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John M. Felton
Feb, 1952



have been
A.H.J. Clarke.
1709

A
V I E W

Of the PRINCIPAL

DEISTICAL WRITERS

THAT HAVE

Appeared in *ENGLAND* in the
last and present CENTURY;

WITH

OBSERVATIONS upon them,

AND SOME

ACCOUNT of the ANSWERS that
have been published against them.

In several LETTERS to a Friend.

V O L. I.

The SECOND EDITION with Additions.

By *JOHN LELAND*, D. D.

L O N D O N :

Printed for B. DOD at the *Bible and Key* in *Ave-Mary-Lane* near *Stationers-Hall*.

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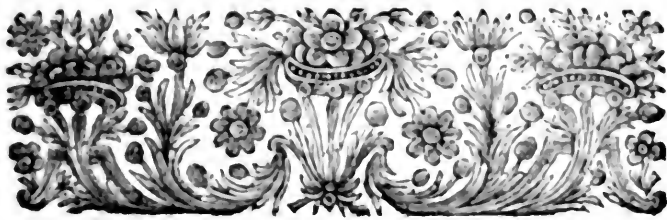
AS a new edition of this work is called for, it will be proper to give the reader some account of the Additions and Alterations that have been made in it. Soon after the first edition was published, the ingenious authors of *The Monthly Review*, in their Review for *March 1754*, gave an advantageous and candid account of the nature and design of this performance: but, at the same time, they were pleased to point out to some omissions in it, which they thought it their duty to lay before the public. These omissions relate to the not mentioning several good Answers which had been published to *The Deistical Writers*, of whom some account is here given. The author was very sensible when he was put upon this work, that he should not be able to avoid some omissions of this kind, and this was one reason, among others, that made him backward to undertake it. He endeavoured however, in the Preface, to guard against any censures to which this might expose him, by declaring that he had not given an account of all the Answers that had been published, but of such of them as came under his own special notice; and that “very probably some have been omitted, which might well deserve to be particularly mentioned.” Accordingly, in the execution of the plan he had proposed, it was a rule he laid down to take a particular notice of those Answers only which he had himself read, and of which therefore he was capable of forming a judgment from his own observation.

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He is now satisfied that it would have been proper to have mentioned some of the Answers which he had not seen, but the characters of which are well known. And therefore in this second edition he has endeavoured to profit by the hints given in *The Monthly Review*, and hath taken care to mention the Authors and Answers there referred to, which are here inserted in their proper places. Several of those Answers he had read with great approbation when they were first published. The only apology he shall make for omitting them is, that this omission was not designed, but was owing to an inattention and inadvertency, which he hopes the candid reader will make proper allowances for, considering the extent of the work in which he was engaged.

In this edition those omissions are supplied: and some other Answers are mentioned, of which no notice is taken by the authors of the *Review*. But after all it is not to be doubted, that some omissions of this kind will still remain, and could scarce have been avoided, even if this work had been undertaken by those that have a much more extensive knowledge of the state of the literary world, and of the history of books and authors than he can pretend to have.

There are no alterations made in the account that was given of the schemes of the several Deistical Writers, and very few additions to the reasoning part of the work. And these are only such as were actually prepared to be inserted in the former edition, but as the author was at a great distance from the press, they came too late to be inserted in their proper places, and therefore were omitted.



P R E F A C E.



O man that is not utterly unacquainted with the state of things among us can be ignorant, that in the last and especially in the present age, there have been many books published, the manifest design of which was, to set aside revealed religion. Never in any country where Christianity is professed, were there such repeated attempts to subvert its divine authority, carried on sometimes under various disguises, and at other times without any disguise at all. The most noted writers on that side, have been at liberty to produce their strongest objections; these objections have been retailed by others: And many seem to take it for granted, that Christianity

hath received very sensible wounds by the several attacks that have been made upon it, and that they have greatly hurt its credit, and weaken'd its authority.

But whosoever will be at the pains impartially to examine those of the Deistical Writers, that have hitherto appeared among us, and to compare them with the answers which have been made to them, will find, that upon a nearer view they are far from being so formidable as some have been apt to apprehend. And since there are few that have leisure or patience for a particular enquiry into the several writings which have appeared in this controversy; some judicious persons who wish well to the interest of our common Christianity, have been of opinion, that it might be of real service to give a summary view of the most noted books that have been published against revealed religion for above a century past, together with proper observations upon them.

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them. From such a view, the reader might be enabled to form some notion of the several turns this controversy hath taken, how often the enemies of revealed religion have thought proper to change their methods of attack, the different disguises and appearances they have put on, and the several schemes they have formed, all directed to one main end, viz. to set aside revelation, and to substitute mere natural religion, or, which seems to have been the intention of some of them, no religion at all, in its room.

Upon such a comparison between those that have attacked Christianity, and those that have written in defence of it, it would appear, that if it be really true that deism and infidelity hath made a great progress among us, it must have been owing to something else than the force of reason and argument: That the Christian religion is in no danger from a free and impartial enquiry; and that the most

plausible objections which have been brought against it, though advanced with great confidence, and frequently repeated, have been fairly and solidly confuted. Such a view would make it manifest, that the enemies of Christianity have not generally behaved as became fair adversaries, but have rather acted, as if they judged any arts lawful, by which they thought they might gain their cause. And yet notwithstanding their utmost efforts for above a century past, they have really been able to say but little against the Christian religion, considered in its original purity, as delivered by Christ and his apostles, or to invalidate the solid evidences by which it is attested and confirmed.

For these reasons it hath been judged, that a short and comprehensive view of the principal *Deistical Writers* of the last and present age, might be of great use. And as the course of my studies hath led me to be conversant in several of those writings

writings which have been published on both sides in this important controversy, it was urged upon me, by some persons for whom I have a great regard, to undertake this work. There was one great objection which hindered me for some time from attempting it, and which still appeareth to me to be of no small weight, and that is, that as according to the plan that was formed, it would be necessary to give an account of the answers published to the books I should have occasion to mention, this would oblige me to take notice of some of my own. I am sensible how difficult it is for an author to speak of his own performances in such a manner as not to intrench upon the rules of decency. If he gives a favourable character of them, this will be interpreted as a proof of his vanity, any appearance of which is usually turned to his disadvantage. And on the other hand, if he should make no mention of his own books at all, where the nature of the design in which he

is

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is engaged, makes it proper for him to mention them, this might perhaps be censured as a false and affected modesty. It is no easy matter to keep clear of these extremes, and for this reason, it would have been a particular pleasure to me to have seen this work undertaken by another hand; but as this hath not been done, I have chosen rather to attempt it myself, than that a work, which I cannot but think might be of real service, should be neglected. It cannot be expected, that a distinct notice should be taken of all the writers that have appeared among us against revealed religion for this century past. This, if it could be executed, would take too large a compass, and be of no great use. A view of the principal, or, at least, of those of them who have made the greatest noise, may be sufficient. And the design is not to give an historical account of the authors, or of their personal characters, but to give some idea of their writings,

ings, which alone we have properly to do with.

The method proposed, and for the most part pursued is this. The several writers are mentioned in the order of time in which they appeared. Some account is given of their writings, and of the several schemes they have advanced, as far as the cause of revelation is concerned. And great care has been taken to make a fair representation of them, according to the best judgment I could form of their design. Some observations are added, which may help to lead the reader into a just notion of those writings, and to detect and obviate the ill tendency of them. There is also an account subjoined of the answers that were published, not all of them, but some of the most remarkable, or such as have come under the author's special notice. And very probably some have been omitted, which might well deserve to be particularly mentioned.

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This may suffice to give a general idea of the following work; at the end of which there are some reflections subjoined, which seem naturally to arise upon such a view as is here given. Observations are made on the conduct of the Deists in the management of the argument. And the whole concludes with a brief representation of the evidences for the Christian religion, and its excellent nature and tendency.

This work has proved longer than I intended when I first attempted it, but I found upon trial, that it was no easy thing to bring such a variety of matters into a tolerable compass. When this is considered, I hope I shall be judged not to have much exceeded the bounds proper to a work of this nature. What will most need the reader's indulgence in this respect, is the latter part of it; particularly with regard to the *Observations on Chubb's posthumous Works*; which some will probably think are enlarged

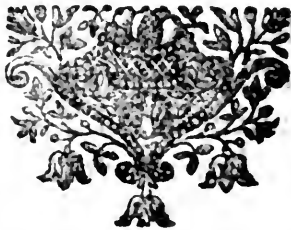
larged upon too much in proportion to the rest of the Work. My reasons for doing so, the reader will find in that part of the book, and I am afraid, after all, that some persons will be apt to censure me in this and other instances for passing over some things too slightly, and wholly omitting others, that deserved to be taken particular notice of. I am very sensible of this, but it was not possible to avoid it without being so voluminous, as would have discouraged the reader, and, in a great measure defeated the end which was proposed in this undertaking. I hope, however, it will appear, that there are few objections of any weight which have been advanced in this controversy against Christianity, but what are taken notice of in some part or other of the following work, and either briefly obviated, or references are made to books where sufficient answers are to be found.

This

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This design was carried on in a series of letters written by me to my worthy, and much esteemed friend, the reverend Dr. *Thomas Wilson*, Rector of *Wallbrook*, and Prebendary of *Westminster*, whose friendship I have before publickly acknowledged *. And I choose to let them continue in this form, that the reader may have some resting places, which may be a relief to him as it was to the author.

* See preface to my Reflections on Lord *Bolingbroke's* letters, &c. p. 1.



T H E



T H E
C O N T E N T S.

L E T T E R I.

Some account of those that first took upon them the name of Deists. Lord Herbert of Cherbury, one of the most eminent deistical writers that appeared in England in the last age. His attempt to form Deism into a System. Observations upon his scheme, and upon the five principles in which he makes all religion to consist. It is shewn that the knowledge of them was very imperfect and defective in the heathen world; and that a revelation from God for clearing and confirming those important principles would be of great advantage.

L E T T E R II.

Farther Observations on Lord Herbert's Scheme. The Philosophers not qualified to recover Mankind from the darkness and corruption into which they were fallen. The usefulness of the Christian Revelation to that purpose. Its not having been universally promulgated in all nations and ages, no just prejudice against it. Other Objections of Lord Herbert considered. Writers that have appeared against him.

Postscript.

An account of a remarkable incident relating to Lord Herbert of Cherbury. Reflections upon it.

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L E T T E R III.

Observations on Mr. Hobbes's writings. He sometimes professes a regard to the Scripture as the word and law of God, at other times ridicules inspiration or revelation. He attempts to invalidate the sacred Canon, and makes religion and the authority of Scripture to depend entirely on the authority of the magistrate. His strange maxims in morality and politics. His scheme tends to subvert natural religion as well as revealed. Confuted by several learned authors.

L E T T E R IV.

Mr. Charles Blount's notes on the life of Apollonius Tyanæus designed to expose Christianity. His Religio Laici copied for the most part from Lord Herbert. He had a chief hand in the Oracles of Reason. He attacks the doctrine of a mediator as unworthy of God. His remarkable concession that it is not safe to trust to Deism alone without Christianity joined with it. Mr. Toland, another deistical writer; very fond of asserting paradoxes. The design of his Amyntor to render the Canon of the New Testament uncertain. He gives a large catalogue of spurious gospels, and pretends that they were equally received and acknowledged in the primitive times, with the four gospels that are now looked upon as authentic. The contrary fully proved in the answers that were made to him.

L E T T E R V.

The Earl of Shaftesbury, a fine and much admired writer. Not very consistent in the account he gives of Christianity. He casts reflections on the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, as if it were of disservice

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disservice to the cause of virtue. The contrary shewn from his own acknowledgments. His Lordship resolves the credit of holy writ wholly into the authority and appointment of the state. He frequently takes occasion to expose the Scriptures, and represents them as uncertain, and not to be depended upon. What he saith concerning ridicule, as the test and criterion of truth, examined. It is shewn, that a turn to ridicule is not the properest disposition for finding out truth: And that there is great danger of its being misapplied. His Lordship's own writings furnish instances of such a wrong application. Authors mentioned that have written against him.

LETTER VI.

Mr. Collins's Discourse of Free-thinking. He gives a long catalogue of divisions among the clergy, with a view to shew the uncertainty of the Christian religion. His attempt to prove that there was a general corruption of the gospels in the sixth century. The absurdity of this manifested. His pretence that friendship is not required in the gospel, tho' strongly recommended by Epicurus, shewn to be vain and groundless. An account of his book, intituled, The Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion. The pernicious design and tendency of that book shewn. He allows Christianity no foundation but the allegorical, i. e. as he understands it, the false sense of the Old Testament prophecies. His method unfair and disingenuous. Some account of the principal objections published against this book, and against the Scheme of literal prophecy considered, which was designed to be a defence of it.

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L E T T E R VII.

Mr. Woolston's Discourses on the miracles of our Saviour; under pretence of standing up for the allegorical sense of Scripture, he endeavours absolutely to destroy the truth of the facts recorded in the gospels. His disingenuous representation of the sense of the fathers on this head, and his false quotations. He charges the account given of Christ's miracles as absurd, false, and incredible. His gross and profane buffoonery, and base reflections on the character of our Saviour; and yet he pretends a zeal for his honour and messiahship. A specimen of his way of reasoning with regard to several of Christ's miracles, and his resurrection: Many good answers published against him.

L E T T E R VIII.

The present age a happy time of liberty, but that liberty greatly abused. An account of Dr. Tindal's Christianity as old as the Creation. He pretends a great regard for the Christian religion, yet uses his utmost efforts to discard all revelation in general, as entirely needless and useless; and particularly sets himself to expose the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. The high encomiums he bestows on the religion of a Deist, and on his own performance. Observations upon his Scheme. It is shewn to be absurd and inconsistent. What he offers concerning the absolute universal clearness of the law of nature to all mankind, contrary to plain undeniable fact and experience. His scheme really less favourable to the heathens than that of the Christian Divines. An account of the answers that were published to his book.

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L E T T E R I X

Another attempt against Christianity in Dr. Morgan's book, called, The Moral Philosopher. He seems to acknowledge the great usefulness of revelation, but leaves no way of knowing when a revelation is really given. He discards all authority, even a divine one, in matters of religion, and all proof from miracles and prophecy. His incredulities against the law of Moses and the prophets. Though he professes himself a Christian on the foot of the New Testament, he insinuates several reflections on the character of our Saviour, and endeavours to invalidate the attestation given to Christianity by the extraordinary gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost. He pretends, that the apostles preached different gospels, and that the New Testament was corrupted by the Jews, and is a jumble of inconsistent religions. The absurdity of that pretence shewn. His book fully confuted in the answers that were made to him. Some account of those answers, as also of the second and third volumes of the Moral Philosopher.

L E T T E R X.

Observations upon the pernicious tendency of the pamphlet intituled, Christianity not founded on Argument. The design of it is to shew that the Christian faith has nothing to support it but a senseless enthusiasm. The author's great dissimulation and misrepresentations of scripture detected. He strikes at natural religion, as well as revealed, destroys all certainty of reason, and declares against education, and the instructing children in any principles at all. The principal arguments he hath offered in support of his scheme considered. Christianity no enemy to examina-

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tion and enquiry. Men's being commanded to believe no presumption that faith is not a reasonable assent. The faith required in the gospel is properly a virtue, and the unbelief there condemned is really a vice. His pretence that the people are not capable of discerning the force of the proofs brought for Christianity, and therefore cannot be obliged to believe it, examined. An account of the answers published against him.

L E T T E R XI.

The Resurrection of Christ an article that lieth at the foundation of the Christian faith. Attacked with great confidence in a pamphlet intituled, The Resurrection of Jesus considered. What this Writer offers to prove, that Christ did not foretel his own resurrection, and that the story of the chief priests setting a watch at the sepulchre is a forgery and fiction, examined and confuted. Observations on the extraordinary way he takes to fix contradictions on the evangelists. The rules by which he would judge of their accounts would not be endured, if applied to any other writings. He insists on farther evidence of Christ's resurrection, and yet plainly intimates that no evidence that could be given would satisfy him. Extravagant demands of the deistical writers on this head considered. The evidence that was actually given, the properest that could be given. The seeming variations among the evangelists, if rightly considered, furnish a proof of the truth and genuineness of the gospel records. An account of the answers published to this author, especially of Mr. West's Observations on the History and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sir George Littleton's Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, commended.

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L E T T E R XII.

An account of Mr. Chubb's Posthumous Works. His specious professions, and the advantageous character he gives of his own writings. He doth not allow a particular providence, or that prayer to God is a duty. His uncertainty and inconsistency with respect to a future state of existence, and a future judgment. He absolutely rejects the Jewish revelation. His objections against it briefly obviated. He expresses a good opinion of Mahometanism, and will not allow that it was propagated by the sword. He seems to acknowledge Christ's divine mission, and sometimes gives a favourable account of Christianity. But it is shewn, that he hath done all he can to weaken and expose it, and to subvert it's credit and divine authority.

L E T T E R XIII.

Some farther remarks on Mr. Chubb's posthumous works. The unfair representations he makes of our Saviour's precepts in his sermon on the mount. His gross perversions of Scripture. His charge against it as uncertain, and as having been greatly depraved and corrupted by the Church of Rome, considered. Observations upon the attempt he makes to invalidate the proof from prophecy and from miracles. His pretence that the apostles quite changed the original plan of Christianity, and that they laid a scheme for worldly wealth and power, examined. His invectives against St. Paul shewn to be vain and groundless. He represents all religions to be alike with regard to the favour of God, and pretends to direct men to an infallible guide.

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L E T T E R XIV.

Observations upon a pamphlet intituled, The Case of Deism fairly stated; and on the attempt against the Scriptures in Lord Bolingbroke's letters on the Study and use of History. The account of the Deistical Writers closed. Reflections on the high encomiums they bestow upon themselves and their own performances. They differ amongst themselves about the most important principles of natural religion. The unfair methods they take with regard to Christianity. No writers discover stronger marks of prejudice. The guilt and danger of rejecting the Christian revelation. An aversion to the laws of the Gospel, one of the principal sources of infidelity. Terms proposed by the Deists for making up the difference between them and the Christians. Their pretence of placing religion wholly in practice and not in useless speculations, considered.

L E T T E R XV.

An extraordinary revelation from God to mankind possible to be given. The propriety of such a revelation shewn. Those to whom it is made known indispensably obliged to embrace it. The marks and evidences by which we may be satisfied that such a revelation is really given, viz. when the revelation itself is of an excellent nature and tendency, and when it is accompanied by the most extraordinary divine attestations, especially miracles and prophecy. The propriety of the proof from miracles vindicated. Confessions of some of the Deists themselves to this purpose. The revelation contained in the holy Scriptures confirmed by a series of the most extraordinary works, which manifestly argued a divine interposition. The nature of

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of the revelation itself considered. Distinguished into three periods, under which the religion for substance the same. First, The patriarchal religion. The second relates to the Mosaical dispensation. The third, which is the perfection of all the rest, is the Christian revelation. The godlike character of its author. The nature and tendency of the religion itself particularly considered, and shewn to be worthy of God. It could not be the effect either of imposture or enthusiasm, and therefore must be of divine original. The Christian scheme of a Mediator wise and excellent. The difficulties attending it no just objection against Christianity. The conclusion.



BOOKS written by the same AUTHOR.

An Answer to Dr. *Tindal's* Christianity as old as the Creation.

The Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted, &c. against the Moral Philosopher.

Remarks on a Pamphlet, intituled, Christianity not founded on Argument: And

Reflections on the late Lord *Bolingbroke's* Letters on the Study and Use of History.

A VIEW



A VIEW of the
DEISTICAL WRITERS, &c.

In several LETTERS to a FRIEND.

LETTER I.

Some account of those that first took upon them the name of Deists. Lord Herbert of Cherbury, one of the most eminent deistical writers that appeared in England in the last age. His attempt to form Deism into a System. Observations upon his scheme, and upon the five principles in which he makes all religion to consist. It is shewn that the knowledge of them was very imperfect and defective in the heathen world; and that a revelation from God for clearing and confirming those important principles might be of great advantage.

Dear Sir,



NOW enter upon the task you have enjoined me, the giving some account of the principal Deistical writers that have appeared among us for above a century past. The reasons given by you, and other judicious friends, have convinced me that such a work might be of use, if properly exe-

LETTER I. cuted, we only differed as to the fitness of the person that was to execute it. My objections have been over-ruled; I must therefore set about it as well as I can: And if I were sure that others would look upon this attempt with the same favourable eye, that your candour and friendship for me will incline you to do, I should be in no great pain about the success of it.

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of D.

The name of Deists, as applied to those who are no friends to revealed religion, is said to have been first assumed about the middle of the sixteenth century, by some Gentlemen in *France* and *Italy*, who were willing to cover their opposition to the Christian revelation by a more honourable name than that of Atheists. One of the first authors, as far as I can find, that makes express mention of them is *Viret*, a divine of great eminence among the first Reformers; who in the epistle dedicatory prefixed to the second tome of his *Instruction Chretienne*, which was published in 1563, speaks of some persons in that time who called themselves by a new name, that of Deists. These, he tells us, professed to believe a God, but shewed no regard to Jesus Christ, and considered the doctrine of the apostles and evangelists as fables and dreams. He adds, that they laugh'd at all religion, notwithstanding they conformed themselves, with regard to the outward appearance, to the religion of those with whom they were obliged to live, or whom they were desirous
of

of pleasing, or whom they feared. Some of them, as he observes, professed to believe the immortality of the soul; others were of the *Epicurean* opinion in this point, as well as about the providence of God with respect to mankind, as if he did not concern himself in the government of human affairs. He adds, that many among them set up for learning and philosophy, and were looked upon to be persons of an acute and subtil genius; and that, not content to perish alone in their error, they took pains to spread the poison, and to infect and corrupt others, by their impious discourses, and bad examples*.

LETTER
1.

I leave it to you to judge, how far the account this learned author gives of the persons that in his time called themselves Deists, is applicable to those among us who take upon them the same title, and which they seem to prefer to that of Christians, by which the disciples of Jesus have hitherto thought it their glory to be distinguished. That which properly characterizes these Deists is, that they reject all revealed religion, and discard all pretences to it, as owing to imposture, or enthusiasm. In this they all agree, and in professing a regard for natural religion, though they are far from being agreed in their notions of it. They are classed by some of their own writers into two sorts, mortal and immortal Deists §. The latter

their character.

* See Bayle's dictionary, article Viret. § Oracles of reason, p 99.

4 *A View of the DEISTICAL Writers.*

LETTER^{1.} acknowledge a future state, the former deny it, or at least represent it as a very uncertain thing: And though these are, by some among themselves, represented under a very disadvantageous character, and as little better than Atheists, they are, it is to be feared, the more numerous of the two. And indeed some of their most eminent modern writers seem to be very easy about these differences. With them, all are true Deists who oppose revelation, whether they own future rewards and punishments or not. And they speak with great regard of those disinterested Deists, who profess to pursue virtue for its own sake, without regard to future retributions*.

HERBERT. In giving an account of the deistical writers that have appeared in these nations (for I shall not meddle with those of a foreign growth,) I shall go back to the former part of the last century: And the first I shall mention, and who deserves a particular notice, is that learned nobleman, Lord *Edward Herbert*, Baron of *Cherbury*. He may be justly regarded as the most eminent of the deistical writers, and in several respects superior to those that succeeded him. He may be also considered as the first remarkable Deist in order of time, that appeared among us as a writer in the last century. For the first edition of his book *de Veritate* was in 1624, when it was published at *Paris*. It was afterwards published at *London*, as was also his book

* See Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 332, 333. ed. 8vo. de

de Causis errorum, to which is subjoined his LETTER
 treatise *de Religione Laici*. Some years after ^{1.}
 this, and when the author was dead, his cele-
 brated work *de Religione Gentilium* was pub-
 lished at *Amsterdam*, in 1663, in Quarto, and it
 was afterwards reprinted there in 1700, Octavo,
 which is the edition I make use of; and an *Eng-
 lish* translation of it was published at *London* in
 1705.

His Lordship seems to have been one of the *His System*
first that formed Deism into a System, and af-
serted the sufficiency, universality, and absolute
perfection of natural religion, with a view to
 discard all extraordinary Revelation, as useless
 and needless. He seems to assume to himself
 the glory of having accomplished it with great
 labour, and a diligent inspection into all reli-
 gions; and applauds himself for it, as happier
than any *Archimedes* *. This universal religion
 he reduceth to five articles, which he frequently
 mentioneth in all his works. 1. That there is
 one supreme God. 2. That he is chiefly to be
 worshipped. 3. That piety and virtue is the
 principal part of his worship. 4. That we must
 repent of our sins; and if we do so, God will
 pardon them. 5. That there are rewards for
 good men, and punishments for bad men, in a
 future state; or, as he sometimes expresseth it,
 both here and hereafter. These he represents
 as common notices inscribed by God on the
 minds of all men, and undertakes to shew that

* De Relig. Gentil. cap. 15. init.

6 *A View of the DEISTICAL Writers.*

LETTER they were universally acknowledged in all nations, ages, and religions. This is particularly the design of his book *de religione Gentilium*; though it is but comparatively a small part of that work which tendeth directly to prove that these articles universally obtained: The far greater part of it is taken up with an account of the heathen religion and ceremonies, which he hath performed with an abundance of learning, and hath intermixed many softening apologies for the pagan superstition and idolatry.

the Pillars.

As he represents these five articles as absolutely necessary, the five pillars, as he calls them, on which all religion is built; so he endeavours to shew that they alone are sufficient, and that nothing can be added to them, which can tend to render any man more virtuous, or a better man. But then he subjoins this limitation, “provided these articles be well explained in their full latitude*.” This universal religion which all men agree in, his Lordship represents to be the only religion of which there can be any certainty, and he endeavours to shew the great advantages that would arise from men’s embracing this religion, and this only. One of the reasons he offers to recommend it is this, that this catholic or universal religion answers the ultimate design of the holy scriptures. “*Sacrarum literarum fini ultimo intentionique quadrat.*” He adds, That “all the doctrines there taught aim at the establishment of these five catholic articles, as we

* Appendix to Relig. Laici, Qu. 3d.

“ have

“ have often hinted; there is no sacrament, LETTER.
 “ rite or ceremony there enjoined, but what ^{1.}
 “ aims, or seems to aim, at the establishment of
 “ these five articles.” See his reasons at the
 end of his *Religio Laici*.

One would be apt to think by what this noble *On which X*
 writer here offers, that he must have a very fa- *a all religi*
 vourable opinion of Christianity as contained in
 the holy scriptures; since he represents it as the
 great design of all its doctrines, and even of the
 rites and sacraments there enjoined, to establish
 those great principles in which he makes reli-
 gion properly to consist. Accordingly he ex-
 pressly declares in the above mentioned treatise,
 that it was far from his intention to do harm to
the best religion, as he there calls Christianity, or
 the true faith, but rather to establish both*.

But I am sorry that I am obliged to say, *Are built*
 that notwithstanding these fair professions, his *- miscu*
Lordship on all occasions insinuateth prejudices
against all revealed religion, as absolutely uncer-
 tain, and of little or no use. He inveigheth
 promiscuously, as many others have done since,
 against all pretences to revelation, without ma-
 king a distinction between the false and the true.
 He often speaks to the disadvantage of *parti-*
cular religion, which is a name he bestoweth
 upon the Christian religion, and any revelation
 that is not actually known and promulgated
 to the whole world. And he representeth it
 as containing doctrines, which disgust some

* Relig. Laici, p. 28.

LETTER ^{1.} men against all religion, and therefore is for recommending what he calls the universal religion, as the best way to prevent mens having no religion at all. And particularly he insinuates, that the Christian religion granteth pardon on too easy terms, and derogateth from the obligations to virtue *. A reflection which is manifestly owing to a misapprehension or misrepresentation of the doctrine of Christianity on this head. So he elsewhere supposeth, that the faith there required is no more than a bare Assent to the Doctrines there taught, though nothing is capable of a clearer proof, than that the faith on which so great a stress is laid in the gospel covenant, is to be understood of a vital operative principle, which purifieth the heart, and is productive of good works; and that the necessity of true holiness and virtue is there strongly inculcated. The charge he advanceth against Christianity might be more justly retorted upon himself, who though he mentions it to the praise of his universal religion, that it giveth no licence to sin, but bindeth men strictly to the severity of virtue; yet to shew what reason sinners have to hope for pardon, offereth several pleas and excuses that tend to extenuate the guilt of sin. Particularly he urgeth, that men's sins are not for the most part committed out of enmity against God, or to cast dishonour upon him, but with a view to their own particular advan-

* See the appendix to his Relig. Laici, Qu. 6.

rage or pleasure, and are chosen by them under ^{LETTER} the appearance of some good *. And in his ^{1.} book *de Veritate* he declares, that those are not lightly to be condemned, who are carried to sin by their particular bodily constitution; and he instances particularly in the rage of lust and anger; no more than a dropsical person is to be blamed for his immoderate thirst, or a lethargic person for his laziness and inactivity. He adds indeed, that he does not set up as an apologist for wicked men, but yet that we ought to pass a mild censure upon those who are carried to sin by a corporal and almost necessary propensity to vice. *Neque tamen me hic conscelerat: in iustis patronum sisto; sed in id solummodo contendit, ut mitiori sententia de iis statuamus, qui corporea, brutali, et tantum non necessaria propensione in peccata prolabantur.* This apology may be carried very far, so as to open a wide door to licentiousness, and would soon introduce a very loose morality.

But not to insist upon this, I would observe that the principal design of his treatise *de Religione Laici* seems to be to shew that the people can never attain to any satisfaction as to the truth and certainty of any particular revelation, and therefore must rest in the five articles agreed to by all religions. This particularly is the intention of his fourth and fifth queries in the appendix to that treatise. In his fourth query he

No final
certainty

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 268. Dr. Tindal talks in the same strain. Christ, as old as the Creat. p. 32. ed. 8vo.

LETTER ^{I.} supposes that the things which are added to those common principles from the doctrines of faith are uncertain in their original; and that though God be true, the *Laics* can never be certain that what is pretended to be a revelation from God is indeed a true revelation from God. In his fifth query he urgeth, that supposing the originals to be true, yet they are uncertain in their explications. To this purpose he takes notice of the multiplicity of sects among Christians; and that the *Laics* can never be sufficiently sure of the meaning of the revelation concerning which there are so many controversies; that in order to arrive at any certainty in these matters, it would be necessary either to *learn all languages, to read all the celebrated writers, and to consult all those learned men that have not written*, a method which is manifestly absurd and impracticable; or else to have recourse to a *supreme judge of controversies* appointed by common consent.

Controversy not uncertainty. It is an observation that will undoubtedly occur to you on this occasion, that his Lordship here maketh use precisely of the same way of talking, to shew that the *Laics* can have no certainty about any revelation at all, which
 X the writers of the *Romish* Church have frequently urged to shew the necessity the people are under to rely intirely upon the authority of the Church or *Pope*, because of the difficulties or the impossibility of their coming to any certainty in the way of examination or private judgment. But if
 the

the *Laiety* cannot be certain of revealed religion, because of the controversies that have been raised about the articles of it, for the same reason it may be said, that they can arrive at no certainty with respect to his Lordship's catholic universal religion: For though he representeth men as universally agreed in the five articles, in which he makes that religion to consist, it is undeniable that there have been great controversies about them; and that the modern Deists, as well as ancient Philosophers, are divided in their sentiments in relation to them, especially when explained, as he requireth they should be, in their full latitude. He ought not therefore to make a thing's being controverted to be a proof of its uncertainty, and that men can come to no satisfaction about it; a principle which he and other Deists often insist upon, but which manifestly leads to universal scepticism. But this is not the only instance, in which arguments have been brought against Christianity, that in their consequences tend to subvert all religion, and all evidence and certainty of reason.

From this general view of Lord *Herbert's* Scheme, it sufficiently appears that his design was to overturn all revealed, or, as he calls it, particular religion, and to establish that natural and universal religion, the clearness and perfection of which he so much extols, in it's room, as that which alone ought to be acknowledged and embraced as true and divine.

LETTER I. I shall now freely lay before you some observations that have occurred to me in considering the scheme of this noble author.

This Concession
too many of
not Deists. One is this, that he hath carried his account of natural religion much farther than some others of the Deists have done. It were to be wished, that all that glory in this character would agree with this noble Lord in a hearty reception of those articles, which he representeth as so essentially necessary, and of such vast importance. These he would have to be explained in their full extent, and that except they be properly explained they are not sufficient; and thus explained they include the belief not only of the existence, but the attributes of God; of some of which in his book *de Veritate* he gives a good account, and of his providence and moral government. He asserts, that God is to be worshipped, and that this worship includeth our offering up to him our prayers and thanksgivings*; that piety and virtue are absolutely necessary to our acceptance with God: and he particularly urgeth the necessity of observing the ten commandments: that we are obliged to repent of our sins in order to our obtaining forgiveness, and that this repentance includeth both a sorrow for our sins, and a turning from them to the right way. He also insisteth upon the belief of the immortality of the Soul; and a future state of rewards and punishments, in which God will recompence men *according to their actions*, and even *according to their*

* *De Veritate* p. 271, 272.

thoughts.

thoughts *. These things he supposeth to be common notices, so clear that he can scarce be accounted a reasonable creature who denieth them. And yet I am afraid, if all these things are to be looked upon as necessary, many that call themselves Deists will be as loth to admit his Lordship's natural and catholic religion, as Christianity itself. There is reason to apprehend, that some of their strongest prejudices against Christianity arise from it's setting those principles in too clear a light, and enforcing them in too strong a manner. It is true, that when they are for putting a fair gloss upon Deism, and asserting the sufficiency and perfection of natural religion abstracted from all revelation, they are willing to have it thought that their religion includeth the belief of those important articles. They are then obliged to have recourse to his Lordship's system, and the arms he hath furnished them with; but at other times they make it plainly appear that they are far from being fixed in these principles. His Lordship declares, that it is necessary these articles should be well explained. And indeed they are expressed in very general and indefinite terms. But there is no great likelihood of their agreeing in the explications of them. It is a thing well known, that many who have made no small figure among our modern Deists, have denied some of his Lordship's five articles, at least taken in the extent in which he seems

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 283.

LETTER willing to understand them. God's moral govern-
 I. ment and particular providence; his worship
 especially as it includes prayer and praise; man's
 free agency, the immortality of the Soul, and
 a future state of retributions, have made no part
 of their creed. Some of them have been far
 from pleading for that strictness of virtue, which
 his Lordship tells us natural religion obliges men
 to; and instead of urging the necessity of re-
 pentance, have after *Spinoza*, represented it as
 a mean, an unreasonable and wretched thing*.
 And the rewards and punishments of a future
 state have been exploded under the notion of
 bribes and terrors, a regard to which argueth
 a sordid and mercenary temper of soul, incon-
 sistent with a true and generous virtue.

Another reflexion that it is proper to make
 on Lord *Herbert's* Scheme is this: That these
 five principles in which he makes his universal
 religion to consist, were not so very clear and
 well known to all mankind, as to make an ex-
 ternal revelation needless or useless. His Lord-
 ship indeed supposeth them to be common
 notices inscribed by a divine hand in the minds
 of men: And accordingly he sets himself to
 prove with a great shew of learning in his book
de Religione Gentilium, that these principles were
 universally believed and acknowledged by the
 people in all ages, countries and religions. But
 any man that carefully examines his book will

* *Pœnitentia virtus non est, siue ex ratione non oritur: quem
 facti pœnitent bis inier sua impotens est.* Spin. Eth. Pt. 4. Prop. 54.
 find,

find, that all that he really proves is no more LETTER
than this; that there were some imperfect 1.
vestiges of these important truths preserved
among the *Gentiles*, and that the knowledge of
them was never absolutely and totally extin-
guished, which will be easily allowed. But he
has not proved, that the people, or even all
those that passed for wise and learned, had a
distinct knowledge and assurance of those prin-
ciples, especially if taken in their just extent.
The Testimonies he hath produced, by no
means prove such an universal Agreement.
What he seemeth principally to rely upon is
the reasonableness and evidence of the princi-
ples themselves, which he supposeth to be so
plain, that no rational man can be ignorant of
them. Thus he declares, that he would sooner
doubt whether the beams of the sun shone
upon those regions, than suppose that the know-
ledge of God, the evidences of whose existence
and perfections are so obvious from his works,
did not enlighten their minds*. And he can-
not be persuaded, that any of them worshiped
the sun as the chief Deity, because of the incre-
dible absurdity of such a practice, which he
well exposes†. But when we are inquiring
what men do in fact believe and practice,
we are not to judge of it from what we appre-
hend it is reasonable for them to believe and
practice.

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 225.

† Ibid. p. 27, 247.

If

LETTER ^{1.} If this were a proper place to take a distinct
 view of the proofs he hath offered, in relation to
 his famous five articles, it would be no hard
 matter to shew, that according to his own re-
 presentation of the case, they were not so uni-
 versally acknowledged and clearly known among
 the *Gentiles*, as to make a farther revelation
 and inforcement of them to be of no use or
 advantage. This might be particularly shewn
 with regard to the first and second of these ar-
 ticles, *viz.* That there is one supreme God,
 and that this God is to be worshipped; which
 are principles of the greatest importance, and
 which lie at the foundation of all the rest:
 Notwithstanding the pains he hath taken to
 excuse and palliate the pagan superstition and
 idolatry, and to prove that they worshipped the
 one true God, the same that we adore; under
 various names, and by various attributes; yet
 he owns, that what were at first only different
 names, came in process of time, as superstition
 increased, to be regarded and worshipped as
 different gods. It is plain, from express and
 formal passages, produced by him from antient
 writers, that some nations worshipped no other
 Deities but the sun, moon, and stars. When
 in the third chapter of his book *de Relig. Gentil.*
 he mentions the names of the Deities which
 were in use among the *Hebrews*, and shews that
 those names and titles were also used among the
Gentiles; he owneth that the *Hebrews* appro-
 priated these names and titles to the One su-
 preme

E. g. mono-
theism.

preme God, superior to the sun, but that the *Gentiles* understood by them no other than the sun itself. He thinks it indeed probable that the worship they rendered to the sun was symbolical, and that they intended to worship God by the sun as his most glorious sensible image; and sometimes he is very positive that they did so; and that they rendered no proper worship to any but the supreme God. But at other times he speaks very doubtfully about it, and pretends not positively to assert it, but leaves the reader to his own judgment in this matter *. And elsewhere he acknowledges, that the people perhaps did not sufficiently understand this symbolical worship. *Symbolicum illum cultum haud satis forsitan intellexit* †. It is indeed a little strange, that if the notion and belief of one only supreme God universally obtained among the *Gentiles*, none but the *Hebrews* should have made the acknowledgment of the One supreme God, the Maker and Lord of the Universe, the fundamental article of their religion; and that in the laws of other states, particularly among the learned and polite nations of *Greece* and *Rome*, Polytheism was established, and the public worship was directed to be offered to a multiplicity of Deities. Many of the Heathens, by his own acknowledgment, thought that the God they were to worship should be visible, and looked upon it to be incongruous, that he who demanded worship from all should inde-

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I.



* De Relig. Gentil. p. 25, 310.

† Ibid p. 213.

LETTER I. self from his worshippers*. And though it was a notion which generally obtained among them, that some kind of external worship was necessary to be render'd to their Deities, yet as to the manner of their worship he doth not deny that some of the Heathen rites were ridiculous, others absurd and even impious. To which it may be added, that some of their wisest men acknowledged, that they were ignorant of the proper manner in which God is to be worshipp'd, except he himself, or some person sent by him, should please to reveal it. There is a remarkable passage in *Plato's second Alcibiad*, which hath been often quoted. *Socrates* meeting *Alcibiades* who was going to the Temple to pray, proves to him that he knew not how to perform that duty aright, and that therefore it was not safe for him to do it, but that he should wait for a divine Instructor to teach him how to behave both towards the gods and men; and that it was necessary that God should scatter the darkness which covered his soul, that he might be put in a condition to discern good and evil. To the same purpose *Iamblichus in Vita Pythag.* cap. 28. speaking of the principles of divine worship saith, "It is manifest that those things are to be done which are pleasing to God, but what they are it is not easy to know, except a man were taught them by God himself, or by some person that had received them from God, or obtained

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 26.

“ the knowledge of them by some divine
“ means.”

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I.

The third article mentioned by his Lordship as universally agreed on is, that piety and virtue is the principal part of God's worship. But not to urge, that the proof he brings of an universal agreement in this principle, seems to be very defective, this article would be of no great use, except men were also generally agreed as to the nature and extent of true piety and virtue. And it can scarce be reasonably denied, that a Revelation from God pointing out our way to us, and containing a clear signification of the divine will, with regard to the particulars of the duty required of us, would be of great use. Lord *Herbert* himself, after having mentioned some virtues which were honoured among the *Pagans*, acknowledgeth, that besides these there were many other things looked upon to be necessary to true piety, especially those things which shewed a devout or grateful temper towards the gods, and the observation of the public rites and ceremonies of religion *; which is in other words to say, that the joining in superstitious and idolatrous worship, for such the established public worship was, made up a necessary part of the Heathen piety and virtue, and was counted a principal ingredient in a good man's character.

As to the fourth article, that men must repent of their sins, and that if they do to God will

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 250.

LETTER I. pardon them, it might easily be shewn that the Gentiles were far from being agreed what are to be accounted sins; since some sins and vices of a very enormous kind were not only practised and pleaded for by some of their Philosophers, but permitted and countenanced by the public laws, nor were they agreed what is included in a true repentance. His Lordship himself acknowledgeth, that the Ancients seldom used the word repentance in the sense in which we take it*. And that they did not look upon it to be an atonement for all crimes, but for those of a less heinous nature; and that they generally looked upon other things to be also necessary, and laid the principal stress upon lustrations, and the rites of their religion, for purifying and absolving them from guilt. And any one who duly considers that the dispensing of pardon is an act of the divine prerogative, the exercise of which depends upon what seemeth most fit to his supreme governing wisdom, cannot but be sensible that it must needs be a great advantage to be assured by an express Revelation from God upon what terms the pardon of sin is to be obtained, and how far it is to extend.

With regard to the fifth article about future rewards and punishments, which he representeth to be, as it really is, of vast importance, though he sometimes expresseth himself as if the Heathens were generally agreed that good

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 263

men would be rewarded with eternal life; at ^{LETTER} other times he intimates that they only agreed ^{1.} in this, that there would be rewards and punishments in a future state; and sometimes, that they held this only, that there would be rewards for good men, and punishments for bad men, either in this life or after it. And he himself frequently owns in his book *de Veritate*, that what kind of rewards shall be conferred, or punishments inflicted, cannot be certainly known from the light of natural reason *.

But we need not insist farther on these things. His Lordship himself fairly granteth, that the knowledge the *Gentiles* had of the One supreme God was *lame and imperfect*; which he attributes to the sloth or cunning of the Priests, who neglected to instruct the people, or instructed them wrong; and that from thence it came to pass, that the *rays of the divine light being intercepted, a wonderful darkness overspread the minds of the vulgar*, “*Unde etiam factum, ut radiis divini luminis interceptis, mira caligo vulgi animis obducta esset* §.” And he observes, that by what was added by the Priests, Poets, and Philosophers, the whole fabrick of truth was in danger of falling to the ground. *Tota inclinata in casumque prona nutavit veritatis fabrica* †. And at the close of his book *de Relig. Gentil.* he owns, that at length the purser parts of divine worship being neglected.

