to articles of such complexion.—The bounce of *Laicus* on the Liturgy and Articles of our church, is extremely ridiculous, as it would insinuate, there is no christianity without its pale; tho' the very same civil power which has given her episcopal constitution its existence, equally countenanceth and protects an anti-episcopal one beyond the *Tweed*.—

This bigotted churchman is confoundedly afraid of *Socinianism*, notwithstanding. and such are his paroxysms, as would incline one to think him bit by a mad dog; and that the virulence of the poison, instead of exhibiting the *hydrophobia*, has taken this unhappy turn, and vents itself on *Socinianism*.

The examination I have been able to make, into the peculiar tenets of these obnoxious people, has inform'd me of their hypothesis differing from those of other christians, principally, *in their denying the PRE-EXISTENCE of Jesus Christ*. They consider him as truly and properly MAN, tho' conceived in the womb of the virgin, by an immediate divine energy *thus made of a woman*, of a Jewish family, and *so under the law*. They understand his being SENT *from God*, to mean, his divine commission, at-
tested

tested by a presence of divine wisdom and power, that was with him. They understand, that *the glory he had with the father before the worlds were*, was, in the scheme only of the divine purpose; and that the existence he had before *Abraham*, only was in the promise and prophecy. And that, *the world's being made by him*, intends no more than the disposition of the ages, and his having pre-eminence over all, in consequence of his obedience unto the death.

They are of opinion, that GODHEAD, does not import, any number of persons; but only the majesty and dominion of one. And hence conclude it altogether absurd, to ask, “how many persons are there in the Godhead?” when reason and revelation agree, “there can be none other than one God. whose eternal power and godhead are made known, in the works of creation and providence. And perhaps, it will be more difficult to affix absurdity to this hypothesis, than these heated spirits imagine. I should rather undertake a defence of their tenets, than either that of the *athanasian*, or of the *arian*. for it appears, to me, that the notion of *three* distinct persons of equal perfection and glory, is incompatible and inconsistent with the unity of God. which yet is the chief corner stone of the *Athanasian*. And as to the other hypothesis, which reduceth the claims of two of the three persons, in point of *unorigination* and *independence*, by giving these perfections only to one; at the same time, retaining

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taining to the other two, an eternal generation and proceeding; this surely is but a very small and unsatisfactory refinement upon, or an improvement of the tritheistical system. For which reason, I have been tempted to conclude, the *Socinians* bid full as fair for a near approach to truth, as either the *trinitarians* or the *arians*. nay, the *unity* seems to be much better secured with them; because in their interpretation the *mystery* does totally vanish—.

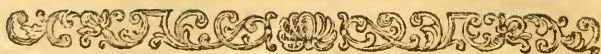
As to moral deductions, or practical useful influences from opinion or sentiment, the *Socinian* may boast far more superior advantage: because his apprehensions of the Deity are more simple and clear, and the unity of the object of his adoration much more distinct. Besides, his conceptions of the *merits* and *righteousness*, the obedience and sufferings of Christ, are far less perplexed and confused, than they can be in the opinion of his proper Deity, or of his half deity and compounded humanity. The very *exaltation* of Jesus, as a reward of his obedience to the death, the *Socinian* better can conceive of and account for, than if he had supposed him to have existed with God for ever, and that all the worlds were actually made by him: since such dignity of nature, does not seem at all capable either of the *metamorphosis* of humanity, or the *Apotheosis* of divinity. And in the article of his exemplary obedience, there is great confusion in both the trinitarian and arian hypothesis: whereas, in the Socinian,
Jesus

Jefus Chrift was capable of temptation, and in all points was formed like unto man ; and therefore became a proper and encouraging *example* of piety and virtue.

It would be well if the *protean Laicus*, in some lucid interval, would fhew himfelf capable of reasoning on the fubject, fo as to favour the world with a better ground of diflike to the *Socinian* tenets, than his own dogmatical declamation. if he does not, there is a quantity of fhame and confufion, that is righteoufly his due, and muft one day pour down on the head of his ftupidity and infolence.—I fhall only add,—


There is no longer any fecret, in the great averfion that church-men have to *Socinianifm*. for what HOBBS faid of fome men, *viz.* “ they are againft reafon, becaufe reafon is againft them :” may be faid in the cafe before us, “ The cry is loud and paffionate againft the *Socinian*, only becaufe his tenets are fo irreconcilable to myftery and church-fyftem.” It is not becaufe of its abfurdity ; but becaufe of its unyeilding obftinacy. It will not mingle with creeds, with litanies, with articles of eftablifhed, current orthodoxy : and is an enemy to all fpiritual power and tyranny. Perfuated, SIR, you will admit of nothing as religious, but what is rational :

I am,



L E T T E R the Third,
O N
S Y S T E M A T I C T A S T E.