* De Veritate, p. 57. et alibi.

§ De Relig. Gentil. p. 225.

† Ibid. p. 283.

LETTER I. the whole of religion sunk by degrees into superstition: and that those five articles were almost overwhelmed with a heavy load of errors, so as to be perceived only by the wiser sort of men, *a perspicacioribus viris*, i. e. by those who had a penetration above the vulgar*.

Now this being a true representation of the case as it stood in fact, whatever it was owing to, it can scarce be reasonably denied, that if God should, in compassion to the corrupt and ignorant state of mankind, grant an express revelation of his will, to clear and restore those great principles which had been so much obscured and perverted, to recover men to the right knowledge and worship of God, and to explain and enforce the main important parts of their duty, this would be of signal benefit to the world, and a remarkable proof and effect of his great goodness. His Lordship indeed, in several parts of his works, throws out hints and suspicions as if either such a revelation from God could not be given, or at least that there can be no way of knowing, or being assured, that such a revelation has been really given; but he no where offers any proof of it. The general invectives he so frequently makes against Priests, Oracles, Impostures, prove nothing; except it be allowed to be a reasonable principle, that because there have been false pretenders to revelation, therefore there never was, nor can be a true one: A way of talking and reasoning this, that might pass among the inferior

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 310.

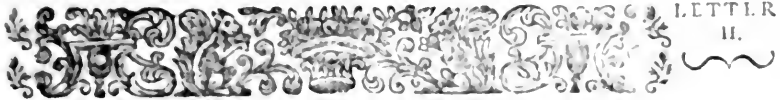
tribe of deistical writers, but which is absolutely unworthy of his Lordship's sense and learning. Whereas it may rather be gathered from it, that mankind, in all ages, have been generally persuaded, that it was both possible for God to grant an extraordinary revelation of his will, and that if he did, it would be of great advantage. Impostors have built upon this principle, but this doth not shew the principle itself to be false, which hath as good a title to pass for a common notion, as some of the five articles which he representeth to be so clear and universally acknowledged. The only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from the many impostures and false revelations which have been put upon mankind, is not that all pretences to revelation are false and vain, but that we ought to be very careful to distinguish the false from the true, and impartially to consider and examine the proofs that are brought, and not to receive any revelation without sufficient credentials of its divine authority. But it would be a most unreasonable limitation of the divine power and wisdom to affirm, either that God cannot make extraordinary discoveries of his will to particular persons, in such a manner that the persons to whom they are immediately communicated, may be certain that they came from God; or that he cannot commission and enable such persons to communicate to others what they have received from him, or cannot furnish them with such credentials of their divine mission.

LETTER
I.
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LETTER <sup>1.</sup> mission, as may be sufficient to convince the world that they were sent of God, and to make it reasonable for others to receive the doctrines and laws which such persons deliver in his name. And it hath been proved, with great strength and evidence, that this hath actually been the case with regard to the christian revelation.

There are other reflections that might be made on Lord *Herbert's* system. But I am willing to give you and myself a little respite, and shall therefore reserve them to be the subject of another letter.





## LETTER II.

*Farther Observations on Lord Herbert's Scheme. The Philosophers not qualified to recover Mankind from the darkness and corruption into which they were fallen. The usefulness of the Christian Revelation to that purpose. Its not having been universally promulgated in all nations and ages, no just prejudice against it. Other objections of Lord Herbert considered. Writers that have appeared against him.*

S I R,

**I**N my former letter an account was given of Lord Herbert's scheme; and it was shewn, that taking the state of mankind, and of the *Gentile* world, as it really was, according to his own representation of the case, an express revelation from God, confirmed by his divine authority, for clearing and enforcing those articles which his Lordship supposeth to be necessary, would be of great use. I now add, that in fact, the Christian Revelation hath been of signal advantage to the world, for giving men a clearer knowledge and fuller certainty of these important truths, than they had before. Our noble author indeed speaks with admiration of the ancient philosophers, as capable of instructing men in a proper manner, if they would have attended

LETTER attended to their instructions. But then he  
 II. owns, that the people had little regard to the  
 purer doctrine of the philosophers\*. And indeed I do not see how it could be expected, that they should place any great dependence upon their dictates, which were for the most part regarded only as the tenets of their several schools, in which the people had little concern. They were not the ministers of religion, nor could pretend to any authority that should make them be regarded as the guides and instructors of mankind, or cause their Opinions to pass for laws. The most eminent among them were contradicted by others of great name: many of them laboured to make all things appear doubtful and uncertain: and those of them that had the noblest notions frequently affected to conceal them, or were afraid to divulge them. What *Alcinous* hath observed concerning *Plato*, with respect to the inquiry concerning the chief good, might be applied to some other matters of great importance. “ That which is worthy  
 “ of all honour, such as the supreme Good,  
 “ he conceived not easy to be found, and if  
 “ found, not safe to be declared §.” His Lordship assureth us, that the philosophers were always *displeas'd with the superstitious worship of the people*. But, if this was the case, they seem to have been very improper persons to reclaim them from it, since it was an uni-

\* De Relig. Gentil. p. 310. § See *Alcinous's* doctrine of *Plato*, cap. 27. in *Stanley's* lives of the philosophers.

verſal maxim among them, and particularly LETTER II. recommended by one of the beſt of them, *Epictetus*, that every man ought to worſhip according to the laws or cuſtoms of his country \*.

And it is well known that their eſtabliſhed worſhip was polytheiſm and idolatry. *Varro*, in a paſſage quoted by his Lordſhip, divides the heathen theology into three kinds: the *fabulous*, which belonged to the poets; the *physical*, which was that of the philoſophers; and the *civil*. He ſpeaks with diſregard of the two former, and repreſentſ the laſt as that in which the people were concerned, and which alone could be of real uſe to them. And this he explaineth to be that which was eſtabliſhed by the laws, and adminiſtered by the prieſts, and which ſhewed what gods they were publicly to worſhip, what rites they were to obſerve, and what ſacrifices it was proper for any man to offer †.

It a reformation of the world by the philoſophers was not to be expected, for the reaſons now given, his Lordſhip will own it was not to be hoped for from the prieſts, againſt whom he bitterly inveighs as the authors of all ſuperſtition, and of the great corruption of religion in the heathen world. And as little was it to be expected from the lawgivers and great men of the ſtate, who generally patronized the eſtabliſhed ſuperſtition, of which they themſelves had been in a great measure the authors, or promoters, and were ready to puniſh any that

\* *Epiſt. Enchirid. cap. 38.* † *De Relig. Genil. p. 306, 307.*

LETTER opposed it. And if there were any of them  
 II. who were for reforming and correcting some  
 abuses in the public superstitions, and explod-  
 ing some of the grosser fables that were receiv-  
 ed among the people, as his Lordship observes  
*Mutius Scævola* the chief pontiff, and *Varro*,  
 were for doing, he owns that the attempts were  
 vain and ineffectual, because the errors and su-  
 perstitions were become inveterate\*. This being  
 the true state of the case, it is hard to see what  
 other method could be taken, that would prove  
 so effectual to recover mankind from their su-  
 perstition and idolatry, as the giving an extra-  
 ordinary revelation, attended with sufficient cre-  
 dentials, to instruct men in the name of God,  
 concerning the nature of true religion, to as-  
 sure them of the certainty of its great princi-  
 ples, and to enforce the practice of its important  
 duties, by the strongest and most prevailing mo-  
 tives.

And accordingly, when Christianity appeared  
 with the most illustrious attestations of a divine  
 mission and revelation from heaven, it effected  
 what no precepts or doctrines of the philoso-  
 phers had been able to do. The pagan poly-  
 theism and superstition fell before it: And it  
 hath actually produced this great advantage,  
 that the principles upon which our author lay-  
 eth so much stress, have been better known and  
 understood, and more universally acknowledged,  
 than they were before. It is incontestible, that

\* De Relig. Gentil. p. 311.



Christians are more generally agreed in those great principles, than ever men were in the Pagan world. They are set in a clearer light, and men are come to a greater certainty about them. That they are so far preserved among the *Mahometans*, was also originally owing to the light of the *Jewish* and Christian revelation. And it is very probable that his Lordship himself is very much obliged to Christianity, though he doth not acknowledge it, for the full persuasion he every where expresseth as to these important articles; several of which were denied by some, and doubted by others of the ancient philosophers.

Though therefore it is not to be wonder'd at, that those among the Deists who have an aversion to these principles when taken in their just extent, should be against Christianity, yet Lord *Herbert*, who asserteth them to be of such vast consequence, ought, one should think, to have been very thankful to God for having enforced them by an express and well-attested revelation, and given them a divine sanction. And if he were sincere in the acknowledgment he sometimes makes, that the explaining and enforcing those great principles, is the ultimate design of the holy Scripture, to which all its doctrines, and even its rites and sacraments tend, he ought certainly to have entertained very favourable thoughts of Christianity, of its doctrines, as well as precepts, and even of its rites and positive institutions.

But

LETTER

Not called <sup>II.</sup> ~~the~~ ~~end~~  
 Rome.

But that which seemeth principally to have prejudiced his lordship against Christianity is, that it is what he calleth a *particular religion*; whereas the true religion must be universal, and promulgated to all mankind. He frequently urgeth, that nothing less than such an universal religion as he pleadeth for, can support the honour of God's universal providence, and the care he exerciseth towards the whole human race; which no particular religion can do; and that otherwise the Gentiles must be supposed to be universally lost and damned, which it were cruel and injurious to God to imagine. This is what hath been often urged and repeated by the Deists since.

X  
 Original uni-  
 versality of  
 religion.

To this it may be justly answered; that those who maintain the Christian revelation, may think as honourably as any others consistently can of the universal care and providence of God towards mankind. No-where is this more clearly asserted than in the sacred writings, which declare God's universal goodness and benignity towards the human race in strong terms; and that he hath been continually doing them good, and hath never left himself without witness among them. We must not indeed carry this so far as to assert, that all men have an actual knowledge of the great principles of religion, and of their duty, because we may imagine that the universal care of providence towards mankind requireth that it should be so; which seems to be the course of his lordship's reason-  
 ing;

ing; for this is contrary to evident and undeniable fact and experience. But we acknowledge that God hath given to all men the principle of reason, together with a natural sense of right and wrong, which would be of great use to assist them in the knowledge of religion, and to direct them in the practice of their duty, if duly cultivated and improved to the utmost that it is naturally capable of. But besides this, Christians generally maintain, and the holy scriptures lead us to think, that God hath from time to time made extraordinary discoveries of his will to mankind; that some such discoveries were made to the first ancestors of the human race, who were bound by all obligations to transmit them to their posterity; that therefore there was an original universal religion, embraced by the first parents of mankind, and transmitted from them to their descendents; that accordingly some of the most eminent ancient philosophers ascribed the knowledge and belief of some of the great principles insisted upon by this noble author to a tradition derived from the most early ages, though his lordship never maketh the least mention of tradition, as one source of that knowledge and belief of these things, which obtained among the nations; that this religion, which was both originally derived from revelation, and agreeable to nature and reason, was gradually obscured, and became greatly corrupted, though still some remarkable traces and vestiges of it remained among the Gentiles;

LETTER  
II.  
III.

LETTER II. that God was pleased in his wise and good providence to interpose by various methods, and by raising up excellent persons from time to time, to keep those remains of the ancient religion from being totally extinguished; that at last he was graciously pleased to send his Son into the world, a person of divine dignity and glory, to recover men to his true knowledge and pure worship, to direct and assist them in the practice of their duty, to shew them the true means of their reconciliation and acceptance with God, and to bring life and immortality into the most clear and open light; that this revelation was attended with the most illustrious attestations, and made a wonderful progress through a considerable part of the known world, and would have spread still farther than it did, if it had met with such a reception as the excellency and importance of it well deserved; and finally, that as to those to whom it never was actually communicated, God will deal with them in a just, a wise, and equitable way, and will make all proper allowances for their want of the advantages which others enjoy.

MB.

The asserters of the Christian revelation are under no obligations to limit God's universal benevolence. They leave those that are destitute of this revelation to God's infinite mercy; and can think more favourably of their case, than those consistently can do, who will not allow that they were under any great darkness, and suppose them to have acted in manifest opposition to the most clear universal light. The

The objection arising against the Christian re-  
 velation for want of its being universally known  
 and promulgated, hath been often considered  
 and obviated, nor is this a proper place to en-  
 ter upon a large and particular discussion of it.  
 At present it may be sufficient to observe, that  
 the objection proceeds upon a wrong founda-  
 tion, *viz.* that the universal goodness, and be-  
 nignity of the common Parent of the universe  
 requireth that he should communicate his be-  
 nefits to all his creatures alike, and in equal  
 degrees. It is evident, in fact, that in the dis-  
 tribution of his benefits God acteth as a free  
 and sovereign benefactor, dispensing them in  
 very various degrees, always undoubtedly for  
 wise reasons, but those reasons often not known  
 to us. It cannot reasonably be denied, that he  
 hath made some whole classes of beings vastly  
 superior to others in valuable gifts and endow-  
 ments, and capacities for happiness: and some  
 individuals of the same class of beings, are fa-  
 voured with much greater advantages than  
 others. And, if we look particularly into God's  
 dealings with the human race, we may observe  
 a very remarkable variety. Some are from the  
 beginning endued with much greater natural  
 abilities, and more excellent dispositions, and  
 are placed in a more favourable situation, and  
 happier circumstances. Some whole nations are  
 eminently distinguished from others, not only  
 with respect to many other advantages of hu-  
 man life, but with respect to the means of

LETTER  
 II.  
 God's Discretion  
 -my Sovereign

LETTER <sup>II.</sup> moral improvement, and are furnished with more excellent helps for making a progress in wisdom and virtue, and consequently in true happiness. All these differences between persons and nations are under the direction of divine providence, as all must own that acknowledge a providence, as his Lordship professeth to do. And those that are distinguished from others by superior advantages, ought to be thankful to God for those advantages, and to ascribe them to his goodness, and not deny that God hath given them those advantages, because there are others that have them not, or not in an equal degree. Since therefore the distinguishing some persons and nations with valuable advantages above others, is not inconsistent with the universal benignity of the great Parent of mankind, for if it were he would not do it; it can never be proved, that he may not grant a revelation to any part of mankind, except at the same time it be granted equally to the whole world. Indeed, if all men everywhere were required actually to believe that revelation, and were to be condemned for not believing it, it would be necessary to have it universally promulgated: But since the actual belief of it is required of those only to whom it is actually published, and they to whom it is not made known, are not put into a worse condition than if there had been no such revelation granted at all, no argument can be brought to shew that it is inconsistent with the  

divine

divine wisdom or goodness, to grant such a revelation to some part of mankind, though it be not actually promulgated to the whole human race. Especially if in its own nature and original intention, it was fitted and designed to be of universal extent: which is the case of the Christian revelation. Those therefore who are so circumstanced as to have an opportunity of knowing it, ought to be very thankful to God on that account, and not refuse or reject their own advantages and privileges, because all others are not partakers of them as well as they. This would be a most absurd and irrational conduct.

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*2nd Edition*

I shall only further observe, that this author seems frequently to make it a great objection against what he calls *particular religion*, that it insisteth upon other things as necessary, besides the religion of nature, as contained in these five articles. Religion, according to him, is *notitarum communium symbolum* \*, a Creed containing common notions or truths: And these common notices he reduceth to the five above-mentioned. But will any man undertake to prove, that God cannot reveal any truths to mankind, but precisely these five articles, or that all useful religious knowledge is wholly absolved in them? May there not be truths which though not precisely the same with those articles, may be of great use for clearing and confirming them, for instructing men in the

\* De Verit. p. 55, 221.

LETTER fuller knowledge of God, and of his will, and  
 II. of the methods of his grace towards us, or for  
 directing us in our duty, and animating us to the  
 practice of it? And must all these be discarded at  
 once, as of no use in religion, because they are  
 distinct from the articles so often refer'd to? Or,  
 must a well-attested revelation be rejected, be-  
 cause it containeth some things of this kind? Our  
 noble author himself, though he supposes these  
 articles to be absolutely necessary, seems not to

MS. — X be quite sure that they are sufficient. For he ob-  
 serves, that God's judgments and proceedings  
 are not fully known to any man; and therefore  
 he will not take upon him positively to pro-  
 nounce that these articles are sufficient. *Quam  
 ob causam neque eos sufficere protinus dixerim*\*.  
 But if they should be supposed to comprehend  
 all that is required from the heathens, who ne-  
 ver had the light of the Christian revelation, it  
 doth not follow that they are also alone sufficient  
 for those to whom this revelation is made known.  
 For supposing God to give an extraordinary re-  
 velation of his will for restoring religion when  
 greatly corrupted, and clearly directing men  
 in the way of salvation, and helping forward  
 their improvement in divine knowledge, and  
 in a holy and virtuous practice, as it would be  
 a signal advantage to those to whom such a re-  
 velation is given, so it must necessarily lay  
 them under additional obligations. Some things  
 would, in consequence of it, be necessary to

\* De Relig. Gentil. p. 293



be believed, and done, by those to whom this revelation is made known, which they were not so expressly obliged to believe and practice before. And it would be a strange thing to complain against that revelation on this account, or accuse it of fallhood, and to choose rather to be without the signal advantage of such a revelation, and its glorious benefits, privileges, and hopes, than to be obliged to receive the discoveries it brings, and to practice the duties which result from them.

One of the first *English* writers that published animadversions on Lord *Herbert's* scheme, (for I shall not take notice of what some learned foreigners have done this way) was Mr. Richard Baxter, in a book published in 1671, which he calls, "*More reasons for the Christian religion, and no reason against it.*" And which he designed as an appendix to his excellent treatise of the reasons of the Christian religion. One part of this book contains, "Animadversions on a Tractate *de Veritate*, written by the noble and learned Lord *Edward Herbert*, Baron of *Cherbury*." This writer makes judicious reflections on several passages in that book; but takes no notice of his Tract *de Religione Laici*, nor of that learned work *de Religione Gentilium*, which probably he had not seen. The celebrated Mr. Locke, in his Essay on human understanding, hath some observations on Lord *Herbert's* five articles, to shew, that however reasonable they may ap-

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" ~~~~~

BAXTER'S  
Reply

LOCKE'S  
Reply

LETTER


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appear to be, they cannot be justly accounted common notices in the sense in what that Lord represents them, *viz.* as clearly inscribed by the hand of God, in the minds of all men \*. And in his “*Reasonableness of Christianity, as delivered in the Scriptures,*” he hath, without formally mentioning Lord *Herbert*, furnished a proper antidote against his scheme, by shewing, with great clearness and force, the usefulness of divine revelation for setting the great principles of the law of nature, and the important duties of religion and morality in a strong and convincing light, and enforcing them with the most powerful motives; and that the mere natural unassisted light of reason, was, as things were circumstanced, insufficient and ineffectual for that purpose †. This matter is also fully and distinctly treated in Dr. *Whitby’s* learned work, intitled, *The Necessity and Usefulness of the Christian Revelation, by reason of the Corruptions of the Principles of natural Religion among Jews and Heathens.* London, 8vo. 1705.

*HALIBURTON’S* The only author among us, that I know, who hath formally considered the whole of Lord *Herbert’s* scheme, and undertaken a direct answer to his writings, is the reverend Mr. *Hallyburton*, professor of divinity, in the university of *St. Andrew*, in a book which was published after the author’s death, at *Edinburgh*, in

Reply.

\* *Essay on human Understanding*, book 1. chap. 3. S. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19.  
 † See his works, Vol. 2d. p. 574. et seq. 4th edit.

1714, 4to, intitled, *Natural Religion insufficient: LETTER*  
*and Revealed necessary to Men's Happiness* — <sup>II.</sup> 

“ in which particularly the writings of the learn-  
 “ ed Lord *Herbert*, the great patron of deism,  
 “ to wit, his books *de Veritate, de Religione*  
 “ *Gentilium*, and his *Religio Laici*, in so far as  
 “ they assert nature's light, able to conduct us  
 “ to future blessedness, are considered, and fully  
 “ answered.” In this elaborate performance he  
 sets himself largely and distinctly to shew that  
 the light of nature is greatly defective even  
 with respect to the discoveries of a Deity, and  
 the worship that is to be rendered to him; with  
 respect to the inquiry concerning man's true  
 happiness; with respect to the rule of duty, and  
 the motives for enforcing obedience. That it  
 is unable certainly to discover the means of  
 obtaining pardon of sin; or to eradicate incli-  
 nations to sin, and subdue its power. And,  
 lastly, he argues its insufficiency from a general  
 view of the experience of the world. He after-  
 wards proceeds distinctly to consider the five  
 articles to which the Lord *Herbert* reduces his  
 catholic religion. He answers the proofs his  
 Lordship has brought to shew that those articles  
 did universally obtain; and, on the contrary,  
 offers several proofs to shew that they did not  
 so obtain. And he endeavours distinctly to an-  
 swer the principal arguments and pleas urged  
 by Lord *Herbert*; and, after him, by Mr. *Blount*,  
 for the sufficiency of natural religion. Who-  
 soever carefully examines what this learned and

LETTER <sup>II.</sup> pious author has offered on these several heads, will find many excellent things; though the narrowness of his notions in some points hath prejudiced some persons against his work, and hindered them from regarding and considering it so much as it deserves.

I shall here conclude my account of Lord *Herbert*, in which I have been the more particular, because as he was one of the first, so he was confessedly one of the greatest writers that have appeared among us in the deistical cause.

P O S T S C R I P T.

*A remarkable Incident, relating to Lord Herbert, considered.*

S I R,

AFTER I had finished the two foregoing letters, I saw a large anonymous letter, which was sent to you, and by you communicated to me, relating to LORD HERBERT OF CHERBURY. This letter deserves particular notice; and what I have to observe upon it may be properly inserted here, immediately after the observations which have been made upon that noble writer in the preceding letters. I readily agree with this gentleman, in acknowledging what, as he observes, Mr. *Baxter* owns in his animadversions on Lord *Herbert's* tract, *De veritate*, that there are excellent things in that book, and that many of the rules there proposed

posed may be of great use. But I had no occa-  
 sion to take particular notice of them, as I pro-  
 posed only to make some general observations  
 on his Lordship's scheme, as far as the cause of  
 Christianity is concerned. I hope the writer  
 of that letter, who appears to be a man of  
 sense, and a friend to Christianity, as well as  
 a great admirer of Lord *Herbert*, will find  
 upon perusing the foregoing reflections, that I  
 have done his Lordship justice, and not pushed  
 the charge against him farther than there is  
 just ground for it. What I have there said  
 is perfectly agreeable to what this ingenious  
 gentleman has observed in this letter; where,  
 after having said, that Lord *Herbert* is com-  
 monly reputed to have been the first starter  
 of Deism in the last century; he adds, "Sup-  
 posing the charge to be true, as I greatly  
 suspect it is, yet I am convinced upon sever-  
 al good reasons, that he was nevertheless a  
Deist of more honour, and of greater candour  
and decency, as he was of far greater parts  
and learning, than many that have appeared  
under that denomination since." He subjoins,  
Had he lived in these days, wherein the sub-  
ject, then new, has been thoroughly canvassed,  
and no stone left unturned to find out the  
truth, and bring it into fair light; I own,  
I have charity enough to suppose, and al-  
most to believe, that Lord *Herbert* would  
either have been an advocate for revelation,  
or at least have forbore opposing it."

This

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This gentleman takes notice of a manuscript which he had lately seen, containing the life of the Lord *Herbert* of *Cherbury*, drawn up from memorials penn'd by himself, and which is now in the possession of a gentleman of distinction whom he does not name. He mentions that Lord's good conduct when he was Ambassador at *Paris*, and some other things that do not come within the compass of my design, which is not to give an account of the lives and characters of the authors I mention, but only to consider their writings, and those no farther than they relate to the controversy between the Christians and the Deists. But there is one thing in that manuscript life of Lord *Herbert*, which the writer of the anonymous letter calls a *surprising incident*, and which is indeed of such a nature, that I cannot pass it by without a particular notice.

After having observed, that Lord *Herbert's* tract, *De veritate*, was his favourite work, he produceth a large extract relating to it in that Lord's own words, signifying, that tho' it had been approved by some very learned men to whom he had shewn it, among whom he mentions *Grotius*, yet as the frame of his whole book was so different from what had been written heretofore on this subject, and he apprehended he should meet with much opposition, he did consider, whether it were not  
better

better for him a while to suppress it. And then LETTER II.  
his Lordship proceeds thus,

“ Being thus doubtful in my chamber, one  
“ fair day in the summer, my casement being  
“ open towards the south, the sun shining clear,  
“ and no wind stirring, I took my book, *De*  
“ *veritate*, in my hands, and kneeling on my  
“ knees, devoutly said these words. *O thou*  
“ *eternal God, author of this light which now*  
“ *shines upon me, and giver of all inward illu-*  
“ *minations; I do beseech thee, of thine infi-*  
“ *nite goodness, to pardon a greater request than*  
“ *a sinner ought to make: I am not satisfied*  
“ *enough, whether I shall publish this book: if*  
“ *it be for thy glory, I beseech thee give me*  
“ *some sign from heaven; if not, I shall sup-*  
“ *press it.* I had no sooner spoken these words,  
“ but a loud, though yet gentle noise, came  
“ forth from the heavens, (for it was like no-  
“ thing on earth) which did so clear and com-  
“ fort me, that I took my petition as granted,  
“ and that I had the sign I demanded; where-  
“ upon also I resolved to print my book. This,  
“ how strange soever it may seem, I protest be-  
“ fore the eternal God, is true: neither am  
“ I any way superstitiously deceived herein;  
“ since I did not only clearly hear the noise,  
“ but in the serenest sky that ever I saw,  
“ being without all cloud, did, to my think-  
“ ing, see the place from whence it came.”

The ingenious writer of the letter says, he  
will make no remarks on this incident, but  
sends

LETTER II. sends it as he finds it; but he makes no doubt, that some observations upon this and other things in that life, would be acceptable to the friends of religion.

I shall mention some reflections that have occurred to me upon this occasion.

I have no doubt of his Lordship's sincerity in this account. The serious air with which he relates it, and the solemn protestation he makes as in the presence of the eternal God, will not suffer us to question the truth of what he relates, *viz.* that he both made that address to God which he mentions, and that in consequence of this, he was persuaded that he heard the noise he takes notice of, and which he took to come from heaven, and regarded it as a mark of God's approbation of the request he had made. And accordingly this great man was determined by it to publish his book. He seems to have considered it as a kind of imprimatur given to it from heaven, and as signifying the divine approbation of the book itself, and of what was contained in it.

x I cannot help thinking, that if any writer, zealous for Christianity, had given such an account of himself, as praying for and expecting a sign from heaven to determine his doubt, whether he should publish a book he had composed in favour of the Christian cause; and, upon hearing a noise, which he took to be from heaven, had looked upon it as a mark of the divine approbation, and as a call to publish that book;



it would have passed for a high fit of enthusiasm, and would no doubt have subjected the author to much ridicule among the gentlemen that oppose revealed religion. What judgment they will pass upon it in Lord *Herbert's* case I do not know. But, considering the great partiality they have often shewn in their own favour, and against Christianity, it is not improbable, that some of them may be apt to interpret this incident, as giving a divine sanction to a book, which contains indeed several important truths, but withal hath some principles which are unfavourable to the Christian religion; or, at least, they may be willing to have it believed, that this is as much to be depended upon, as the signs and attestations said to be given from heaven to the first preachers and publishers of the gospel-revelation.

There are some things observable in Lord *Herbert's* solemn address to God, which, I think, are highly commendable, and would incline one to think very favourably of his Lordship's intentions. He discovereth in it a great veneration for the Deity, and a deep sense of his dependence upon him as the *author of light*, and the *giver of all inward illuminations*. This is agreeable to the sentiments of the best and wisest men in all ages. But yet I think it may be justly doubted, whether an address of such a particular kind, as that made by his Lordship, was proper or regular. It does not seem to me, that we are well-founded to apply for or

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to expect an extraordinary sign from heaven, for determining doubts concerning the expediency of publishing a book. Methinks, if a man hath used his best endeavours to find out truth, and, which certainly ought not to be neglected, hath humbly applied to God to assist and direct him in his enquiries; if he hath the testimony of his own conscience to the uprightness of his own intentions, and that he is not acted by pride and vain-glory, by an affectation of singularity, or any worldly sinister ends and views; and if he is satisfied, upon the most diligent and impartial examination, that what he hath advanced is both true, and of great importance to mankind, and is only afraid of the opposition it may meet with; I think, in such a case, especially if he hath also the advice of good and judicious friends concerning it, he hath sufficient grounds to proceed upon, and doth not need a particular sign from heaven to determine him. This seems to be a putting it on a wrong foot, since God hath not in his word given us any ground to expect that he will answer such a request; nor is there any reason to expect it from the nature of the thing. His Lordship himself seems to have suspected that such an address and expectation was not regular, when he begs of God to *pardon* it, as being a *greater request than a sinner ought to make*. I believe it will be acknowledged, that sudden impressions, or supposed signs from heaven, like that upon which Lord *Herbert* seemeth to lay

so great a stress, are very equivocal, and not much to be depended upon for information in truth, or direction in duty. They may lay persons open to mistake and delusion. It cannot be denied, that, in such cases, men are in danger of being imposed upon by the warmth of their own imaginations, especially if they be wrought up to a strong desire and expectation of an extraordinary sign from heaven, in favour of a design which they heartily wish should succeed.

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I think it is evident from his own account of it, that this was Lord *Herbert's* case. His mind was full of his book, highly prepossessed in favour of its truth and usefulness. He seems not to have been diffident of the truth and goodness of the book itself, but only to have been in doubt about the expediency of its publication; and he took a very extraordinary way to obtain direction concerning it. Nothing less would satisfy him, than a sign from heaven; and it is plain that he was big with expectation. His imagination was warmed with the hope of a sign that should be a mark of the divine approbation. It is not to be wondered at, that a mind thus prepared should be disposed to interpret any incident that should happen, in favour of its own prepossessions, and as countenancing the purpose he had entertained in his own breast. Taking it in this view, nothing happened, but what may reasonably enough be accounted for, without supposing any thing supernatural in the case.

LETTER case. He doth not mention any articulate voice,  
 II. or words spoken to him as from heaven, direct-  
 ing him what to do, or signifying an approba-  
 tion of his design. He only maketh mention of  
 a noise that seemed to him to come from hea-  
 ven. He giveth no particular account what  
 kind of noise it was, but only that it was *loud  
 and yet gentle*, and that *it came from heaven,  
 for it was like nothing on earth*; that it was  
*in a serene sky*, and that *to his thinking he  
 saw the place from whence it came*. In this  
 situation of his mind, any noise that happened  
 at that precise juncture, and which had some-  
 thing unusual in it, (and it is easy to suppose  
 several things of this kind) might be apt to  
 make an impression on his imagination. I  
 shall only put one supposition, and it is this,  
 that at that time it might happen to thunder at a  
 distance, which might well be in summer-time,  
 though in that part of the sky which was within  
 his view, there was no cloud to be seen, and all  
 seemed perfectly serene. And the *noise of thun-  
 der heard remote* (to use *Milton's* phrase) com-  
 ing at that instant, when his soul was filled with  
 expectation of something extraordinary, would  
 undoubtedly greatly affect him, and might be  
 regarded as a sign of approbation from heaven,  
 which was what he sought for. And then no  
 wonder that it comforted and cheated him, as  
 his Lordship observes it did.

How different  
 from Vanity. It is, I must confess, a great satisfaction to  
 me to reflect, that the evidence of the Chri-  
 stian

Christian revelation doth not depend upon such equivocal signs as this. The attestations given to the first preachers and publishers of the Gospel were of such a kind, that supposing them to have really happened, they could not reasonably, or with the least appearance of probability, be ascribed to any thing but a divine interposition; and therefore might justly be regarded as marks of the divine approbation of the Christian scheme.

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Upon this occasion I cannot help drawing some kind of parallel in my own mind between this incident that happened to this noble Lord, and that extraordinary appearance from heaven which St. *Paul* gives an account of, and which, with what followed upon it, had such an effect upon him, as to conquer his obstinate prejudices, and to engage him to profess and preach that faith in Christ, which he himself had zealously persecuted before. I believe the warmest advocates for Christianity would be ready to own, that if that great apostle had had no better account to give of the reasons and motives of his conversion, than such a sign from heaven as Lord *Herbert* mentions, this would have been a very slender foundation either for himself or others, to go upon in receiving the Christian doctrine as of divine original. But the slightest comparison of the cases may let us see that there is a wide and amazing difference between them. Lord *Herbert's* mind was prepossessed with the

Contrast's
Paul's sin

LETTER II. expectation of a sign from heaven. He sought it, he applied to God for it, he had an hope that something of this kind would happen. And when the thing came, which he took for a sign, it was in favour of what he no doubt strongly wished and desired before. And yet, prepossessed as his imagination was, he heard no voice of words, no articulate language, signifying to him the divine will. But St. *Paul* was the farthest in the world from desiring or expecting a sign from heaven in favour of the religion of *Jesus*. On the contrary, his mind was at that very instant wholly possessed with the strongest prejudices against it. He was then going to *Damascus* with a commission from the high-priest, to seize the disciples of *Jesus*, and bring them to *Jerusalem* to be punished; and he was persuaded in his own conscience that he was right in doing so. He *breathed out threatnings and slaughter* against them, as the sacred writer expresseth it. And he himself tells us, that *he verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*. In this circumstance of things, if we should suppose him seized with a sudden pang of enthusiasm, though this is by no means likely to have happened to him as he was travelling along the road at noon-day with several others in his company: but if we should suppose that something of this kind happened to him, and that he saw an extraordinary light from heaven, which he took to be a sign that heaven approved

approved the work in which he was then engaged ; or if he had thought he also heard a voice from above speaking to him, and animating him to go on and courageously to execute the commission he had received from the high-priest, and promising him success in it ; there might possibly be some pretence for ascribing it to the working of an over-heated imagination, filled with the design he was upon, which engaged all his thoughts and resolutions. But it is plain, that, in the temper he was then in, he could not possibly have the least expectation of *Jesus of Nazareth's* appearing to him with a celestial splendor and glory, calling to him with a majestic voice from heaven, and in words which he distinctly heard, reproving him for his enmity to him, and persecuting rage against his disciples, appointing him his minister and apostle, and commissioning him to preach the Gospel to the *Gentiles*, and to invite them to a participation of the benefits and privileges of his kingdom ; which were things the most remote from his apprehension that could possibly be conceived.

I need not here particularly repeat all the circumstances of a story so well known, as that of the divine appearance which occasioned *St. Paul's* conversion. But taking in the whole, as he himself relateth it, it is absolutely impossible that it should have been the effect of his own enthusiastic imagination, considering how his mind was at that time disposed. To which may be added the consequent effects which shewed the

LETTER II. reality of it. Struck blind with the glory of the appearance, he was obliged to be led to *Damascus*. And it was only by the laying on of *Ananias's* hands in the name of *Jesus* that he had his sight restored. There was immediately a wonderful change in his dispositions, notions, and inclinations. He became enlightened at once, without human instruction, in a perfect knowledge of the religion of *Jesus*, than which nothing could be more contrary in many points to the pharisaical principles and prejudices, he had so deeply imbibed. He was endued with the most extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, and had a power of communicating those gifts to others by the laying on of his hands in the name of a crucified and risen *Jesus*; and in the same sacred name was enabled to perform the most illustrious miracles. These were matters of fact in which he could not be deceived himself, and of which there were numbers of witnesses. And accordingly he went through the nations preaching *Jesus Christ*, and him crucified, as the Saviour and Lord; which he did with such evidence, and had such extraordinary attestations from heaven accompanying him, that vast numbers were brought over by his ministry to embrace a religion which was absolutely contrary to their most rooted prejudices, inclinations and interests.

There might possibly be some suspicions with regard to the relation of a fact so circumstanced as was that of Lord *Herbert*. It might be thought possible,

possible, that an author might feign an approbation from heaven in favour of some peculiar notions he had entertained, and of a book of which he was very fond, and upon which he seems to have valued himself. Not that I think there is any reasonable ground of suspicion, that this noble writer feigned what he relates concerning this incident. But yet some may suppose, that an author might possibly be under some temptation to deviate from the rules of truth in such a case. But no such suspicion can be entertained in *St. Paul's* case, that he should have feigned a heavenly appearance in favour of a religion, which he was well known to have hated, persecuted, and despised, and which was absolutely contrary to the prejudices to which he had been so obstinately addicted, and to all his worldly expectations, connections, and interests. To which it may be added, that he gave the highest possible proof of his own sincere belief of the fact as he has related it, by his inviolable adherence to that religion, to which he was by this extraordinary means converted; though he exposed himself by it to the bitterest persecutions, and to the greatest and most various labours and sufferings that any one man ever endured; and which he bore with an invincible constancy, and even with a divine exultation and joy, supported by the testimony of a good conscience, and the hope of a glorious reward in the heavenly world.

LETTER

II.



Upon the whole, let us put the supposition that Lord *Herbert*, in the account he hath given of what happened to him, has had the strictest regard to truth, which for my part I have no doubt of; and that the account St. *Paul* hath given of the extraordinary appearance to him from heaven, is also true; there is this vast difference between the cases; that granting all that happened to Lord *Herbert* to have been as he relates it, there is nothing in it but what may be accounted for in some such manner as that mentioned above, without supposing any thing supernatural in the case; but granting the truth of the relation which St. *Paul* gives of the divine appearance to him, with the effects that followed upon it, there is no possibility of accounting for it in a natural way, or indeed in any other manner, than by owning an extraordinary and supernatural interposition. Though therefore the former, granting it to be true, can by no means be depended upon as a certain mark of the approbation of heaven given to Lord *Herbert's* book; yet the latter, supposing it in like manner true, affordeth a convincing proof of an extraordinary attestation given from heaven to the divine mission and glory of a crucified *Jesus*, and to the truth and divine original of the Christian revelation.

I may perhaps be thought to have expatiated too much in my reflections on this occasion. But I hope I shall be excused, when it is considered, that the incident is of so uncommon a nature,

nature, that it relateth to a person of Lord *Herbert's* character and eminency; and that the account of it is extracted from memorials written by himself.

LETTER
II.
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I shall make no farther remarks on the anonymous letter than to observe, that the writer of it makes mention of the answers to Lord *Herbert*, published by Mr. *Baxter* and Mr. *Halyburton*. He also takes notice of the *Weekly Miscellany*, as having lately appeared against him. The two former I have taken notice of above; the latter I have not seen, and therefore know not how far some of the observations there made may have coincided with mine.





## LETTER III.

*Observations on Mr. Hobbes's writings. He sometimes professeth a regard to the scripture as the word and law of God, at other times ridicules inspiration or revelation. He attempts to invalidate the sacred Canon, and makes religion and the authority of scripture to depend entirely on the authority of the magistrate. His strange maxims in morality and politics. His scheme tends to subvert natural religion as well as revealed. Confuted by several learned authors.*

## S I R,

**I**N my two former letters some observations were made on the writings of that eminent Deist, Lord *Herbert of Cherbury*. The next writer I shall mention was in several respects of a different character from that noble Lord, though also very famous in his time, the noted *Mr. Thomas Hobbes of Malmsbury*. There have been few persons, whose writings have had a more pernicious influence in spreading irreligion and infidelity than his; and yet none of his treatises are directly levelled against revealed religion: And therefore I shall content myself with some brief general reflections upon them.

He

He sometimes affects to speak with veneration of the sacred writings. He expressly declareth, that though the laws of nature are not laws as they proceed from nature, yet "as they are given by God in holy scripture, they are properly call'd laws; for the holy scripture is the voice of God, ruling all things by the greatest right\*." But though he seems here to make the laws of scripture to be the laws of God, and to derive their force from his supreme authority, yet in many other passages, some of which I shall have occasion to mention, he supposeth them to have no authority but what they derive from the prince or civil power. He sometimes seems to acknowledge *inspiration* to be a *supernatural gift*, and *the immediate hand of God*; at other times he treats the pretence to it as a sign of *madness*; and by a jingle upon the words represents God's *speaking* to the ancient prophets in a *dream or vision*, to be no more than their *dreaming* that he spoke to them, or *dreaming between sleeping and waking* †. To weaken the authority of the sacred Canon, he endeavours to shew, that the books of *Moses*, and the historical writings of the Old Testament, were not written by those whose names they bear; and that they are derived to us from no other authority, but that of *Esdra*, who restored them when they were lost ‡. A supposition in which he hath been since followed by

\* De cive. cap. 3. S. 33. † Leviath. p. 196. ‡ ibid. p. 200, 201, 203.

others

† The first about available in a ... Higher ...

LETTER III. others on the same side, and very lately by a noble Lord: though the absurdity of it is manifest, and hath been fully exposed\*. As to the writings of the **New Testament**, he acknowledgeth, that they are as ancient as the times of the apostles, and that they were written by persons who lived in those times, some of whom saw the things which they relate; which is what many of our modern Deists seem unwilling to own. And though he insinuates that the copies of the scriptures were but few, and only in the hands of the Ecclesiastics, yet he adds, that he sees no reason to doubt, [but] that the books of the New Testament, as we have them, are the true registers of those things which were done and said by the prophets and apostles †. But then he most absurdly pretends, that they were not received as of divine authority in the Christian church, till they were declared to be so by the council of *Laodicea*, in the year after Christ, 364: though nothing is capable of a clearer proof, than that their authority was acknowledged among Christians from the apostolic times.

He expressly asserts, that we have no assurance of the certainty of scripture, but the *authority of the church*, and this he resolveth into the *authority of the commonwealth*: and declares, that till the sovereign ruler had prescribed them, “ the precepts of scripture were not obligatory

\* Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's letters, p. 51, &c. † Levith. p. 204.

" laws, but only counsel and advice, which LETTER III.  
 " he that was counselled might without in-  
 " justice refuse to observe, and being contrary  
 " to the laws could not without injustice ob-  
 " serve"; that the word of the interpreter of  
 scripture is the word of God, and the sovereign  
magistrate is the interpreter of scripture, and  
 of all doctrines, to whose authority we must  
 stand \*. Yea, he carrieth it so far as to pro-  
 nounce, that Christians are bound in conscience  
 to obey the laws of an infidel king in matters  
 of religion; that " thought is free, but when  
 " it comes to confession of faith, the private  
 " reason must submit to the public, that is to  
 " say, to God's lieutenant." And accordingly  
 he alloweth the subject being commanded by  
 the sovereign to deny Christ in words, hold-  
 ing firmly in his heart the faith of Christ: and  
 that in that case, " it is not he that denieth  
 " Christ before men, but his governor and the  
 " the laws of his country †. And he expressly  
 declareth, that idolatry to which a man is com-  
 pelled by the terror of death is not idolatry.  
 And this being the case, it is not to be won-  
 dered at, that he speaks with contempt of the  
ancient martyrs. In this the succeeding Devils  
have not failed to imitate him. They have  
 reproached those excellent persons as having  
*died, as a fool dieth* ‡; as if it were a ridiculous

\* See this quest. concerning liberty. p. 136. De cive. cap. 17. Leviath. p. 169. 283. 284. † Ibid. p. 238. 271.