S I R,

 H E R E are not any, I should imagine, who read the discourses of the present *Bishop of London*, that can, with a good grace, deny him the reputation of a fine pen. His language is musical, his periods flowing, his style easy and engaging: very sprightly mixtures of wit embellish and enliven them. Neither are some of them, without merit in their reasoning, theology, and morality.

True it is, notwithstanding, that this *Churchman* has not written always, either with perspicuity or consistency. A remarkable point of doctrine we shall pitch upon, in which he has very presumptuously shut his eyes, waded out of his depth, and sadly plunged in obscurity and contradiction: I mean, *that of the operations and influences of the Spirit*. Vol. II d. Disc. II d.

The *Bishop* and Dr. *Sherlock*, shall be placed in two distinct columns, by as distinct citations from the very same volume.

Bishop

Bishop of London.

Dr. Sherlock.

I.

IF men were able of themselves to do the whole will of God, and so to apply to him as to engage his favour and mercy, and to obtain salvation for themselves at his hands; you will find it very hard to account for the REASONABLENESS of the christian religion, which provides *preternatural assistances* to enable us to do that which nature can do without them. p. 32.

I.

Ascribing *faith* to the operation of the spirit, does not make our faith cease to be a reasonable act of the mind. p. 54.

I

II. But

I do not remember that God ever promised to force or subdue our reason to the belief of the gospel by his spirit. p. 57.

II.

But tho' reason, upon due application, can discern the truth, yet it cannot govern the corrupt will and therefore it is one thing to judge with reason, another thing to act with reason : and *the grace of obedience* is given us by the spirit, that we may not only think, but act like reasonable creatures. p. 58.

II.

Reason is the common rule by which we judge of the actions of all reasonable beings, and of our own. p. 323.

III. The

Reason

Reason will not always strive with man; but if often subdued by corrupt affections, it will at last give over the contest, and grow hard, stupid, and void of feeling. p. 203.

Since God has given us reason and understanding to moderate and direct our passions, it is in vain to plead our passions in defence or excuse of sensuality ; unless at the same time we could plead that we were void of reason, and had no higher principle than passion to influence our actions.— It is the work of reason then to preside over the passions. p. 178, 179.

Reason is given to man to govern the lower appetites, and to keep
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keep them within their proper bounds; in this consists the virtue of man: this is the trial to which he is called; and the prize contended for is no less than. immortality p. 190.

III.

The spirit dwells with the faithful, to guide and direct them, to second and encourage their good desires, to help them in overcoming their infirmities, in a word, to labour together with them, in the work of their salvation, to make their calling and election sure. p. 33.

Our Saviour's doctrine, is, that without the assistance of the spirit *we can do nothing*; but with it we may bring forth fruit. To bring

III. An

Bishop of London.

Dr. Sherlock.

bring forth fruit, — is to be obedient to the laws of God, and to be employed in the works of righteousness: so that faith cannot be perfected, or become the governing principle of our lives, *without the assistance of the spirit*, to subdue our wills to the law of holiness. p. 53.

This is an argument for immediate care and industry; *God worketh in us when he thinks fit.* p. 74.

For this very reason we are careful and diligent, because of ourselves *we can do nothing.* p. 77.

III.

An internal proof of Deity arising from Conscience, and the re-

IV. Faith

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flection

flection of the mind upon the good or evil we do, amounts to the fullest declaration of the power of God, and is the compleatest promulgation of his law to mankind that can be desired or expected. with respect to the authority of God, and the common laws of morality, such care is taken, that the promulgation is made at every man's door; nay, in his very heart. p. 394.

Morality not being founded primarily upon the authority of revelation, but upon that reason which is a *common gift* to mankind, every man must answer for the use of his own reason: and where reason shews him the difference of good and evil, he is without

out excuse.—*Reason* was given for the very purpose, to govern passion, and the submitting to passion and temptation against the light of reason is the very depravity and corruption of heart that calls for vengeance. p. 121, 122.

This Sense of good and evil, which is natural to rational minds and is thus guarded against false and corrupt interpretations by the power of conscience, is a great justification of the goodness and equity of God, in taking care to promulge his laws sufficiently to all who are bound to obey them, and to make their duty clear and evident to them ; without which we should not be able to discern him to be the righteous judge of the world, in which

G 2 character

*character we are chiefly
concerned to know him.*
p. 398.