‡ See Christ. not founded on argument. p. 52, 53.

LETTER and senseless thing to endure hardships and sufferings, for the sake of truth and conscience. <sup>III.</sup> And yet those have been always justly admired, who have exposed themselves to the greatest dangers in a noble cause, and who would not do a base thing to save their lives.

Mr. *Hobbes* acknowledgeth the existence of God, and that we must of necessity arise from the effects which we behold <sup>at</sup> to the eternal Power of all powers, and Cause of all causes; and he blames those as absurd, who call the world, or the soul of the world, God; but he denies, that we know any more of him than that he exists; and seems plainly to make him corporeal; for he affirms, that that which is not body, is nothing at all\*. And though he sometimes seems to acknowledge religion and its obligations, and that there is an honour and worship due to God, prayer, thanksgivings, oblations, &c. yet he advanceth principles which evidently tend to subvert all religion. The account he gives of it is this, that “from the fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, ariseth religion, not allowed, superstition.” And he elsewhere resolveth religion into things which he himself derides, *viz.* “opinions of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion to what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics †.” He takes pains in many of his works to prove man to be a necessary

\* *Leviath.* 214. 371. † *Ibid.* p. 54.



agent, and expressly asserts the materiality and mortality of the human soul; and he represents the doctrine concerning the distinction between soul and body in man, to be an error contracted by the contagion of the demonology of the *Greeks*. We may observe by the way the great difference there is in this respect between Mr. *Hobbes* and Lord *Herbert*. This noble writer has reckoned the notion and belief of a future state among the common notions naturally obvious to the minds of all men: But the account Mr. *Hobbes* is pleased to give of it is this, that the belief of a future state after death, "is a belief grounded upon other men's saying, that they knew it supernaturally, or that they knew those, that knew them, that knew others, that knew it supernaturally \*"

That we may have the better notion of this extraordinary writer, it may not be amiss to mention some other of his maxims. He asserts, that by the law of nature every man hath a right to all things, and over all persons, and that the natural condition of man is a state of war, a war of all men against all men: that there is no way so reasonable for any man as to anticipate, that is, by force and wiles to master all the persons of others that he can, so long till he sees no other power great enough to endanger him. That the civil laws are the only rules of good and evil, just and unjust, honest and dishonest; and that antecedently to such laws every action

\* *Leviath* p. 74.

LETTERIS in its own nature indifferent: That there is  
 III. nothing good or evil in itself, nor any common  
 laws constituting what is naturally just and un-  
 just; that all things are measured by what every  
man judgeth fit where there is no civil govern-  
 ment, and by the laws of society where there is  
 one\*. That the power of the sovereign is abso-  
 lute, and that he is not bound by any compacts  
 with his subjects: That nothing the sovereign  
 can do to the subject can properly be called in-  
 jurious or wrong; and that the king's word is  
 sufficient to take any thing from any subject, if  
 there be need, and the king is judge of that  
 need †.

In Mr. *Hobbes* we have a remarkable instance  
 what strange extravagancies men of wit and  
 genius may fall into, who whilst they value  
 themselves upon their superior penetration, and  
 laugh at popular errors and superstition, often  
 give into notions so wild and ridiculous, as none  
 of the people that govern themselves by plain  
 common sense, could be guilty of. It will  
 hardly be thought too severe a censure to say  
 that Mr. *Hobbes's* scheme strikes at the founda-  
 tion of all religion, both natural and revealed.  
 That it tendeth not only to subvert the authority  
 of the scripture, but to destroy God's moral ad-  
 ministrations. That it confoundeth the natural  
 differences of good and evil, virtue and vice,  
 and taketh away the distinction between soul

\* De cive. cap. 6. S. 18. cap. 10. S. 1. cap. 12. S. 1.  
 Leviath. p. 24, 25. 60, 61, 62, 63, 72. † Lev. p. 90. 106.

and body, and the liberty of human actions. LETTER III.  
 That it destroyeth the best principles of the human nature, and instead of that innate benevolence, and social disposition which should unite men together, ~~supposeth~~ <sup>supposeth</sup> all men to be naturally in a state of war with one another. That it erecteth an absolute tyranny in the state and church which it confounds, and maketh the will of the prince or governing power the sole standard of right and wrong; and that it destroyeth all the rights of private conscience, and indeed leaveth no room for conscience at all.

But notwithstanding the ill tendency of many of Mr. *Hobbes's* principles, yet the agreeableness of his stile, of which he was a great master, joined to his dogmatical way of pronouncing with a very decisive air, and the very oddness and apparent novelty of his notions, gave them a great run for a time, and did no small mischief. He himself boasteth of the good reception his *Leviathan* met with among many of our gentry: But the manifold absurdities and inconsistencies of his scheme, and the pernicious consequences of it to religion, morality, and the civil government, have been so well exposed, and set in a clear light, that there are not many of our modern Deists that would be thought openly to espouse his system in its full extent. And yet it cannot be denied, that there are not a few things in their writings borrowed from his; and that some of them

LETTER have chosen rather to follow him than Lord *Herbert* in several of his principles; and particularly in asserting the materiality and mortality of the human soul, and denying man's free agency.

Antagonists.

Mr. *Hobbes* met with many learned adversaries; among whom we may particularly reckon Dr. *Seth Ward*, afterwards bishop of *Salisbury*, and archbishop *Bramhal*. The latter argued with great acuteness against that part of his scheme which relates to liberty and necessity; and afterwards attacked the whole of his system in a piece called the *Catching of the Leviathan*, published at *London* in 1658; in which he undertakes to demonstrate out of Mr. *Hobbes's* own works, that no man who is thoroughly an *Hobbist* can be "a good Christian, or a good commonwealth's-man, or reconcile himself to himself." The reverend Mr. *Tenison*, afterwards archbishop of *Canterbury*, gave a summary view of Mr. *Hobbes's* principles, with a judicious confutation of them, in a book called, *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes examined*, published in 1670. To these may be added the famous Earl of *Clarendon*, who writ, "a brief view and survey of the dangerous and pernicious errors to the church and state in Mr. *Hobbes's* book, intitled *Leviathan*." This was published in 1676. Bishop *Parker*, Mr. *Tyrril*, but above all bishop *Cumberland* in his justly celebrated work *de Legibus Naturæ*, did also distinguish themselves in this controversy.

It is to be observed that the learned writers, who opposed Mr. Hobbes, did not so much apply themselves to vindicate revealed religion, or the Christian system, as to establish the great principles of all religion and morality, which his scheme tended to subvert; and to shew, that they had a real foundation in reason and nature. And in this they certainly did good service to religion. Yet some of the enemies of revelation endeavoured to take advantage of it, as if this shewed that there is no other religion but the law of nature, and that any extraordinary revelation is needless and useless. Thus on every supposition these gentlemen seem resolved to carry their cause against Christianity. If there be no law of nature, no real difference in the nature of things, between moral good and evil, virtue and vice, there is no such thing as religion at all, and consequently no Christian religion. On the other hand, if it be proved, that there is such a thing as the religion and law of nature, which is founded in the very nature and relations of things, and agreeable to right reason, then it is concluded, that this alone is sufficient, and that it is clear and obvious to all mankind; and therefore they need no revelation to instruct them in it, or assure them of it. A very wrong conclusion this! since it is manifest that a well-attested revelation from God would be of very great use, both farther to clear and confirm some of the important principles of natural religion, which

LETTER  
III

LETTER though in themselves reasonable, were in fact  
 III. greatly obscured and perverted in the corrupt  
 state of mankind; and also to instruct men in  
 things, which however highly useful to be  
 known, they could not have clearly discovered  
 or been fully assured of, by the mere un-  
 assisted light of nature without a divine reve-  
 lation.

This might lead one into a train of reflexions  
 on the connection there is between natural and  
 revealed religion. But I must content myself  
 with giving short hints of things. To enlarge  
 farther upon them would not suit my present  
 design. You will probably hear from me again  
 soon: and in the mean time, I am, &c.





## LETTER IV.

Mr. Charles Blount's notes on the life of Apollonius Tyanæus designed to expose Christianity. His Religio Laici copied for the most part from Lord Herbert. He had a chief hand in the Oracles of Reason. He attacks the doctrine of a mediator as unworthy of God. His remarkable concession that it is not safe to trust to Deism alone without Christianity joined with it. Mr. Toland, another deistical writer; very fond of asserting paradoxes. The design of his Amyntor to render the Canon of the New Testament uncertain. He gives a large catalogue of spurious gospels, and attempts to shew that they were equally received and acknowledged in the primitive times, with the gospels which are now looked upon as authentic. The contrary fully proved in the answers that were made to him.

S I R,

**A**MONG those who openly avowed the cause of deism, and seemed zealous to promote it, may be reckoned Charles blount, Esq; In 1680, he published a translation of the two first books of *Philostratus's life of Apollonius Tyanæus* with large notes, which are manifestly intended to strike at revealed religion. *Apollonius*, you know, was a *Pythagorean* philosopher that

LETTER  
IV.

lived in the first century, whose character and miracles were opposed by the *Pagans* to those of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Hierocles* writ a book to this purpose, which was answered by *Eusebius*, who hath plainly proved, that *Philostratus* was a vain and fabulous writer, and that his accounts are full of romantic stories and ridiculous fables. And whoever impartially considers *Philostratus's* book, which is still extant, must be convinced that *Eusebius's* censure upon it is just. Nothing can be supposed more different than *Philostratus's* manner of writing, stuffed with rhetorical flourishes and vain ostentations of learning, is from the plain, sober, artless narration of the evangelists, which hath all the characters of genuine unaffected simplicity, and a sincere regard to truth. To which it may be added, that *Apollonius's* philosophy, and the wonders he is said to have wrought, all tended to uphold the reigning established superstition and idolatry, which at the same time had all worldly advantages on it's side; and yet was not able to oppose the progress of Christianity, which triumphed over it, though destitute of all those advantages, and though it had all the powers of the world engaged against it. A manifest proof this, how vastly superior the evidence of our Saviour's divine character and miracles was to any thing that could be produced in opposition to it. And yet many of our modern Deists have been fond of running the parallel between *Apollonius* and Jesus Christ. Mr. *Blount* in his notes  
has



has thrown out several insinuations against the miracles of our Saviour, in which he has been followed and even exceeded by some succeeding writers, of whom I may afterwards give some account. This gentleman has on several occasions discovered a strong prejudice against the scriptures; and shewn how willing he is to lay hold on whatsoever he thinks, may expose them: It could be only owing to this, that he finds fault with that manner of expression, he *opened his mouth, and said* \*. A censure which may be thought to proceed from an extraordinary nicety, rather than a true justness of taste. But though this, and other oriental idioms and forms of speech, may differ from what is usual among us, the language of scripture has been always admired by the best judges.

In 1683, the same Gentleman published a small book intituled *Religio Laici*, which is little more than a translation of Lord *Herbert's* treatise of the same name. The additions and improvements he has made are so few, and of such small moment, as not to deserve a distinct consideration, and therefore I shall refer to the reflections already made on Lord *Herbert's* scheme.

Some years after in 1693, there was another book published, in which Mr. *Blount* had a principal concern, and which was plainly intended to propagate infidelity. It had a pompous title, *The oracles of Reason*, and was published after Mr. *Blount's* unhappy end, by his

\* *Blount's* notes on *Philostratus*. p. 69.

LETTER friend Mr. *Charles Gildon*, who usher'd it into  
 IV. the world by a preface in defence of self-mur-  
 der, which that gentleman had been guilty of  
 to get rid of the uneasiness of a passion which  
 proved too violent for him. The title of the  
 book seem'd to promise demonstration, as if it  
 were intended to serve as an infallible guide in  
 matters of religion. But there is little order or  
 method in it, or regularity of design. It is a  
 collection of different pieces, consisting for the  
 most part of letters between Mr. *Blount* and his  
 friends, intermixed with fragments and transla-  
 tions from some *Greek* and *Latin* authors, done  
 with no great exactness.

That part of the book which relates to na-  
 tural religion, and it's sufficiency, proceeds  
 chiefly upon Lord *Herbert's* plan. There are  
 two of the tracts particularly remarkable this  
 way: The one is a Summary Account of the  
 Deist's religion, by Mr. *Blount*: The other is a  
 Letter from *A. W.* to Mr. *Blount* concerning na-  
 tural religion, as oppos'd to divine revelation.  
 In the former of these, Mr. *Blount* having set  
 himself to shew that God is not to be worship-  
 ped by an image, or by sacrifices, next endea-  
 voureth to prove that he is not to be worshipp'd  
 by a mediator. He pretends that the worship  
 of God by a mediator derogateth from his in-  
 finite mercy, equally as an image doth from his  
 spirituality and infinity. But his argument is  
 founded upon a misapprehension or misrepre-  
 sentation of the gospel scheme. Far from de-  
 rogating from the mercy or goodness of God,  
 the

the appointment of such a mediator as the gospel proposeth is one of the most signal instances of his grace and goodness towards mankind. It is a wise and gracious provision for exercising his mercy towards guilty creatures in such a way as is most becoming his own glorious government and perfections, and most conducive to their peace and comfort, and most proper to remove their guilty jealousies and fears.

But he farther urgeth, that if God appointed the mediator, this shews that he was really reconciled to the world before, and consequently that there was no need of a mediator. It sheweth indeed, that God had kind thoughts of mercy, and gracious intentions towards the human race, but this doth not prove that therefore the appointment of a mediator was needless. On the contrary, his wisdom determined him to take this method as the properest way of exercising his mercy, and dispensing the effects of his goodness; of which he is certainly the fittest judge. And whosoever duly considers the sublime idea given us in the gospel of the mediator, the work upon which he was sent, and the offices he is invested with, may observe such characters of the divine wisdom and goodness in it, such a regard to the honour of God, and to the comfort and benefit and happiness of mankind, as ought greatly to recommend the gospel-scheme. But the distinct consideration of these things would take up more room than the present design will allow.

LETTER

IV.



To this tract is prefixed a letter from Mr. *Blount* to Dr. *Sydenham*, in which there is this remarkable passage: That “undoubtedly in our travels to the other world the common road is the safest; and though  
 X “Deism is a good manuring of a man’s conscience, yet certainly if sowed with Christianity, it will produce the most plentiful crop.” Here he seems plainly to own, that it is not safe to trust to Deism alone, if Christianity be not joined with it\*.

As to the other tract I mentioned, the letter written by *A. W.* to Mr. *Blount* concerning natural religion as opposed to divine revelation, the chief heads of natural religion are there reduced to seven articles. 1. That there is an infinite and eternal God, creator of all things. 2. That he governs the world by his providence. 3. That it is our duty to worship and obey him as our creator and governor. 4. That our worship consists in prayer to him, and praise of him. 5. That our obedience consists in the rules of right reason, the practice whereof is moral virtue. 6. That we are to expect rewards and punishments hereafter according to our actions in this life, which includes the soul’s immortality, and is proved by our admitting providence. 7. That when we err from the rules of our duty, we ought to repent, and trust in God’s mercy for pardon †. Here Lord *Herbert’s* five articles,

\* Oracles of reason. p. 87, 91. † Ibid. p. 197.

which

which were all that he accounted necessary, LETTER  
IV. are enlarged to seven, which indeed may be regarded as farther explications of the former; and with other explications they might be enlarged to a still greater number. What was observed concerning Lord *Herbert's* articles may be applied to these. It will be acknowledged, that they are agreeable to right reason, but this is no proof that therefore an exprels divine revelation would not be needful in the present state of mankind, to set them in a stronger light, and give them additional force. Several of the Deists would be far from agreeing with this writer in some of the articles he mentions. The first article runs thus, that *there is one eternal self-existent God, creator of the world.* Where it is plainly supposed, that the world was created; and yet in another part of that book, Mr. *Blount* has taken the pains to translate a large fragment of *Ocellus Lucanus*, which is designed to prove the eternity of the world \*. And it appears that he himself does not disapprove it. In another part of these pretended *Oracles*, in a letter from Mr. *Gildou*, to Mr. *Blount*, the opinion of the origin of good and evil, from two different eternal principles the one good, the other evil, is represented as not unreasonable †. In another of the above mentioned seven articles it is declared, that the *worship we owe to*

\* *Oracles of reason.* p. 212.—228. † *Ibid.* p. 194.

LETTER *God consists in prayer to Him, and praise of Him :*

IV.

and yet it is well known, that this has been contested, and denied, by some of the ancient philosophers, and modern Deists. And Mr. *Blount* himself in his Notes upon the life of *Apollonius Tyanæus*, having observed that some of the heathens used no prayers at all, insinuates, Gibbon—in their names, objections against that duty\*.

With regard to the fifth article, that *our obedience consists in the rules of right reason, the practice whereof is moral virtue*; this is easily said in general, but there is no great likelihood, that if they were to come to a particular explication, they would agree what is to be looked upon as included in the rules of right reason, and in the practice of moral virtue. Some of them would probably think it reasonable to indulge the appetites and passions in instances which others would not think reasonable or proper: Even in a point of such consequence as self-murder, some of the ancient philosophers and modern Deists have pleaded for it, whilst others have condemned it: and it is openly justified (as was before observed) in the preface to these *Oracles of Reason*. And one should think no reasonable man could deny, that express precepts, determining by a divine authority the particulars of moral duty, would be of great advantage. As to the article of future rewards and punishments, and the soul's immortality; this is represented by

\* Notes on Philostratus, p. 58.

Mr. *Blount*, in a letter to the right honourable the most ingenious *Strephon*, and by *A. W.* in his letter to Mr. *Blount*, as a necessary part of natural religion; and yet he observes, that the ancient heathens disagreed about it\*. And, in another part of these *Oracles*, it is declared to be probable, that the soul of man is not of an entirely distinct nature from the body, but only a purer material composition †. And the soul's materiality is not very consistent with the doctrine of its immortality. And now we may see what to judge of *A. W.*'s argument against Christianity, That "if the reasons of the Christian religion were evident, there would be no longer any contention or difference about it: and if all do not agree in it, those marks of truth in it are not visible, which are necessary to draw our assent ‡." This argument, if it were good for any thing, would prove that there are no visible marks of truth in natural religion, no more than in revealed; since it cannot be denied that men differ about the one as well as the other. But the truth is, the argument doth not conclude in either case.

There are several things in the *Oracles of Reason*, which are particularly designed against the holy scriptures, and which have been repeated by others since. But the sacred writings have been fully vindicated against those

\* *Oracles of Reason*, p. 201.

† *Ibid.* p. 154, 187.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 201. 206.

LETTER exceptions. Mr. *Blount* has particularly at-  
 IV. tacked the writings of *Moses*, and the most  
 considerable part of what he has offered to  
 this purpose, is borrowed either from the  
 learned author of the *Archæologia Philosophicæ*,  
 who though he differed in some things from  
 what is generally looked upon as the true in-  
 terpretation of *Moses's* sense, was far from in-  
 tending to subvert the authority of the *Mosaic*  
 writings; or from the author of the hypothe-  
 sis of the *Præadamites*, who afterwards re-  
 tracted his own book. From this writer Mr.  
*Blount* hath given us a literal translation from <sup>ten</sup>the  
 pages together, in two different parts of this  
 book, without making the least acknowledg-  
 ment of it, or taking any notice of the an-  
 swers that had been returned. In like manner  
 he hath thought proper to repeat the ob-  
 jections which have been frequently urged  
 against the *Mosaic* writings, from the irrecon-  
 cilableness of the accounts there given with  
 the antiquities pretended to by the most learn-  
 ed heathen nations, particularly the *Chaldeans*  
 and *Egyptians*. Our great *Stillingfleet* had, in  
 the first book of his *Origines Sacræ*, very amply  
 considered that matter, and clearly shewn the  
 vanity of those pretences, yet they are here  
 again advanced with as much confidence as if  
 they had never been refuted. The same ob-  
 servation may be made with regard to the ar-  
 guments of *Ocellus Lucanus*, about the eternity  
 of the world, which are translated and pro-  
 duced



duced with great pomp, by Mr. Blount, though they had been unanswerably exposed in the last-mentioned learned treatise \*.

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The *Oracles of Reason* were animadverted upon by Mr. John Bradley, in a book published at London, in 1699, in 12mo. intitled, *An impartial View of the Truth of Christianity, with the History of the Life and Miracles of Apollonius Tyanæus: To which are added some Reflections on a book called Oracles of Reason.* This book I have not seen. Dr. Nichols's conference with a Theist was also particularly designed by the learned and ingenious author in opposition to the *Oracles of Reason*; and he hath not left any material part of that book unanswered. The first part of this conference was published at London, in 12mo. in 1696, and the other three parts in the following years. But what deserveth our special notice, Mr. Giddon the publisher of the *Oracles of Reason*, and who had recommended them to the world, with a pompous elogium, was afterwards, upon mature consideration, convinced of his error; of which he gave a remarkable proof, in a good book, which he published some years after, in 1705, intitled *The Deist's Manual.* It is observable, that the greatest part of this book is taken up in vindicating the doctrines of the existence and attributes of God, his providence and government of the world, the immortality of the soul, and a future state. And his

\* Origines Sacrae, book 3. chap. 2. sect. 4. 5. 6. 7.

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reason for it was, as he himself intimates, because many of the Deists, with whom he was well acquainted, did really deny those great principles which lie at the foundation of all religion, or at least represented them as doubtful and uncertain. And their not admitting natural religion in its just extent formed some of their principal prejudices against the Christian revelation.

TOLAND.

The next writer, of whom I shall give some account, is Mr. *Toland*, who, though he called himself a Christian, made it very much the business of his life to serve the cause of infidelity, and to unsettle men's minds with regard to religion. There are many things in his writings which shew that he was very fond of asserting things that had an appearance of novelty, however destitute of reason or probability; a remarkable instance of which he has given in his strange attempt to prove, that motion is essential to matter. See his letters to *Serena*, Letter 3d. \*. In another book, which he calls *Pantheisticon*, published in 1720, he has shewn himself a favourer and admirer of the Pantheistic philosophy, i. e. that of Spinoza, which acknowledgeth no other God but the universe. The first thing that made Mr. *Toland* taken notice of, was his *Christianity not mysterious, or a discourse shewing that there is*

\* This is confuted in Dr. Clarke's Demonstration, &c. p. 24. Edit. 7th.

nothing

nothing in the gospel contrary to reason, nor above it, and that no Christian doctrine can be properly called a mystery. This was published in 1696. and was animadverted upon by several writers of learning and reputation, as Mr. *Becconsal*, Mr. *Beverly*, Mr. *John Norris*, Dr. *Payne*, Mr. *Syngé*, afterwards Archbishop of *Tuam*, and Mr. *Broxan*, afterwards Bishop of *Corke*. In 1709, he published at the *Hague* two *Latin* Dissertations. The first is intituled, *Adeisidemon sive Titus Livius a superstitione vindicatus. In qua dissertatione probatur Livium historicum in sacris, prodigijs, et ostentis enarrandis, haudquaquam fuisse credulum aut superstitiosum: ipsamque superstitionem non minus Reipublicæ, (si non magis) exitiosam esse, quàm in purum putum atheismum.* The second dissertation bears the title of *Origines Judaicæ, sive Sorabonis de Mose et religione Judaicæ historie breviter illustrata.* In this dissertation he seems to prefer the account of this *Pagan* author concerning *Moses* and the *Jewish* religion before that which is given by the *Jews* themselves. These two dissertations were answered by Mr. *la Fave*, Minister at *Utrecht*, in a book printed in 1710, and intituled, *Defensio religionis, nec non Mosis et Gentis Judaicæ contra duas dissertationes Joannis Tolandi.* And by Mr. *Benoit*, minister at *Dessl*, in his *Melange de remarques critiques, historiques, philosophiques, theologiques, sur les deux dissertations de Mr. Toland, intitulez, l'un l'Homme*

LETTER *sans superstition, et l'autre les origines Juda-*  
 IV. *iques*, printed at Delft in 1712. But what I  
 shall here particularly take notice of, and by  
 which he hath chiefly distinguished himself, is  
 the pains he hath taken to invalidate the au-  
thority of the sacred canon of the New Testa-  
ment, and to render it uncertain and preca-  
 rious. This seems to have been the design of  
 the book he calls *Amyntor*, which he published  
 in 1698, and in which he hath given a cata-  
 logue of books, attributed in the primitive  
 times, to *Jesus Christ*, his apostles, and other  
 eminent persons, "together with remarks and  
 " observations relating to the canon of scrip-  
 " ture." He hath there raked together what-  
 ever he could find relating to the spurious gos-  
 pels, and pretended sacred books, which ap-  
 peared in the early ages of the Christian church.  
 These he hath produced with great pomp to  
 the number of eighty and upwards, and though  
 they were most of them evidently false and  
 ridiculous, and carried the plainest marks of  
 forgery and imposture, of which, no doubt, he  
 was very sensible, yet he has done what he  
 could to represent them as of equal authority  
 with the four gospels, and other sacred books  
 of the New Testament, now received among  
 Christians. To this end he has taken ad-  
 vantage of the unwary and ill-grounded hypo-  
 theses of some learned men, and has endea-  
 voured to prove that the books of the pre-  
 sent Canon lay concealed in the coffers of pri-  
 vate

vate persons, till the latter times of *Trajan* or *Adrian*, and were not known to the clergy or churches of those times, nor distinguished from the spurious works of heretics; and that the scriptures, which we now receive as canonical, and others which we now reject, were indifferently and promiscuously cited and appealed to by the most ancient Christian writers. His design in all this, manifestly is to shew, that the gospels and other sacred writings of the New Testament, now acknowledged as canonical, really deserve no greater credit, and are no more to be depended upon, than those books which are rejected and exploded as forgeries. And yet he had the confidence to pretend, in a book he afterwards published, that his intention in his *Amyntor*, was not to invalidate, but to illustrate and confirm the Canon of the New Testament\*. This may serve as one instance, among many that might be produced, of this writer's sincerity.

Several good answers were returned to *Toland's Amyntor*. Mr. (afterwards) Dr. *Samuel Clarke*, published a small tract, in 1699, intitled, *Some Reflections on that part of the book called Amyntor, which relates to the Writings*

\* See Toland's preface to his *Nazaræus*, p. 9. This very odd book was well answered by Mr. (afterwards) Dr. *Manger*, in his *Remarks upon Nazarinus*. On which Mr. Toland made some reflections in a Tract he call'd *Mangoneutes*. Mr. *Paton* also published his *Anti-Nazaræus*, in answer to Mr. Toland's book. And Dr. *Thomas Brett* took some notice of it in the Preface to his *Tradition necessary to explain and interpret the Holy Scriptures*.

LETTER of the primitive Fathers, and the Canon of the  
 IV. *New Testament*. In this he gave an early specimen of those talents, which he afterwards employed to so great advantage in the defence of Christianity. The same book was afterwards answered by the ingenious Mr. *Stephen Nye*, in his *Historical Account and Defence of the Canon of the New Testament, in answer to Amyntor*. And, by Mr. *Richardson*, in his *Canon of the New Testament vindicated*; whose work hath been justly and generally esteemed; as executed with great learning and judgment. To these may be added, “Mr. *Jones*, who hath considered this matter distinctly, and at large, in his *New and full Method of settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament*,” which was published at *London* in 1726, in two volumes 8vo; to which a third small one was afterwards added, published in 1727, but left unfinished by reason of the author’s death.

*Spurious Gospels.*

These learned writers have plainly shewn Mr. *Toland’s* great unfairness and disingenuity in his whole management of the argument: That he has frequently imposed upon his readers by false quotations, or by grossly misrepresenting the authors he cites: That he has been guilty of great blunders, and ridiculous mistakes: That several of the writings he produces, as having been written in the apostolic age, were forged so late as the third or fourth century: That by far the greatest part of those writings,

writings, of which he hath given so pompous a catalogue, and which he would put upon the world as most ancient and apostolical, are expressly rejected by the authors whom he himself refers to, as spurious and apocryphal. or even as absurd and impious forgeries: That as to those few of them which are not expressly rejected and condemned by the writers who have mentioned them, it doth not appear by any one testimony, that they were ever generally received, and acknowledged in the Christian church, or equalled with the books of the sacred canon: and that even those authors who have been thought to quote some of them with approbation, yet expressly declare, that none but the four gospels were received in the Christian church, as of divine authority. That though some of the false gospels, that they might the better pass upon the people, were compiled out of the genuine gospels, with such additions, omissions, and interpolations, as might best answer the design of the compilers; this did not hinder their being generally rejected: whereas the four gospels, the same which we now receive, were generally acknowledged from the beginning: That these and other sacred books of the New Testament, were even, in the earliest ages, spread into distant countries, and were in the possession of great numbers of persons, and read in the churches as divine: And finally, that several of the genuine writers of the three first cen-

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tures have left us catalogues of the sacred books of the New Testament, but in none of those catalogues do any of the apocryphal gospels appear.

To set this whole matter in a clearer light, Mr. *Jones* has given us a complete enumeration of all the apocryphal books of the New Testament, and made a critical inquiry into each of those books, with an *English* version of those of them which are now extant, and a particular proof that none of them were ever admitted into the Canon. And he hath distinctly produced and considered every testimony relating to them, that is to be found in any Christian writer or writers of the first four centuries after Christ.

Upon all that hath been written on this subject, it is a just and natural reflection, that as the number of spurious gospels, which were rejected by the primitive Christians, shews how scrupulous they were not to admit any books as canonical, but those of whose truth and authenticity they had sufficient proofs; so their admitting, and receiving with so general a consent, the four Gospels which are now in our hands, affordeth a strong argument, that they had undoubted evidence of the genuine truth and certainty of the evangelical records, which fully satisfied them who lived nearest those times, and who had the best opportunities of knowing; and that to this it was owing, that they, and no others, were generally received



ceived and acknowledged as of divine authority. LETTER  
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On this occasion it is proper to mention Dr. *Lardner's* excellent work of the *Credibility of the Gospel-History*; in the second part of which consisting of several volumes, he hath made a full and accurate collection of the passages which are to be found in the writers of the first ages of the Christian church, relating to the four Gospels, and other sacred books of the New Testament. This he hath executed with so much fidelity and diligence, and with such exactness of judgment, that the *English* reader, who hath not opportunity to consult the originals, will be able to judge for himself, upon considering the passages of the original authors, which are very faithfully translated. This affordeth so clear and continued a proof of their having been generally received in the earliest ages of the Christian church, that one would hope it should put an end to this part of the controversy.

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## LETTER V.

*The Earl of Shaftesbury, a fine and much admired writer. Not very consistent in the account he gives of Christianity. He casteth reflections on the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, as if it were of disservice to the interests of virtue. The contrary shewn from his own acknowledgments. His Lordship resolves the credit of holy writ, wholly into the authority and appointment of the state. He frequently takes occasion to expose the Scriptures, and represents them as uncertain, and not to be depended upon. What he saith concerning ridicule, as the test and criterion of truth, examined. It is shewn, that a turn to ridicule is not the properest disposition for finding out truth: and that there is great danger of its being misapplied. His Lordship's own writings furnish instances of such a wrong application. Authors mentioned that have written against him.*

S I R,

*Once a defend-  
er of Xian<sup>ty</sup>.* **I**T gives me a real concern, that among the writers who have appeared against revealed religion, I am obliged to take notice of the noble author of the *Characteristics*. Some indeed are not willing to allow that he is to be reckoned

reckoned in this number. Passages are produced out of some of his writings, in which he expresseth very favourable sentiments of Christianity. Thus he doth particularly, in a preface, which, and I believe justly, is ascribed to his Lordship as the author, prefixed to a volume of select sermons of Dr. *Benjamin Whichcot*, published in 1698. In that preface he finds fault with those in this profane age, that represent not only the institution of preaching, but even the Gospel itself, and our holy religion to be a fraud. He expresseth his hope, that from some things in those sermons, even they that are prejudiced against Christianity may be induced to like it the better; and that the vein of goodness, which appears throughout these discourses, will make such as are already Christians, prize Christianity the more; and the fairness, ingenuity, and impartiality, which they learn from hence, will be a security to them against the contrary temper of those other irreconcilable Enemies to our Holy Faith. In 1716, some of his letters were published at *London*, under the title of "*Several Letters written by a noble Lord to a young Man in the University.* 8vo." In these letters, which were written a few years before the Earl of *Shaftesbury's* death, in the years 1707, 1708, 1709, there are excellent sentiments and advices, and some which seem to discover a real regard for the Christian religion.

It were greatly to be wished, on many accounts, <sup>inconsistency</sup>

LETTERCOUNTS. that his Lordship had always expressed  
 V. himself in an uniform manner, on this sub-  
 ject. No impartial man will deny him the praise  
of a fine genius. The quality of the writer,  
 his lively and beautiful imagination, the deli-  
 cacy of taste he hath shewn in many instances,  
 and the graces and embellishments of his style,  
 though perhaps sometimes too affected, have  
 procured him many admirers. To which may  
 be added his refined sentiments on the beauty  
 and excellency of virtue, and that he hath of-  
 ten spoken honourably of a wise and good  
 providence, which administers and governs the  
 whole in the best manner; and hath strongly  
 asserted, in opposition to Mr. *Hobbes*, the na-  
 tural differences between good and evil; and  
 that man was originally formed for society, and  
 the exercise of mutual kindness and benevo-  
 lence; and not only so, but for religion and  
 piety too\*. These things have very much  
 prejudiced many persons in his favour, and pre-  
 pared them for receiving, almost implicitly,  
 whatever he hath advanced. And yet it can-  
 not be denied, that there are many things in  
 his books, which seem to be evidently calcu-  
 lated to cast contempt upon Christianity, and  
 the holy Scriptures.

It is in the *Characteristics* that we are properly  
 to look for an account of his Lordship's sen-  
 timents. They were first published in three  
 volumes 8vo. in 1711. And the last part of his

\* *Characteristics*, vol. 3d. p. 224.

life was employed in revising them, and preparing for a new and most correct edition of them, which accordingly was published immediately after his death. In them he completed the whole of his works which he intended should be made public. And these books are so generally read, and by many so much admired, that it is necessary to take notice of those things in them which seem to have a bad aspect on religion, and to be of a dangerous influence and tendency.

Of this kind are the frequent reflections he hath cast on the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. This, as I observed in a former letter, is represented by Lord *Herbert* as a fundamental article of natural religion: And though he carries it too far in making it an innate principle, in which all mankind are, and have been always agreed; yet it cannot be denied, that there were some notices and traces of it generally spread among the nations, though mixed with much obscurity, and which probably had a great effect in preserving the remains of religion and virtue among the people, though contradicted by several sects of their philosophers. It is the great advantage and glory of Christianity, that it hath cleared and confirmed this important principle, and hath brought life and immortality into an open light. But the author of the *Characteristics* frequently expresseth himself in a manner, which tendeth to raise a prejudice

against

LETTER <sup>v.</sup> against this great principle of natural and revealed religion, as if it were of little use in morals, yea, and in many cases of a bad tendency. Thus, after having made an elegant representation of the happy state of things in the heathen world, and the liberty and harmony which then prevailed, he proceeds to shew the different state of things among Christians which he seems chiefly to attribute to the notion and belief of a future state. “ A new sort of policy (saith he) which extends itself to another world, and considers the future lives and happiness of men rather than the present, has made us leap beyond the bounds of natural humanity, and out of a supernatural charity has taught us the way of plaguing one another most heartily. It has raised an antipathy which no temporal interest could ever do; and intail’d upon us a mutual hatred to all eternity. The saving of souls is now the heroic passion of exalted spirits\*.” This is not the only place where his Lordship speaks with ridicule of the *saving of souls*, and of those *who act for their soul’s sakes and make a careful provision for hereafter* †. And he elsewhere tells us, speaking of the expectation of God’s dispensing rewards and punishments in a future life, that “ an expectation and dependency so miraculous and extraordinary as this is, must naturally take off

\* Characteristics. vol. 1. p. 18, 19. ed. 5th. † Ibid. vol. 3. p. 302.

“ from other inferior dependencies and en-  
 “ couragements. Where infinite rewards are  
 “ thus inforc'd, and the imagination strongly  
 “ turned towards them, the other common  
 “ and natural motives to goodness are apt  
 “ to be neglected, and lose much by dis-  
 “ use. Other interests are hardly so much  
 “ as computed, whilst the mind is thus trans-  
 “ ported in the pursuit of a high advantage,  
 “ and self-interest, so narrowly confined with-  
 “ in ourselves. On this account all other  
 “ affections to our friends, relations, or man-  
 “ kind, are often slightly regarded, as being  
 “ worldly, and of little moment in respect of  
 “ the interest of our souls\*.” To the same  
 purpose he represents it, as if the Christian  
 were so urg'd to have his *conversation in hea-  
 ven*, as not to be oblig'd to *enter into any en-  
 gagements with this lower world*, or to concern  
 himself either with the businesss of life, or with  
 the offices of *private friendship*, or the service of  
 the public: and that these are to be regarded  
 as *embarrasments to him in working out his own  
 salvation* †. It seems to be a natural inference  
 from all this, that according to his representa-  
 tion of the matter, it were better for mankind  
 not to believe, or have any regard to a future  
 state at all. For if the belief be weak, he  
 tells us it will be of the worst consequence.  
 “ There can, says he, in some respects be  
 “ nothing more fatal to virtue than the weak

\* Characterist. vol. 2. p. 68. † Ibid. vol. 1. p. 99, 100.

“ and

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“ and uncertain belief of future rewards and  
 “ punishments: For the stress being wholly  
 “ laid on this foundation, if this foundation  
 “ seems to fail, there is no farther prop or se-  
 “ curity to men’s virtue\*.” And on the other  
 hand, if the belief be strong, and deeply im-  
 pressed upon the mind, it will cause men to  
 neglect the interests and duties of this present  
 life, the duties they owe to their friends, their  
 neighbours, and their country. This is the  
 account his Lordship gives of it, but it is  
 grossly misrepresented. For since that vir-  
 tue and goodness which is to be rewarded  
 hereafter includes, according to the scripture  
 account of it, the doing good here on earth  
 as far as we have an opportunity, and even  
 a diligence in the business of our several call-  
 ings, and the exercise of social duties, it is  
 evidently wrong to say that a regard to the re-  
 compenses of a future state must carry us off  
 from these duties, when, on the contrary, it  
 X bindeth us more strongly to the performance  
 of them. Our having our conversation in hea-  
 ven is not designed to cause us to neglect the  
 duties incumbent upon us here on earth, for  
 these are most expressly enjoined in this goshel-  
 law, as being comprehended in that righteous-  
 ness which intitleth us to that future glory;  
 but that we should not take up with the infe-  
 rior things of this present world as our proper  
 ultimate portion and happiness, but raise our

\* Characterist. vol. 2. p. 69.



views to a nobler state, where we hope to arrive to the true felicity and perfection of our natures. And this certainly is an admirable lesson, highly to the honour of Christianity; since it is a too great affection and esteem for worldly enjoyments that puts men upon wrong pursuits, and is the principal source of the greatest disorders of human life.

Several other passages might be produced, in which his Lordship seems to represent the belief and expectation of a future state as of pernicious influence. Thus he observes, "that the principle of self-love which is naturally so prevailing in us, is improved and made stronger every day by the exercise of the passions on a subject of more extended interest, (by which he refers to the expectation of eternal happiness in a future state) and that there may be reason to apprehend, that a temper of this kind will extend itself through all the parts of life. And this has a tendency to create a stricter attention to self-good and private interest, and must insensibly diminish the affection towards public good, or the interest of society, and introduce a certain narrowness of spirit, which is observable in devout persons of almost all religions and persuasions\*." Here he lays a heavy charge on the hope of future happiness; as if it had a bad tendency to spread an inordinate criminal selfishness through the whole

\* Characterist. vol. 2. p 58.

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of human life, to diminish the public good affections, and introduce a narrowness of spirit. A most unjust charge this! Since it might easily be shewn, that the belief and hope of such a happiness as the Gospel sets before us, and which is there represented as a state of perfect goodness and the most extended benevolence, and for which that *charity* which *seeketh not her own* is one of the best preparatives, has a tendency, if rightly understood, to enlarge the heart, to purify and ennoble the soul, and raise it above the little narrow interests of the fleshly self, and to fill it with the highest idea of God, and his immense goodness.

But his Lordship urges, That “those who talk of the rewards of virtue make it so very mercenary a thing, and have talked so much of its rewards, that one can hardly tell what there is in it after all that is worth rewarding\*.” He observes that the most *heroic virtues, private friendship, and zeal for the public* †, have little notice taken of them in our *holy religion*, nor have any reward promised

\* Characterist. vol. 1. p. 97.

† It has been noted by the Deistical writers, that zeal for the public, or love to a man's country, which was so much inculcated by some of the antient philosophers and moralists, is passed over in the Gospel; and this is mentioned as a defect in the Christian morality. But if the matter be rightly considered, there is no just foundation for this objection. To have recommended as by a divine authority, what the *Romans* generally understood by love to their country, a strong passion for the glory of it, and which often carried them to do great injustice to those of other nations, would not have been suited to the nature of a revelation, which

mised them; though if they be comprehended LETTER  
 in the things that are *lovely and virtuous*, and V.  
*praise-*

which was designed for the general good of mankind, and to promote universal benevolence. And if our Saviour had exhorted the Jews in the name of God to a zeal for their country, and its liberties, this in the disposition they were then in, could have been looked upon in no other light, than as a stirring them up to tumults and insurrections. But of love to our country, as it signifies a true and affectionate concern for the public good, he gave an admirable example, and his example hath the force of a precept according to the Christian system. This will be evident to any one that impartially considers the affection he shewed to the Jewish nation, from whom he sprung according to the flesh, the amiable concern he expressed for the miseries he foresaw were coming upon them, and the endeavours he used to prevent those evils, by checking the tumultuous spirit which was then working among them, and injoining them to a peaceable subjection to the *Roman* government. The same observation may be made with regard to the apostles and first publishers of Christianity after our Saviour's resurrection. If they had in the name of God urged it upon the Jews and Gentiles, among whom they preached the gospel, to be zealous for their country, and had promised divine rewards to so heroic a virtue, this would undoubtedly have been regarded as an attempt to raise disturbances in the state. It could not, as things were circumstanced, have produced any good effects, and might probably have had very bad ones. But if by zeal for the public be meant a hearty desire and endeavour to promote the public good, and the real welfare of the community, nothing can be better fitted to answer that end than the Christian law. It hath a manifest tendency, wherever it is sincerely believed and embraced, to make good magistrates, and faithful and peaceable subjects, and to render men truly useful to the public, by engaging them to a diligent discharge of the duties of their several stations and relations, and to the practice of universal righteousness. Christianity, which requires us to exert so noble a spirit of disinterested benevolence, as to be ready to lay down our lives for the brethren, 1 John iii. 16. would certainly engage and animate us, if properly called to it, even to lay down our lives for the good of the community. A virtuous regard to the public happiness, and a contributing as far as in us lies to promote it in our several stations, makes a part of that excellent and praise-worthy conduct,

which

LETTER <sup>v.</sup> *praise-worthy*, they are both commanded there, and shall according to the gospel-scheme be rewarded; but his Lordship, who supposes the contrary, mentions it as an advantage, that no præmium or penalty being enforced in these cases, it leaves *more room for disinterestedness*, the virtue is a *free choice*, and *the magnanimity is left entire*\*. And does not this insinuate, that if no reward had been promised at all, to any part of our duty, it would have been the better for us, and our virtues would have been the more excellent? In like manner he represents that resignation to God, which depends upon the hope of infinite retributions or rewards, to be a *false resignation*, which *discovers no worth nor virtue*; since it is only a man's resigning his present life and pleasure conditionally, for that which he himself owns to be beyond an equivalent †.

And yet this right honourable author himself acknowledgeth, that if by the hope of reward be understood the hope and desire of virtuous enjoyments, or of the very practice and exercise of virtue in another life, it is far from being derogatory to virtue, but is rather an evidence of our loving it ‡. And nothing is more evident to any one that is acquainted with the holy scriptures, than that though

which it is the great design of the Christian religion to promote, and which, according to the divine promises there given us, shall be crowned with a glorious reward.

\* Characterist. p. 97, 99, 100, 101. † Ibid. vol. 2. p. 59.

‡ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 55, 56.

the future happiness is there sometimes me-<sup>LETTER</sup>  
taphorically described under splendid sensible <sup>V.</sup>  
images, which his Lordship is pleased to reflect  
upon as trifling and childish \*, yet the idea there  
given us of it is the noblest, the sublimest,  
that can be conceived. It is represented as a  
state of consummate holiness, goodness, and  
purity, where we shall arrive to the true per-  
fection of our natures; a state into which *no-  
thing shall enter that defileth*; where the spirits  
of the just shall be *made perfect*, and even their  
bodies shall be refined to a wonderful degree;  
where they shall be associated to the glorious  
general assembly of holy and happy souls, and  
to the most excellent part of God's creation,  
with whom they shall cultivate an eternal  
friendship and harmony; and, which is chiefly  
to be considered, where they shall be admitted  
to the immediate vision of the Deity, and shall  
be transformed, as far as they are capable of it,  
into the divine likeness. Such is the happiness  
the Gospel setteth before us, and which cer-  
tainly furnisheth a motive fitted to work upon  
the worthiest minds. And the being animated  
by the hope of such a reward hath nothing  
mean or mercenary in it, but rather is an argu-  
ment of a great and noble soul.

And even as to the fear of punishment, this  
also may be of signal use to restrain the exor-  
bitancies of the passions, to check the career  
of vice, and to awaken men to serious thoughts,

\* Characterist. vol. 1. p. 282.

LETTER <sup>V.</sup> and thereby put them in the way of better im-  
 pression. His Lordship himself asserteth the  
 usefulness of punishments as well as rewards in  
 all well-regulated governments. And with re-  
 spect to future punishments he acknowledgeth,  
 that “ though this service of fear be allowed  
 “ ever so low and base, yet religion being still  
 “ a discipline and progress of the soul towards  
 “ perfection, the motive of reward and punish-  
 “ ment is primary, and of the highest moment  
 “ with us, till being capable of more sublime  
 “ instructions, we are led from this servile  
 “ state to the generous service of affection and  
 “ love\*.” And he elsewhere expressly de-  
 clareth, that “ the hope of future rewards,  
 “ and fear of future punishments, how mer-  
 “ cenary or servile soever it may be accounted,  
 “ is yet in many instances a great advantage,  
 “ security, and support to virtue,” and he  
 offereth several considerations to prove that  
 it is so †. I cannot therefore help thinking  
 that this admired writer has done very wrong  
 in throwing out so many insinuations against  
 the doctrine of future retributions, and against  
 the holy Scriptures and Christian divines for  
 insisting so much upon it, as though it were  
 of ill influence in morals. I am persuaded,  
 that any one who duly considers the state of  
 mankind, and what a mighty influence our hopes  
 and fears have upon us by the very frame of

\* Characterist. vol. 2. p. 63. 273.  
 et seq.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 60.

our nature, must be sensible that if the scripture had only contained fine and elegant discourses on the beauty of virtue, and the deformity of vice, instead of proposing the sanctions of eternal rewards and punishments, it would neither have been so becoming the majesty and dignity of the supreme legislator, nor so well fitted to answer the end of a revelation designed for common use. The scripture indeed doth every-where suppose, and frequently representeth the excellency of holiness and virtue, and the turpitude and deformity of vice and sin, and the good effects of the one, and bad effects of the other, even in this present state. But it is the great advantage of the Christian revelation, that it carrieth our views beyond this narrow transitory scene to a future eternal state, and deriveth it's most important motives from thence, which he himself acknowledgeth to be of infinitely greater force; and, which is very odd, he seemeth to make the very force of those motives an objection against insisting upon them, as if they would render all other motives and considerations useless.

The prejudices his Lordship had conceived against Christianity sufficiently appear from several of those passages that have been mentioned; to which many others might be added. He is pleased indeed more than once to declare himself a very orthodox believer. He hath assured us, in his ironical way, of his *steady orthodoxy*, and *entire submission to the truly Christian and*

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in the beginning of the

LETTER ^{v.} *Catholic doctrines of our holy church as by law established: And that he faithfully embraces the holy mysteries of our religion even in the minutest particulars, notwithstanding their amazing depth* *. For which he gives this reason, that “when the supreme powers have given their sanction to a religious record or pious writ, it becomes immoral and profane in any one to deny or dispute the divine authority of the least line or syllable contained in it †.” To the same purpose he elsewhere declares, that the mysteries of religion are to be *determined* by those to whom the state has *assigned the guardianship and promulgation of the divine Oracles*; and that the *authority and direction of the law* is the *only security against heterodoxy and error*, and the *only warrant for the authority of our sacred symbols ‡*. So that according to him, Christianity has no other foundation than what will serve a false religion as well as the true. And elsewhere in the person of the sceptic, he talks of our *visible sovereign’s answering for us in matters of religion* ||. In this his Lordship exactly agrees with Mr. Hobbes: He is indeed far from asserting with that writer that there is nothing good or evil in its own nature, and that virtue and vice depend wholly on human authority and laws; this he on all occasions strenuously argueth against. But he comes into another part of his

* *Characterist.* vol. 3. p. 315, 316. † *Ibid.* p. 231.
 ‡ *Ibid.* p. 71. vol. 1. p. 360. || *Ibid.* vol. 2 p. 353^o

scheme, the making the magistrate or supreme civil power, the sole judge of religious truth and orthodoxy, and resolving all doctrines and opinions in religion, and the authority of what shall be accounted holy writ, into the appointment of the state; a scheme which absolutely destroyeth the rights of private judgment and conscience, and which evidently condemneth the conduct and judgment of Christ and his apostles, and the primitive Christians at the first plantation of Christianity, and of those excellent men that stood up for the reformation of it since.

But notwithstanding our noble author's pretended veneration and submission to the holy writ by public authority established, he hath taken occasion to expose the scripture as far as in him lay to ridicule and contempt, of which many instances might be produced. Not to mention the insinuations he has thrown out relating to particular passages both in the Old Testament and the New, he hath endeavoured to expose the spirit of prophecy, and made a ludicrous representation of it, and compared it with the extravagancies of the maddest Enthusiasts*. Miracles he will not allow to be any proofs though ever so certain †, or, that there is any ground to believe their having been done, but the authority of our governors, and of those whom the *state* has ap-

* Characterist. vol. 1. p. 45 vol. 3 p. 67. † Ibid. vol. 2. p. 331, 332.

LETTER pointed the *guardians of holy writ* *. He speaks
 with ridicule, as other Deistical writers have
 often done, of what he calls the *specious pre-
 tence of moral certainty*, and *matter of fact* †,
 and insinuates that the facts recorded in the
 gospels are absolutely uncertain, and that he
 that relies upon those accounts must be a
sceptical Christian ‡. He represents St. Paul,
 as speaking *sceptically*, and as *no way certain or
 positive as to the revelation made to him*, though
 the contrary is manifest from the apostle's own
 most express declarations ||. The very enco-
 miums he sometimes pretends to bestow upon
 the scriptures are of such a kind, as tend ra-
 ther to give a low and mean idea of them. Thus
 he commends the *poetical parts of scripture*,
 Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and other intire volumes
 of the sacred collection, as full of humorous
 discourses, and jocular wit; and saith, that
 the sacred writers "had recourse to humout
 " and diversion, as a proper means to promote
 " religion, and strengthen the established
 " faith." In like manner he tells us, that our
 Saviour's discourses were *sharp, witty, and hu-
 morous*; and that his miracles were done with
 a *certain air of festivity*; and so that it is im-
 possible not to be moved in a pleasant manner at
 their recital. i. e. it is impossible not to laugh
 at them §. But though he seemeth here to

* Characteristic. vol. 3. p. 71, 72, 73. † Ibid. vol. 1. p. 44. ‡ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 72. || Ibid. p. 74, 75. § Ibid. vol. 3. p. 118, 122, 123.

commend his *good humour*, as he calls it, and elsewhere represents Christianity as in *the man* ^{V.} *a witty good-natur'd religion*, he insinuateth that this may be all an artful pretence to cover deep designs, and schemes laid for worldly ambition

and power. Having observed, that the affection and love which procures a true adherence to the *new religious foundation*, must depend either on *a real or counterfeit goodness in the religious Founder*, whom he had called before *the divinely authorized instructor, and spiritual Chief*; he adds, that "whatever ambitious spirit may inspire him, whatever savage zeal or persecuting principle may be in reserve, ready to disclose itself, when authority and power is once obtained, the first scene of doctrine however, fails not to present us with the agreeable views of joy, love, meekness, gentleness, and moderation *." I believe few that consider how this is introduced, will doubt its being designed as an insinuation against the character of the holy Jesus; an insinuation for which there is not the least foundation in his whole conduct, or in the scheme of religion he hath taught, and which therefore is as malicious as it is groundless.

Agreeably to this he elsewhere intimates, that *the gospel was only a scheme of the Clergy for aggrandizing their own power.* ^{Clerical ambition} He represents it as a *natural suspicion* of those who are called sceptical. "That the holy records them-

* Characterist. p. 114, 115.

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“ selves were no other than the pure invention and artificial complement of an interested party in behalf of the richest corporation, and most profitable monopoly which could be erected in the world *.” But any one that impartially considers the idea of religion set before us in the New Testament, in its primitive simplicity, will be apt to look upon that which his Lordship representeth as a *natural suspicion* to be the most unreasonable supposition in the world. If an ambitious and self-interested clergy, and particularly the favourers of the papal *Hierarchy*, had been to forge a gospel or sacred records to countenance their own claims, or if they had had it in their power to have corrupted and new modelled them in their favour, the Christian religion and worship would in many instances have been very different from what it now appeareth to be in the sacred writings of the New Testament. Mr. *Hobbes* himself was so sensible of this, even where he inveighs against the clergy as endeavouring to put their own laws upon the Christian people for the laws of God, and pretends that the books of the New Testament were in the first ages in the hands only of the *Ecclesiastics*, yet he adds, that he is persuaded “ they did not falsify the scripture, because if they had had an intention so to do, they would surely have made them more favourable to their power over Christian princes, and civil sovereignty, than they are †.”

* *Characteristick* p. 336. † *Hobbes's Leviath.* p. 203, 204.

His Lordship on many occasions insinuates, that the original records of Christianity are not at all to be depended upon. He frequently repeats the charge of corruptions and interpolations; and particularly concludes the last Miscellany of his third volume with an heap of objections against the scriptures, drawn from the great number of copies, various readings, different glosses and interpretations, apocryphal and canonical books, frauds of those through whose hands they have been transmitted to us, &c. *. These objections are put into the mouth of a gentleman whom he makes go off the stage with an air of triumph, as if they were unanswerable. And yet they are no other than what have been frequently considered and obviated by the learned defenders of the Christian cause. Dr. *Tindal* hath since urged all the objections and more of the same kind more largely, and with greater force than his Lordship had done; and a full answer hath been returned to them sufficient to satisfy an impartial enquirer †.

I have already dwelt longer on this right honourable author than I at first intended, but you will undoubtedly expect that, before I leave him, I should take some notice of that part of his scheme where he seemeth to set up

to ridicule the
last of books

* *Characterist.* vol. 3. p. 317—344. † See particularly *Answer to Christianity as Old as the Creation*, vol. 2. chap. v. vii, viii.

LETTER ^{V.} ridicule as the best and surest criterion of truth: This deserves the rather to be considered, because there is not perhaps any part of his writings, of which a worse use hath been made. I am sensible that some ingenious writers have been of opinion, that in this his Lordship has been greatly mistaken or misrepresented: That his opinion if fairly examined amounts only to this, that ridicule may be of excellent use, either against ridicule itself, when false and misapplied, or against grave specious and delusive impostures: That he distinguishes between true and false ridicule, and between *genteel wit*, and *scurrilous buffoonry*, which without decency or distinction raises a laugh from every thing. This he condemneth as justly offensive, and unworthy of a gentleman and a man of sense. He would have religion treated with *good manners*, and is for subjecting ridicule to the judgment of reason; and declares, that as he is in *earnest in defending raillery*, so he can be *sober in the use of it*. Several passages are produced to this purpose*. But whatever apology may be made for this noble writer, I think it cannot be denied, that he has frequently expressed himself very incautiously on this head, and in a manner that may lead persons into a very wrong method of enquiring and judging concerning truth. He not only expressly calls ridicule a *test*, and a *criterion of truth*, but declares for applying it to every thing, and

* Characterist. vol. 1. p. 11. 63, 83, 84, 85. 128.

in all cases. He would have us carry the LETTER *rule* of ridicule constantly with us, *i. e.* that we must be always in a disposition to apply ridicule to whatever offers, to see whether it will bear*. He observes, that "truth may bear all lights, and one of those principal lights or natural mediums, by which things are to be viewed in order to a thorough recognition, is ridicule itself, or that manner of proof (for so he calls it) by which we discern whatever is liable to just railery on any subject †." And though he doth not approve the seeking to *raise a laugh for every thing*, yet he thinks it right to *seek in every thing what justly may be laughed at ‡*. He declares, that "he hardly cares so much as to think on the subject of religion, much less to write on it, without endeavouring to put himself in as good humour as possible ||." *i. e.* treating it as he himself expresseth it in a way of *wit* and *raillery*, *pleasantry* and *mirth*. And indeed what kind of ridicule his Lordship is for, and how he is for applying it in matters of religion, plainly appears from many specimens he has given us of it in several parts of his works; especially in his 3d volume, which is designed as a kind of review and defence of all his other treatises.

The best and wisest men in all ages have always recommended a calm attention and sobriety of

*Rather than so-
berity & reserve.*

* Characterist. p. 11, 12. † Ibid. vol. 1. p. 61. ‡ Ibid. p. 128. || Ibid. p. 28.

LETTER ^{V.} mind, a cool and impartial examination and enquiry, as the properest disposition for finding out truth and judging concerning it: But according to his Lordship's representation of the case, those that apply themselves to the searching out truth, or judging what is really true, serious and excellent, must endeavour to put themselves in a merry humour, to raise up a gaiety of spirit, and seek whether in the object they are examining they cannot find out *something that may be justly laugh'd at*. And it is great odds, that a man who is thus disposed will find out something fit, as he imagines, to excite his mirth, in the most serious and important subject in the world. Such a temper is so far from being an help to a fair and unprejudiced enquiry, that it is one of the greatest hindrances to it. A strong turn to ridicule hath a tendency to disqualify a man for cool and sedate reflection, and to render him impatient of the pains that is necessary to a rational and deliberate search. A calm dispassionate love of truth, with a disposition to examine carefully and judge impartially, and a prevailing inclination to jest and raillery, seldom meet together in the same mind. This discovereth rather an odd turn and vivacity of imagination, than strong reason and sound judgment; and it would be a strange attempt to set up wit and imagination, instead of reason and judgment, for a judge and umpire in matters of the greatest consequence.

Our

Our noble author indeed frequently observes, LETTER
V. that truth cannot be hurt by ridicule, since when the ridicule is wrong placed, it will not hold. “Nothing is ridiculous, but what is deformed, nor is any thing proof against raillery, but what is handsome and just: this weapon therefore can never bear an edge against virtue and honesty, and bears against every thing contrary to it*.” It will be readily allowed, that truth and honesty cannot be the subject of *just* ridicule; but then this supposeth, that ridicule itself must be brought to the test of cool reason. And accordingly his Lordship acknowledges, that it is *in reality a serious study to temper and regulate that humour* †. And thus after all, we are to return to gravity and serious reason as the ultimate test and criterion of ridicule, and of every thing else. But though the most excellent things cannot be justly ridicul’d, and ridicule when thus applied, will, in the judgment of wise and thinking men, render him that useth it ridiculous, yet there are many persons on whom it will have a very different effect. The ridicule will be apt to create prejudices in their minds, and to inspire them with a contempt, or at least a disregard of things, which when represented in a proper light, appear to be of the greatest worth and importance. *The face of truth* indeed, as his Lordship observes, *is not less fair and beautiful*

* Characteristics. vol. 1. p. 11. 128, 129. † Ibid. p. 128.

LETTER ^{v.} for all the counterfeit vizards that have been put upon it; yet these vizards may so conceal and disguise it's beauty, as to make it look a quite different thing from what it really is. It cannot be denied, that truth, piety and virtue, have often been the subjects of ridicule; and bad, but witty, men have met with too much success in exposing them to the derision and contempt, instead of recommending them to the esteem and veneration of mankind. It is our author's own observation, that *false earnest is ridicul'd, but the false jest passes secure.* And though he says, he cannot conceive how any man should be *laugh'd out of his wits*, as some have been *frightned out of them*, yet there have been and are too many instances of persons that have been laugh'd out of their religion, honesty, and virtue. Weak and unstable minds have been driven into atheism, profaneness, and vice, by the force of ridicule, and have been made ashamed of that which they ought to esteem their glory.

His Lordship is pleased to represent ridicule as the fittest way of dealing with *Enthusiasts*, and *venders of miracles and prophecy*; and having mentioned the reveries of the *French prophets*, and recommended *Bartlomy-Fair drollery*, as proper to be used on such occasions, he gives a broad hint, that if this method had been taken against the reformation, or against Christianity, at its first rise, it would have been effectual to destroy it without having recourse to persecution

tion*. He has here plainly let us know in what light he regardeth our holy religion: on other occasions, he declares only for genteel raillery, but here it seems what he calls the *Bartlomy-Fair method*, which I believe will hardly pass for very genteel raillery, is supposed to be sufficient, not only against that set of *Enthusiasts*, who were called the *French prophets*, but against Christianity itself. But he seems not to have considered, that the great author and first publishers of the Christian religion were scoffed and derided, as well as exposed to grievous sufferings and torments, and that they had *trial of cruel mockings*, as well as of *bonds and imprisonments*. It appears from what remains of the works of *Celsus*, as well as from what *Cæcilius* saith in *Minucius Felix*; that no sarcasm or ridicule was spared among the heathens, by which they thought they could expose Christianity. Tho' when they found this ineffectual to suppress it, they from time to time had recourse to more violent and sanguinary methods: And indeed those that have been most prone to scoff at religion and truth, have often been most prone to persecute it too. A scornful and contemptuous spirit, which is an usual attendant on ridicule, is apt to proceed to farther extremes; nor am I sure, that they, who on all occasions throw out the bitterest sarcasms against religion, and its ministers, would not, if it were in their power,

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\* Characteristics, vol. 1. p. 28, 29.

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give more substantial proofs of their aversion. His Lordship indeed honoureth that raillery and ridicule, which he recommends, with the name of *good-humour*; and by shuffling one of these for the other, and playing upon the words, maketh himself merry with his reader. But *good-humour* taken in the best sense, for what he calls the *sweetest, kindest disposition*, is a different thing from that sneering faculty, which disposes men to cast contempt upon persons and things, and which is often managed in a manner little consistent with a true benevolence.

The proper use of ridicule is to expose such follies and absurdities as scarce deserve or admit a very serious consideration: But to recommend raillery and ridicule as fit, to be employed on all occasions, and upon the most weighty and important subjects, and as the properest means for discerning truth, appears to be an inverting the just order of things. It is, even when innocently used, for the most part a trifling employment, and a man of great genius cannot addict himself much to it, without descending beneath his character. Indeed there needs no more to give one a disgust at this pretended test of truth, than to consider the use his Lordship has made of it. When he is in any degree serious, he shews how capable he is to inform and please his reader; but when he gives a loose to gaiety and ridicule, he often writes in a manner unworthy of himself. And I am apt to think, that if nothing

thing of this had been published, but the two LETTER  
 first treatises of his first volume, and the third <sup>v.</sup>  
 volume, in which he chiefly indulges himself  
 in those liberties, he would have generally  
 passed in the world for a sprightly and ingeni-  
 ous, but very trifling writer. He often throws  
 out his sneers and flirts against every thing  
 that comes in his way; and with a mixture  
of low and solemn phrase, and grave ridicule,  
he sometimes manages it so, that it is not very  
easy to discern his true sentiments; and what it  
 is that he really aims at. This is not very con-  
 sistent with the rule he has himself laid down  
 more than once; *viz.* That "it is a mean,  
 " impotent, and dull sort of wit, which leaves  
 " sensible persons in a doubt, and at a loss to  
 " understand what one's real mind is." And  
 again he censures "such a feigned gravity as  
 " immoral and illiberal, foreign to the character  
 " of a good writer, a gentleman, and a man of  
 " sense\*." There seems to be no other way  
 of screening him from his own censure, but  
 by supposing that he imagined his true inten-  
 tion, with regard to Christianity, and the holy  
 Scriptures, might be perceived by any sensible  
 person, through his concealed ridicule. And  
 it must be acknowledged that, for the most  
 part, it is so; though, in some particular places,  
 it is hard to know whether he be in jest or  
 earnest. By this covered way of ridicule he  
sometimes steals upon the reader before he is

ribbon

revert.

\* Characteristics, vol. 1. p. 63. vol. 3. p. 225.

LETTER <sup>v.</sup> aware, and, under the guise of a friend, gives a more dangerous blow, than if he had acted the part of an open and avowed enemy.

Upon the whole it may be justly said, that, in this noble and ingenious author, we have a remarkable instance of the wrong application of that talent of ridicule, of which he was so great a master. And if it has succeeded ill in his hands, how much more may it be expected to do so in those who for want of his genius, are not able to rise above low buffoonry, nor capable of distinguishing gross and scurrilous raillery and scandal from wit and delicate ridicule! His Lordship hath since had many awkward imitators, and probably will have more, who will be apt to apply his test of ridicule, not only as he himself hath given them an example against revealed religion, but against all religion, even that which is called natural, and against that virtue, of which, in his serious moods, he hath professed himself so great an admirer.

antagonists.

I shall conclude my account of this celebrated author with observing, that the *Characteristics* have been attacked, or at least some particular passages in them have been occasionally animadverted upon by several learned writers, by Bishop *Berkley*, Dr. *Wotton*, Dr. *Warburton*, and others. That part of his Lordship's scheme which represents a regard to future rewards, as derogating from the dignity and excellency of virtue, hath been particularly considered by Mr. *Balguy*,

*Balguy*, in a short but judicious tract, written like his other tracts, in a very polite and masterly manner. It is intituled, *A Letter to a Deist concerning the beauty and excellency of moral virtue, and the support and improvement which it receives from the Christian Revelation*, 8vo. 1729. But I know of none that has undertaken to answer the whole, but Mr. *John Brown* in a treatise intituled *Essays on the Characteristics*, published in 1750: This work is divided into three Essays: The first is on ridicule, considered as a test of truth: The second is on the obligations of men to virtue, and the necessity of religious principle: The third is on revealed religion and christianity. Under these several heads he hath considered whatever appeared to be most obnoxious in the writings of our noble author.

The length of this letter may seem to need an apology. But you, I know, will agree with me, that as it was proper in pursuance of the design in which I am engaged to take notice of this admired writer, so it was necessary to make such observations as might help to obviate the prejudices so many are apt to entertain in his favour, to the disadvantage even of Christianity itself.




## LETTER VI.

*Mr. Collins's Discourse of Free-thinking. He gives a long catalogue of divisions among the clergy, with a view to shew the uncertainty of the Christian religion. His attempt to prove that there was a general corruption of the gospels in the sixth century. The absurdity of this manifested. His pretence that friendship is not required in the gospel, though strongly recommended by Epicurus, shewn to be vain and groundless. An account of his book, intituled, The Grounds of the Christian Religion. The pernicious design and tendency of that book shewn. He allows Christianity no foundation but the allegorical, i. e. as he understands it, the false sense of the Old Testament prophecies. His method unfair and disingenuous. Some account of the principal answers published against this book, and against the scheme of literal prophecy considered, which was designed to be a defence of it.*

S I R,

**I**N the year 1713, came out a remarkable treatise, which it will be necessary to take some notice of, intituled, *A Discourse of Free-thinking, occasioned by the Rise and Growth of a Sect called Free-thinkers.* It was written  
by



by *Anthony Collins*, Esq; though published, as LETTER VI.  
 all his other writings are, without his name. 

The same gentleman had in 1707, published *an Essay concerning the use of reason in proposition, the evidence whereof depends upon human testimony*. In which there are some good observations, mixed with others of a suspicious nature and tendency. In this essay there are animadversions upon some passages in a tract written by Dr. *Francis Gastrel*, afterwards Lord Bishop of *Chester*, intituled, *Some Considerations concerning the Trinity, and the way of managing that Controversy*, published in 1702.

To the third edition of which, published in 1707, that learned and judicious divine subjoined a vindication of it, in answer to Mr. *Collins's* Essay. This gentleman also distinguished himself by writing against the immateriality and immortality of the human soul, as he afterwards did against human liberty and free-agency; and with regard to both these, was answered by Dr. *Samuel Clark*, with that clearness and strength for which that great author was so remarkable. The discourse on *Free-thinking*, is professedly intended to demonstrate the necessity and usefulness of *Free-thinking* from reason, and from the examples of the best and wisest men in all ages. But there is

great reason to complain of a very unfair and disingenuous procedure throughout the whole book. He all along insinuates, that those who stand up for revealed religion are enemies to a

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just liberty of thought, and to a free examination and inquiry. His design is certainly levell'd against Christianity, and yet he sometimes affects to speak of it with respect. He no-where argues directly against it, but takes every occasion to throw out sneers and insinuations, which tend to raise prejudices in the minds of his readers. No small part of this book is taken up in invectives against the clergy, and in giving an account of the divisions that have been among them about the articles of the Christian faith. If there hath been any thing unwarily advanced by any of them, if they have vented any odd or absurd opinions, or have in the heat of dispute cast rash and angry censures upon one another, these things are here turned to the disadvantage of Christianity itself: as if this excellent religion were to be answerable for all the passions, follies, and exorbitancies of those that make profession of it: Or, as if the differences which have been among Christians were a proof that there is nothing in the Christian religion that can be safely depended upon. This indeed has been a standing topick for declamation in all the deistical writings, though it is founded upon a principle which is manifestly false, *viz.* that whatever has been at any time controverted is doubtful and uncertain: A principle, which, as I had occasion to observe before, would set aside the most important truths of natural religion as well as revealed. But these gentlemen too often act, as if they were not very

very solicitous about the former, provided they could destroy the latter with it.

A great noise is raised in this *Discourse of Free-thinking*, about the pious frauds of ancient fathers and modern clergy, and their forging, corrupting, and mangling of authors; and it is insinuated, that they have altered and corrupted the Scriptures, as best served their own purposes and interests. Lord *Shaftesbury* had insinuated the same thing before, and these clamours are continually renewed and repeated; though it hath been often shewn with the utmost evidence, that a general alteration and corruption of the holy Scriptures, was, as the case was circumstanced, an impossible thing. And we have the plainest proof in fact, that even in the darkest and most corrupt ages of the Christian church, the Scriptures were not altered in favour of the corruptions and abuses which were then introduced; since no traces of those corruptions are to be found there: on the contrary, they furnish the most convincing arguments for detecting and exposing those corruptions.

But what he seems to lay the greatest stress upon is a passage from *Victor of Tunnis*, in which it is said, that at the command of the emperor *Anastasius*, the holy gospels were corrected and amended. This our author calls *an account of a general alteration of the four gospels in the sixth century*. And he says, it was discovered by Dr. *Mills*, and was very little

VI  
Corruptions of  
Scripture

An alteration  
in 6<sup>th</sup> cent. exposed

LETTER known before\*. But then he should have taken  
 VI. notice of what Dr. *Mills* has added, *viz.* that  
 it is certain as any thing can be, that no such altered gospels were ever published; and that if the fact had been thus, it would have been mentioned with detestation by all the historians, and not be found only in one blind passage of a puny chronicle. Indeed there cannot be a plainer instance of the power of that prejudice and bigotry against Christianity, which has possessed the minds of the gentlemen that glory in the name of *Free-thinkers*, than their laying hold on such a story as this to prove a general corruption of the gospels, contrary to all reason and common sense. Let us suppose the emperor *Anastasius*, to have had an intention to alter the copies of the gospels, (which yet it is highly improbable he should attempt) he could only have got some of the copies into his hands: There would still have been vast numbers of copies spread through different parts of the empire, which he could not lay hold of, especially considering how much he was hated and opposed: or if we should make the absurd and impossible supposition of his being able to get all the copies throughout the east into his hands; yet as there were still innumerable copies in the west, where he had little or no power, they would have immediately detected the alteration and corruption, if there had been any. Loud complaints would have been made

\* Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 89, 90.

of the attempt, but no such complaints were ever made. And, in fact, it is evident, that there have been no greater differences since that time between the eastern and western copies than there were before. And it is undeniably manifest from great numbers of authors, who lived in the preceding ages, and whose works are come down to us, that the scriptures, a great part of which is transcribed into their writings, were the same before that pretended alteration, that they have been since.

With a view of shewing the uncertainty of the sacred text of the New Testament, this author takes notice of the various readings collected by Dr. *Mills*, which he says amount to thirty thousand. This objection has been so fully exposed, and this whole matter set in so clear a light by the famous Dr. *Bentley*, under the character of *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis*, that one should think it would have been for ever silenced. And yet it has been frequently repeated since by the writers on that side, and particularly by Dr. *Tindal*, in his *Christianity as old as the Creation*, without taking the least notice of the clear and satisfactory answer that had been return'd to it.

The ancient prophets have been the constant objects of the sneers and reproaches of these gentlemen. And accordingly this writer has told us, that to obtain the prophetic spirit they played upon musick, and drank wine\*. That they

\* Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 153.

LETTER VI. might very lawfully and properly drink wine, in a country where there was great plenty of it, may well be allowed without any diminution of their character; and that they employed music, particularly in singing praises to God, may be concluded from several passages in the sacred writings. But certainly if they had the prophetic spirit at all, neither wine nor music gave it them, or could enable them to foretel things to come. But then he does them the honour to say, *They were great Free-thinkers*, and that “they writ with as great liberty against “the established religion of the *Jews*, (which “the people looked on as the institution of “God himself) as if they looked upon it all to “be imposture.” That the prophets freely declared against the *Jewish* corruptions, against their idolatries and immoralities, and against their laying the chief stress on ritual observances, whilst they neglected the weightier matters of the law, is very true. And this is here by an unpardonable disingenuity represented as an inveighing against the *Mosaic* dispensation, as if they did not believe it to have been originally of divine institution: whereas it is to the last degree evident, that they all along suppose the law of *Moses* to have been instituted by God himself, and reprove the people and priests not for their adherence to that law, but for their deviations from it, and neglect of the most important duties there enjoined.

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This gentleman has given us a long list of *Free-thinkers*; but there is none of them all of whom he seems to speak with greater complacency than *Epicurus*; though he owns that his system was a *System of Atheism*\*. And after having observed, that *Epicurus* was eminent for that most divine of all virtues, friendship, he says, that we Christians ought to have a high veneration of him on this account, because even our holy religion itself does not any where particularly require of us this virtue.

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Friendship.

The noble author of the *Characteristics* had made the same observation before him: and both the one and the other cite a passage from Bishop *Taylor*, to shew that there is no word properly signifying *Friendship* in the New Testament. Thus they have happily hit upon an instance in which the morality of the gospel is defective, and exceeded by that of *Epicurus*. But it ought to be considered, that friendship, when understood of a particular affection between two or more persons is not always a virtue. It may in some cases inroach upon a nobler and more extensive benevolence, and may cause persons, and hath often done so, to sacrifice the most important duties to private affections. Or, where this is not the case, yet where friendship ariseth from a particular conformity of natural tempers and inclinations between some men and others, or as Lord *Shaftesbury* expresses it, that peculiar relation

\* Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 90. 129.

which

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which is formed by a consent and harmony of minds, it does not properly come under the prescription of a law, nor can be the matter of a general precept. But if it be understood of that benevolence which uniteth virtuous minds in the sacred bands of a special cordial affection, never was this more strongly recommended and enforced than in the gospel of Jesus. It requireth us to love and do good to all mankind, in which sense Bishop *Taylor* rightly observes in the very passage referred to, that *Christian charity is friendship to all the world*. And the last-mentioned noble writer asketh, *Can any friendship be so heroical as love to mankind*\*? And besides this general affection towards all men, the gospel requireth us to cultivate a still nearer, stronger, and more intimate affection towards good men, whom it representeth as obliged to *love one another with a pure heart fervently*. Lord *Shaftesbury* is pleased to mention St. *Paul's* saying, that *perhaps for a good man one would even dare to die*, and observes, that the *apostle is so far from founding any precept upon it, that he ushers it in with a very dubious peradventure* †. But it is to be supposed, his Lordship had not considered that noble passage of St. *John*, *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he, our Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*, 1 *John* iii. 16. Can friendship be

\* *Characterist.* vol. 2. p. 229. † *Ibid.* vol. 1. p. 102.



carried to a nobler height, or be enforced by more engaging motives, or a more powerful example? Can it be pretended, that the *most divine of all virtues, friendship*, is not required of us in our *holy religion*, when we are there required, if properly called to it, to give so glorious a proof of our friendship to our Christian brethren, whom we are taught to regard as united to us by the most sacred ties?

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We shall dismiss this discourse of *Free-thinking* with observing, that as the author of it hath put *Solomon* into his list of *Free-thinkers*, for asserting, as he pretends he did, the mortality of the soul, and denying a future state, though the contrary is manifest from what *Solomon* himself saith *Eccles. xii. 7. 14.* So he takes that occasion to inform his reader, that the immortality of the soul was first taught by the Egyptians, and was an invention of theirs \*. *Mr. Toland* had said the same thing before in his letters to *Serena* †, and this may help us to judge how far some of our boasted *Free-thinkers* are from being friends to natural religion taken in its just extent.

Soon after this discourse of *Free-thinking* appear'd, the reverend *Mr. Hoadley*, now lord bishop of *Winchester*, published some very sensible *Queries address'd to the authors of a late Discourse of Free-thinking*, in which the dishonest insinuations, false reasonings, and pernicious tendency of that treatise are laid open in

\* Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 152. † Letter 2d.


LETTER VI. <sup>VI.</sup> short and concise, but clear and convincing manner. There were several other ingenious pamphlets published to the same purpose. But none of them was so generally admired and applauded as the *Remarks on a late Discourse of Free-thinking by Phileleutherus Lipsiensis, i. e. Dr. Bentley.* This learned writer hath so fully and effectually detected and exposed the great and inexcusable mistakes committed by the author of that discourse, his blunders and absurdities, his frequent wrong translations, and misunderstanding of the authors he quotes, or wilful perversions and misrepresentations of their sense, that it might one should think have discouraged him from appearing any more as a writer in this cause.

*Discourse on  
Religion?*

But such was this gentleman's zeal against Christianity, that some years after he thought fit to attack it in another way, which was more subtil and more dangerous. He published a *Discourse on the grounds and reasons of the Christian religion*, London 1724, 8vo. as if his design had been to do real service to Christianity by establishing it upon a sure and solid foundation. The scheme he lays down is this: That our Saviour and his apostles put the whole proof of Christianity solely and entirely upon the prophecies of the Old Testament: That if these proofs are valid, Christianity is established upon its true foundation; but if they are invalid, and the arguments brought from thence be not conclusive, and the prophecies cited from thence

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not fulfilled, *Christianity has no just foundation, and is therefore false.* Accordingly he sets himself to shew, that the prophecies cited in the New Testament from the Old in proof of Christianity, four or five of which he particularly considers, are only typical and allegorical proofs; and that allegorical proofs are no proofs according to *scholastic rules*, i. e. as he plainly intends it, according to the rules of sound reason and common sense. He asserts, that the expectation of the Messiah did not obtain among the *Jews*, till a little before the time of our Saviour's appearing, when they were under the oppression of the *Romans*; and that the apostles put a new interpretation on the *Jewish books*, which was not agreeable to the obvious and literal meaning of those books, and was contrary to the sense of the *Jewish* nation: That Christianity deriveth all its authority from the Old Testament, and is wholly revealed there, not literally, but mystically and allegorically; and that therefore Christianity is the allegorical sense of the Old Testament, and is not improperly called *Mystical Judaism*; and that consequently the Old Testament is properly speaking the *sole true Canon of Christians*: That the allegorical reasoning is set up by *St. Paul*, and the other apostles, as the true and only reasoning proper to bring all men to the faith of Christ, and all other methods of reasoning are wholly discarded. Thus it appeareth that the evident design of this author's book is to shew

LETTER <sup>VI.</sup>  show, that the only foundation on which Christianity is built is false. That the first publishers of the gospel laid the whole support and credit of Christ's divine mission, and of the religion he taught, upon pretended *Jewish* prophecies, applied in a sense which had no foundation in the prophecies themselves, and contrary to the plain original meaning and intention of those prophecies; which the *Jews* had never understood nor applied in that sense, and which had nothing to support it but allegory; *i. e.* the mere fancy of him that so applies it. If we needed any farther proof of our author's intentions towards Christianity, it might be observed, that he represents Jesus and his apostles as having founded their religion on *prophecy*, in like manner as the several sects among the Heathens did theirs on *divination*. And these prophets, he tells us, manifested their divine inspiration by the *discovery of lost goods, and telling of fortunes*\*. So that he makes Jesus and his apostles found their religion on the predictions of fortune-tellers and diviners, and those misapplied too; which plainly shews what a despicable idea this writer intended to convey of the Christian religion, and the blessed author of it.

Few books have made a greater noise than this did at its first publication. The turn given to the controversy had something in it that

\* Discourse on the grounds, &c. of the Christian religion, chap. vi.

seemed new, and was managed with great art; and yet when closely examined, it appears to be weak and trifling. The very fundamental principle of the author's whole system, *viz.* That the prophecies of the Old Testament are the sole foundation of Christianity, and the only proofs and evidences insisted upon by our Saviour and his apostles, in confirmation of it, is absolutely false; as any one may know that can read the New Testament. For it is undeniable, that our blessed Lord often appealeth to his wonderful works, as manifest proofs that the Father had sent him; and the apostles in like manner frequently appealed to his miracles and resurrection, and to the miracles wrought, and the extraordinary gifts of the holy ghost poured forth in his name, as uncontested proofs of the divine authority of that scheme of religion which they published to the world. With regard to the prophecies, the course of his reasoning really amounts to this. That because there are difficulties and obscurities attending some very few passages cited out of the Old Testament in the New, as having a reference to the times of the gospel; and we cannot well at this distance see the propriety of the application; therefore the whole of the New Testament is false: and the accounts given of our Saviour, his excellent discourses, the miracles he performed, and the illustrious attestations given to him from heaven, are of no force at all; and all the arguments drawn

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LETTER VI. from thence are ineffectual and vain. It is in the same strain of reasoning, that he concludes that because four or five prophecies, for he produces no more, cited in the New Testament from the Old, seem not to relate to the gospel times in a literal, but in a secondary and typical, *i. e.* as he explains it, an allegorical sense, therefore none of the Old Testament prophecies can be applied directly and literally at all, or have any relation to our Saviour and the gospel-dispensation. And because the modern *Jews* contest the application of some prophecies to the Messiah, which are applied to our Saviour in the New Testament, therefore the ancient *Jews* allowed none of those prophecies to be applied to the Messiah, which in the New Testament are applied to him. And yet the contrary is invincibly evident from their writings still extant, by which it appeareth that most of the prophecies applied to our Saviour in the New Testament, and many others not there mentioned, were understood of the Messiah by the ancient *Jews*, as many of them still are by the most celebrated of the modern *Jews* themselves. And it was certainly a strange attempt in this author, to endeavour to prove that the *Jews* had no notion or expectation of the Messiah, till a little before the times of our Saviour, when all their writers with one consent, ancient and modern, who are the proper judges in such a case, agree that there had been all along among them

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an hope and expectation of the Messiah, founded, as they universally believed, on the sacred writings. It may further let us see this writer's ingenuity, that because *St. Paul* makes use of an allegory in his epistle to the Galatians, though he there manifestly introduces it by way of illustration, and expressly declares to those to whom he writes, that these things are allegorized, therefore he layeth the whole stress of his arguments upon allegory as the principal and only proof; and that he and the other apostles absolutely reject all other reasoning but the allegorical, which is no reasoning at all. And yet any one that ever read *St. Paul's* epistles must know, that he often makes use of reasoning and argument, and very close reasoning too. The last Instance I shall produce of this author's extraordinary way of arguing is, that because the apostles and sacred writers of the New Testament acknowledge the authority of the Old, and draw proofs from thence, therefore the New Testament is of no authority at all, and the Old Testament is the sole Canon of Christians, *i. e.* Because there is an harmony between the Old Testament and the New, and because the former had foretold a glorious person who was to introduce a new and more perfect dispensation; therefore that new and more perfect dispensation is no new dispensation at all, but is absolutely and in all respects the same with that old and more imperfect one in which it was prefigured and fore-

LETTER told, and which was designed to prepare the  
 VI. way for it.

Antagonists.

Having made these general observations, it will be proper to take notice of some of the answers that were made to this book; and here that which was written by Dr. *Chandler*, the lord bishop of *Coventry* and *Litchfield* deserveth special notice. It was published in 1725, and is intituled *A Defence of Christianity from the prophecies of the Old Testament*. This is a very learned and elaborate performance, and executed with great judgment. In it the bishop first sets himself to shew, that there was a general expectation of the Messiah at the time when our Saviour appeared; and he traces this expectation from that time to the very age of the prophets themselves. He then proceeds to shew, that to support this expectation there were express literal prophecies, that truly concern the Messiah, of which he produceth twelve, which he particularly considers; and he proves with great Evidence, that they were applied by the antient *Jews* to the Messiah, and that it appeareth from the prophecies themselves, that they could not be applied to any other. He then goes on to shew, that besides these, there were typical prophecies to the same effect, and which were intended to be applied to the Messiah. The author of the *Grounds*, &c. had every-where represented typical prophecies, as signifying no more than that they were afterwards applied in  
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an allegorical sense, and had asserted that there appear not the least traces of a typical intention in the writings of the Old Testament, or any other *Jews* of those times. In opposition to which, the bishop plainly proves, from the writings of the prophets themselves, that they were wont to prophesy by types, and to speak of themselves or others as types of other persons and people, on purpose to foretel what should be done by or to single persons or nations hereafter, of which he giveth several instances: that therefore typical actions and typical discourses made part of the prophetic language, and were understood by the people to carry a reference to something future. And consequently, if the prophets speak of the Messiah in their own persons, or of other persons as types of him, there is nothing in this but what is agreeable to the known prophetic language. He makes it appear, that the prophets themselves understood some of those prophecies as typical of the Messiah, and at the time of delivering those prophecies, gave intimations that they were thus to be referred: that accordingly the *Jews* acknowledge, that there were types in the Old Testament, and particularly that there were types of the Messiah; and that both the ancient and modern *Jews* understand many texts of the Messiah as the Christians do, which are plainly typical; and he shews, that there were good reasons for covering some of the events relating to the Messiah under the veil of types,

LETTER which were not to be fully explained till the age  
 VI. in which they were fulfilled.