We may observe
what care the author of
nature has taken, not
only to manifest him-
self and his laws to us,
but likewise to secure
our obedience, and
thereby our eternal
happiness and welfare.
p. 399.

IV.

Faith is ascribed to
this disposition wrought
by the Spirit of God.
p. 51.

IV.

The assent of the
mind to the truth of
religion is an act of
REASON, and must be
so notwithstanding the
gifts and assistances
of the spirit which are
previous to the assent
of the mind; so I hope
it will not be thought
it can be influenced by
those

those that are consequent to it. Faith is not perfected but thro' obedience. The power to obey and to love God, we ascribe to the spirit. Now you cannot obey God 'till you know what is the will of God; therefore you must first judge of religion, before this gift can operate : and therefore this gift cannot affect your *reason* one way or other. After you have proved and consented to the truth of the Gospel, it is highly reasonable you should obey it. p. 57.

If any man is willing to do the will of God, he shall know of his doctrine: and if so, then to be willing to do the will of God, must amount to the same thing with being
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of God, and being
drawn by God. p. 50.

V.

But tho' reason upon due application, can discern the truth, yet it cannot govern the corrupt will: and therefore it is one thing to judge with reason, another to act with reason: and the grace of obedience is given us by the spirit, that we may not only think, but act like reasonable creatures. p. 57.

V.

To do the will of God, is to walk in his laws, is to work out our own salvation. this to do, under the assistance which God has given us, *depends upon our selves*: we can miscarry in no point, but in this which is *left to our selves*. p. 78.

Natural

Natural religion is the foundation and support of revelation.— which may cast new light upon the dictates of reason, but can never contradict them. I cannot listen to revelation but in consequence of the natural notion I have of God, of his being, his wisdom, power and goodness : destroy then the principle of reason, and there is no room left for revelation. shall I believe it a spirit come from God, when I know *that the spirit he placed within me*, speaks the contrary ? In which case, there is only this choice, either to disown God for my Creator, or to reject the spirit which contradicts the law of my creation, and the light
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of reason which God has placed in the minds of men. p. 424.

How then does this uncertainty (of a future state) affect the practice of virtue, since the certainty requires nothing of us but what our reason and present interest will teach us without it. p. 402.

You see then that the common sense and expectation of mankind, with respect to the rewards and punishments of another life, is so far from being the effect of weakness and superstition, that it is the immediate result of that reason which God has given us: so strong a result is from our reason, that it is not possible to justify God, and the methods of his
pro-

providence by the reason he has given us, without maintaining the certainty of a future state, in which sin shall be punished and righteousness rewarded p. 419.

Whether the extracts made, are opposed in the best manner, I will not say: but they are so contrasted, as to enable any reader, of common sense and careful attention, to conclude with me,

I. That there is not only obscurity, but contradiction in the BISHOP's discourses. for he would place the operations and influence of the *spirit* in a light which does not consist, at all, with what he has said of the sufficiency and supremacy of reason, in all matters of religion and morality.

II. He has endeavoured to convey an idea of the *Spirit's* agency, repugnant to that freedom and fulness of the human powers of volition and action, which he himself has strongly asserted. for he says, that of ourselves *we can do nothing*; and has, absurdly enough, assigned this as a reason, why we are careful and dili-

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gent, *page 77.* all the while, he has made the whole efficacy of the Spirit's operations and influences to depend *upon our selves.* *page 78.* And not content with this extravagance, in urging this reason of care and diligence, because of our inability to do any thing; he moreover points the motive for immediate care and industry, from "God's working in us, when he thinks fit." Than which, surely nothing can burlesque more the human understanding; or more dishonour the divine volitions.—

III. It should seem as if the Bishop had an infinitely more clear and consistent notion of *natural*, than he has, or ever had, of *revealed* religion. Since he has advanced many excellent observations upon the offices and functions of reason and conscience; whilst he has represented revelation as enveloped in involved *mystery*, and in *subtle darkness.*" Unpardonable is his plea if he would have us think, "that there is *religious mystery* which comes not within the province of reason." He absolutely condemns the plea in the following paragraph——

"WE do not teach that nature and reason cannot lead to the speculative knowledge of divine truths; for the evidence of all divine truths resolves itself ultimately into either sense or reason; which are the common gifts of God to mankind; by the principles of which the truth of all things, depending upon the deductions of sense and reason, may be proved
and

and examined. From the exercise of reason we come to know God, and the essential difference between good and evil; and by these principles are enabled to judge of any doctrine, whether it be agreeable to the pure and holy nature of God; which is the first presumptive argument for the truth of any divine revelation—from reason we learn the *unlimited power of God*—and can distinguish between the works which the power or policy of man can perform, and the works which can flow only from the unbounded power of God.” page 46.

Thus has the *Doctor* at one single stroke disarmed the *Bishop's* mystery, of all its enchantment; and disabled Enthusiasm of all its plea of superiour ability, in any of the religious or moral departments of human agency.

And yet, in this censure of him, we mean not to say, that the *Father of lights* is unable to convey instruction, or throw incitements a thousand ways before the eye of man, in order to excite to the exercise of his reason, and the improvement of his virtue: Still, the rank ABSURDITY, of man's inability to use any divine means, and the necessity of impulsive supernatural impulse, both to will and to do, remains unmoveable.—This hypothesis about the *Spirit*, is not compatible with the promulgation of law, its moral obligation upon us, and our being chiefly concerned to know God, as our judge.—It is quite inconsistent with that autho-

city, made known at the door of every human heart.

I cannot forbear the recital of page 58. “*grace of obedience* given us by the spirit, that we may not only think, but act like reasonable creatures.”—methinks, I see the laugh burst through the lawn sleeve.—The *pen* of such a genius, could not surely be grave and serious.—*grace of obedience!* a spark span new one, now added to the list of graces. Created by the right reverend the Bishop of *London*. This *grace of obedience given by the Spirit*—and not a whit more unintelligible is it, than *the HOLY GHOST given by the Bishop*.—yet, how may we conceive of a sovereign, giving the grace of obedience to a subject; when, at the same time, all the *grace* of his subject’s obedience, is confessedly found, in his chosen and cheerful subjection? Or, what idea can we form of a prince, granting his subject the favour of obeying his own injunctions? Much difficulty is upon the face of this prelatical doctrine. And we must submit to the mystery, from an utter inability of saying, what can possibly be meant by, “the grace of obedience given us by the spirit, that we may not only think but act like reasonable creatures.”—It is well *Bishops* are not called TEACHERS; a reproachful term applied to Dissenting ministers. Happy for the conforming laity, that they are not under such apprehensions about them. If they were, they would soon call in question the reasonableness of the Christian religion, because
of

of it's providing *preternatural assistances* to enable us to do that, which the Bishop has shewn, *nature can do without them.*

HIS LORDSHIP shall not have reason to suspect partiality, in these animadversions; for however flagrant is his systematic taste, there is not less extravagance daily found among men, who dissent from the Establishment, and would be denominated, PROTESTANTS. Many of these talk of the *Spirit's assistances*, and of *free grace*, in the most carnal and graceless manner. Even with rancorous resentments towards those, who assert the freedom of the human mind, in its moral volitions and determinations! It is, with them, to be *unsound* in the faith, should any plead for the use of reason, in matters of religion. and none are allowed to be *Gospel preachers*, but only such, who can solemnly veil their bonnets to mystery; and confess themselves, the most impotent and vile of all the workmanship of God!

Where ever a people or congregation, are under the ministrations of a *Teacher*, who is labouring to recommend the use of reason in all religious matters, and would persuade his *charge* to consider themselves as moral agents and accountable, if these *systematics* have but opportunity and solemn artifice enough, they will quickly sow *tares* in this promising field. they will alarm weak minds, and unsettle them, with notions of *unsoundness* in their teachers! And
such

such is usually their success, that they split and divide, they break in pieces, *churches*, that were edifying on the principles of everlasting truth and reason.

Not a few of these zealots, under pretence of doing honour to the *grace* of God, and of having a zeal for *Gospel preaching*, have done unspeakable mischief to the cause of religion; and have sadly weakened the hands, of the most rational and worthy labourers in all Christ's vineyard. What the end of these things will be, God only knows. but the prospect is very gloomy! and cannot be otherwise, so long, as the busy-body, the wild *Enthusiast* is thrusting his foul fingers into the eye of human understanding, and disabling the efforts of reason, in the services of piety and religion.

Whether the BISHOP has not given too much countenance to the spread of this dreadful delusion, in his inconsistent account of the SPIRIT, and its influences on the human mind, may possibly deserve his more close and serious consideration. for I would, most humbly observe, that every method made use of, to disunite and divide, to discountenance and weaken the advocates for the rights of private judgment, in all matters of faith and worship, will, in its own nature and tendency, infallibly undermine and inevitably ruin the PROTESTANT cause, either in this, or in any other country.