He next proceeds to give a distinct account of the texts pretended by the author of the *Grounds* to be misapplied. He justly observes, that if the principal characters of the Messiah be evidently found in the *Jewish* scriptures, to the same intent for which they are cited by Christ and his apostles, it is unreasonable to quit a certain truth, because every individual circumstance is not equally clear; and it doth not plainly appear at this time how two or three authorities are to be applied to the Messiah. And that the expression *that it might be fulfilled*, on which the author layeth so great a stress, was sometimes designed by the *Jews* to mean no more than that something answered alike in both cases, or that there was a suitableness in the cause or circumstances of one event to the other: and he shews, that the same way of speaking continueth among the *Jews* to this day.

With relation to the allegorical way, he observes that it was chiefly in condescension to the *Jewish* Christians that St. Paul at all used it; but that nothing can be more false and disingenuous than to pretend that he never used any other way of reasoning than this. Finally, he thinks it may be allowed, that considering the illustrious attestations given to our Saviour, which plainly shewed that he was a teacher sent from God, his interpretation of the prophecies ought

ought to be acquiesced in; since he wrought his miracles by the same spirit by which those prophecies were delivered; and he instances in several prophecies, the interpretation of which given by our Lord, though different from that of the *Jews*, was actually fulfilled and verified by the event.

There was another learned author of the same name with the bishop, Mr. *Samuel Chandler*, who also distinguished himself on this occasion, in a book intituled, *A Vindication of the Christian Religion*, published in 1725, 8vo. In the former part of that work, he hath a discourse on the nature and use of miracles; in which, after having stated the true notion of a miracle, and given the characters that distinguish true miracles from false, he clearly vindicates the miracles of our Saviour, and shews, that as they were circumstanced, they were convincing proofs of his divine mission. The second part of the same book is particularly designed as an answer to the author of the *Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*. After having shewn, that the prophecies of the Old Testament are not the only proofs of Christianity, and that it is very absurd to pretend, as that author had done, that the Old Testament is the sole canon of Christians, he clearly evinceth, that many of those prophecies had a farther reference than to the times when they were first delivered; and particularly, that they contain a description of a great and good person, to proceed from *David*,  
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who, notwithstanding his sufferings, should be highly exalted, and under whom true religion and righteousness should be more extensive than before; that these prophecies relate principally to a spiritual salvation and deliverance; and that the *Jews* in our Saviour's time, as appeareth from their most antient writings, applied many of those prophecies to the Messiah. He next treats of the double sense of prophecies, which the author of the *Grounds* had ridiculed, and shews that there is no absurdity in supposing that as some prophecies relate wholly to the Messiah, so others may relate partly to his time, and partly to the times when they were first delivered: and that this double sense of the prophecies was originally intended, and was so understood by the *Jews*. He accounts for the particular places excepted against by the author of the *Grounds*, and observes, as the bishop had done, that the apostles sometimes quote passages from the Old Testament, not in a way of direct proof, but to illustrate the argument they are upon; and sometimes by way of accommodation to signify a correspondence of events, and to describe things that happen'd in their own times, by expressions derived from the antient prophetic writings. That as arguments *ad hominem* have been always allowed, so if there were some particular passages in the antient prophets, which were applied by the *Jews* to the Messiah, the reference of which was not so natural and clear, the apostles were fully justifiable

in applying them to Jesus Christ, in their reasonings with the *Jews*, as far as they did agree with his person and character; but that there are few instances of this kind; nor did the apostles make use of this way of arguing, except to the *Jews* or *Jewish* proselytes: and even to them they did not put the chief stress on these things, but laid before them other solid and substantial proofs of Christianity. Finally, if the difficulties which attend the quotations out of the Old Testament were much greater than they really are, yet this would not affect the credit or truth of the Christian religion, which hath so many evidences to support it.

There were several other good answers published to the *Grounds*, &c. and which were so well executed, as to deserve that a particular account should be given of them, if my prescribed limits would allow. Among others, Mr. *Bullock's* sermons were very justly and highly esteemed, in which “ the reasoning of Christ and his  
“ apostles in their defence of Christianity is con-  
“ sidered. To which is prefixed, a preface, take-  
“ ing notice of the false representations of Chri-  
“ stianity, and of the apostle's reasoning in de-  
“ fence of it, in a book intituled, *A Discourse*  
“ *of the Grounds and Reasonings of the Chri-*  
“ *stian Religion.*” London, 8vo, 1725. Dr. *Sykes* also published an *Essay upon the Truth of the Christian Religion, wherein its real Foundation in the Old Testament is shown, occasioned by the Discourse of the Grounds*, London,

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LETTER 8vo, 1725. In this book it is both clearly proved, that there are some direct prophecies relating to the Messiah in the Old Testament, especially in the book of *Daniel*; and there are many good observations to shew, that the New Testament writers often quote passages by way of accommodation and allusion only; and that most of the texts produced as prophecies by the author of the *Grounds* are of this kind. To these may be added, an ingenious treatise, intituled, *The true Grounds and Reasons of the Christian religion, in opposition to the false ones set forth in a late book, intituled, The Grounds, &c. London, 8vo, 1725. Letters to the author of the Discourse of the Grounds, shewing that Christianity is supported by facts well attested, that the words of Isaiah, chap. vii. 14. in their literal sense are a prophecy of the birth and conception of the Messias; and that the gospel-application of several other passages in the Old Testament is just, by John Greene, 8vo, London, 1726. Mr. Whiston also published, The literal accomplishment of Scripture-prophecies, being a full answer to a late Discourse of the Grounds, &c. London, 8vo, 1724. And he afterwards published A Supplement to the literal accomplishment of Scripture-prophecies, London, 8vo, 1725. It may be proper also to mention a book, which was occasioned by the *Grounds, &c.* though not directly in answer to it, intituled, *The Use and Intent of Prophecy in the several Ages of the Church, by Dr. Thomas Sherlock,**

*Sherlock*, now bishop of *London*. This is an excellent performance, in which a regular series of prophecy is deduced through the several ages from the beginning, and its great usefulness shewn. The various degrees of light are distinctly marked out, which were successively communicated in such a manner as to answer the great ends of religion, and the designs of providence, till those great events to which they were intended to be subservient, should receive their accomplishment. There was another valuable book which though not published till some years after, may be considered as particularly designed against the *Grounds*, &c. viz. *The argument from prophecy, in proof that Jesus is the Messiah, & indicated, in some considerations on the prophecies of the Old Testament, as the grounds and reasons of the Christian religion, by Moses Lowman, London, 8vo. 1733.* The last book I shall here take notice of, as published on this occasion, was *A Review of the Controversy between the Author of the Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion and his Adversaries, in a Letter to the Author, 8vo. 1726.* by Mr. *Thomas Jeffrey*. This is drawn up in a clear and judicious manner, and was deservedly well esteemed.

The author of the *Grounds*, &c. thought fit in 1727, to publish a second book, which was to pass for a defence of his first, in answer to his several adversaries, and particularly to the  
Bishop

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LETTER VI. Bishop of *Litchfield*. It was intituled, *The Scheme of literal Prophecy considered*. In this book, he very slightly passeth over the chief things he ought to have proved, and on which in his former book he had laid the greatest stress. Instead of confirming what he had so positively asserted before, that the prophecies of the Old Testament were the only proof on which Christianity is founded, he only shews that they are part of the proof insisted on by our Saviour and his apostles, and most disingenuously supposes, that his adversaries would not allow them to be any proofs at all. He had affirmed with great confidence, that none of the antient *Jews* ever understood any of those prophecies of the Messiah, which are applied to Christ in the New Testament: But the utmost that he now attempts to shew is, that some of those prophecies were not understood by the antient *Jews* of the Messiah; and even for this he can give no other reason than that some of the modern *Jews* do not so apply them. He has nothing now to prove that the Old Testament is the only Canon of Christians, or that the allegorical sense is the only sense of prophecies intended by our Saviour and his apostles. And whereas his answerers had urged, that though most of the prophecies applied in the New Testament to our Lord Jesus Christ were literally fulfilled in him, yet some particular passages might be used only in a way of illustration and accommodation, and not as direct proofs; he sets himself, as his man-



manner is, with a mighty pomp of quotations, to shew the absurdity of supposing that the apostles method of citing prophecies was nothing but a mere accommodation of phrases, as if his adversaries had held that all the passages cited in the New Testament from the Old were applied only by way of accommodation, which not one of them ever asserted. He puts on an appearance of answering what the Bishop had alledged concerning the general and constant tradition, which had obtained among the *Jews* with regard to the Messiah; and he considers the twelve prophecies that learned writer had produced as literally fulfilled in the Messiah. But any one that will take the pains to compare what he hath here offered with the book he pretends to answer, will find how little he has been able to say, that is really to the purpose, and how far he has been from invalidating the proofs which had been brought. He often slips over the most material things that had been urged, and, as the Bishop afterwards complained, takes no more notice of them than if he had not read them. If he can but find a single passage in any *Jewish* or Christian writer, tho' but a modern one, and contrary to the general consent of interpreters, this is laid hold on to set aside the Bishop's interpretation, and to shew that the *Jews* did not generally understand a prophecy of the Messiah, or apply it to him, though clear evidence had been produced that they so applied it. But there is no part of the *Lit-  
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LETTER <sup>VI.</sup> *literal Scheme, &c.* which the author has so much laboured, as that where he hath collected together all that he could meet with against the antiquity and authority of the book of *Daniel*, and the prophecies contained there. This occasioned a second answer from the learned Bishop, intituled, *A Vindication of the Defence of Christianity from the Prophecies of the Old Testament*, published in 1728, in which he hath largely and very solidly vindicated the antiquity and authority of the book of *Daniel*, and the application of the prophecies there contained to the Messiah against the author's objections: And hath also fully obviated whatsoever he had farther advanced against the antiquity and universality of the tradition and expectation among the *Jews* concerning the Messiah. The learned Dr. *Rogers* had before this published his very valuable sermons on the *Necessity of divine Revelation, and the Truth of the Christian Religion*. To which is prefixed a preface, with some remarks on a late book, intituled, *The Scheme of literal Prophecy considered*, London, 1727, 8vo. Soon after which, there came out an ingenious pamphlet, intituled, *The true Grounds of the Expectation of the Messiah*, in two letters by *Philalethes*, London, 1727, said to be written by Dr. *Sykes*. Mr. *Bullock* also appeared again to great advantage in this controversy, in a treatise, intituled, *The Reasoning of Christ and his apostles vindicated*, in two parts. I. *A Defence of the argument from Miracles,*

*Miracles, proving the Argument from Prophecy not necessary to a rational Defence of our Religion.* 2. *A Defence of the Argument from Prophecy, proving the Christian Scheme to have a rational Foundation upon the Prophecies of the Old Testament*, in answer to a book, intituled, *The Scheme of literal Prophecy considered*, London, 1728, 8vo. In this Book, Mr. Bullock finds great fault with our author's way of managing the argument: He observes, that he has not only "raked together the un-  
" guarded expressions of ingenious men, but by  
" altering, adding to, and curtailing passages  
" referred to, and by other disingenuous me-  
" thods unbecoming a man of honour and sin-  
" cerity, wrested them to purposes apparently  
" contrary to their true import." And yet no man had raised a louder outcry against the clergy, for abusing, corrupting, and mangling of authors to serve their own purposes, than this gentleman had done in his *Discourse of Free-thinking*. The Bishop in his vindication makes the same complaint against him, so does Mr. Samuel Chandler, who published on this occasion a judicious *Vindication of the Antiquity and Authority of Daniel's Prophecies, and their Application to Jesus Christ*: In answer to the objections of the author of *the Scheme of literal Prophecy considered*, London, 1728, 8vo. About the same time was published, *Christianity the Perfection of all Religion, natural and reveal'd, wherein some of the principal Prophecies*

LETTER relating to the Messiah in the Old Testament  
 VI. are shewn to belong to him in the literal Sense,  
 in opposition to the Attempts of the literal  
 Scheme, &c. by Thomas Jeffreys, London,  
 1728. I shall conclude this letter with observ-  
 ing, that this attack against Christianity, though  
 carried on with great art as well as malice, pro-  
 duced this advantage, that it gave occasion to  
 a full and accurate examination into the na-  
 ture, design, and extent of many of the Old  
 Testament prophecies, and to the placing some  
 difficult passages in a clearer light.





## LETTER VII.

*Mr. Woolston's Discourses on the miracles of our Saviour; under pretence of standing up for the allegorical sense of Scripture, he endeavours absolutely to destroy the truth of the facts recorded in the gospels. His disingenuous representation of the sense of the fathers on this head, and his false quotations. He charges the accounts given of Christ's miracles as absurd, false, and incredible. His gross and profane buffonry, and base reflections on the character of our Saviour; and yet he pretends a zeal for his honour and Messiahship. A specimen of his way of reasoning with regard to several of Christ's miracles, and his resurrection: Many good answers published against him.*

S I R,

I HAVE already taken notice of several attempts, which were manifestly intended to subvert the truth and divine authority of our holy Religion. The last that was mentioned was that of the author of the *Discourse of the grounds and reasons of the Christian religion*, who under pretence of setting Christianity on a sure and solid foundation, had endeavoured to shew that it hath no just foundation at all; that it is found-

LETTER VII. ed wholly on the Old Testament prophecies, taken not in a literal but merely in an allegorical, *i. e.* as he plainly designed it, in a false sense, contrary to the original intention of the prophecies themselves. In opposition to him it was clearly shewn, that many of the Old Testament prophecies are justly applied to our Saviour in their proper and literal sense. Besides which it was urged, that there were other solid proofs of Christianity, particularly that our Saviour's miracles, and his resurrection from the dead were illustrious attestations given to him from heaven, and evident proofs of his divine mission. And now under pretence of acting the part of a moderator in this controversy, a new antagonist arose, Mr. *Woolston*, who endeavoured to allegorize away the miracles of our Saviour, as Mr. *Collins* had done the prophecies. This he first attempted in a pamphlet intitled *A Moderator between an Infidel and an Apostate*; and in two *Supplements* to it. And afterwards more largely in six Discourses on the miracles of our Saviour which were successively published at different times, in the years 1727, 1728, and 1729. The design of all which is to shew, that the accounts of the great facts recorded in the gospels are to be understood wholly in a mystical and allegorical sense; and that taken in the literal and historical sense they are false, absurd, and fictitious. This attempt he hath carried on with greater rudeness and insolence than any

of those that appeared before him. The Earl of Shaftesbury, even where he unhappily sets up ridicule as the test and criterion of truth, expresth his disapprobation of *scurrilous buffoonry, gross raillery, and an illiberal kind of wit*. And if there was any performance to which these characters might be justly applied, it is this of Mr. Woolston. The same noble writer observes, that to *manage a debate so as to offend the public ear, is to be wanting in that respect that is due to the society—and that what is contrary to good breeding, is, in this respect, as contrary to liberty*. If we are to judge of Mr. Woolston's writings by this rule, they are as inconsistent with a just liberty, as they certainly are with good breeding and decency.

There are two ways by which he endeavours to answer the design he hath in view. The one is, by shewing that the literal sense of our Saviour's miracles is denied by the most antient and venerable writers of the Christian church: the other is, by shewing the absurdity of the accounts given in the gospels, taken in the literal sense. With regard to the first of these, he hath with great pomp produced many testimonies of the fathers, for whom he professeth the profoundest veneration; and, by a strange dissimulment, endeavoureth to represent them as absolutely denying the facts themselves related in the gospels; because, according to a custom which then obtained, they added to the literal,

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a spiritual and allegorical sense, and took occasion from thence to make pious allusions. He pretendeth, that if we will adhere to the fathers, the *gospel is in no sort a literal story*; and that *the history of Jesus's life is only an emblematical representation of his spiritual life in the souls of men*. But it is certain, and was evidently proved by his learned answerers, that in giving the allegorical and mystical sense, the fathers first supposed the literal sense, and the historical truth of the facts, and upon them built their allegorical interpretations. It is acknowledged, that in these they often exceeded just bounds, and too much indulged the vagaries of a pious fancy: but to pretend, that they intended to deny that the facts recorded by the evangelists were really done, is one of the most confident impositions that were ever put upon mankind, and it is not to be doubted, but the author himself was sensible of this. Many glaring instances of unfairness and disingenuity in his quotations from the fathers were plainly proved upon him. It was shewn, that he hath quoted books generally allowed to be spurious, as the genuine works of the fathers, and hath, by false translations, and injurious interpolations, and soiling in of words, done all that was in his power to pervert the true sense of the authors he quotes, and that sometimes he interprets them in a manner directly contrary to their own declared sense, in the very pas-

sages



sages he appeals to, as would have appeared, if he had fairly produced the whole passage.

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It is not to be wonder'd at, that an author who was capable of such a conduct, should stick at no methods to expose and misrepresent the accounts given by the evangelists of our Saviour's miracles. Under pretence of shewing the absurdity of the literal historical sense of the facts recorded in the gospels, he hath given himself an unrestrained licence in invective and abuse. The books of the evangelists, and the facts there related, he hath treated in a strain of low and coarse buffoonry, and with an insolence and scurrility that is hardly to be parallel'd. He asserts that they are full of *improbabilities, incredibilities, and gross absurdities*: that they are like *Gulliverian tales of persons and things, that out of the romance never had a being: that neither the fathers, nor the apostles, nor Jesus himself meant that his miracles should be taken in the literal, but in the mystical and parabolical sense*. And he expressly declares, that if *Jesus's miracles, literally taken, will not abide the test of sense and reason, they must be rejected, and Jesus's authority along with them* \*. He casteth several reflections on our blessed Lord, so base and scurrilous, that they cannot but be extremely offensive to a Christian ear; and which, even sober heathens, many of whom regarded him as a person of great wisdom and virtue, would have been

\* Disc. iv. p. 16.

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ashamed of; and yet this author charges the bishop of London with *ignorance or malice*, in representing him as a *writer in favour of infidelity*. He declares that he is the *farthest of any man from being engaged in the cause of infidels or deists*. And that he *writes not for the service of infidelity, which has no place in his heart, but for the honour of the holy Jesus, and in defence of Christianity*. The like declarations he frequently repeateth. He ends his fourth discourse on our Saviour's miracles with avowing, that his design in these his discourses, is *the advancement of the truth and of the Messiahship of the holy Jesus, to whom be glory for ever, Amen*. He concludes his sixth discourse in the same manner; and expresses himself in his first and second Defence to the like purpose. Any one that compares these declarations with the whole strain of his discourses, will be apt to entertain the worst opinion imaginable of the writer's sincerity; and the most extensive charity will scarce be able to acquit him from the most gross and shocking prevarication.

But not to insist farther on this, one would have expected, that after all the clamours he hath raised against the evangelical accounts of our Saviour's miracles, he should have had some formidable objections to produce; and yet, when stripp'd of the ridiculous turn he hath given them, they are, except some few difficulties, which are far from being new, and have been

been solidly answered, contemptibly vain and trifling. It is an objection he frequently repeats against what we are told concerning our Saviour's curing the diseased, the blind, the lame, &c. that the evangelists have not given us an exact account of the nature and symptoms of their distempers, as physicians and surgeons would have done, that we might know whether the cure was supernatural. And if they had done this, it would, no doubt, have been improved as a strong presumption of art and contrivance in the relators, and as no way consistent with that honest, artless simplicity of narration, for which the evangelists are so remarkable. With regard to the cure of the man that was born blind, he finds fault that our Saviour did not cure him with a word speaking, which he says would have been a great and real miracle; and if he had done so, as he did in several other cases, this writer would have been as far from believing it as before. He will have it, that under pretence of anointing the blind man's eyes with clay and spittle, Jesus made use of a sovereign balsam which wrought the cure, and supposes, in direct contradiction to the whole story, that his blindness was only a slight disorder of the eyes, which was wearing away with age, and that therefore the restoring him to his sight was no miracle at all, tho' the man himself, his parents and friends that had known him all along, and the chief priests and pharisees, who made a strict enquiry into the case,

LETTER could not help acknowledging that it was a very  
 VII. great one. Our Saviour's discovering to the *Samaritan* woman the secrets of her past life, which convinced her of his being a prophet, and from whence he took occasion to give her the most excellent instructions concerning the nature of true religion, passes with this writer for the trick of a *fortune-teller*. And whereas it appeareth from the account given by the evangelist, that the *Samaritans* looked for the Messiah under the idea of a divine teacher, and the *Saviour of the world*, he represents it as if they expected the Messiah not as a *prince* or a *prophet*, but a *conjuror* only. Several other instances might be produced, in which he addeth or varieth circumstances, and altereth the story as recorded by the evangelists, that he may take occasion to place it in a ridiculous light.

*Resum.*

*Raising the Dead.*

It is a remarkable concession which is made by him in the beginning of his fifth Discourse, that "it will be granted on all hands, that the restoring a person indisputably dead to life is a stupendous miracle, and that two or three such miracles well-attested, and credibly reported, are enough to conciliate the belief, that the author of them was a divine agent, and invested with the power of God \*." Three miracles of this kind are recorded in the gospel to have been wrought by Jesus, *viz.* his raising *Jairus's* daughter, the widow's son at *Naim*, and *Lazarus*. And

\* Disc. v. p. 3.

what has our author to object against these accounts? He objects in general against them all, that the persons raised ought to have been magistrates or persons of eminence. But the raising such persons would not have been so agreeable to the rest of our Saviour's conduct and character, who shunned what might have the appearance of ostentation, or be looked upon as an attempt to make an interest with the great. He farther objects, that the persons that were raised should have told what they had seen and done in the separate state. And if the evangelists had been romantic writers that wanted to amuse their readers with strange stories, they might probably have inserted some things of this kind into their accounts. But they confined themselves to the plain facts, as far as they knew them, which they have related with the greatest simplicity. He objects particularly against the story of raising *Jairus's* daughter, because she was but *a girl of twelve years old*; as if the raising one of that age was not as great a miracle as if she had been twenty. He next pretends that she was only *in a fit*, though all the persons about her, and her nearest relations were satisfied that she was dead, and were making the usual preparations for her funeral. It is enough with him to discredit the story of raising the widow's son at *Nain* from the dead, that he was not a person of importance, but a youth and the son of a poor woman. And he has with great sagacity discovered, that Jesus's acci-

LETTER VII. accidental meeting the corpse, and touching the bier, is a plain proof that it was all a contrivance between him and the young man: To mention such objections is to confute them. But perhaps he hath stronger ones to produce against the story of the resurrection of *Lazarus*, which he pronounceth to be such a *contexture of folly and fraud, as is not to be equall'd in all romantic history*. And yet the principal objection he hath to offer is no more than this, that three of the evangelists have not mentioned it. But no argument can be drawn against the truth of the fact from their silence; since it is evident that they never designed, or pretended to record all the remarkable miracles which our Saviour wrought; and St. *John*, who was an eye-witness, and who chiefly taketh notice of the things which the others had omitted, hath given us a very distinct and particular account of it. Among the circumstances which Mr. *Woollston* looks upon to be sufficient to set aside that story, one is, that we are told, *Jesus wept*. This was a sign of his great humanity, and the goodness of his temper, but our author thinks a *stoical apathy* would have become him better. Another is, that Jesus called to *Lazarus* with a loud voice to come forth; which was certainly very proper, that all who were present might attend and observe. And what is very odd, he makes *Lazarus's* being bound in grave clothes, and having his head bound about with a napkin, to be a very suspicious sign

sign that he had not been really dead; and very wisely has found out, that *Lazarus* by a concert with Jesus, who was at a considerable distance when it happened, contrived to be buried, and lie in the grave four days, that Jesus might have the honour of seeming to raise him up from the dead. And because the *Jews* took counsel to kill Jesus, and he withdrew for a while from their rage, this is produced as a proof that the *Jews* knew he was guilty of a fraud, and that he himself was conscious of it; whereas it appears from the whole account, that their taking counsel to put him to death, was owing to their being sensible of the greatness of the miracle, and that it was too evident to be denied, and was likely to draw the people after him.

The objections which he makes in the person of a *Jewish* rabbi, against the evangelical story of our Lord's resurrection, which he declareth to be a *complication of absurdities, incoherences and contradictions*, are equally frivolous. He insinuates, that the guards set by the *Roman* governor, at the desire of the chief priests, to watch the body of Jesus, suffered themselves to be bribed or intoxicated by the disciples; in which he is more quick-sighted than the chief priests and *Pharisees*, whom it more nearly concerned, who it is plain suspected no such thing; in which case, instead of excusing, they would have endeavoured to get them severely punished. But what he seems to lay the principal

stretches

The Resurrection  
from the dead

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stress upon is a supposed covenant between the chief priests and Jesus's disciples, that the seal with which the stone of the door of the sepulchre was sealed should not be broken, till the three days were entirely past; and that therefore the rolling away the stone from the sepulchre, and breaking the seal before the three days were ended, was a breach of that covenant, and a proof of an imposture. A most extraordinary conceit this! as if the rulers of the *Jews* would have troubled themselves to enter into a concert with Jesus's disciples, whom they hated and despised, and who at that time had hid themselves for fear of them, and were fled; or as if such a covenant could bind our Lord from rising when he judged fittest. As to that part of the objection which supposes, that he ought to have lain in the grave according to his own prediction, three whole days and nights, it proceeds from a real or affected ignorance of the *Jewish* phraseology. This is a modern objection. The ancient enemies of Christianity did not pretend that Jesus rose before the time prefixed; for they very well knew that according to a way of speaking usual among the *Jews* and other nations, his rising again on any part of the third day was sufficient to answer the prediction. This matter was set in a clear light in *the trial of the witnesses*. Yet the objection was again repeated by the author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*; and was so fully exposed by his learned



ed answerers, that one would hope we shall hear no more of it \*.


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Mr. *Woolston* makes it also a great objection against the truth of Jesus's resurrection, that he did not shew himself after his death to the chief-priests and rulers of the Jews. And indeed there is no objection with which the deistical writers have made a greater noise than this. It is urged particularly by the author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*; but above all, Mr. *Chubb* has insisted upon it at large, and with great confidence, in his posthumous works, vol. 1. p. 337. *et seq.* And yet good reasons may be assigned, why it was not proper that it should be so. Considering the cruel and inveterate malice they had shewn against Jesus, and the power of their prejudices, there is no likelihood of their submitting to the evidence. They had attributed his miracles to the power of the devil; and his raising *Lazarus* from the dead, of which they had full information, only put them upon attempting to destroy him. Instead of being wrought upon by the testimony of the soldiers, they endeavoured to stifle it. And if Jesus had shewn himself to them after his passion, and they had pretended it was a spectre or a delusion, and had still refused to acknowledge him after this, it would have been insisted upon as

\* See the Evidence of the resurrection cleared, p. 64. &c. and Mr. Chandler's Witnesses of the resurrection re-exam. p. 14—19.

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 a strong presumption against the reality of his resurrection. But let us suppose that Jesus had not only appeared to them after his resurrection, but that they themselves had acknowledged the truth of his resurrection and ascension, and had owned him for their Messiah, and brought the body of the *Jewish* nation into it; can it be imagined that they who now make that objection would have been satisfied? It may rather be supposed, that those great men's coming into it would have been represented as a proof that all was artifice and imposture; and that the design was to spirit up the people against the *Roman* government, and carry on some political scheme under pretence of restoring the kingdom to *Israel*. The whole would have been treated as a national *Jewish* affair, a thing concerted between the chief-priests, and the disciples; and there would have been a greater clamour raised against it, than there is now: I am persuaded that the evidence which was actually given of Christ's resurrection by the apostles and disciples of Christ, in opposition to their own prejudices, and to the authority and power of the *Jewish* chief-priests and rulers, and notwithstanding the persecutions to which their testimony to it exposed them, was much more convincing and less exceptionable, than it would have been, if they had the favour and countenance of the chiefs of the *Jewish* nation, or of those persons who

were

were of the greatest interest and authority among  
 them.

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What has been mentioned may serve for a specimen of this writer's objections against the accounts of our Saviour's miracles recorded in the evangelists: And he might by the same way of management, by arbitrary suppositions, and adding or altering circumstances as he judged proper, have proved the most authentic accounts in the Greek or Roman history to be false and incredible. He might at the same rate of arguing have undertaken to prove that there was no such person as Jesus Christ, or his apostles, or that they were only allegorical persons, and that Christianity was never planted or propagated in the world at all.

This extraordinary writer thought fit to begin his second Discourse on our Saviour's miracles, with boasting that none of the clergy had published their exceptions against what he had offered in his first; and that this shewed that his cause was just, and his arguments and authorities unanswerable; but he did not continue long unanswered. Many learned adversaries soon appeared against him. But they were far from imitating him in his low and scurrilous way of treating the subject. They shewed themselves as much superior in the temper, calmness, and solid and serious manner of treating the argument, as in the goodness of their cause. They considered even his most trifling objections; and whatever things he had urged,  
 that

Antagonists.

LETTER that had any real or seeming difficulty in them  
 VII. (and some such things must be expected in an-  
 cient writings, which relate to times and cus-  
 toms different from ours, and especially with  
 regard to facts of an extraordinary nature), were  
 coolly examined, and fully obviated.

The late worthy bishop of *London* published on this occasion an excellent pastoral letter, written, as all his are, with great clearness and strength. The learned and ingenious Dr. *Zachary Pearce*, now Lord Bishop of *Bangor*, published *The miracles of Jesus vindicated* in four parts, which came out at different times in the year 1729, and were deservedly much esteemed. But the largest answer was that by Dr. *Smalbrook* lord bishop of *St. David's*, in two volumes, 8vo. This learned work is intituled, "*A vindication of our Saviour's miracles*, in which Mr. *Woolston's* discourses on them are particularly examined, his pretended authority of the fathers against the truth of the literal sense are set in a just light, and his objections in point of reason, answered," *London* 1729. There were other good answers published, which also took in the whole of Mr. *Woolston's* discourses: Such was Mr. *Ray's Vindication of our Saviour's miracles*, in two parts, the first published in 1727, the second in 1729; and Mr. *Stevenson's Conference on the miracles of our Saviour*; published in 1730, an ingenious and solid performance. Besides which there were several excel-

excellent pamphlets that were designed to vindicate some particular miracles against Mr. Woolston's exceptions. Such was Mr. Atkinson's *Vindication of the literal sense of three miracles of Christ—his turning water into wine—his whipping the buyers and sellers out of the temple—And his exorcising the devils out of two men.—Against Mr. Woolston's objections in his first and second discourses on the miracles of our Saviour: In three letters to a friend, London, 8vo. 1729.* Dr. Harris's two sermons on the *Reasonableness of believing in Christ, and the Unreasonableness of Infidelity. With an appendix, containing brief remarks upon the case of Lazarus:—Relating to Mr. Woolston's fifth discourse of miracles, London, 8vo. 1729.* That discourse of Mr. Woolston was also animadverted upon by Mr. Simon Brown, in a treatise written with great firmness and spirit, intitled, *A fit Rebuke to a ludicrous Infidel, in some remarks on Mr. Woolston's fifth discourse on the miracles of our Saviour. With a Preface concerning the prosecution of such writers by the civil power, London, 8vo, 1732.* The following tracts also deserve special notice, as being written with great clearness and judgment. *A Vindication of three of our blessed Saviour's miracles, in answer to the objections of Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse on the miracles of our Saviour, by Nathaniel Lardner, now Dr. Lardner, London, 1729.* *A Defence of the Scripture History, as far as it concerns*

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LETTER VII. *the resurrection of Jairus's daughter, the widow's son at Naim, and Lazarus, in answer to Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse, London, 1729.* This is said to have been written by Dr. Henry, who afterwards published *A Discourse on our Saviour's miraculous power of healing; in which the six cases excepted against by Mr. Woolston, are considered; being a continuation of the Defence of scripture History, London, 1730.* And as Mr. Woolston had bent his efforts with a particular virulence against the resurrection of our blessed Lord, this was fully and distinctly considered, especially in a pamphlet written by Dr. Sherlock, now lord bishop of London, intituled, *The Tryal of the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, London, 1729,* which has been very justly admired for the polite and uncommon turn, as well as the judicious way of treating the subject. There were also published on the same occasion *An Answer to the Jewish Rabbi's two Letters against Christ's resurrection, and his raising Lazarus from the dead; with some observations on Mr. Woolston's own reflections on our Saviour's conduct, London, 1729.* *An impartial examination and full confutation of the arguments brought by Mr. Woolston's pretended Rabbi against the truth of our Saviour's resurrection, London, 8vo, 1730.* And two Discourses by Dr. Wade: The first, *An appeal to the miracles of Jesus Christ for his Messiahsip:* The second, *A Demonstration of the truth and certainty of*

*his resurrection from the dead, London, 8vo, 1729.* Among the writers that appeared against Mr. Woolston, Mr. Joseph Hallet ought not to be forgotten on the account of his judicious *Discourse of the reality, kinds, and numbers of our Saviour's miracles, occasioned by Mr. Woolston's six Discourses.* This was published in the second volume of his notes and discourses, 8vo, 1732. The last I shall mention is Mr. Stackhouse who published *A fair state of the controversy between Mr. Woolston and his adversaries, London, 8vo, 1730.* In which he hath given a very clear account of Mr. Woolston's objections, and the answers that were return'd by those who had written against him.

Mr. Woolston publish'd what he called, *A Defence of his Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour, against the Bishop of London and St. David's, and his other adversaries,* in two pamphlets; the first was published, *London, 1729,* the second in 1730. These are very trifling performances, in which there is a continued strain of low drollery, but little that has a shew of reason and argument, in answer to what had been strongly urged against him. He has scarce attempted to take notice of the instances which had been brought to shew his great dishonesty in his quotations, and his gross falsifications of the fathers, and antient writers. This seems to have given him very little disturbance, tho' if he had any regard to his own reputation, it highly concerned him to clear

LETTER VII. himself, if he had been able to do it, from so heavy a charge.

But I believe you will be of opinion, that I have dwelt long enough upon such an author, though he himself boasts of *cutting out such a piece of work for our Boylean lectures, as shall hold them tug*, (as he politely expresseth it) *so long as the ministry of the letter, and a hireling priesthood last* \*.

\* See his fifth Discourse on Miracles, p. 65, 66.





## LETTER VIII.

*The present age a happy time of liberty, but that liberty greatly abused. An account of Dr. Tindal's Christianity as old as the Creation. He pretends a great regard for the Christian religion, yet uses his utmost efforts to discard all revelation in general, as entirely useless and needless; and particularly sets himself to expose the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. The high encomiums he bestows on the religion of a Deist, and on his own performance. Observations upon his Scheme. It is shewn to be absurd and inconsistent. What he offers concerning the absolute universal clearness of the law of nature to all mankind, contrary to plain undeniable fact and experience. His scheme really less favourable to the heathens than that of the Christian Divines. An account of the answers published against him.*

**I** Believe, Sir, you will agree with me, that never had any nation a fuller enjoyment of liberty than we have had since the *Revolution*. What *Tacitus* celebrates as the felicity of the times of *Trajan*, that men might think as they pleased, and speak as they thought, may be more justly applied to our own. *Rara temporum felicitate, ubi sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias*

LETTER *dicere licet* \*. The noble author of the *Cha-*  
 VIII. *racteristics* is pleased to mention it to the ho-  
 nour of the heathen world in ancient *Greece*  
 and *Rome*, that “ Visionaries and Enthusiasts  
 “ were tolerated; and, on the other side, Phi-  
 “ losophy had as free a course, and was per-  
 “ mitted as a balance against superstition.—  
 “ Thus matters were happily balanced: Reason  
 “ had fair play; learning and science flourish-  
 “ ed †.” It would be no hard matter to shew  
 that this representation is not altogether just: for  
 not to mention the case of *Socrates*, and others,  
 it is capable of a clear proof, that though they  
 might bear with the disputes among the se-  
 veral sects of philosophers in their schools,  
 yet they would not suffer the established reli-  
 gion of the state to be called in question, and  
 were ready to punish those that opposed it, of  
 which they gave the most sanguinary proofs when  
 Christianity appeared. But what his Lordship  
 has said of those heathen times, the felicity of  
which he so much extols, is undoubtedly true  
 of ours. Visionaries and Enthusiasts are not  
 persecuted but tolerated: Philosophy has a free  
 course: Reason has fair play: Learning and  
 Science have greatly flourished. Nor can any  
 age or country be mentioned, in which men  
 have had a greater freedom of openly declaring  
 their sentiments, either with regard to civil or  
 religious matters. This is our privilege and  
 our glory; but the greatest advantages are ca-

\* Tacit. lib. 1. in proem. † Characterist. vol. 1. p. 18.  
 pable

*Cubborn*

pable of being perverted through the corruption of mankind. Liberty, which rightly improved, is the best friend to truth, and to pure and undenied religion, is often abused to a boundless licentiousness. Of this we have had many instances: But in nothing has it more remarkably appeared than in the open repeated attempts that have been made against all revealed religion. It cannot be pretended, that the adversaries of Christianity have not been at liberty to produce their strongest objections against it. They have not only offered whatsoever they were able in a way of reason and argument, but they have in many instances given a loose to the most offensive ridicule and reproach. And if they have frequently thought fit to cover their attempts with a pretended regard for Christianity, we may safely affirm, that it has not been so much out of fear of punishment, as that under that disguise they might the better answer the end they had in view, and give religion a more deadly wound as pretended friends, than they could do as avowed adversaries. This advantage however hath arisen from it, that it hath given occasion to many noble defences of Christianity, and to the clearing various difficulties, and placing the excellency and evidences of our holy religion in the strongest and most convincing light.

The attacks against Christianity, of which I have taken notice in my former letters, seemed for some time to have been carried on almost

LETTER VII. without intermission: animated with a strange kind of zeal, the enemies of revelation were unwearied in their endeavours to subvert it. When repelled in one attempt they were not discouraged, but renewed it in another form. Of this we are now going to have a fresh instance: *Woolston's* attempt was so conducted as to raise a kind of horror and just indignation in all that had not utterly extinguished all remaining regard to the religion in which they were baptized. Such outrageous abuse, such undisguised reproach cast upon our blessed Saviour, and his Holy Gospel, such coarse ridicule and contempt, though it did a great deal of mischief among men of empty and vicious minds, with whom scurrileous jest and gross buffoonry, especially when levelled against things sacred, passeth for wit and argument; yet was apt rather to create disgust in persons of any degree of taste or refinement. It was therefore judged necessary, that Christianity should be attacked in a more plausible way, which had a greater appearance of reasoning, and might be better fitted to take with persons of a more rational and philosophic turn. This seems to have been the design of Dr. *Tindal's* laboured performance, intituled, *Christianity as old as the Creation, or the Gospel a Republication of the law of nature*, which was first published in 4to. London, 1730, and afterwards in 8vo. One would have been apt to expect from the title of this book, that he should have set himself to prove, that

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the gospel is perfectly agreeable to the law of nature; that it hath set the great principles of natural religion in the clearest light, and that it was designed to publish and confirm it anew, after it had been very much obscured and defaced through the corruption of mankind. And if so, this author, who every-where professeth such a high esteem for the genuine law and religion of nature, ought to have done all in his power to recommend the gospel-revelation to the esteem and veneration of mankind, and to have represented it as a great advantage to those that enjoy it, and a signal instance of the divine goodness: And what would farther induce one to think that this was his view, he expressly declareth, that Christianity is the *external*, as natural religion is the *internal revelation of the same unchangeable will of God*, and that they differ only in the manner of their being communicated. And he proposeth greatly to *advance the honour of external revelation*, by shewing *the perfect agreement there is between that and internal revelation*. He professeth to agree with Bishop Chandler, that “Christianity itself, stript of the additions that policy, mistake, and the circumstances of time have made to it, is a most holy religion; and that all its doctrines plainly speak themselves to be the will of an infinitely wise and good God\*.” Accordingly he honoureth himself and his friends with the title of *Christian Deists*.

\* Christianity as old as the creation, p. 382, edit. 8vo.

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But whosoever closely and impartially examineth his book, will find that all this plausible appearance, and pretended regard to Christianity, is only intended as a cover to his real design, which was to set aside all revealed religion, and entirely to destroy the authority of the Scriptures. Others have attacked particular parts of the Christian scheme, or of its proofs. But this writer has endeavoured to subvert the very foundations of it, by shewing, that there neither is, nor can be any external revelation at all, distinct from what he calls *the internal revelation of the law of nature in the hearts of all mankind*: That such external revelation is absolutely needless and useless; that the original law and religion of nature is so perfect, that nothing can possibly be added to it by any subsequent external revelation whatsoever; nor can God himself lay any new commands upon us, or institute any positive precepts, additional to the immutable eternal law of nature, without the imputation of erecting an unreasonable tyranny over his creatures. And as the religion and law of nature is absolutely perfect, so it always was and is clear and obvious to all mankind, even to those of the meanest capacity; so clear, that it is impossible to be rendered more plain to any man by any external revelation, than it is to all men without it; that therefore all pretences to such revelation are only owing to enthusiasm or imposture; that reason and external revelation are inconsistent,

stent, and to be governed by the authority of such revelation is really to renounce our reason, and to give up our understandings to implicit faith: That this hath been the source of all the superstitions and corruptions which have prevailed among mankind: And that therefore the best thing that can be done for them is to engage them to throw off all regard to revelation, and to *adhere to the pure simple dictates of the light of nature.*

And as he thus endeavoureth to set aside all external supernatural revelation as needless and useless, and all pretences to it as vain and groundless; so he particularly setteth himself to expose the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. He attempteth to invalidate the original proofs on which the authority of that revelation is founded, and particularly that which is drawn from the miracles that attested it. And he also taketh pains to prove, that we cannot possibly have any assurance, that this revelation is transmitted to us in a manner, which may be safely depended upon. He examineth the revelation itself, and endeavoureth to shew, that it is uncertain and obscure; that its precepts are delivered in a loose, general, undetermined manner, so as to be incapable of giving clear directions to the bulk of mankind; that the *keys of solution* necessary for understanding the Scriptures, are what the people are wholly unacquainted with; that far from being

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LETTER <sup>VIII.</sup> Of use as a rule to direct men in faith and practice, the Scriptures are only fit to perplex and misinform them; that they tend to give them very wrong and unworthy apprehensions of the Deity, and the duty they owe him; and that there are many things either commanded or approved there, which are apt to lead men astray in relation to the duties they owe to one another. He farther endeavoureth to shew, that there is a contrast and opposition between the parts of this revelation, particularly between the Old Testament and the New. And it may be said upon the whole, that he hath spared no pains to rake together whatsoever he thought might be capable of exposing the Scriptures, or the Christian religion. He concludes his book with arguing against the Christian revelation, from its not having been universal in all times and places, and from the corruptions of Christians.

Whilst he thus useth his utmost endeavours to expose Christianity as a falsely pretended revelation, and as not only needless and useless, but of pernicious influence to mankind; he hath taken care to make the most advantageous representation of that scheme of natural religion he would recommend, and to shew the great advantage the religion of the Deists hath above that of the Christians. He sometimes speaks as if he thought the Deists were infallibly guided in making use of the reason God hath *given them to distinguish religion from su-*  
per-



*perstition*, so that they are sure not to run into any errors of moment \*. On the other hand, he honours all those that are for positive precepts in religion with the character of *Demonists*. And he represents divines in all ages, as for the most part, mortal enemies to the exercise of reason, and even below brutes.

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He ends his book as he had begun it with a high panegyric upon his own performance. That by this attempt of his, “ as nothing but “ rubbish is removed, so every thing is advanced which tends to promote the honour of “ God, and the happiness of human societies. “ That there is none who wish well to mankind, but must also wish his hypothesis to be “ true; and that there cannot be a greater proof “ of its truth, than that it is in all its parts so “ exactly calculated for the good of mankind, “ that either to add to it, or take from it will “ be to their manifest prejudice. That it is a “ religion as he hopes he has fully proved, “ founded upon such demonstrable principles, “ as are obvious to the meanest capacity, and “ most effectually prevents the growth both of “ scepticism and enthusiasm.”

This may suffice to give a general idea of this boasted performance, but if carefully examined, it will appear, that it is far from deserving the magnificent encomiums, which he himself, and others, who are favourers of the same cause, have so liberally bestowed upon it.

\* Christianity as old as the creation, p. 336. edit. 8vo.

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The scheme which this writer hath advanced in order to shew, that there is no place or need for extraordinary revelation, dependeth chiefly upon two principles. The one is, that the law or religion of nature, obligatory upon all mankind, was from the beginning absolutely perfect and immutable, so that nothing could ever be added to it by any subsequent revelation. The other is, that this original law or religion of nature, comprehending all that men were from the beginning obliged to know, believe, profess, and practise, always was, and still is so absolutely clear to all mankind, that it cannot be made clearer to any man by any external revelation, than it is to all men without it.

Judaism.

As to the first, he argues, that because God is unchangeable and absolutely perfect, therefore the religion he gave to man from the beginning must have been unchangeable and absolutely perfect; since nothing can proceed from a God of infinite perfection but what is perfect; and that to suppose any subsequent addition to it, or alteration in it, is to suppose a change in God.

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But this will not answer the author's end, except he can prove that man is unchangeable too; and that the state of mankind must necessarily in all ages and seasons continue precisely the same that it was at the beginning of the world. For if there should be a change in the state and circumstances of mankind, e. g. from pure religion to superstition, or from a righteous and innocent to a guilty

and corrupt state; God may see fit for excellent ends to lay new injunctions upon men, or make some farther discoveries of his will, suited to that alteration of circumstances. Nor would this shew that he was changeable but that he was most wise and good. And it would be a strange thing to affirm, that there could not possibly be any farther significations or discoveries of the divine will ever made by God himself, or any other thing required by him of men, or any additional help or advantages ever offered to them in any supposable state or circumstances of mankind, but what were afforded and made from the beginning of the creation. This is a most absurd scheme; and if such a one had been advanced by the advocates for revelation, plentiful ridicule would have been bestowed upon it.

And it is equally absurd to pretend, as this writer doth, that God cannot at any time, or in any circumstance of things, injoin positive precepts. If there be any external worship to be rendered to God at all; (and this gentleman hath not thought fit openly to deny this) it would be the most unreasonable thing in the world to pretend, that he cannot institute or appoint what are the properest outward rites, or manner of performing that worship; especially since our author allows, that men themselves may appoint them: And to deny God the power which he alloweth

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to human magistrates in such a case, is abhorrent to the common sense of mankind. Especially considering that there is nothing in which men have more grossly erred, or as to which they stood in greater need of being properly directed, than in what relateth to religious worship. I would only farther observe, that this writer in the whole dispute about positive precepts, always supposes *positive* and *arbitrary* precepts to be terms of the same signification: And by arbitrary he means things for which there is no reason at all. But this is a very unfair state of the case; for when we say God hath instituted positive precepts, though the matter of them be antecedently of an indifferent nature, it is still supposed there were wise reasons for injoining them, and that when injoined, they are designed to be subservient to things of a moral nature, and to help forward the great ends of all religion. And that the positive precepts required in the Christian religion are such, and of an excellent tendency, hath been often clearly shewn.

*The Law of Nature.* The other main principle of the author's scheme is, that that law or religion of nature, which he supposes to be absolutely perfect, always was, and is so clear and obvious to all men, that there is not the least need or use of external revelation. This is what he hath greatly laboured; and if strong and confident assertions, frequently repeated, may pass for

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for proofs, he hath fully proved it. This part LETTER  
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of his scheme coincides with that of Lord *Herbert of Cherbury*, who had represented the five great principles, in which he makes religion to consist, to be common notions inscribed by a divine hand in the minds of all men, and universally acknowledged in all ages and nations. In like manner the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation*, asserteth that that religion, the perfection of which he so much extols, is *apparent to the whole world, to those of the meanest as well as highest capacity, and who are unable to read their mother tongue*. He expressly declareth that God could *not more fully make known his will to all intelligent creatures than he hath done this way; no, not if he should miraculously convey the same ideas to all men*\*. He frequently speaks, as if the principles and obligations of natural religion were so clear, that men could not possibly mistake them; that all men see them at first view; and that the actual knowledge of the law of nature is naturally necessary, and inseparable from rational nature; so that it is as impossible for any reasonable creature to be ignorant of it, as it is for animals to live without the pulse of the heart and arteries.

This scheme, though it hath been mightily applauded, is contrary to evident fact and experience: It supposeth the law or religion of nature, in its important principles and

\* *Christ. as old as the Creation*, p. 22. ed. 8vo

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 VIII. mankind, and to be so clear that they cannot  
 mistake it; when nothing is more certain and  
 undeniable, than that they have mistaken it in  
 very important instances, and that some of its  
 main principles have been very much perverted  
 and obscured. I shall not here repeat what  
 was offered to this purpose in a former letter in  
 my remarks on Lord *Herbert's* scheme, in  
 which it is plainly proved, that men have fallen  
 into a gross darkness with respect to some  
 of those great principles in which that noble  
 writer makes the true religion to consist; and  
 that after all his efforts to the contrary, he  
 hath found himself under a necessity of ac-  
 knowledging it. The like acknowledgments  
 the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation*  
 hath been obliged to make. He himself in  
 several parts of his book, though in plain con-  
 tradiction to his own scheme, representeth al-  
 most all mankind in all ages, excepting the  
*Free-thinking few*\*, as having had very un-  
 worthy apprehensions of God, and wrong  
 notions of the religion and law of nature.  
 And no small part of his book is employed  
 in inveighing against that superstition which he  
 supposeth to have generally prevailed among  
 mankind at all times, and which in his opi-  
 nion is worse than Atheism; and consequently  
 it must be acknowledged, even according to  
 his own representation of the case, that men

\* *Christ.* p. 149.

had fallen from the right knowledge of the religion of nature into great darkness and corruption. *Cicero* was so sensible of this, that speaking of *some small sparks of virtue implanted in us*, he complaineth that they are *soon extinguished by corrupt customs and opinions, so that the light of nature no where appears* †. From whence he infers the great necessity and usefulness of philosophy to direct and assist us; and certainly this will conclude much more strongly for the necessity and usefulness of a divine revelation, which would be much more advantageous, and more to be depended on.

The argument therefore which *Dr. Tindal* urgeth from the supposed universal clearness of the law of nature, to shew that there is no need or use for external revelation, falls to the ground. And indeed his way of arguing, if it proves any thing, equally proves, that all the writings of philosophers and moralists, all the instructions that have been ever given to mankind in matters of religion and morality, have been perfectly needless and of no use; and that consequently, all books which have been written on these subjects, the noblest in the world, and the best worth writing upon, must be discarded, as well as the scriptures: Since all mankind have such a perfect knowledge of their duty, that they stand in no need of instruction or informa-

† *Tuscul. Quæst. lib. 3. in præm.*

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tion. Yea, he sometimes represents it, as if instructing them by words tended only to mislead them from the knowledge of things. Thus, according to this goodly scheme, all men are to be left to what he calls the simple dictates of the light of nature, without any instruction at all: the certain consequence of which would be universal ignorance and barbarism. He often expresseth himself as if he thought that all men have an equal knowledge of the law of nature; and indeed I do not see but that upon his scheme it must be so: Yet at other times he supposeth the knowledge men have of it to be more or less clear according to the circumstances they are in. For he says, it is not necessary that all men *should have equal knowledge of it, but that all should have sufficient for the circumstances they are in* \*; and talks of a man's *doing his best, according as his circumstances permit, to discover the will of God*; and of men's being *accepted, if they live up to their different degrees of light*. But though others may charitably make use of this way of speaking, it is hard to see how this writer can do it in consistency with his scheme; or how he can suppose any allowances to be made for involuntary errors; since, according to his representation of the case, all errors in matters of religion or morals, must be voluntary in opposition to the clearest universal light. Though therefore he sets up for a mighty ad-

\* Christ. as old as the Creation, p. 4. ed. 8vo.



vocate for the heathen world, and blames the Christian divines for passing too severe a censure upon them, he himself must, if he be consistent, judge much more harshly of them than they : since his hypothesis quite destroys the plea with regard to the heathens, drawn from the great darkness and difficulties they laboured under ; for he positively asserteth, that the law of nature is so clear, that no well-meaning Gentile could be ignorant of it \* : He must therefore suppose all of them, who were involved in the general superstition and idolatry which he himself acknowledgeth to be contrary to the law of nature, to have been destitute of that sincerity, which he maketh to be the only title to happiness, and to the favour of God.

It may not be improper to observe farther, that though he often speaks of the law of nature, as if it were a system of principles and rules fixed and unalterable, to which nothing could ever be added, and in which nothing could ever be altered ; which rules and principles he supposes to be necessarily known to all mankind ; yet at other times he expresses himself, as if he thought there were no fixed unchangeable principles and rules of morality at all. The goodness of actions is according to him to be wholly measured by their tendency, and this is to be judged by the circumstances a man is under, which circumstances he repre-

Do the best  
under the cir-  
cumstances.

\* Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 36.

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\* Christ. as old as the Creation, p. 16, 317, 318.

In a revelation confirmed by the authority of God himself.

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As this book made a great noise, many good answers were returned to it. A second *pastoral Letter* was published on this occasion by the late bishop of *London*, which, like his former, comprized a great deal in a small compass, and was very well fitted to answer the end it was intended for, to be an antidote against the spreading infection of infidelity. Several other valuable treatises might be mentioned, such as, the argument set forth in a late book, intitled, *Christianity as old as the Creation, reviewed and confuted in several Conferences*, by Dr. *Thomas Burnet*. Dr. *Waterland's Scripture vindicated*; which was particularly designed to vindicate the holy Scripture, which this author had taken great pains to vilify and expose: A good account is here given of a great number of passages in the sacred writings, and his exceptions against them are fully obviated. Mr. *Law's Case of Reason, or natural religion, fairly and fully stated*, in answer to a book, intitled, *Christianity as old as the Creation*. Mr. *Jackson's Remarks* on a book, intitled, *Christianity as old as the Creation*. Dr. *Stebbing's Discourse, concerning the use and advantage of the Gospel-revelation, in which are obviated the principal objections*, contained in a book, intitled, *Christianity as old as the Creation*, London, 8vo, 1731. The same learned and judicious writer published another excellent tract against

Pelagians

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Dr. *Tindal*, intitled, *a Defence of Dr. Clarke's evidences of natural and revealed religion*, in answer to the 14th chapter of a book, intitled, *Christianity as old as the Creation*, London, 8vo. 1731. Mr. *Balguy*, the worthy author of a *Letter to a Deist*, of which some notice was taken before in the account of the Earl of *Shaftesbury's* writings, published on this occasion a *second Letter to a Deist, concerning a late book, intitled, Christianity as old as the Creation, more particularly that chapter which relates to Dr. Clarke*, London, 8vo. 1731. And several years after he published a very valuable tract, which was particularly intended to defend the mediatorial scheme, against the objections which Dr. *Tindal* had advanced, intitled, *An Essay on Redemption, being the second part of Divine Rectitude*, London, 8vo, 1741. To these ought to be added a piece which has been deservedly much esteemed, written by the ingenious Mr. *Anthony Atkey*, though without his name, intitled, *The main-argument of a late book, intitled, Christianity as old as the Creation, fairly stated and examined; or a short view of the whole controversy*, London, 8vo, 1733. Besides these and other tracts that were published on this occasion, there were some large answers made to this book, of which I shall give a more particular account.

The first of them that I shall mention is intitled, *The Usefulness, Truth and Excellency of the Christian revelation*, defended against the objections

objections contain'd in a late book, intitl'd, *Christianity as old as the Creation*, by *James Foster*, afterwards *Dr. Foster*, *London*, 8vo. 1731. LETTER VIII.

This is generally and justly acknowledged to be an ingenious performance, and written with great clearness of thought and expression: it is divided into five chapters. The first is designed to shew the advantages of revelation in general, and particularly of the Christian. It is plainly proved, that whatever the power of reason may be supposed to be, if duly exercised and improved to the utmost, yet when the light of nature is darkned, and ignorance, idolatry, and superstition have overspread the world, which was undoubtedly the case when our Saviour appeared, an extraordinary revelation would be highly useful, and of great benefit to mankind. He then proceeds to consider what is the proper evidence of the truth and divinity of any particular revelation; and how those to whom it is given may be satisfied that it really came from God. And here it is shewn, that miracles, when considered in conjunction with the good tendency and excellency of the doctrines, furnish a proper and sufficient evidence. In the second chapter, he vindicates the conduct of God's providence in not making the Christian religion universally known to all nations, and in all times and ages; and proves that this is analogous to the general course of providence both in the natural and moral world, and that it is consistent with the divine perfections, and consequently with

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with the notion of its being a divine revelation. In the third chapter, which is the largest in the whole book, it is shewn that we have a sufficient probability, even at this distance, of the authentickness, credibility, and purity of the books of the New Testament; and that the common people are able to judge of the truth and uncorruptedness of a traditional religion. And a good answer is returned to the arguments drawn from the change of languages, the different use of words, and the style and phrase of scripture, to prove it an obscure, perplexed, and uncertain rule. The fourth chapter contains a general defence of positive commands, which Dr. *Tindal* had urged as alone “sufficient to make all things else, that can be said in support of any revelation, totally ineffectual”. It is proved, that they are not repugnant to reason, nor subversive of moral obligation, nor inconsistent with the wisdom, justice and goodness of God: and that instituted religion is not superstition, and if rightly understood has no more a tendency to superstition, than natural religion itself. And the fifth contains a particular vindication of the peculiar positive institutions of Christianity; in which it is shewn, that they are of excellent use for begetting and strengthening good moral habits, and for exciting and engaging men to a more diligent practice of moral duties.

Another

Another answer which particularly engag'd the attention of the public, was that published by Dr. *John Conybeare*, rector of *Exeter-College, Oxford*, now lord bishop of *Bristol*, viz, *A Defence of revealed Religion, against the exceptions of a late writer in his book*, intituled, *Christianity as old as the Creation*, London 1732. This book is divided into nine chapters: The first is designed by the acute and learned author to shew what we are to understand by the law or religion of nature, from what the obligation of it arises, and how far it extends. He shews that the religion or law of nature, does not take in every thing that is founded in the nature or reason of things, which seems to be the sense the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* takes it in throughout his whole book, but only such a collection of doctrines and precepts, as is discernible to us in the use of our natural faculties. And this, though founded in nature, becomes then only properly a law to us, when it is regarded as the will of God the supreme legislator; and our obligation to it, strictly speaking, is founded on the divine sanctions of rewards and punishments. In the second chapter it is shewn, that the law or religion of nature, in the sense already explained, is not absolutely perfect: since the law of nature is only what men are capable of discerning in the use of their natural faculties, it can be no more perfect than human reason. If the law of nature was abso-

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lutely perfect, it must have such a clearness as to the meaning and authority of it, as can admit of nothing more in any possible circumstance; it must have such a strength of inforcement, that it cannot be heightened in any way whatsoever: and such an extent of matter, as to comprehend every thing that may be fit and proper to be known or done, and not to admit of any possible article to be added to it. And he plainly proves, that the law or religion of nature is not absolutely perfect in any of these respects. Chap. 3d is intended to shew, that the law of nature is not immutable, in such a sense especially as to be incapable of admitting any additional precepts. And here the question concerning positive precepts is accurately stated, and it is proved that God may appoint them, and an answer is returned to the author's objections to the contrary. In chap. 4th he enquires, whether natural and revealed religion be necessarily the same, and if not, wherein the proper distinction between them doth consist. In the former chapter he had shewn, that positive precepts might be given; here he carries it farther, and proves that some positive institutions might reasonably be expected, if ever God should reveal his will at all; both as tokens of his authority and our submission, and for the better order and decency of his worship, and the outward part of religion, and for the increase and advancement of inward piety. The same thing is urged



urged from the concurrent sense of mankind in all ages, and under all religions. It is further shewn, there are other things of higher importance in which natural and revealed religion differ, though they are not properly opposed to each other, *e. g.* with regard to principles and doctrines not discoverable by nature's light, or as to precepts which though founded in the nature of things, yet are not certainly knowable in the use of our own reason; they also differ in point of clearness, and in efficacy. He instances particularly in the assurance given us of the pardon of sin, divine assistances, and the eternal retributions of a future state. Chap. 5th is designed to shew, that a proper rule of life is not perfectly and easily discoverable by every man, even by those of the meanest capacity. And here it is evinced, that the author's own scheme of natural religion, which he pretends is so obvious to all mankind, is perplexed, obscure, and defective. In chap. 6th he inquires whether a proper rule of life be more easily and perfectly discoverable by us in the use of our own reason, than the proof or meaning of a revelation can be. He shews the possibility of immediate revelation or inspiration, and that this gives the highest evidence. And that as to traditional revelation, though the evidence be not strictly demonstrative, it may be such as is sufficient to determine the assent of a sober thinking man. And he answers what the author had brought

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 VIII. a revelation cannot be fixed and ascertain'd.  
 Chap. 7th is designed to shew, that a revelation is expedient in order to a more easy, more perfect, and more general knowledge of the rule of life. This is distinctly evinced, both with regard to the wiser and better part of men, particularly the philosophers, and with respect to persons of a lower rank and meaner abilities. And a good answer is made to what the author had urged concerning the supposed inconsistency between our being governed by reason, and revelation. In chap. 8th it is shewn, that a revelation is expedient in order to inforce the general practice of the rule of life. That the mere pleasure of doing well, or a moral taste or sense, is not alone a sufficient balance for all the inconveniencies of doing otherwise, amidst all the embarrassments of passion and temptation: nor if to this be added the civil sanctions of human authority, are these alone sufficient: For these are designed not so much to reward virtues, several of which do not come under the cognizance of human courts, as to punish crimes, and those only such as tend to the hurt of the society. Virtue can only be sufficiently inforced by sanctions established by God himself; and a revelation is expedient for that purpose. He concludes this chapter with giving a clear answer to two objections urged by the author: The one is, that

that if a revelation be expedient to be made to any, it must be equally expedient to be made to all, and at all times. The other is, that the revelation hath not in fact answered that purpose for which we affirm it to be expedient. The ninth and last chapter is intended to evince, that there is sufficient evidence of the reality of a revelation, especially of the Christian. He observes, that what is usually called the internal evidence of a revelation is not strictly and properly an evidence; but only a necessary condition or qualification of a true revelation: That external proof is the only direct evidence of a divine revelation; and this consisteth in miracles as including prophecies, which may be considered as one sort of miracles. He shews what reason we have to believe that the miracles recorded to have been done in favour of the Christian religion were really wrought; and that supposing them to have been wrought, they were real and satisfactory proofs of a divine original.

There was another answer to Dr. *Tindal's* book which I should not have chosen to take notice of, if the method I am in did not make it proper for me to do so, as I am sensible how hard it is for an author to speak of his own work, without offending his own modesty, or the delicacy of the reader: It was published at *Dublin* in two volumes 8vo, in 1733, under the title of *an Answer to a late book intitled Christianity*

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*Christianity as old as the Creation*: And was afterwards reprinted at *London* in 1740. It is much larger, and takes a wider compass than the other answers, and therefore the account here given of it will be also larger. It is divided into two parts: In the first part, which takes up the first volume, the author's account of the law of nature is considered, and his scheme is shewn to be inconsistent with reason, and with itself, and of ill consequence to the interests of virtue, and to the good of mankind. This volume consisteth of eleven chapters, besides a large introduction containing observations upon the author's spirit and design, and the way of reasoning made use of by him, and others of our modern Deists. In the first chapter there is a general account of that writer's scheme, which lies scattered in his book with little order or method, but is here brought together in one view, and the various and inconsistent senses in which he takes the law of nature, examined. The second chapter relates to the vast extent he gives to the law of nature as taking in whatsoever is founded in the nature of things. This is shewn to be a strange hypothesis, when he is speaking of that law which he supposes to be known to all men, as if the whole reason and nature of things were open to every man; whereas, taken in this comprehensive view, it is only perfectly known to God himself. In the third and fourth chapters what he hath offered

to prove, that the religion or law of nature given to mankind at the beginning was to absolutely perfect, that nothing could ever be afterwards added to it; and particularly that God could never institute any positive precepts, is distinctly considered. And it is proved, that God may both give men new laws suited to new circumstances of things, and may, if he seeth fit, institute positive precepts; and that these may answer very valuable ends; and particularly that there were wise reasons for the positive institutions both of the *Jewish* and Christian religion. The fifth and sixth chapters relate to what our author had advanced concerning the universal clearness of the law of nature. It is shewn at large, that it is not so obvious to all mankind, as to render an extraordinary revelation needless. That even as to those principles and duties which absolutely speaking are discoverable by human reason, revelation may be of great use to give a clearer and more certain knowledge of them, than the bulk of mankind, or even the wisest, could have without it. Besides which, there are several things of great importance to us to know, of which we could not have a certain assurance by the mere light of natural reason without revelation, and with regard to which therefore an express revelation from God would be of signal advantage, and ought to be received with great thankfulness. As particularly, with relation to the methods of our reconciliation

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with God when we have offended him, the terms and extent of forgiveness, and the nature, greatness, and duration of that reward which it shall please God to confer on imperfect obedience. In the 7th and 8th chapters it is evinced; that this writer's scheme of natural religion is very defective; and that he giveth a wrong account of some of the main principles and duties of the law of nature; that he in effect depriveth it of it's strongest sanctions; and that his scheme tendeth to take away the fear of God, and to make men easy in their sins. The ninth is designed to shew that his scheme is not fitted to answer the ends he proposeth by it, the delivering mankind from superstition and priestcraft, and that a strict adherence to the Christian revelations in its original purity would have a happier influence this way. Chap. 10th relates to those passages in which he pretends to describe the religion of Deists, and to draw a parallel between that and Christianity; and it is shewn, that the advantages he would appropriate to Deism, do much more properly belong to the Christian religion, as laid down in the holy scriptures. In chap. 11th, his pretence of introducing a new and glorious state of things is examined, and the whole concludes with a brief representation of the pernicious tendency, and manifold inconsistencies of the author's scheme.

In the second part, the authority and usefulness of the revelation contained in the sacred writings of the Old and New Testament, is asserted and vindicated against the objections and misrepresentations of this writer. This part is divided into sixteen chapters. The first contains some considerations concerning divine revelation in general, and what are the proper characters and evidences, by which it may be known that such a revelation is really given; and that our being governed by the authority of such a revelation is not inconsistent with our being governed by reason, as this author has attempted to prove. The second chapter examines his objections against the characters of the first publishers and witnesses of the *Jewish* and Christian revelation: and it is shewn, that we have all the assurance that we can reasonably desire, that they were neither imposed upon themselves, nor had a design to impose upon others, nor indeed, as things were circumstanced, had it in their power to do so, if they had designed it. In the third chapter his objections against the proof from miracles are considered. It is shewn, that they are neither needless nor uncertain proofs: That there are certain marks and characters by which true divine miracles may be distinguished from those pretended to be wrought by imposture, or the agency of evil spirits; and that these characters are to be found in the miracles wrought in favour of

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the *Jewish* and Christian revelation. The design of the fourth chapter is to prove that we have all the evidence that can be reasonably desired, that the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures, with an account of the facts and attestations, by which that revelation was originally confirmed and established, is transmitted to us with such a degree of purity and certainty, as may be safely depended upon. And this is particularly shewn with regard to the writings of the Old Testament, especially the law of *Moses*. In the fifth chapter, the authority and Integrity of the sacred records of the New Testament is asserted and vindicated against the author's exceptions: And that we have both sufficient external proofs of their being safely transmitted to us, and that they carry in them the greatest internal evidences of genuine truth and uncorruptedness, that can be found in any writings whatsoever. The sixth chapter shews, that the wonderful success the gospel met with, and its speedy and general propagation, furnished a strong proof, as the case was circumstanced, of the truth of the facts on which it is founded. The following chapters are designed to consider his objections against Scripture drawn from the nature and manner of the revelation there contained. And first, his attempt to prove that it is uncertain and obscure is obviated. What he urgeth to this purpose concerning the ambiguity and uncertainty of words, concerning the Scriptures  
being



being written in dead languages, and that the translations are not to be depended on, is in the seventh chapter distinctly examined. The eighth relates to the keys of solution, necessary for understanding the Scripture, which he pretends the people are wholly unacquainted with, and what he offers concerning the figurative language of Scripture, and the parables and proverbial expressions made use of by our Saviour, is considered. The ninth chapter makes it appear that many of those passages which this writer censures as obscure, and apt to mislead the people, are so noble and of such excellent use, that a candid critic would have judged them worthy of admiration. In the tenth an answer is given to his objections against the gospel precepts drawn from their being delivered in a loose, general, undetermined manner; and his argument for the obscurity of Scripture from the divisions among Christians about the sense of it, and his pretence that this would infer the necessity of an intallible guide, is shewn to be vain and inconclusive. The eleventh and twelfth chapters contain a distinct and particular examination of all those passages, whereby he pretends to prove, that the Scriptures tend to lead the people into wrong apprehensions of God, and into a wrong practice with relation to the duties they owe to one another. Chapter thirteenth considers what he has offered to shew, that there is a contrast between the spirit of the Old and New Testament.

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VIII. the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters the *Mosaic* account of man's original dignity and the fall, and the Christian Doctrine of a Mediator, are vindicated against this writer's exceptions. The last chapter contains an answer to two objections against Christianity, which have been often urged, and with which the author concludes his book: The one drawn from its not having been given and made known to all mankind in all ages and places from the beginning; the other drawn from the corruptions of Christians. And it is shewn, that no argument will justly hold from either of these against the usefulness and divine authority of the Christian revelation.

There was also a good and solid answer to *Christianity as old as the Creation*, drawn up by the reverend Mr. *Simon Brown*, and which well deserves a particular notice. But I fear I may be thought to have been too tedious and particular already in the account that has been given of the answers to this book: Though the opinion many have entertained of it, as if + it were a very formidable attack upon Christianity, will I hope in some degree plead my excuse.

*Voltaire was chiefly indebted to it. Benn, Rationalism etc. 216*



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## L E T T E R IX.

*Another attempt against Christianity in Dr. Morgan's book, called, The Moral Philosopher. He seems to acknowledge the great usefulness of revelation, but leaves no way of knowing when a revelation is really given. He discards all authority, even a divine one, in matters of religion, and all proof from miracles and prophecy. His invectives against the law of Moses and the prophets. Though he professeth himself a Christian on the foot of the New Testament, he insinuates several reflections on the character of our Saviour, and endeavours to invalidate the attestation given to Christianity by the extraordinary gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost. He pretends that the apostles preached different gospels, and that the New Testament is a jumble of inconsistent religions. His book fully confuted in the answers that were published against him. Some account of those answers, as also of the second and third volumes of the Moral Philosopher.*

S I R,

**A**S you still insist upon my continuing the LETTER IX. correspondence on the subject of my former letters, I shall now take notice of a new attempt against Christianity, in a book that ap-

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IX. } appeared with a more pompous title, *The Moral Philosopher, in a Dialogue between Philalethes, a Christian Deist, and Theophanes, a Christian Jew.* “ In which the grounds and reasons  
 “ of religion in general, and particularly of  
 “ Christianity as distinguished from the reli-  
 “ gion of nature; the different methods of  
 “ conveying and proposing moral truth to the  
 “ mind; and the necessary marks, or criteria  
 “ on which they must all equally depend; the  
 “ nature of positive laws, &c. with many  
 “ other matters of the utmost consequence to  
 “ religion, are fairly considered and debated,  
 “ and the arguments on both sides impartially  
 “ represented,” *London, 8vo. 1737.* The au-  
 thor of this book, Dr. Morgan, seems at first  
view to go much farther in his Concessions,  
than other his fellow-labourers in the same  
cause. If we were to judge by some parts of  
 his book, we should be ready to look upon him  
 as having very friendly dispositions towards  
 the Christian religion: Since he seems expres-  
 sly to acknowledge the great usefulness of di-  
 vine revelation in general, and of the christian  
 revelation in particular. He speaks of man’s  
 natural weakness and inability; and represents  
 those, as conceited of themselves, who in the  
 present state of mankind talk of the *strength of*  
*human reason in matters of religion.* He ob-  
 serves, that at the time of Christ’s appearing,  
 “ mankind in general were in a state of gross  
 “ ignorance and darkness, with respect to the  
 “ true

“ true knowledge of God, and of themselves, LETTER IX.  
 “ and of all those moral relations and obli-  
 “ gations we stand in to the supreme Being,  
 “ and to one another. That they were under  
 “ great uncertainty concerning a future state,  
 “ and the concern of divine providence in the  
 “ government of the world, and at the same  
 “ time were filled with a proud and vain  
 “ conceit of their own natural abilities and  
 “ self-sufficiency. That our Saviour’s doc-  
 “ trines on these heads, though they appeared  
 “ to be the true and genuine principles of na-  
 “ ture and reason, when he had set them in a  
 “ proper light, yet were such as the people  
 “ had never heard or thought of before, and  
 “ never would have known without such an  
 “ instructor, such means and opportunities of  
 “ knowledge. That they who would judge  
 “ uprightly of the strength of human reason  
 “ in matters of morality and religion, under  
 “ the present corrupt and degenerate state of  
 “ mankind, ought to take their estimate from  
 “ those parts of the world which never had  
 “ the benefit of revelation, and this perhaps  
 “ might make them less conceited of them-  
 “ selves, and more thankful to God for the  
 “ light of the gospel.” He asks, “ If the  
 “ religion of nature, under the present pravity  
 “ and corruption of mankind, was written with  
 “ sufficient strength and clearness upon every  
 “ man’s heart; why might not a *Chinese*, or an  
 “ *Indian*, draw up as good a system of natural  
 “ religion

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“ religion as a Christian, and why have we  
 “ never met with any such?” He adds, that  
 “ let us take *Confucius, Zoroaster, Plato, So-*  
 “ *crates*, or the greatest moralist that ever lived  
 “ without the light of revelation, and it will  
 “ appear, that their best systems of morality  
 “ were intermixed and blended with so much  
 “ superstition, and so many gross absurdities,  
 “ as quite eluded and defeated the main de-  
 “ sign of them\*.” This author could scarce  
have declared more expressly than he hath here  
done against *Tindal's* darling scheme, concerning  
such an absolute universal clearness and suffi-  
ciency of the light of nature in the present state  
of mankind, as renders revelation intirely need-  
less and useless. To which it may be added,  
 that he speaks in many passages very honour-  
 ably of Jesus Christ, and the religion he hath  
 introduced, as having brought clearer disco-  
 veries of our duty, and enforced it by stronger  
 motives, and provided more effectual aids,  
 than ever was done before. And accordingly  
 he expressly declareth himself to be a *Chris-*  
*tian on the foot of the New Testament.*

If we were to form our judgment of him  
 merely from such passages as these, it might be  
 thought to be doing wrong to our moral Phi-  
 losopher, to rank him in the list of the Deisti-  
 cal Writers. But by a prevarication and a dis-  
 ingenuity which is not easily parallel'd, except  
 among some of those that have appeared on the

\* Moral Philosopher, vol. 1. p. 144, 145.

same side, under all these fair pretences and dignities, he hath covered as determined a matter against the honour and authority of the Christian revelation, as any of those that have written before him.

It is not easy to form a distinct notion of what he understandeth by that revelation, the usefulness of which he would be thought to acknowledge. He granteth, that God may, if he thinks fit, communicate his will by *immediate Inspiration*, or *supernatural Illumination*; yea, and that what he thus communicates may come with evidence equal to a mathematical demonstration\*. Yet he plainly intimates, that it can never be proved, that God hath ever thus communicated his will; and treats such inspiration as the invention of our *spiritual scholastics*, or *systematical divines*. By several passages of his book, especially if compared with what he saith in his second volume, which he published in defence of it, it appeareth, that by *revelation* he understandeth any discovery of truth, in *what way soever a man comes by it, even though it be by the strength and superiority of his own natural faculties* †. So that all that have discovered rational or moral truth by their own study and application in the use of their natural faculties may be said, according to this account of it, to have had the light of revelation: And it so, it is not easy to see how he could consistently represent whole

\* Moral Philosopher, vol. 1. p. 83, 84. [Vol. 1. p. 347. vol. 2. p. 12, 13, 25, 26, 11.

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nations, among whom he reckoneth the *Indians* and *Chinese*, as *having never had the benefit of revelation*; or how he could say, that the most eminent philosophers and moralists, such as *Confucius*, *Zoroaster*, *Plato*, *Socrates*, *lived without the light of revelation*. For will he say, that none of them had any discovery or manifestation of rational moral truth made to them in any way whatsoever, no, not so much as in the exercise of their own natural faculties?

The great principle he hath laid down, and which runs through his whole book is, that there is but one certain and infallible mark or criterion of divine truth, or of any doctrine or law as coming from God, and that is the moral truth, reason or fitness of the thing itself, when it comes to be fairly proposed to, and considered by the mind or understanding. He frequently declareth, that we are not to receive any thing as true in religion upon any authority whatsoever\*, or upon any other foundation than its own intrinsic evidence, or moral fitness. And this he explaineth to be its conducibleness to our happiness, as appearing to our reason, independently of all authority. So that after all his fair pretences about the benefit of revelation, we are not to receive any thing upon the authority of revelation at all. Supposing any persons to have been extraordinarily sent of God, to make a discovery of his will concerning truth or duty, whatever

\* Moral Philosopher, vol. 2. p. 6, 21, &amp;c.



credentials they produce to prove their divine mission, we are not to receive any thing upon that authority, no more than if they were not thus extraordinarily sent of God. The doctrines and laws they deliver as from God, in what way soever they are attested and confirmed, are really and intirely on the same footing with the opinion of philosophers or moralists who do not pretend to be extraordinarily sent of God at all; *i. e.* we are to believe the doctrines they teach, if upon examining them we find them to be true by reasons drawn from the nature of things; and we are to submit to their precepts and directions, if upon considering them we are satisfied that they tend to our own advantage and happiness; but their authority, abstractly from the reason of the thing, must have no weight to determine us. Thus the proper use and advantage of revelation, which is to assure us by a divine testimony of the truth of things which either we could not have known at all, or not so certainly and clearly, by our own unassisted reason; and with regard to our practice, to direct us to our duty, and bind it upon us by express precepts, confirmed by a divine authority, is intirely set aside by this author. Accordingly he will not allow either miracles or prophecy to be any proof of divine revelation, or any reason at all for our believing any doctrines, or submitting to any laws, which have this attestation given to them. This being

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 ing the true state of the case according to him, that nothing is to be received upon the authority of revelation; it is to no great purpose to enquire how this revelation is communicated to us. Yet he makes a great noise about the uncertainty of the manner of conveying a revelation to us. He frequently seems to make a mighty difference between *immediate* and *traditional revelation*; and sometimes puts on an appearance of granting that inspiration or extraordinary revelation from God is a sufficient ground of assurance to the person or persons to whom this revelation is originally and immediately communicated. But upon a close examination, and by comparing several passages in his book, it will be found that he does not, and indeed cannot, in consistency with his scheme, allow that those persons to whom this revelation is immediately made, have any way of being sure of the truth of what is thus communicated, but by the reason of the thing, by its own intrinsic evidence, or apparent tendency to our benefit. And those to whom this revelation is traditionally communicated, may have the same kind of assurance; i. e. they may believe it, if upon examining they find it to be true by arguments drawn from the nature and reason of the thing. So that upon his scheme immediate revelation makes no difference, though he often talks as if there were a very great one.

It appeareth upon this view, that though he sometimes seems absolutely to contradict and subvert the scheme of the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation*; yet at the bottom, his own scheme cometh pretty much to the same thing. He, as well as that author, is for discarding all authority, even a divine one, in matters of religion; and represents the receiving any thing purely upon such authority, as a renouncing our reason. According to him the only way any man, even of the meanest capacity, can have to be fully assured of the truth of any doctrine in religion, is by the reason of the thing, or its own intrinsic evidence, independent of all authority or testimony. And in like manner with regard to practice, the only way any man hath of knowing any thing to be his duty, is its conducibleness to his own happiness in the circumstances he is in; of which every man is to be judge for himself. To put all duty and obedience upon this foot, would go a great way to dissolve all bands of government, human and divine: Since upon this scheme, it is in effect left to men themselves, whether and how far they shall obey; i. e. so far only as they apprehend the thing required to tend to their own happiness. And certainly it cannot be denied, that considering the present darkness and corruption of mankind, and how much they are influenced by their appetites and passions, they would be in great danger, if left to themselves,

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of forming wrong judgments concerning their own happiness, and what is conducive to it, or connected with it. Such a scheme might be consistently advanced by Dr. *Tindal*, who supposed, though contrary to evident fact and experience, that the whole law of nature and fitness of things is obvious to all mankind, even to those that cannot read their mother tongue. But it seems not so easily reconcilable to the concessions made by the *Moral Philosopher*, who acknowledgeth the present *weakness* and *inability* of reason, and that the law of nature is not written *with sufficient strength and clearness in every man's heart*, in the *present corrupt and degenerate state of mankind*.

We have seen the regard this writer hath to revelation in general. As to the revelation contained in the holy scriptures, he expressly and avowedly rejecteth the Old Testament, and openly declareth that he will have nothing to do with it in his religion. He representeth the law of *Moses* as “having neither truth nor  
“goodness in it, and as a wretched scheme of  
“superstition, blindness, and slavery, contrary  
“to all reason and common sense, set up un-  
“der the specious popular pretence of a di-  
“vine instruction and revelation from God.” And he endeavours to prove that this was the sentiment of *St. Paul*. Among other heavy charges which he hath advanced against that law, one is, that it encouraged human sacrifices,

as the highest act of religion and devotion, when offered not to idols, but to God; and he takes occasion to consider the case of *Abraham's* being commanded to offer up *Isaac*, which he represents as absolutely unhinging and dissolving the whole law of nature. He then goes on to consider the spirit of prophecy. He representeth the *Urim* and *Thummim* as a priestly cheat; and afterwards proceedeth to make a very odious, though inconsistent, representation of the character and conduct of the ancient prophets; against whom he exclaimeth as the great disturbers of their country, the authors of all the civil wars and revolutions in the kingdom of *Israel* and *Judah*, and the cause of the final ruin of both; though the contrary is evident from the very historical accounts to which he pretendeth to appeal. And he praiseth *Ahab* and *Jezebel*, and other idolatrous princes, for having endeavoured to destroy them.

As to the new Testament, though he frequently affecteth to speak with great veneration of Jesus Christ, yet he insinuateth very base and unworthy reflections upon his person and character. That he pretended to be the Messiah foretold by the prophets, though he very well knew that those prophets had only spoken of a temporal *Jewish* prince, who was to arise and reign in *Judea*; and that accordingly he suffered himself to be carried about by the mob as their Messiah for a twelve-

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IX. } month together; and did not renounce that character till his death, when he absolutely disclaimed his being the Messiah foretold in the prophetic writings, and died upon that renunciation. As to the apostles, the first authorized teachers and publishers of the religion of Jesus, he affirms that they themselves never so much as pretended to be under the unerring guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost. That they differed among themselves about the most concerning parts of revelation, and preached different and even contrary gospels; and that all the apostles, except St. Paul, preached what he calls the *Jewish* gospel, viz. *Salvation by Jesus Christ as the Jewish Messiah, i. e. the national prince and deliverer of the Jews.* This, which he all along explodes as false and absurd, he represents as the only proper essential article of the Christian faith. As to the attestations given to our Saviour's divine mission, and to the doctrines taught by the apostles, by miracles, prophecy, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, he absolutely denieth them to be any proofs at all. Finally, though he professeth himself to be a *Christian on the foot of the New Testament*, yet he representeth it as leaning strongly towards *Judaism*, which is, in his opinion a system of superstition and *tyranny*. He pretends, that Christ's own disciples represented things according to their *Jewish* prejudices, and therefore are not to be *depended upon for a just*

a just account either of doctrines or facts: And that the New Testament was corrected, revised, and published by the Jews, who altered it according to their own prejudices and false opinions; so that, as it now stands, it is a system of *Judaism*, a jumble of inconsistent religions.

You will allow me here to observe, that a writer must have an uncommon degree of confidence to represent the New Testament as corrupted and altered by the *Jews* according to their own prejudices and false opinions, when not one of their peculiar and most darling notions and prejudices are to be found in this book, but much to the contrary: whereas if they corrupted it at all, it must be supposed they would have corrupted it in favour of those notions and prejudices. No where is the observation of the *Mosaic* law prescribed to Christians, or insisted upon as necessary to the favour of God under the gospel. The Messiah there spoken of is the author of a spiritual salvation, and the Saviour of the world, not the national deliverer of the *Jews* only. And the *Gentiles* are represented as incorporated into his church and kingdom, and as sharers in his benefits equally with the converted *Jews*. The New Testament is so far from being a jumble of inconsistent religions, that it is evidently one and the same scheme of religion that is carried on in the writings of the *Evangelists*, the *Acts of the Apostles*, and the *Apostolical Epistles*. The same doctrines

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are every where taught, relating to God, to our Lord Jesus Christ, the great and only mediator between God and man, and the methods of our redemption and salvation through him; relating to the terms of our acceptance with God, to the resurrection of the dead, the general judgment, and the eternal retributions of a future state. The same excellent laws and precepts are every where inculcated, the same duties enjoined towards God and man, the same purity of heart and life indispensably required, the same noble motives are every where proposed to animate our obedience, the same discoveries and displays of the divine grace and mercy, the same encouragements given to the truly penitent, the same gracious assistances promised and provided for the upright and sincere, the same awful threatenings denounced against those that go on in a course of presumptuous sin and disobedience. Thus one beautiful and harmonious scheme of religion appears throughout, uniform and consistent in all its parts, which shews that those sacred writings have not undergone any material corruption. Some have found fault, that some of those writings seem to have been written occasionally, and that the Christian religion is not delivered there in a systematical way: But it has been much more wisely ordered. If it had been delivered once for all in a formal system, it might have been more easily altered and corrupted, or at least there  
would



would have been greater ground of suspicion that it was so. Whereas, as the case now stands, the doctrines and laws of it, and the most important facts relating to it, are repeated and inculcated in so many places, and on so many different occasions, that without a total alteration and corruption of those original writings, which could not be effected, the religion must still be maintained and preserved.