Very

Very confident I am, that such absurdities, such palpable contradictions, as we have found in the *Bishop's discourses*, could never have dropped from such a pen, were it not that system, church-system, under the smile of civil sanction, does strangely warp the judgment; and enables a man to blend and compound flagrant *disparates*, the most disagreeing things in all nature.—When I say, *system*, I would intend to be understood, that of *Church-Theology*, which, has a magic power of infatuation.—Cast your eye on page 41. where this PRELATE has preferred the authority of the Church, to that of the *Old Testament* writings: “Let us therefore work whilst we have the light, and continually pray, in the words of our CHURCH, O Lord, take not thine holy Spirit from us.” A petition, originally seen in Psalm li. 11. But because made use of in the established Liturgy, the prayer is said to be in the words of *our Church*! Of much more authority, to be sure, than if he had said, *in the words of holy Scripture*?—

And because of the church, or clerical dress of the sentiment, 2 Cor. iv. 18. we have a like finishing of *Discourse* xvth. page 367. “And as our CHURCH has taught us to pray, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal.” No doubt, the citation from St. PAUL, [look we not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal,

ral, but the things which are not seen are eternal,] would have a disrelifhing flatness in it, when compared with *the teaching of our Church*.——

A novice in Church-Theology, however well acquainted he was with his Bible, would be apt to flinch, and put an impertinent question or two, *viz.* what is meant by *our Church*? and who invested her with authority, to teach men to pray? Does the new testament writings ever once suppose any *church* so qualified? and who can be meant by them who are taught by her, thus to pray? If a dignified *Prelate* should be thought a principal pillar of the Church, then the *Church* teacheth herself. She exerciseth a spiritual authority over her own self-supremacy. But if a Bishop is a ruler and Governour, a church-legislator; how improperly does he mention the *Church*; as teaching him to pray?— Or, if he would not be understood to include himself, but the unsanctified *Laity* only, and them exclusively of all others, then they should not be conceived of as any part of that Church, who thus teacheth them to pray. the consequence would then be, that the laity are no part of the Church, but taught by her.

Might I form a conjecture, from the acquaintance I have had with the New Testament, the term, *Church*, when used to signify the people of God, over whom Jesus is head and Lord, will precisely include and comprehend, “every sincere Christian throughout the world, in any and every age, from the commencement
to

to the finishing of his reign and dominion." So that it is absolutely impossible, that the *Church* should have ever exercised any one single act of legislation, or authoritative rule, in any matter or thing, relative either to faith or worship. and that of consequence, the notion or imagination of the CHURCH's *teaching us to pray*, is no better than a devout prelatical dream, that may amuse, but can never inform or edify the Christian.

It is more than time, that a protestant Clergy did lay aside the arrogant airs of Authority; and never more presume to mention the word, CHURCH, in exclusive terms. would not they think the Style very ridiculous, if they should read such language in the Sermons of any Dissenting-Teacher? and yet, why might not *be*, with as much propriety, harrangue, "let us continually pray in the words of OUR CHURCH, or, as she has taught us, *Lord, take not thine holy Spirit from us*,"—Is not the Authority which gives him this instruction, in every respect as divine and obliging, as when the language and style is used by the mouth, or the pen of a *Dioecesan-Bishop* or a *parish-priest*? If it be; and yet, in the eye of these Gentlemen, would be reckoned affectation, and insufferable vanity: can it be less vaninty in themselves, to use these groundless and unmeaning airs of Authority. For whatever they have, or ever will be able to say, *in the church or kingdom of Christ, there is no superiority, no pre-eminence; no power of domination,*

no legislation invested in any. Rank, Title, Honours, civil distinctions and emoluments have nothing at all to do with the Kingdom of Christ, *which is not of this world.*

There is but one more remark I should choose to make, and with which I will conclude; whatever these *Church-Writers* may design, they have done more to subserve the cause of infidelity, than ever they will do to weaken and expose it. They would first support *mystery*; and to do it, they egregiously revile reason. So it is they build or construct their theological system. But when they have to do with moral obligation, and are disentangled from their church-tenets, they then give reason and conscience, those natural powers of man, all their scope, energy and honours, maintaining with great eclat their supremacy.

If this be not the case with the *Bishop* and the Author of the *Centaur not fabulous*, my mistakes are extravagantly wide of the truth. If I am right, these Letters may have their use, in some degree detecting and preventing the spread of delusion, from systematic taste.

I am,

S I R,

Your, &c.

The E N D.