But to return to our *Moral Philosopher*, he honoureth himself, and those of his sentiments, with the title of *Christian Deists*, as the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* had done before him, as if they only were the true Christians; and brandeth all others *i. e.* those that acknowledge the divine authority of the Christian religion, as taught in the New Testament, with the character of *Christian Jews*. He frequently inveighs against all *historical faith*, and *books of historical religion*, as he calls the holy Scriptures, as of no use or importance at all; as if the belief of the important facts recorded in the gospel, relating to our Lord Jesus Christ, had nothing to do with the faith of a Christian. All the religion he is pleased to allow to those whom he characterizeth as *Christian Jews*, is only an *historical, political, clerical, mechanical faith and religion*; whilst he appropriateth *real religion*, and *moral truth and righteousness* to himself, and those of his own faction.

One of the first tracts which appeared against the *Moral Philosopher* was an ingenious piece

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written by Mr. *Joseph Hallet*, viz. *The Immorality of the Moral Philosopher*, being an answer to a book lately published, intitl'd, *The Moral Philosopher*, 8vo, 1737. He afterwards published a vindication of it in a letter to the *Moral Philosopher*; who had answered it. Some time after there were two large answers published to that book, of both which I shall give a distinct account. The first I shall mention is intitl'd, *Eusebius, or the true Christian's Defence*, against a late book, intitl'd, *The Moral Philosopher*, Cambridge, 8vo, 1739, by *John Chapman*, M. A. now Dr. *Chapman*. In this learned and accurate work the author doth not examine the whole of the *Moral Philosopher's* book, nor concern himself with the particular objections he had brought against the *Jewish* and *Christian* revelation, but applies himself to consider the main principles of his scheme, and on which the whole structure depends.

He begins with his fundamental principle, viz. that moral truth, reason, and the fitness of things is the sole certain mark or criterion of any doctrine as coming from God. He shews the ambiguity of the phrase, and the various senses it is capable of, and that in no sense can it be understood to be a proper mark or criterion of any doctrine or law, as having come from God in a way of extraordinary revelation, concerning which alone the question lieth. That therefore we must have some other

other mark or criterion, which may evidence an extraordinary interposition of God, and his testimony to the truth of what is delivered in his name. And particulatly he setteth himself to prove, that miracles and prophecy are evidences of an extraordinary divine interposition and testimony. He treats the question about miracles, largely and distinctly, and, after having stated the true notion of a miracle, shews, that miracles may be of such a nature, and so circumstanced, as in some cases to prove the divine mission of the persons by whom they are wrought, and the truth and divine authority of the doctrines which are attested by them, independently of all consideration of the doctrines themselves; but that when they are considered in conjunction with the good tendency of the doctrines and laws that are thus attested, they incontestibly demonstrate the divine original of those doctrines and laws. He hath good observations on the great use of miracles, as the plainest and most popular, the most short and compendious way of proving a divine revelation, and judiciously obviates the objections made against the proof from miracles, both by the *Moral Philosopher*, and by others that have written on the same argument before him. He also vindicates the argument from prophecy against this writer's exceptions.

Having shewn what are the true proofs of original revelation, he proceeds to consider *traditional revelation*, concerning which the *Mo-*

LETTER IX. *ral Philosopher*, after many others, had raised a great clamour, under pretence that there can be no such thing as divine faith upon fallible human testimony. This, Dr. *Chapman* hath examined very fully, and hath clearly shewn, that the original revelation itself, together with the accounts of the proofs, or extraordinary facts whereby it was at first attested, may be transmitted to after ages, with such a degree of evidence, as may make it reasonable for those to whom it is thus transmitted to receive it as divine, or as having originally come from God, and consequently may lay a just foundation for their receiving it with a divine faith. He afterwards applieth what he had said concerning the original proofs of revelation, and concerning that revelation's being safely transmitted to after ages, to the revelation which was published by our Lord Jesus Christ, and his apostles. He sheweth at large, that the miracles which were wrought were of such a kind, as were sufficient alone to prove to eye-witnesses his and their divine mission, and when farther considered in conjunction with the doctrines taught by him and them, amounted to a full demonstration of it. He then proceeds to shew, that these miracles, together with particular accounts of our Lord's doctrines, and those of his apostles, were faithfully recorded, and committed to writing by those who were witnesses to them, and that these writings have been transmitted with unquestionable evidence of

of their being genuine and uncorrupted in all material points: And that therefore we cannot refuse to receive them, but upon principles which would absolutely destroy the credit of all past facts whatsoever.

He next proceeds to consider and explain the nature of the Christian religion as distinguished from *Deism*, which the *Moral Philosopher*, and others would contound. He answers the objections those writers had urged from the pretended ambiguity and obscurity of scripture, and the differences among Christians about the interpretation of the Christian doctrines. And concludes with a vindication of that great article of the Christian faith, which this writer had endeavoured to pervert and expose, concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, as the true Messiah foretold by the prophets. The prophecies relating to the Messiah are considered, and from thence it is evinced, that he was not to be merely a national Prince, and deliverer of the *Jews*, but the Saviour of the world; and was not merely to erect a temporal dominion, but a spiritual kingdom of truth and righteousness.

There was another answer published about the same time, *viz.* *The divine authority of the Old and New Testament asserted, &c.* against the unjust aspersions, and false reasonings of a book, intitled, *The Moral Philosopher*, London, 8vo. 1739. After what was said on a like occasion in my last letter, I shall make no apology for giving some account of this answer, which is the rather

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ther necessary, because the *Moral Philosopher*, in the second volume he published, and of which some notice must be taken afterwards, bent his force principally against it. The design of this answer was to take a distinct view of what Dr. *Morgan* had offered both against revelation in general, and against the holy Scriptures in particular: And it cost some pains to range the objections of that writer in some order, which are scattered with a strange confusion through his book. This answer begins with stating the question concerning revelation in general, the usefulness of which the *Moral Philosopher* maketh a shew of acknowledging, and yet in effect leaveth no way of knowing when such a revelation is really given. His pretended sole criterion of moral truth and fitness is examined; and it is shewn, that miracles may be so circumstanced for number, nature and continuance, as to yield a sufficient attestation to the divine mission of the persons by whom, and to the divine authority of the doctrines and laws in confirmation of which, they are wrought. And that the account of those extraordinary miraculous facts, as well as the laws and doctrines attested and confirmed by them, may be transmitted to us in such a manner, that it would be perfectly unreasonable to deny or doubt of them.

From the question concerning revelation in general, the author of this answer proceeds to what is the principal design of his book, *viz.*

to vindicate the revelation contained in the holy LETTER  
IX. Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. And first, the law of *Moses* is vindicated at large against the objections of the *Moral Philosopher*; and the excellent design, nature, and tendency of it is distinctly shewn. Particularly, that law is cleared from the charge of countenancing and encouraging human sacrifices. And as the case of *Abraham's* offering up *Ishac*, has been often insisted upon, and particularly is represented by this writer, as absolutely subversive of the whole law of nature, and a command which it was impossible for God to give, or for us to have any proof that it was given, care is taken to set this whole matter in a proper light, and to answer the objections that have been made against it. The same is done with regard to the war against the *Benjamites* in the affair of *Gibeath*, of which our author had made a most odious representation, with a view to cast a reflexion on the oracle of *Urim* and *Thummim*. The prophet *Samuel* and *David* are cleared from the unjust aspersions he had cast upon them; and the scandalous representation he had made of the latter's dancing naked before the ark; as also what Lord *Shaftsbury* had offered on the same subject, and concerning the *naked saltant spirit of prophecy*, is considered, and the injustice and absurdity of it shewn. The characters of the ancient prophets are vindicated; and the author's gross falsifications, and strange perversions

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IX. } fions of the Scripture-history exposed. With regard to the objections brought by the *Moral Philosopher* against the New Testament, particular notice is taken of his base insinuations against the character of our blessed Saviour, and especially of his pretence that Jesus at his death renounced his being the Messiah foretold by the prophets. It is shewn, that he claimed to be the Messiah, and that he was really so in the true sense of the prophetic writings. As to the apostles, it is proved in opposition to what he had confidently asserted to the contrary, both that they themselves professed to be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that they gave sufficient proofs to convince the world of their divine mission. The attestation given to them by the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost is particularly considered, and the author's pretence, that the false teachers as well as the true, had those extraordinary gifts and powers, and made use of them in confirmation of their false doctrines, is examined, and shewn to be vain and groundless. The account he giveth of the *Jewish* gospel, which he pretends was preached by all the apostles but St. *Paul*, is shewn to be entirely his own fiction, and the harmony between St. *Paul* and the other apostles, and the wisdom and consistency of their conduct, is manifested. The attempt he maketh against the whole Canon of the New Testament, as if it was corrupted and interpolated by the *Jews*,



is considered. And whereas, under pretence of rectifying the errors of Christians with regard to some particular doctrines of Christianity, he had severely inveigh'd against the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction; this is vindicated against his exceptions. Finally, the argument he would draw from the differences among Christians, to prove that none of the doctrines of revealed religion are of any certainty or use to mankind, is shewn to be vain and inconclusive.

The author of the *Moral Philosopher*, who was a writer of great vivacity, did not continue long silent. He published a defence of his former book, in what he called the second volume of the *Moral Philosopher, or a farther Vindication of Moral Truth and Reason*. This was chiefly designed against the author of the answer last mentioned, except a long letter addressed to *Eusebius*, i. e. *Dr. Chapman*. In this book, he talks with the same confusion that he did before concerning moral truth and reason, as being the sole criterion of divine truth, or truth as coming from God; without adding any new proof, or distinctly explaining what he means by it. He represents his adversaries, and all the advocates for revelation, as *renouncing all evidences from nature and reason in matters of religion*: and that, in their scheme, natural and revealed religion are two *essentially different and opposite religions*. This is a very unfair representation, since he could not but know, that

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that they maintain that there is a harmony and connection between reason and revelation: And that revelation leaves all the proofs of religion drawn from reason in their full force, and adds to them the attestation of a divine authority or testimony. And this must certainly be of great weight. It gives a farther degree of certainty and evidence, even with regard to those things, of which we might have some discovery by our reason before, as well as furnisheth a sufficient ground of assent with regard to things, which we could not have known by mere unassisted reason.

As to the proofs of revelation, he still insisteth upon it, that miracles are no proofs. But he takes very little notice of what his answerers, and particularly Dr. *Chapman*, who had treated this question largely and distinctly, had offered to prove that they are so. He lays down several observations tending to shew the great difficulty there is in knowing which are true miracles. To this purpose he observes, that men may easily be mistaken, and think those things to be miracles which are not so; or they may be imposed upon by artifice, or the strength of their own imaginations, so as to take those things to have been done, which really were not done; that persons are much more liable to be deceived, and often have been so, in judging of things supposed to be supernatural, than in things that come in the common course! And that if even those before

whom they are supposed to have been originally wrought may be thus deceived, much more those to whom they come only by report. All that follows from these, and other observations to the same purpose, amounts really to no more than this, that great and particular care and caution is necessary to guard against deception in things of so extraordinary a nature. But it is far from proving, either that it is impossible that any true miracles should ever be done, or that we should have any satisfactory evidence or certainty concerning them. Notwithstanding all that this writer hath offered, it is still true, that miracles may be so circumstanced with regard to their number, nature, and continuance, that persons may be as certain of their having been really done, as they can be of any facts whatsoever for which they have the testimony of all their senses; and may be also certain, that they are things absolutely exceeding all human power. They may also be of such a nature and tendency, and so manifestly designed to promote the cause of righteousness and virtue, that we may be sure they were not done by any evil being superior to man; and must therefore have been done either by the immediate power of God himself, or by superior good beings acting under his direction. It hath been often shewn, that such were the miracles wrought at the first establishment of the *Jewish* and Christian dispensation. They were done in to open a man-  
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ner, and produced such effects, that those before whom they were wrought had as full an assurance of the reality of them, as they could have of any facts whatsoever; and at the same time could not but be sensible that they exceeded all the power of man. And they were also of such a nature, that they could not without the highest absurdity be supposed to have been wrought by any evil being or beings; and therefore ought to be regarded as the testimony of God to the divine mission of the persons by whom, and to the truth and divine original and authority of the doctrines and laws in confirmation of which, they were wrought.

Our author indeed hath in this book made an extraordinary attempt, with regard to the miracles of *Moses*, to prove that though that vast assembly of people were made to believe that those things were done before their eyes, and that they themselves saw them done, yet they were never really done at all; and in order to account for this, he makes some of the wildest suppositions that ever entered into the head of any man that was not absolutely out of his senses. But lest this should not take, his next attempt is to prove, that those miracles, if wrought at all, were done by an evil power. As if an evil being, even supposing what is absurd to imagine, that he were capable of exerting such amazing acts of divine power as were exhibited at the establish-

establishment of the *Mosaic* dispensation, would do it to confirm a system of laws which prescribed the adoration of the one living and true God in opposition to the then spreading idolatry, and strongly obliged men to the practice of virtue and righteousness. The chief proof he bringeth for so strange an assertion, is the command relating to the destruction of the *Canaanites*, on account not only of their impure and cruel idolatries, but of the most abominable crimes and vices which then universally prevailed among them; as if it were impossible for God, in any circumstance of things, ever to give such a command. This which hath been frequently urged by the writers on that side, particularly by Dr. *Tindal*, was considered in the *Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation*, vol. 2d. p. 352-358. 2d. ed. And upon its being here repeated by the *Moral Philosopher*, was again examined and obviated in the 2d. volume of *The Divine authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*, p. 97, &c. It is also set in a proper light by Mr. *Lowman* in his *Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews*, p. 220, &c.

As to our Saviour's miracles, this writer pretendeth, contrary to Christ's own most express declarations, that he did not appeal to them as proofs of his divine mission. He also repeateth the stale objection, which hath been so often answered and exposed, that the miraculous cures which Jesus wrought were

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owing to the strength of fancy and imagination in the patient, and not to power in the agent. But whatever we suppose the force of imagination in some cases to be, there are many of our Lord's miracles of such a kind, that there cannot possibly be the least room or pretence for such a supposition.

With regard to the conveyance of divine revelation, it had been shewn that doctrines and laws which were originally received by revelation from God, together with an account of the extraordinary facts or proofs whereby that revelation was attested, may be transmitted to after-ages in a manner that may be safely depended upon. And that the doctrines and facts of the Christian revelation have been so transmitted. He hath little to oppose to the clear and distinct proofs that were brought for this, but some general clamours, which he repeateth on all occasions, about the uncertainty of tradition and fallibility of human testimony; though it be incontestibly evident, that laws and facts may be, and often have been, transmitted in this way, with such a degree of evidence and certainty, that it would be perfectly unreasonable, and contrary to common sense, to deny or doubt of them. And yet all along throughout his whole book he argues as if it were sufficient to destroy the authority of the scripture-revelation, that its doctrines and laws, and the account of its important facts have been trans-

transmitted through the hands of weak and fallible men. This he representeth as a placing the most important divine truth on the foot of fallible human testimony. But however specious this may appear, and fitted to impose upon superficial enquirers, there is nothing in it of real weight. For if a revelation or law had any original divine authority, and that it might be of use to succeeding ages was committed to writing, which is the surest method of conveyance; and if we have sufficient evidence to give us reasonable assurance that this written revelation has been safely transmitted to us, without any material corruption or alteration, as hath been often plainly shewn with regard to the Christian revelation; then it is as really of divine authority now, as it was at first, and we are obliged to receive and submit to it as such. For it doth not lose its authority by being committed to writing; nor doth its authority depend on the intermediate conveyers, any more than the authority of a law formerly enacted by the legislature can be said to depend upon the persons by whom it has been transcribed or printed, but upon its having been originally enacted by the legislature\*.

As to the objections this writer had urged in his former book against the Revelation contained in the holy scriptures of the Old

\* See concerning this, Div. Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted, vol. 2. p. 24, 25.

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and New Testament, and which had been particularly considered; he repeats them again in this book with greater confidence than before, and often without taking the least notice of what was offered to the contrary; or if he makes a shew of answering, very lightly passeth over what was of principal importance in the argument. He gives himself little trouble about the gross misrepresentations and falsifications of the sacred history which had been plainly proved upon him, but still persisteth in the charges he had advanced, and addeth farther invectives; at the same time assuring his reader that his answerer *had not said one word to the purpose*, and that what he had offered was *one continued rant*. And sometimes, as in the case of the Messiah's being, according to the prophetic writings, a mere temporal prince of the *Jews* only, our author instead of answering the proofs which had been brought to the contrary, declares it to be a point so evident, that he *scorns to dispute with any man that will deny it*, i. e. he scorns to dispute with any man that will not give him up the very point in question.

These are arts of controversy which none would envy him the honour of. And he frequently expresseth himself in a manner that shews little regard to common decency: As when he saith of *David, away with him to the devil from whence he came!* And speaking of



of the *Jews*, he avers, that this *miraculously stupid* LETTER IX. *people was always inspired and possessed with the spirit of the devil.* And the Christians come in for their share of the compliment: For he adds, that *they*, i. e. the *Jews*, have *transfused their spirit and faith into Christians.*

It would not be worth while to mention these things, if it were not to give some idea of the temper and genius of this writer. He has gone so far as boldly to pronounce, that the God of *Israel*, to whom the priesthood was *instituted*, and *sacrifices* were *offered*, was a *cheat* and an *idol*, as much so as any of the *Pagan* deities, and that he was only considered as a local tutelar deity; though one would think it scarce possible for any man seriously to read the Old Testament, and not be sensible that the God there every where recommended to our adoration and obedience, and whom the people of *Israel* were obliged by their law to worship exclusively of all idol deities, is represented as the maker of heaven and earth, the sovereign Lord of the universe. In his former book he had sometimes spoken with great seeming respect of Christianity, but here he throws off all disguise, and does what he can to expose it to the derision and contempt of mankind. Nothing can be more scandalous than the representation he makes of the effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. He avers, that those who had the gift of tongues could not speak those langua-

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ges with any sense, coherence, or consistency; that they only uttered a strange kind of gibberish, which neither they themselves nor any body else could understand. And yet it appears from the account that is given us; that the people of many different countries which were come from all parts to *Jerusalem*, at the feast of Pentecost, understood the apostles as speaking to them in their several languages the *great things of God*, and were filled with such admiration on this account as produced the conversion of great numbers of them to the Christian faith. He pronounces that they who seemed to have those gifts, *were out of their wits for the time*, and expressly calls them *frantic fits*; and what is very extraordinary, pretends to prove all this from the authority of *St. Paul* himself, who, according to his representation, must have been one of the maddest enthusiasts that ever liv'd; though at other times he thinks fit to extol him as *the bold and brave defender of religion and liberty*.

He concludes his book with a fresh invective against the law of *Moses*, as if it were designed to indulge men in personal intemperance, and were wholly calculated for the interest of his own family; though no law-giver ever gave greater proofs of his disinterestedness than *Moses* did; as he made no provision for raising his own children to honours and dignities in the state, but left them to continue in the rank of common *Levites*.

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The last thing he mentions is the law about the trial of jealousy, of which he gives a strange account. But this, as was clearly proved against him, dependeth wholly upon his own false and arbitrary suppositions, which betray either great ignorance or willful misrepresentation\*.

It could not be a very agreeable employment to carry on a controversy with such a writer. There was however a second volume published of the *Divine authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*, by the author of the first, which was designed as an answer to the second, volume of the *Moral Philosopher*, London, 8vo, 1740. In this reply every thing in his book is considered that had any appearance of reason and argument; and his unfair representations; his unjust aspersions, and confident attempts to impose falsehoods upon his reader, are detected and exposed. And whereas there is no part of his book that seems to have been more laboured, than where he undertakes to prove, that the tribe of *Levi* had above twenty shillings in the pound upon all the lands of *Israel*, the extravagance of his computations is plainly shewn. But no man hath set this matter in a clearer light, than Mr. *Lowman* in his ingenious and judicious *Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews, in which the Justice, Wisdom and Goodness of the Mo-*

\* See Divine Author. of the New and Old Testament asserted, vol. 2. p. 362. et seq.

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But this author was not to be convinced or silenced. He soon after published what he called the third volume of the *Moral Philosopher, or Superstition and Tyranny inconsistent with Theocracy*, London, 8vo, 1740. In the body of this book, which is particularly designed as an answer to the second volume of the *Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*, there is scarce any thing new attempted. The same things are repeated over again in a strain of confidence, peculiar to this writer; and at this rate it is easy to write books and carry on controversies without end. But there scarce needs any other confutation of what he hath here offered, than to desire the reader carefully to compare it with the book to which it is pretended to be an answer. The only farther observation I would make upon it is, that our author, contrary to his usual custom, has in one instance condescended to acknowledge a mistake he had been guilty of in his former volume. It is in his computation of the *Levitical* revenues in which he had made an overcharge in one single article of no less than one million two hundred thousand pounds a year. Yet so fond is he of what he had advanced concerning the *Levites* having, by the *Mosaic* constitution,

constitution, the whole wealth and power of the nation in their hands, that he still endeavours to support it by some very extraordinary calculations; the falshood and absurdity of which was soon after clearly and fully exposed by Mr. *Lowman*, in an appendix to his *Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews*, London, 1741. But the most remarkable thing in the third volume of the *Moral Philosopher*, and that part of it which may be most properly called new, is a long introduction of above an hundred pages, in which he pretends to give an account of the ancient patriarchal religion, and an historical relation of the descent of the *Hebrew* shepherds into *Egypt*; the rise and foundation of the *Mosaic* theocracy, the inconsistencies and self-contradictions of the *Hebrew* historians, &c. In this part of his work he hath, if possible, exceeded himself in misrepresentation and abuse: But I shall take no farther notice of it than to observe, that there were solid and ingenious remarks made upon it by a gentleman that styles himself *Theophanes Cantabrigiensis*, in a pamphlet intituled, *The ancient History of the Hebrews vindicated*, Cambridge, 8vo, 1741. And afterwards by Mr. *Samuel Chandler*, in his *Vindication of the History of the Old Testament; in answer to the Misrepresentations and Calumnies of Thomas Morgan, M. D. and Moral Philosopher*. The first part of which was published, London, 1741, and a second part

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part came out in 1743, and after Dr. *Morgan's* death. It is here plainly proved, that this writer hath been guilty of manifest falshoods, and of the most gross perversions of the scripture-history, even in those very instances in which he assureth his reader, he hath kept close to the accounts given by the *Hebrew* historians. The author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, who writ soon after, thought fit to make a very contemptuous representation of Mr. *Chandler's* performance. He is pleased to represent him, as having levell'd all his artillery of wit, learning, and spleen against the *Moral Philosopher*, Dr. *Morgan*, instead of answering; and as having fir'd off twenty sheets to shoot one of his, and mis'd the mark\*. This no doubt must pass for a full confutation of Mr. *Chandler's* work. But all that can be gathered from it is, that, with these gentlemen, the proving any of them guilty of the most gross falsifications of scripture, which had been fully proved upon Dr. *Morgan*, is to pass for a thing of no consequence; as if falshood and misrepresentation were to be looked upon as very allowable, when put in practice for so good an end as the exposing Christianity and the holy scripture. It is proper here to observe, that the ingenious Mr. *Hallet*, who, as was mentioned before, had early appeared against the first volume of the *Moral Philosopher*, published also *A Rebuke to the Moral*

\* *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, p. 71, 72. edit. 3d.

*Philosopher for the errors and immoralities contained in his third volume, 8vo, 1740.* LETTER  
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I shall conclude this account of the *Moral Philosopher* with observing, that soon after his third volume appeared, Dr. Chapman published a second volume of his *Eusebius; or the true Christian's farther Defence against the principles and reasonings of the Moral Philosopher*, London, 8vo, 1741. In this he considers at large all that this writer had offered concerning what he calls the *Jewish* gospel, which he confidently affirms was preached by all the apostles, but St. Paul, and of which he pretends the temporal kingdom of Christ in the *Jewish* sense was the principal article. He shews with the clearest evidence that this was not preached by any of the apostles, and that there was a perfect harmony between them and St. Paul, as to what concerned the authority and obligation of the *Jewish* law under the gospel. He also judiciously explains and vindicates the scripture-doctrine of redemption, and the satisfaction of Christ, against that author's objections and gross misrepresentations.

The following this extraordinary writer, through his several books, and the answers that were made to him, has engaged me in a detail which I am afraid has not proved very agreeable to you, any more than it has been so to myself. But it may be of some  
use

LETTER IX. use to shew that, notwithstanding his boasted pretences, there have been few writers who have been more effectually confuted and exposed, than he that was pleased to honour himself with the title of the *Moral Philosopher*.



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L E T T E R X.

*Observations upon the pernicious tendency of the pamphlet intitled, Christianity not founded on Argument. The design of it is to shew that the Christian faith has nothing to support it but a senseless enthusiasm. The author's great dissingenuity and misrepresentations of scripture detected. He strikes at natural religion, as well as revealed, destroys all certainty of reason, and declares against education, and the instructing children in any principles at all. The principal arguments he hath offered in support of his scheme considered. Christianity no enemy to examination and enquiry. Men's being commanded to believe, no presumption that faith is not a reasonable assent. The faith required in the gospel is properly a virtue, and the unbelief there condemned is really a vice. His pretence that the people are not capable of discerning the force of the proofs brought for Christianity, and therefore cannot be obliged to believe it, examined. Account of the answers published against him.*

S I. R,

**T**HE controversy with the *Moral Philosopher* was scarce at an end, when a new and very remarkable pamphlet appeared, intitled,

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LETTER <sup>X.</sup> titled, *Christianity not founded on argument*,  
 London, 1742. The author of this carried  
 on his design against the Christian religion, in  
 a way somewhat different from what others had  
 done before him. Under specious appearances  
 of zeal for religion, and under the cover of de-  
 vout expressions, he hath endeavoured to shew  
 that the Christian faith hath no foundation in  
 reason, nor hath any thing to support it but  
 a wild and senseless enthusiasm, destitute of  
 all proof and evidence. And if this could be  
 made out, it would no doubt answer the in-  
 tention he too plainly appears to have had in  
 view, the exposing the Christian religion to  
 the derision and contempt of mankind. With  
 great gravity and seeming seriousness he sets  
 himself to shew, that a rational faith, *i. e.* as  
 he explains it; “an assent to revealed truth  
 “founded upon the conviction of the under-  
 “standing, is a false and unwarrantable no-  
 “tion †.” That “that person best enjoys faith,  
 “who never asked himself one single question  
 “about it, and never dealt at all in the evi-  
 “dence of reason\*.” That God never intend-  
 ed that we should make use of our reason, or  
 intellectual faculty at all in believing, or that  
 our faith should be founded upon any evi-  
 dence which might convince the judgment,  
 or make it reasonable for us to believe. This  
 he undertakes formally to prove, first by se-  
 veral arguments drawn from the nature of

† *Christ. not founded on argument*, p. 7.      \* *Ibid.* p. 29.

reason

reason and religion; and afterwards he endeavoureth to prove the same thing from the account given us in scripture. LETTER  
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Having thus, as he pretends, removed the false grounds of faith and religion, and shewn that it hath nothing to do with reason or argument; he next proceeds to declare what is the true principle of faith; and this he resolves wholly into a *constant particular revelation, imparted separately and supernaturally to every individual*\*. That "the Holy Ghost irradiates the souls of believers at once with an irresistible light from heaven, that flashes conviction in a moment, so that this faith is completed in an instant, and the most perfect and finished creed produced at once, without any tedious progress in deductions of our own †." He represents this great dictator and infallible guide, as having promised "to abide with us to the end of the world, that we might not be liable one moment to a possibility of error and imposture ‡; and as speaking the same thing to all, and bringing them to think all alike ||." Nothing can be more absurd in itself, nothing more contrary to plain undeniable fact, than this immediate infallible inspiration of every particular person, which causes *men to think all alike*, and does not leave them liable one moment to a

\* *Christ. not founded on argument.* p. 112.

† *Ibid.* p. 53.

‡ *Ibid.* 3. 60.    || *Ibid.* p. 89.

*possibility*

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possibility of error and imposture; and yet this he makes to be the sole foundation of the Christian faith. He represents it to be of such a nature as to render all outward instruction, and even the scriptures themselves, entirely needless; and that those who are thus instructed by the spirit, “need not concern themselves about the credit of ancient miracles, or the genuineness of distant records.” As if the Christian faith had nothing to do with the facts recorded in the gospels: This he calls the *revealed and scriptural account of the matter*\*. And pretends that “this account depends not upon the strength of any single quotation whatever, but on the joint tendency and tenor of the whole †.”

This pamphlet was received by the enemies of Christianity with great applause; and yet, upon a close examination, there are such apparent marks of great dissimulation in it, as should tend, with fair and candid minds, to give very disadvantageous impressions both of the author, and of a cause that needs such base arts to support it.

The whole turn of the pamphlet is in a religious strain: He formally pretends to offer up his most ardent prayers in behalf of his friend at the throne of grace, “that God would be pleased himself to illuminate and irradiate his mind with a perfect and

\* *Christ. not founded on argument*, p. 63. † *Ibid.* p. 103.

“ thorough

“ thorough conviction of the truth of his holy  
“ gospel ; that the same Holy Spirit that first  
“ dictated that divine law, would powerfully  
“ set on his seal, and attest its authority in  
“ his heart\*.” Such a strain of ridicule as  
this, for whosoever impartially considers this  
treatise can regard it in no other view, is one  
of the most solemn mockeries that were ever  
offered to the supreme being. In many other  
passages, under pretence of exalting the in-  
fluence of the Holy Spirit, the scriptures are  
depreciated, as of no use : They are called by  
way of contempt *manuscript authorities*, and  
*paper revelations* ; as if the being committed  
to writing could destroy the authority of a  
divine law ; when the man would be thought  
out of his senses that should, under the same  
pretence, attempt to invalidate the authority  
of human laws. It is observable, that the  
most high-flown enthusiasts have always spo-  
ken with disregard of the holy scripture,  
and represented it as a *dead letter* ; which  
by the way is no great sign of its being of  
an *enthusiastic* nature and tendency. And  
this writer hath endeavoured to take advan-  
tage of their madness for exposing the au-  
thority of the sacred writings. Thus the  
Deists can upon occasion run into the wilds  
of *enthusiasm*, and join with the men they  
most heartily despise, in order to answer their  
design of exposing Christianity. Such hath

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\* *Christ. not founded on Argument*, pag. 112.

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But what greatly strengthens the charge of disingenuity against this writer is, that he is guilty of the most gross misrepresentations of scripture and the matters of fact therein contained: some of which are of such a kind as to be scarce reconcilable to any degree of honesty and candour. He pretends to prove from the plain narrative part of the New Testament-history, that Christ and his apostles, in planting the gospel, never proposed arguments or evidences of any kind to engage men to believe. Whereas it is manifest from the accounts given in the *gospels*, the *acts*, and the *epistles*, that the method Christ and his apostles took to make converts was by assiduous instruction, by teaching and preaching, and by laying before them evidences of the most convincing kind, and which made it reasonable for them to believe.

There can scarce be a more glaring instance of disingenuity than to assert, as this writer does contrary to Christ's own most express declarations, (concerning which, see *John* v. 36. x. 25, 38. xiv. 11. *Matth.* xi. 3, 4, 5, 6.) that he himself never designed that his miracles should be regarded as proofs and evidences of his divine mission; that he was *always remarkably upon the reserve when he happened among un-believing*

*believing company*: And that he took particular care that his miracles should not come to public notice, and *see thou tell no man* was generally the charge: Though it is manifest from the whole gospel, that he generally wrought his miracles in the most public way, before great numbers of people, and in the presence even of his most malicious adversaries; and there were only a very few instances, in which he seemed to be upon the reserve, for which no doubt there were good reasons, some of which may be gathered from the circumstances of the cases mentioned. But such is the manner of this writer; if he can find a particular instance or two that seems favourable to his intention, he lays hold of this, contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel-history, and would put it upon his reader, as if what was done for special reasons in a very few instances, was constantly and always the case in every instance. Thus he positively asserts, that our Saviour “ constantly stipulated before-hand, for a certain “ degree, and no ordinary one, of confidence “ and persuasion in the persons on whom “ he wrought his miracles\*.” This he seems to lay a particular stress upon, and yet it is so far from being true that this was *constantly* the case, that there are comparatively but a very few instances, in which he previously required persons to profess their belief in him. In one of the answers to this pamphlet, there are near

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 47.

LETTER <sup>X.</sup> fifty instances produced of miracles wrought by our Saviour, where no such thing was required †. And in the few instances where it was insisted upon, it was not a commanding those to believe in an instant who did not believe before, it was only a requiring them to profess the faith they already had, and a declaring his approbation of their faith, and was designed as a means to strengthen it more and more. And the propriety of his taking this method in some instances is manifest, as it tended to direct men's views to that which was the principal use and end of his miracles, and which our author hath thought fit to deny, *viz.* to confirm their faith in his divine mission.

With the same unfairness he confidently avers, that, according to the scripture-accounts, the apostles always expected to make their converts by a word's speaking, that they never allowed any time for deliberation, but denounced damnation against those that hesitated in the least, and that they discouraged all examination and inquiry. When on the contrary it appeareth, that they often staid a considerable time together in a place, reasoning in the synagogues, repeating their excellent instructions, and performing the most illustrious miracles, as proofs of their divine mission. Thus St. Paul abode for a long time at *Iconium*, for a year and six months at *Corinth*, and for above two

† Benson's Reasonableness of the Christian relig. &c. p. 181—188.



years at *Ephesus*. It is also evident, that they encouraged men to examination and enquiry, and commended them when they did so. A remarkable instance of which we have in the encomium bestowed upon the *Bereans*, who examined the apostle's doctrine, and *searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so*, as they had taught them. And the consequence of this their diligent examination was, that *many of them believed*, Acts xvii. 10, 11, 12.

The representation this author makes of the influence of the Holy Spirit imparted to all believers is also highly disingenuous, though in it he pretends to keep close to the scripture-accounts. He represents it as absolutely excluding all outward teaching, and all use of our own endeavours. And yet nothing can be more evident than it is from the whole gospel, that we are required to be diligent in the use of our own endeavours; and the great usefulness of outward teaching is constantly supposed, and provision is made for its continuance in the Christian church. With the like candour he pretendeth, that, according to the scripture-account, faith is perfected in an instant, and admitteth of no degrees; and that the Spirit causeth all believers to *think all alike*, and raiseth them above all *possibility of error*. Whereas it is evident, that faith is there represented as not ordinarily completed at once, but capable of continual growth and improve-

LETTER  
X. } ment, and as admitting of various degrees.  
And it is every where supposed, that believers may in many things be of different sentiments, and are to bear with one another in those differences.

These, and other things of the like kind, are so palpably misrepresented, that it can hardly be supposed that this writer himself, who is quick-sighted enough when he pleases, should not have been sensible that they were so.

Another thing that may give us no very advantageous notion of the author's design is, that he hath advanced several things, which seem to have a bad aspect on natural religion as well as revealed; and representeth the former as not founded on reason and argument any more than the latter. He pretends, that all attempts to prove the principles of natural religion by reason have done more harm than good; and that "even upon the plainest question in nature, the existence of a Deity, the laboured productions of Dr. *Clark* himself have rather contributed to make for the other side of the question, and raised a thousand new doubts in the reader's mind\*." Accordingly he takes a great deal of pains to destroy all certainty of reason. He represents it as perpetually fluctuating, and never capable of coming to a certainty about any thing; and as if truth and falshood may be equally proved by

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 81.

it. The bulk of mankind are, according to him, under a natural incapacity of reasoning at all. And as to *the ablest and best of men*, "they are equally disqualified for fair reasoning by their natural prejudices; which, being ever earlier than the first efforts of reason, is as absolute a disqualification for such a trial, as the greatest natural incapacity \*."

But surely all who have any regard to religion, or who think that reason is an advantage or privilege, and that men are to be regarded as rational thinking beings, moral agents, must look upon this way of representing things as absolutely subversive of all religion and morality. It tendeth to debase and vilify human nature, and to cast dishonour upon God's government and providence; as if he had taken no care of mankind at all, but gave them up entirely to their passions, without any principle of reason to guide or govern them; or at least had placed them in such circumstances, that, as this writer declares, Reason always *comes too late with its assistance*, and not till we are *lost in the power of evil habits beyond recovery*.

To all this it may be added, that there are several passages in his book, in which he absolutely declares against instructing children in religious or moral principles, as a wicked attempt to prepossess their tender minds, and as barring all farther improvement. No care is

\* Christ, not founded on Arg. p. 17, 18, 23, 26.

LETTER <sup>X.</sup> to be taken to cultivate the minds of young persons, under pretence that this would only tend to fill them with prejudices. Thus there is no advantage at all in being born in an enlightened or civilized age or nation; and a child in *Great Britain* must be left as much without instruction, as if he were born in the wilds of *America*. To make this scheme of a piece, and perfectly consistent, it should be so contrived, that children should not be trained up to any language at all, and that they should be kept from all converse with others for fear of their being prepossessed; and that they should be left wholly to nature, without institution of any kind. And what a hopeful state of things this would introduce is easy to see. Thus to avoid Christianity, these gentlemen seem willing to sink us into the lowest degree of barbarism and brutality.

Having made these general observations on the spirit and design of this applauded performance, and the pernicious tendency of it to subvert all certainty of reason, and natural religion as well as revealed: I shall now take some notice of the principal things he hath offered in support of his scheme, and to shew that Christianity hath no foundation in reason.

One of his arguments bears a near affinity to what has been just mentioned concerning education. For he produceth it as a proof that the Christian religion is not a rational one, because we are baptized into it, and obliged to  
train

train up children in the knowledge and belief of it. A strange argument this, since common sense tells us, that the more rational and excellent any religion is, the more requisite it would be to instruct children in the principles of it, and to set its doctrines and evidences in a proper light before them, as far as they are capable of receiving them: For this would be the best preservative against the pernicious influence of corrupt principles, and the power of wrong affections and evil habits, which otherwise, by the author's own acknowledgement, would be apt to get the start of them, and give a wrong bias to the mind.

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X.

He seems to lay a great stress on the sudden conversions we sometimes read of in the New Testament. But they are far from being proofs of what he brings them to prove, that those persons were converted without reason and evidence. All that can be fairly concluded from those instances is, that the evidence that was offered, was so strong, and came with such light and force, as did more to produce conviction in a short time, than a long course of abstracted reasonings would have done. If there were some thousands, as he observes, converted at one lecture\*, these instances only relate to the conversions that were wrought at *Jerusalem* soon after our Lord's resurrection and ascension, of which the people had such convincing evidences by the extraordinary effu-

\* *Christianity not founded on Argument*, p. 39.

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tion of the Holy Ghost on the day of *Pentecost*, and the signal and undeniable miracles wrought by the disciples in the name of a risen Jesus, as, joined with what they had known before of our Saviour's admirable discourses and illustrious miracles, as well as the extraordinary events that had happened at his crucifixion, to which they themselves had been witnesses, rendered the evidence so strong and striking, that it was perfectly rational to submit to it, and receive it.

That passage of the apostle, *2 Cor. x. 4, 5. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, or reasonings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,* is produced by this writer to shew that the gospel is not only without all evidence, but contrary to reason. And yet the manifest design of it is to shew, not that the gospel had no evidence to support it, but that the evidences accompanying it were so strong and convincing, as were vastly superior to any arguments or reasonings that could be brought against it. But there is no injunction there laid upon Christians, as the author pretends, "to lay reason under the most absolute restraint and prohibition, and not to permit it the least opportunity or freedom to exert itself, or interpose upon any occasion whatsoever\*."

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 84.

Another

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Another argument with which he makes a mighty parade is to this purpose, That no religion can be rational, that is not founded on a free and impartial examination \*. And such examination supposes a perfect neutrality to the principles which are examined, and even a temporal disbelief of them, which is what the gospel condemneth. But this proceeds upon a wrong account of the nature of free examination and enquiry. It is not necessary to a just enquiry into doctrines or facts, that a man should be absolutely indifferent to them before he begins that enquiry, much less that he should actually disbelieve them; as if he must necessarily commence Atheist, before he can fairly examine into the proofs of the existence of God. It is sufficient to a candid examination, that a man applieth himself to it with a mind open to conviction, and a disposition to embrace truth on which side soever it shall appear, and to receive the evidence that shall arise in the course of the trial. And if the enquiry relateth to principles in which we have been instructed, then supposing those principles to be in themselves rational and well founded, it may well happen, that in enquiring into the grounds of them, a fair examination may be carried on without seeing cause to disbelieve, or doubt of them through the whole course of the enquiry; which in that case will end in a fuller conviction of them than before.

\* *Christ. not founded on Argument.* p. 5.

But

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But there is no argument on which he seems to place a greater stress to shew that Christianity is not founded on reason and evidence, than this, that we are there authoritatively commanded to believe, and penalties are denounced against us, if we do not believe. Whereas it is plain that “no proposition can be tendered to our reason with penalties annexed, or under the restraint of threats and authority\*.” Since assent or dissent is an independent event under no influence of ours.” Men are constantly determined to believe, or disbelieve, according to the evidence that appeareth to them, and the will hath nothing to do with it. And therefore there can be no virtue in believing truth, or fault in rejecting it. And he expressly affirms, “that a determination either right or wrong in matters which are not self-evident, and in which there is any thing of induction or inference, is equally meritorious †.” This is a very convenient plea for infidelity, and so it is for atheism itself: Since it proceeds upon this foundation, that men can never be obliged to believe any principles at all, in which there is any thing of induction or inference, nor consequently those relating to the existence of God and a providence. And if there be no fault in disbelieving those principles, there may be no fault in refusing to obey, or worship him, which necessarily dependeth upon

\* Christ. not founded on Argument. p. 8. † Ibid. 17, 18.



the belief of his existence. But the founda-<sup>LETTER</sup>  
tion this goes upon is manifestly false; as if <sup>X.</sup>  
men were always, and in all cases determined  
by mere evidence, and that assent and dissent  
were therefore necessary acts, and absolutely  
out of their power. Nothing is more unde-  
niable from common observation and expe-  
rience, than that the will and affections have  
a great influence on the judgment; and that  
we have a great deal of freedom in the right  
or wrong use of our reasoning faculties; and  
consequently are liable to praise or blame on  
that account. Let the proofs that are offered  
be never so plain, we may choose whether we  
will attend to them, or we may turn our eyes  
from the evidence, or if we profess to exa-  
mine, may, through prepossession and wrong  
dispositions of mind, institute a slight, a partial  
and defective examination. Men may be, and  
often are, so biased by the influence of affec-  
tions and interests, as to cause things to ap-  
pear to them in a quite different light, than  
otherwise they would do. All the world  
owns, that a candour and simplicity of heart,  
the love of truth, and a readiness to embrace it  
when fairly proposed, is a very commendable  
disposition of mind; and that a refusing to  
receive it through the influence of corrupt  
affections and passions is really culpable. But  
this especially holdeth in truths of a re-  
ligious and moral nature. Our believing or  
disbelieving them, is very much influenced  
by

LETTER <sup>X.</sup> by the good or bad dispositions of our minds, and must have a great effect upon the practice. And therefore in these cases to receive and embrace these truths may be an important duty, and to disbelieve or reject them may be highly criminal. And God may very justly interpose his authority to require the one, and warn men against the other.

The author all along supposeth, that the faith required in the gospel is no more than a bare assent of the understanding, and the unbelief there condemned is a mere speculative dissent. But this is a wrong representation: Nothing is more evident than that the faith required in the gospel of those to whom it is made known, that faith to which the promises are made, is a complex thing: It includeth a love of truth, and a disposition to embrace and profess it, which in the circumstances in which Christianity first appeared, argued a great deal both of candor and fortitude. And it is always represented to be of a vital operative nature, a principle of holy obedience, and which purifieth the heart, and leadeth men to do the will of God, and obey his commands. And such a faith is certainly a virtue, and very properly the subject of a divine command: And the unbelief there condemned, is supposed to proceed from men's being under the influence of corrupt affections and prejudices, and from their unwillingness to receive the truth, because their deeds are evil.

evil. It is expressed by their *shutting* their LETTER  
X. eyes, and *hardning* their hearts, lest they should *see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts, and be converted and healed.* And this certainly argueth a bad and vicious disposition of soul, and leadeth to disobedience; and is therefore very properly forbidden in the divine law.

With regard to human laws, when they are once sufficiently promulgated, it would scarce be accepted as a plea for men's neglecting or breaking those laws, that they are not satisfied that they are the king's laws; and that no man can be justly obliged under the restraint of authority and penalties to assent to this proposition, that these are the king's laws; since assent is not in our own power. It is very probable, that a way would soon be found to over-rule this plea, and convince them that authority could interpose in this matter. In like manner, it seems to be obvious to the common sense and reason of mankind, that if God hath given a revelation or discovery of his will concerning doctrines and laws of importance to our duty and happiness, and hath caused them to be promulgated with such evidence as he knoweth to be sufficient to convince reasonable and well-disposed minds, that will carefully attend to it, he hath an undoubted right to require those to whom this revelation is published, to receive and to obey it. And if through the influence of corrupt affections

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affections and lusts, those to whom this revelation is made known refuse to receive it, he can justly punish them for their culpable neglect, obstinacy, and disobedience. Our author himself speaking of the Spirit's working faith in *all men*, saith, though in evident contradiction to his own scheme, that "the  
 " tender of this conviction, however potent  
 " in its influence, may yet depend greatly  
 " upon the proper dispositions of our minds,  
 " to give it a reception for its efficacy; and  
 " so far will give place, and afford ample  
 " matter of trial and probation, and become  
 " indeed a test of our obedience. And that  
 " in this case disbelief and guilt have a mean-  
 " ing when put together; since the compli-  
 " ance required is, not a compliance out of our  
 " power, nor any longer that of the under-  
 " standing, but of the will, in its nature free,  
 " and therefore accountable, and though we  
 " are not by any means chargeable for the  
 " effects of our apprehension, yet there is no  
 " reason but that we may be with all justice  
 " called to the strictest account for our obsti-  
 " nacy, impiety, and perverseness\*."

I shall only take notice of one thing more, and which is indeed the most plausible thing in his whole book, and that is, that the generality of mankind, even of those among whom Christianity is published, cannot be obliged to believe it, because they have not a capacity to

\* Christ. not founded on Argument, p. 64.

discern and judge of the proofs and arguments ILLUSTR  
which are brought for it. But though it N.  
should be allowed, that they could not of  
themselves trace those proofs and evidences;  
yet there are few but may be made sensible  
of the force of those proofs, and evidences,  
when set before them by others. And this  
is sufficient. It is evident to any one that  
knows mankind, that we are so constituted,  
as to stand in need of mutual assistance and  
information, in matters of great consequence  
to our duty and happiness. Most of the prin-  
ciples of science of every kind, are things  
that must be taught; and there are few that  
reason out those principles for themselves, but  
proceed upon them as demonstrated by others,  
and apply themselves to practice the rules that  
are founded on those principles. In like man-  
ner religion must be taught, or the most of  
mankind will know but little of it. And if  
it requireth care and application to understand  
its doctrines and precepts, and the evidences  
whereby it is confirmed, this is no argument  
at all, either against its reasonableness or ex-  
cellency. For nothing that is truly excellent  
in knowledge or practice, is to be attained to  
without care and diligence. It is every man's  
duty in this case, to take in what helps and  
informations he can get. And if we can  
come to perceive the evidence by the assist-  
ance of others, this will answer the purposes  
of religion as well, as if we could do it merely

LETTER <sup>X.</sup> by the force of our own reason, without any assistance at all.

It would undoubtedly be a thing above the capacity of the generality of mankind, and what the most learned would not be well fitted for, to trace out all the parts of religion and morality, by a regular deduction from the first principles in a way of abstracted reasoning. And therefore it is a great advantage that God hath given a clear revelation of his will containing in plain and express propositions the principles and doctrines which are of greatest importance to be known, and the duties which are most necessary to be practised: Such a revelation is set before us in the gospel: And the evident marks of disinterestedness that appear in it, without the least traces of a worldly spirit or design, the purity and excellency of its doctrines and precepts, and the uniform tendency of the whole, for promoting the glory of God, and the good of mankind, and the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world, furnish arguments obvious to common capacities, that this religion owed not its rise to human policy, to the arts of impostors, or to evil beings, but was of a godlike and heavenly original. And as to historical evidence, persons of common sound understanding may be made sensible, by the help of the learned, that we have all the evidence of the truth of the extraordinary facts, whereby the divine authority of the Christian religion was attested, which  
can

can be reasonably desired. That most of those facts were of a public nature, which might have been easily detected and exposed if they had been false; in which case that religion which had nothing else to support it, and was destitute of all worldly advantages, must have fallen at once. But that this was so far from being the case, that the greatest enemies of Christianity are not able to deny that, upon the credit of those facts, this religion, though directly opposite to the prejudices which then universally obtained, and though it had the most unsurmountable difficulties to encounter with, and had all the powers of the world engaged against it, soon made a wonderful progress both among *Jews* and *Gentiles*; which, as things were circumstanced, cannot otherwise be accounted for, than by admitting the truth of those extraordinary facts. That the original revelation itself, together with an account of those facts, was committed to writing in the very age in which that revelation was first given, and those facts were done; which is a sure method of conveyance, though oral tradition is a very uncertain one. And that these accounts which were written by persons who were perfectly acquainted with the things they relate, and which have all the characters of purity, artless undisguised simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth, that any writings can possibly have, were in that very age received with great veneration,

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LETTER<sup>X.</sup>AS of sacred authority. The copies of them were soon spread abroad into many different countries, they were read in the public assemblies, translated into various languages, and they have been ever since so constantly cited and appealed to in every age by persons of different sects and parties, many of whom have transcribed large portions of them into their writings, that it may be justly said, they have, been transmitted with a continued evidence, far greater than can be produced for any other books in the world; and that a general corruption of them, if any had attempted it, would have been an impossible thing. There is nothing in all this, but what persons of common-sound sense, who are desirous of information, may be sufficiently assured of by the assistance of the learned. And when besides this, they feel the power and influence of the doctrines and motives proposed in those sacred writings upon their own hearts, comforting them in all the vicissitudes of mortal life, and animating them to all virtue and goodness, this compleateth their satisfaction and assurance. Especially when it is farther considered, that we are taught in scripture to hope, that God's gracious assistances will not be wanting to those that with honest hearts, and upright intentions, endeavour to know and do the will of God. *For if any man will do his will, saith our Saviour, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself,* John vii. 17.



Our author, in order to shew that the ge-<sup>LETTER</sup>nerality of mankind are incapable of judging <sup>X.</sup> of the evidence for Christianity, hath taken upon him to pronounce that there are few that are capable of reasoning at all, *if there is the least of induction or inference in the case* \*. And this, if it proveth that they are under no obligation to believe Christianity, equally proveth that they are under no obligation to prove natural religion, not even the existence of a God, or a providence; since here there is certainly room for induction and inference. But the truth is, this is a very false and base representation of human nature: It would follow from it, that the generality of men are incapable of moral agency, of virtue and vice, or of being governed by laws. For this supposeth them capable of understanding what those laws are, and what is the duty required of them, and of making inferences and deductions. And with regard to religion, and its proofs and evidences, it can scarce be doubted, that if men applied themselves to it with the same care and diligence, that they generally do in matters of much less consequence, they would attain to such a sense of religion and its evidences, as would both make it reasonable for them to believe it, and to govern their practice by it.

\* *Christ. not founded on Argument*, p. 17, 18.

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There were several good answers published to *Christianity not founded on argument*. One of the first that appeared was that written by Dr. *Dodderidge*, which I remember to have read with pleasure, but as I have not had an opportunity of seeing it for some years, cannot give a particular account of it. I shall confine myself to those answers which I have now by me.

The first I shall mention is intitled, *The reasonableness of the Christian religion as delivered in the Scriptures*, being an answer to a late treatise, intitled, *Christianity not founded on argument*, by *George Benson*, now Dr. *Benson*, London, 8vo, 1743. This may be regarded not merely as an answer to that pamphlet, but as a good defence of Christianity in general, and so the learned author designed it. It consisteth of three parts. In the first part, after having settled the meaning of the word *Faith*, and shewn what that faith is which the gospel requireth of those to whom it is made known, and to which rewards are there annexed, and that it is really a virtue; and what that unbelief is which is there forbidden and condemned, and that it is really a vice: He goes on to produce some of the principal arguments which prove the truth of the Christian religion. He first considers what are usually called the internal evidences of Christianity, the reasonableness of its doctrines, of its moral precepts, of its positive

positive institutions, and of the sanctions by which it is enforced; and then considers the external evidence arising from prophecy and miracles particularly from the resurrection of Christ, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost poured forth upon the apostles and first Christians. These things are here set in a fair and agreeable light; and it is also shewn, that the accounts given of these things in the New Testament may be depended on, and that we have sufficient evidence of the truth and authenticity of the gospel records. In the second part a solid answer is given to the several objections and difficulties proposed by the author, with a view to shew that religion cannot be a rational thing. The third part contains a distinct explication of those texts of Scripture which he had perverted and misapplied. And there is scarce any one text cited or referred to in his whole book which is not here particularly considered.

Not long after this there was another valuable answer published, intitled, *The Christian's Faith a rational Assent*, in answer to a pamphlet, intitled, *Christianity not founded on Argument*, by *Thomas Randolph*, D. D. London, 1744. It was published in two parts, and divided into six chapters. In the first, the question in dispute is clearly stated, which is reduced to this, whether the Christian faith be founded on argument, and is ordinarily attain-

LETTER <sup>X.</sup> able in a rational way, or is to be acquired only by a *particular revelation imparted supernaturally to every individual?* And he undertakes in opposition to the author of that pamphlet to shew, that the Christian's faith ought to be founded upon the conviction of the understanding, and that it is a rational assent, by which he means that just and satisfactory reasons may be given for the hope and faith we profess. He considers the nature of assent, and shews that we are not wholly passive in believing or disobeying, but have a great compass of liberty in the use of those faculties on which assent depends, and that therefore faith may be a virtue, and argue a good disposition of mind, and unbelief vicious and criminal. In his second chapter, he fairly examines and clearly confutes the author's arguments drawn from the nature of reason and religion: And, in the third, the arguments from Scripture, by which he pretends to prove, that we are not to use our understandings in matters of religion. In his fourth chapter, he inquires into the author's own scheme, and the principle of gospel evidence, which he has thought fit to assign, which he wholly resolveth into an immediate, infallible, supernatural revelation, darted with an irresistible light into the mind of every particular person. The absurdity of this Dr. *Randolph* exposes, and answers the pretended proofs brought from Scripture in support of it. The fifth chapter, contains

contains a good account of the proofs of the Christian religion, with a particular consideration of the objections of this writer against miracles, and traditional testimony. Lastly, he takes notice of the reflections thrown out by the author of that pamphlet against the *Church of England* in particular.

You will probably expect that I should take some notice of another answer, which appeared about the same time, and which also met with a favourable reception from the public, *viz.* *Remarks on a late pamphlet, intitled, Christianity not founded on Argument.* These remarks, which were drawn up by me at your own desire, were contained in two letters that were published separately, *London, 1744.* The design of this answer, which was much shorter than either of the former, was not to enter upon a distinct and particular account of the evidences which are usually produced in proof of the Christian religion, which the author of these letters had considered largely on some former occasions; but to represent in a clear and concise manner the absurdity and ill tendency, as well as manifold inconsistencies of this writer's scheme; to give a plain confutation of the principal arguments from Scripture and reason, by which he has pretended to support it, and to detect and expose his fallacies and misrepresentations.

But

LETTER  
X. } But it is time to take leave of this writer,  
whom I have taken the more particular notice of, because some of his objections are managed with great art, and have a specious appearance.



LETTER



L E T T E R X I.

*The resurrection of Christ an article that lies at the foundation of the Christian faith. Attacked with great confidence in a pamphlet, intituled, The Resurrection of Jesus considered. What this writer offers to prove, that Christ did not foretell his own resurrection, and that the story of the chief priests setting a watch at the sepulchre is a forgery and fiction, examined and confuted. Observations on the extraordinary way he takes to fix contradictions upon the evangelists. The rules by which he would judge of their accounts would not be endured, if applied to any other writings. He insists on farther evidence of Christ's resurrection, and yet plainly intimates that no evidence that could be given would satisfy him. Extravagant demands of the deistical writers on this head considered. The evidence that was actually given the properest that could be given. The seeming variations among the evangelists, if rightly considered, furnish a proof of the truth and genuineness of the gospel records. An account of the answers published to this author, especially of Mr. West's Observations on the History and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sir George Littleton's Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, commended.*

S I R,

S I R,

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**T**HE resurrection of Christ is an article of vast importance, which lieth at the foundation of Christianity. If this faileth, the Christian religion cannot be maintained, or may be proved to be false. *If Christ be not risen, (saith St. Paul) then is our preaching vain, your faith is also vain, 1 Cor. xv. 14.* On the other hand, if this holdeth good, the divine mission and authority of the blessed Founder of our holy religion is established. This is what he himself appealed to as the great and ultimate proof, which was to convince mankind that he was what he professed himself to be, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. If he had been an artful impostor, it can scarce be supposed that he would have appealed to such a proof as this, which would have been the most effectual way he could have taken to detect and expose the vanity of his own pretences, and overturn the whole scheme of his religion. Or, if he had been an Enthusiast, and was imposed upon by the warmth of his own imagination, to believe that God would indeed raise him from the dead, the event would have effectually shewn the folly and madness of his expectations. And therefore since he put the proof of his divine mission upon a thing of so extraordinary a nature, which manifestly exceeded all human power, and was actually enabled to accomplish it, this shews, both that he



he certainly knew that he was sent of God, and that he really was so. And indeed it cannot be conceived how a more illustrious attestation could possibly have been given to him from heaven, than his resurrection from the dead in accomplishment of his own prediction, and what followed upon it, his ascension into heaven, and the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost upon his disciples, as he himself had promised. This the enemies of our holy religion are sensible of, and therefore though they have sometimes affected to argue, that, supposing Christ to have really risen from the dead, this would not be a valid proof of the truth of the Christian revelation\*, yet they have in all ages bent their utmost efforts against it. Celsus employed all his wit and malice to ridicule it; to have others done since. Of late Mr. Woolston had distinguished himself this way; no part of his discourses on the miracles of our Saviour was so much laboured, as that wherein he endeavoured to shew that the account given by the evangelists of Christ's resurrection is a false and incredible story. But the weakness of his objections was clearly shewn in the answers that were made to him; among which *the Trial of the Witnesses*, &c. was especially remarkable both for the strength of the reasoning, and the ingenious and polite

\* See a letter said to be written by Mr. Collins to the author of the "Discourse on the Grounds, &c." in answer to Mr. Green's letters, published in 1726.

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 XI. *Woolston* himself never attempted to vindicate that part of his *Discourses* against the answers that had been given to it. But after several years had past, a bold adventurer appears in a pamphlet, intitled, *The Resurrection of Jesus considered, in answer to the Trial of the Witnesses*, by a Moral Philosopher, London, 1744; so this gentleman thinks proper to stile himself, as Dr. *Morgan* had done before him, and like that writer he appears to be of great vivacity, and no small degree of confidence, and to have a high opinion of his own abilities and performances; and like him seems resolved to put all the arts of controversy in practice, by which he thinks he might carry his point, without being very solicitous whether they are properly reconcilable to truth or candour. He has with great diligence raked together, all that a lively imagination, animated with the most determined malice, could invent or suggest for misrepresenting and exposing the Gospel-history. Nor does he, as some others had done, any where pretend a regard for the religion of Jesus, but all along openly declares against it; in which he is so far to be commended, if he had but acted the part of a fair, as he doth of a professed, adversary.

The principal things observable in this treatise, with relation to the declared design of it, the overthrowing the accounts that are given us of the resurrection of Jesus, may be reduced

to these three heads: 1. He undertakes to prove, that Christ did not foretell his death and resurrection at all, neither to the Jewish priests and pharisees, nor to his own disciples: And that all that the evangelists say on this head is mere fiction and forgery. 2. That the whole story of the Jewish priests and rulers setting a watch at the sepulchre, and sealing the stone, is also false, and a most absurd and incredible fiction. 3. That the accounts given by the evangelists of Christ's resurrection are in every part inconsistent, and self-contradictory, and carry plain marks of fraud and imposture. I shall make some observations on each of these, and that I may not return to this subject again, shall take notice, as I go along, of some things advanced by Mr. *Chubb*, in his posthumous works, to enforce the objections of this writer.

It is of great importance to our author's cause to prove, if he was able to do it, that Jesus did not foretell his own death and resurrection. For if he did foretell it, and it was known that he did so, this makes the precautions taken by the chief priests to prevent an imposition in this matter absolutely necessary; and the whole story is perfectly consistent. Besides that, as hath been already hinted, his foretelling a thing of such a nature, which if he had been an impostor, he must have known it would be absolutely out of his power to accomplish, and which yet was actually fulfilled, affords the most convincing proof, that he was really that  
extraor-

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extraordinary and divine Person he professed himself to be. Our author saw this, and therefore has made an attempt to shew, that Jesus did not foretell his death and resurrection, neither to the *Jewish* priests and pharisees, nor to his own disciples. With regard to the former, it appeareth from the testimony of the evangelists, *St. Matthew* and *Luke*, that when the scribes and pharisees desired Jesus to shew them a *sign from heaven*, he told them, that *no sign shall be given them, but the sign of the Prophet Jonas*. And *St. Matthew* farther informs us, that he then openly declared to them, that *as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*, *Matth. xii. 38, 39, 40.* Which plainly supposed, that, in that space of time, he should, after lying in the earth or grave, rise out of it, as *Jonas* came alive out of the belly of the fish. From this prediction therefore, which was uttered more than once in the hearing of the scribes and pharisees, they might gather that he intended to signify that he should rise again from the dead. What this writer hath offered against this is very trifling. Because *St. Luke*, in mentioning what our Saviour said concerning the sign of the prophet *Jonas*, doth not expressly take notice of his declaring that the Son of man should lie three days and nights in the heart of the earth, he pretends that this is a proof that *St. Matthew* forged it.

Whereas

Whereas all that it proves is, that St. *Matthew* hath given a fuller relation of what our Saviour said on that occasion, than St. *Luke* hath done; though what the latter relateth concerning Christ's mentioning the sign of the prophet *Jonas*, plainly implieth it. He also repeats what Mr. *Woolston* had urged, that Christ did not lie three days and nights in the grave; of which I took some notice before in my remarks on Mr. *Woolston's* discourses\*. He farther hints at what Mr. *Chubb*, who wrote after our author, and endeavours to reinforce his objections, has enlarged upon for several pages together †, that Jesus could not have made such a declaration as this, *viz.* that *no sign should be given to that wicked and adulterous generation, but the sign of the prophet Jonas*; both because their being a wicked generation was rather a reason for giving them a sign, since in that case they needed it most, and the design of his coming was to call sinners to repentance; and because in fact Christ did work signs and wonders among them after this. But to take off the force of this, it is sufficient to observe, that by comparing *Matt.* xvi. 1. *Luke* xi. 16. *Mark* viii. 11. it appeareth that the sign they demanded was a *sign from heaven*, by which they probably meant some glorious appearance in the heavens. They had a little before attributed

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\* See above, p. 137. † Chubb's posthum. works, vol. 1. p. 242—347.

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his miracles to Beelzebub. And now they insisted, that he should give them a particular kind of sign, and it was perfectly consistent with his character to refuse to humour them in this demand, which he well knew proceeded from a cavilling temper, and not from minds honestly willing to submit to evidence. But though he refused to give them at that time precisely such a sign as they demanded, he yet both continued to work miracles among them, and referred them to his resurrection, which, taking in the circumstances that attended it, and followed upon it, was, in the fullest and properest sense, *a sign from heaven*, and was sufficient to convince them, if they were disposed to receive conviction. To this it may be added, what St. *John* informs us of, that in a discourse addressed to a great number of the *Jews*, among whom were several of his malicious enemies, he plainly spoke of his *laying down his life*, and *taking it again*, and declared that *this commandment* he had *received of his Father*, John x. 17, 18, 19, 20.

As to his own disciples, under which character, others besides the twelve apostles are often comprehended, the author himself acknowledgeth, that the evangelists represent him as having declared to them in plain and express terms, on five different occasions, that he should suffer and die, and rise again on the third day. But because they tell us, that the disciples *did*

not understand this saying, and that it was hid from them, and that they questioned among themselves, what this rising from the dead should mean, he would have the whole pass for forgery and fiction. He thinks it incredible, that twelve men could hear such plain expressions, so clearly foretelling his dying and rising again, and yet not be able to understand them. But this is easily accounted for, considering that the disciples were at that time under the power of those prejudices, which then generally prevailed among the Jews, relating to the Messiah. They could not conceive how the Messiah, who according to their notions of things was to abide for ever, and not die at all\*, could be subject to sufferings and death; nor consequently how he should rise again from the dead. When therefore they heard Jesus, whom they looked upon to be the Messiah, talk of his dying and rising again on the third day, they thought it must be understood in some mystical or figurative sense, and that some meaning which they did not at present comprehend, lay hid under those expressions, however plain they might appear: So that this only shews the dulness of their apprehensions, and the force of their prejudices, and at the same time the impartiality of the evangelical historians, who have recorded it. But though the disciples could not conceive how

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\* See John xii. 34.

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This leads me to take some notice of the 2d main thing this writer insisteth upon, which is, that the story *St. Matthew* tells of the Chief-priests setting a watch at the sepulchre, and sealing the stone, is a false and absurd fiction. *Mr. Woolston* had allowed the truth of the story, and built one of his principal arguments against the resurrection of *Jesus* upon the circumstance of sealing the stone. And this argument was mightily cried up for a while. But our author had the sagacity to discern, that if this was admitted, it would afford a strong presumption of the truth and reality of *Christ's* resurrection; and therefore



fore thinks it more for the interest of his cause to deny it. The chief thing he urgeth against the story, proceeds upon the supposition that Jesus did not foretell his resurrection at all, nor had the *Jewish* priests and Pharisees heard that he had foretold it; and therefore it is absurd to think they would give themselves any concern about it. But the falshood of this supposition hath been already shewn, nor is there any thing in the whole story, as related by St. *Matthew*, that is not perfectly consistent, and highly probable. It is very natural to suppose, considering their characters and dispositions, and the circumstances of the case, that they would take the fittest precautions, that the disciples of Jesus might not have it in their power to pretend he was risen from the dead, as it was reported he had foretold. And there could not be a more probable method fixed upon for this purpose, than the setting a watch to guard the sepulchre, and sealing the stone that was rolled to the mouth of it. And though we should allow them to have known, as this writer affirms they did, that *Nicodemus* and *Joseph of Arimathea*, had wound up the body in linnen and spices, which shewed they did not expect his resurrection, yet they knew he had other disciples; and besides might suspect, that all this preparation for embalming the body, was only the better to cover their design of taking it away. What he farther urgeth concerning

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LETTER <sup>XI.</sup> concerning their believing him to have been, what they called him to *Pilate*, a deceiver, instead of being an argument, as he would have it to be, against their using this precaution, would furnish a strong reason for it. Since in that case they might be apt to suspect that his disciples would act the part of deceivers too, and endeavour to carry on the imposture, which therefore they were resolved to prevent. And they might think this one of the most effectual methods they could take to convince the people, many of whom they knew had a high veneration for Jesus, that he was a false prophet, by shewing the falshood of his prediction, concerning his rising again the third day, which would justify their own conduct in putting him to death.

x This author thinks it incredible, that the *Jews* should bribe the soldiers to be silent, when they themselves must upon their report have been convinced of the truth of the fact. But their conduct on this occasion was no other than might be expected from persons of their character. Whosoever considers their determined malice and envy against Jesus, who had unmasked their hypocrisy, and opposed their traditions, how deeply their reputation was engaged, and their authority with the people, as well as that of the *Sanhedrim* who claimed to themselves a power of trying prophets, and had condemned him as a false prophet, and blasphemous,

phemer, must be sensible how unwilling they would be to have it thought, that they had wrongfully procured a most excellent person to be crucified, and that they would take all possible methods by stifling the evidence to throw off the odium from themselves. To which may be added the power of their prejudices, which would not suffer them to imagine, that a person who had been crucified could possibly be their Messiah, which was absolutely subversive of all their maxims. They who, when they could not deny his miracles, ascribed them to a diabolical power, shewed what they were capable of. And indeed the force of obstinate prejudice, hatred, envy, pride, and a desire of maintaining their own authority, all which concurred in this case, is amazing, and hath often caused persons to stand it out against the clearest evidence.

The last thing he hath to offer is, that *St. Matthew* is the only Evangelist who relateth the story of sealing the stone, and placing the watch: but this is of small moment, *St. Matthew's* relation of it is sufficient. He wrote his gospel, by the consent of all antiquity, the first of the evangelists, and according to *Eusebius*, whose account is generally followed, in eight years after our Lord's ascension, and designed it especially for the use of the *Jewish* converts. And his relating this story in a gospel published among the *Jews*, and so early in

LETTER <sup>XI.</sup> that very age when the story must have been fresh in remembrance, and when, if false, it might have been easily contradicted, shews that it was a thing well known, and that he was fully assured of the truth of it, and in no fear of being detected in a falsehood. And what farther confirmeth this, is his referring to a report as current among the *Jews* at the time when he wrote, concerning the disciples having stolen the body, whilst the soldiers that were set to watch the sepulchre slept. The story indeed was not very consistent, but yet, as the case was circumstanced, it was the best thing they had to say. The body was gone out of the sepulchre; either therefore it must be acknowledged that he rose again from the dead, or that his disciples had taken it away; and this, if done at all, must have been done either with the connivance of the guards that were set to watch it, or when they were asleep: The guards if charg'd with having connived at it, and with having been bribed by the disciples, would have been obliged to justify themselves against that charge, and would have told the fact as it really happened. There was nothing therefore left but to pretend that it was done whilst they were asleep. And yet the rulers never pretended to convict the disciples of having stolen the body, nor instituted any process against them on that account; but contented themselves with threatening to punish them if they preach-  
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ed the resurrection of Jesus, which yet they boldly avowed to their faces. As to the author's insinuation, how came St. *Matthew* to know of the angel's appearing to the soldiers with such circumstances of terror, if they were hired to conceal it: This is easily accounted for. It is only said that *some of the watch* went and told the chief priests, *Matt.* xxviii. 11. It may therefore be reasonably supposed that others of them might, immediately after the thing happened, tell it to some other persons. Yea, it might probably happen that some of those who were then hired and bribed might discover it afterwards, when all was over; or that some of the priests, many of whom were afterwards converted to the Christian faith, as we learn from *Acts* vi. 7. might have known and divulged it.

Thus it appeareth that this writer's principal objections against this story, and which he insisteth upon as manifest proofs of the absolute falshood and forgery of the gospel-history, are of no force. And yet he taketh upon him to pronounce, that *it is in all views absurd to suppose, that the Priests and Pharisees should guard against a resurrection, fraudulent or real.*

He next proceeds to inquire how the witnesses agree in their evidence, and endeavoureth to prove that the accounts the evangelists give of the resurrection of Jesus are  
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LETTER in every part inconsistent and self-contradictory, and carry plain marks of fraud and imposture. And here I shall not enter into a distinct examination of the several more minute particulars he insiteth upon, which are all considered and discussed in the answers that were made to him, but shall content myself with some general observations upon his management of the subject. And first I would observe, that he has thought fit to consider the accounts of the three evangelists *Mathew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, separately from *St. John*; whereas they ought all to be taken together, since they all relate to the same fact of Christ's resurrection. He positively asserteth, that the three evangelists mention in general but three appearances of Jesus; whereas there are plainly seven appearances of Jesus after his resurrection referred to by them, besides two others peculiarly mentioned by *St. John*: 1. His appearing to Mary Magdalen alone, *Mark* xvi. 9. *John* xx. 14, 15, 16, 17. 2. His appearing to the women, *Matth.* xxviii. 9. 3. His appearing to the two disciples going to Emmaus, *Mark* xvi. 12. *Luke* xxiv. 13—32. 4. His appearing to Simon Peter, *Luke* xxiv. 34. *I Cor.* xv. 5. 5. His appearing to the eleven as they sat at meat on the evening of the day on which he rose, *Luke* xxiv. 36—43. *John* xx. 19—23. 6. His appearing to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, *Matth.* xxviii. 16, 17. 7. His appearing to his disciples

principles on the day of his ascension, *Mark* xvi. 19, 20, *Luke* xxiv. 50, 51, 52. *Acts* i. 6—11. LETTER  
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Besides these, there are two other appearances of Jesus recorded by St. *John*, which are not taken notice of by the other evangelists. One is that to the eleven, when St. *Thomas* was with them eight days after the first, *John* xx. 26—29. The other is that at the sea of Tiberias, to seven of the disciples, *John* xxi. 1—14. Here are nine distinct appearances pointed out by the evangelists, which were at different times, and are plainly marked out by distinct characters. But this author, in order to have a pretence for charging those writers with contradictions, thinks fit to confound these different appearances. And the different circumstances and variations, which shew that they belong to different appearances, are represented by him as so many inconsistencies in the relation of the same appearance. But by this way of management, instead of proving contradictions upon the evangelists, he only proves his own unfairness, and absurdity. Thus, *e. g.* St. *Luke* relates an appearance of Jesus to his disciples at *Jerusalem*, on the very evening of the resurrection day. St. *Matthew* tells of an appearance of his to his disciples at a mountain in *Galilee*, which must have been some time after. The time and place of these appearances are manifestly different; which should lead every person of candour to regard them as different

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 XI. } different appearances. But our author is pleased to suppose them to relate to the same appearance, and then chargeth these different circumstances as to time and place, as so many contradictions and inconsistencies. This must be owned to be a very extraordinary way of proceeding, and at this rate it will be easy to expose the most authentic history that ever was written.

There is another rule frequently made use of by this writer, and upon which his charge of contradictions against the evangelists principally dependeth; and that is, that if any one of them takes notice of any circumstance or event not mentioned by the rest, this is to pass for a proof of fiction and forgery. According to this new rule of criticism, where several historians give an account of the same facts, if some of them relate those facts with more, and some with fewer circumstances, this shall be sufficient absolutely to destroy the credit of the whole; and they that omit a circumstance, or say nothing at all about it, must be looked upon as contradicting those that mention it. Upon this principle, *St. Mark* and *St. Luke*, are made to contradict one another, because the latter mentions *Bethany* or mount *Olivet*, as the place from whence Jesus ascended, and the former in mentioning Christ's ascension takes no notice of the place from whence he ascended. In like manner it is pretended, that *St. Matthew* and *St. John*, in



contradiction to the two other evangelists, LETTER XI say, that Jesus never ascended at all, because they give no distinct account of his ascension, though they evidently suppose it, and there are more references to it in St. *John's* gospel, than in any one of the evangelists. See *John* vi. 62. vii. 39. xiv. 2, 28. xvi. 7, 16, 28. xvii. 5, 11. xx. 17. So because the last mentioned evangelist is the only one of them that mentions the piercing the side of Jesus with a spear, of which he himself was an eye-witness, and gives an account of some appearances of Jesus to his disciples not mentioned by the other evangelists, this shews, according to our author, that he forged those accounts, and that *his evidence destroys theirs, or they his*; though one design of his writing his gospel was to take notice of things which they had omitted; nor do any of them give the least hint that they proposed distinctly to recount all Christ's appearances.

In order to fix the charge of contradictions and inconsistencies upon the evangelists, he pretendeth, that according to St. *Luke*, our Lord ascended the very evening of the day of his resurrection. The only proof he bringeth for so strange an assertion is, that St. *Luke* immediately after having given an account of our Lord's appearing to the eleven disciples, and others with them, *Luke* xxiv. 36. and which, by comparing ver. 29 and 33, was pretty late in the evening of the day on which he rose, tells

LETTER XI. tells us that he led them out as far as *Bethany*, where he was parted from them and carried up into heaven, ver. 50, 51. And this he might justly say, though there was an interval of several days between the one and the other; and it is manifest from other accounts there was, and particularly from what *St. Luke* himself saith in the beginning of the *Acts of the Apostles*. It is plain that he intends here only to give a very summary narration; and therefore after having taken notice of his first appearance to the eleven, the account of which ends at ver. 43. he passeth over the other appearances without a distinct mention; only giving the substance of what *Jesus* said on some of those occasions, and which he introduces thus, εἶπε δὲ αὐτοῖς, which may be thus understood, *he said besides or moreover unto them*. And then he proceeds to give a short account of *Christ's* ascension, and of what followed upon it, which he more distinctly relateth in the book of the *Acts*.

*St. Luke* observes, that the women when they went to the sepulchre, found not the body of *Jesus*, *Luke* xxiv. 3. This our candid author represents as if he had said, that they never saw *Jesus* at all after his resurrection, dead or alive; and then would have this, which is a manifest perversion of *St. Luke's* meaning, pass for a contradiction to the other evangelists who tell that *Jesus* was

was seen of the women after he rose again from the dead. To prove that the other evangelists contradict St. *John*, he represents St. *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*, as expressly declaring that Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples *but once* after his resurrection; and yet certain it is, that not one of them says any such thing. Nor do the evangelists any where say, as he affirms they do, that Jesus appeared *but to a very few* after he rose from the dead, which he thinks contradicts the story of the hundred and twenty, and five hundred, mentioned by the author of the *Acts* and St. *Paul*. He might as well have pretended, as Mr. *Chubb* did afterwards, though without offering the least proof to support it, that the word *hundred* in that passage, *Acts* i. 15. is an interpolation, and that instead of *an hundred and twenty*, it should be read *twenty*\*. Such wretched shifts only discover a fixed resolution not to believe any accounts that should be given.

Our author endeavours to take great advantage, in which he is followed by the last mentioned writer, of what is told us concerning Christ's appearing to the two disciples going to *Emmaus*. Because they did not for some time know Jesus, it is argued that he had not a true body, and that they could not be afterwards sure that it was he: since if their senses were deceived at first, they might be so afterwards too; and the like may be supposed,

\* Chubb's posthum. works. vol. 1. p. 378.

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as to all Christ's other appearances to his disciples. That the two disciples did not at first know Jesus, is plain from the story. And this may be accounted for in a natural way, if we suppose that besides some change which there might be in his countenance, occasioned by his sufferings and death, he might on purpose alter the tone of his voice, or have something in his garb, his air and manner different, from what had been usual with him before, or in some other way disguise himself, which seems to be signified when St. *Mark* referring to this, saith, he *appeared in another form*, Mark xvi, 12. And this might hinder them from knowing him, considering how little at that time they expected to see him. Or, if we should suppose that he employed a miraculous power to prevent their at first knowing him, which was done for a valuable end, that he might have the better opportunity of instructing them in a familiar way in the true meaning of the scriptures relating to the Messiah, his sufferings and glory, and thereby the better prepare them for the discovery he intended afterwards to make of himself; it by no means follows, that, because they were withheld from knowing him for a while, therefore when he fully discovered himself to them, they could not be certain that it was he. It is plain, that they had afterwards such convincing proof that it was Jesus, as left no room for doubt in their minds. And that very evening he

shewed himself again to them, and to the eleven apostles, and others with them, and the more effectually to convince them, shewed them his hands and his feet, and eat and drank before them, and by the proofs which were given them, both on that and other occasions, they had as full evidence of the reality of his risen body, as they could have of any thing that came to them confirmed by the testimony of all their senses. And to suppose an extraordinary miraculous power employed all along to deceive them and overrule all their senses, would be to suppose as great a power employed to make them believe a falshood, *i. e.* to make them believe that Jesus was risen, when he was not so, as would have sufficed for the truth of the reirrection; since it would have been as easy for the divine power to have raised his body really from the dead, as to give all those proofs and evidences that were given of a true body without the reality. As to his appearing among them when the *doors were shut*, which is also urged against the truth of his risen body, all that can be fairly concluded from it is, that when the doors were shut, which the evangelist tells us, was for fear of the *Jews*, Jesus came suddenly among them, opening the doors at once by his miraculous power; not that his body pass'd through the doors by a penetration of dimensions, which is the construction the author puts upon it. For

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this would have entirely destroy'd our Lord's own argument, which he used at that very time to convince them that he had a real body. *Behold (saith he) my hands, and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.* See *Luke xxiv. 36, 39.* compared with *John xx. 19, 20.*

It is observable that this writer, in his great eagerness to expose the evangelical accounts, seems not to consider that some of the arguments he hath produced, may be turned against him, and prove the contrary to what he produceth them for. He frequently lays a mighty stress on those passages which relate to the disciples not having understood our Saviour, when he foretold his resurrection before his death, and to their doubting of his resurrection after it. And yet it is this very thing that gives the greatest force to their testimony. If they had been prepossessed beforehand with a strong belief that he would rise again, or if they had immediately believed that he was risen from the dead upon the first message that was brought to them, it would undoubtedly have been ascribed to the warmth of their imagination, and to a too forward credulity; but as the case is circumstanced, there is no room for this pretence. It is plain that nothing but the irresistible evidence of their senses brought them to believe at all, and their believing it so firmly

at last, so as to be ready to seal their testimony to it with their blood, shews, that they were constrained to believe by an evidence which they could not withstand, and which absolutely removed their doubts, and overcame all their prejudices.

The account given by the evangelists of Christ's resurrection is farther confirmed by the testimony of *St. Paul*, who mentions his having been seen by *Peter*, by *James*, and by the twelve apostles; concerning which he had many opportunities of informing himself from the persons themselves. He also maketh mention of his having been seen of above five hundred brethren at once, and expressly affirms, as a thing he was well assured of, that the greater part of them were alive at the time when he wrote this; and it is not to be doubted, that he had seen and known many of them, to whose living testimonies he could then appeal. These things he refers the *Corinthians* to in his epistle, as things known to be certainly true, and which could not be contested, and concerning which he himself had spoken to them more at large when he was with them, *1 Cor. xv. 1, 2, 3, &c.* And in a dispute which he there maintaineth against some who denied the future resurrection of the dead, he principally argueth from the resurrection of Christ as a fact so fully proved, that they could not deny it: Yet our author is pleased to reject all

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LETTER<sup>XI.</sup> this at once, because *St. Paul writes by hear-*  
*say, i. e.* because he was not himself present at  
those appearances, though he had the account  
from those that were so. And so fond is he of  
this thought, that he repeats it, as his man-  
ner is, in three or four different parts of his  
book. According to this rule, an historian is  
not to be credited in any fact of which he  
himself was not an eye-witness, though he  
might have undoubted assurance of it, a maxim  
which would destroy the credit of the best  
historians now in the world. But one should  
think this writer would at least allow, that  
*St. Paul* ought to be credited, when after  
mentioning Christ's having appeared to others,  
he affirms, that he himself had seen Jesus,  
*1 Cor.* xv. 8. ix. 1. But it seems this also  
is to be rejected, under pretence that he on-  
ly saw him in a vision; though it was at noon  
day, as he was travelling with several others  
in his company, and which was attended with  
such remarkable circumstances, and produced  
such real effects, that if he could not be sure  
of this, no man can be certain of any thing  
that he hears or sees. *Mr. Chubb* indeed,  
who faithfully treads in our author's steps,  
takes upon him to affirm, that *St. Paul's* tes-  
timony weakens, instead of strengthening the  
evidence of Christ's resurrection. For which  
he gives this reason, that though *St. Paul*  
had known Jesus before his resurrection, which  
it doth not appear he did, yet as that glo-  
rified



rified body must have been different from what it had appeared to be whilst he was on earth, he could not be a proper judge of the identity of that body with that body which had been crucified\*. But it is to be considered, that what St. *Paul* was to be convinced of, and of which he himself was afterwards to be a witness, was that Jesus was raised again, and invested with a divine dominion and glory. And of this the appearing of Jesus to him in the manner he did, as he was going to *Damascus*, and assuring him by a voice from heaven, that it was Jesus whom he had persecuted who then spoke to him, attended with such amazing displays of a divine glory and splendor, together with the remarkable consequences which then followed upon it, especially the extraordinary miraculous gifts and powers with which he himself was endued, and which he was enabled to confer upon others in the name of a risen Jesus, exhibited the most illustrious and convincing proof and evidence that could possibly be desired, and which absolutely overcame all the strong and obstinate prejudices with which his mind was at that very time possessed. So that all things considered, there never was a testimony which deserved greater regard than that of St. *Paul*, and accordingly it has justly had the greatest weight in all ages.

\* Chubb's posthum. works. vol. 1.

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I pass by other instances that might be mentioned of our author's great unfairness and disingenuity, particularly his gross perversions of several passages of Scripture, and putting a meaning upon them contrary to the plain intention of the writers, with many other things which are fully detected and exposed by his learned answerers. But what is wanting in reasoning is made up in confidence. He boldly pronounceth, that "the witnesses do not all agree in one circumstance, but palpably contradict one another in every particular; and that such inconsistencies, improbabilities, absurdities and contradictions, would destroy the credit of other histories;" but he sneeringly adds, "that the faith of this is founded on a rock" \*. And I believe it will hardly be thought too severe a censure to say that any man who would treat any other historians as this writer hath treated the evangelists, and who would advance such rules of judging concerning any other books whatsoever, as he seems to think fair with regard to theirs, would, instead of passing for a candid and judicious critic, be generally exploded as a malicious and impertinent caviller, that had betray'd a great defect of sense, manners, or honesty.

In my remarks on Mr. *Woolston's* discourses in the seventh letter, notice was taken of that grand objection, that our Lord ought to have appeared publicly to the chief priests and ru-

\* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 56, 57, 58.

lers of the *Jews* after his resurrection. I shall not repeat what is there offered in answer to it; but shall only observe, that our author has endeavoured to strengthen that objection by pretending that Jesus had actually engaged to do so: And that “not to appear to the *Jews*” when he had promised it, and put the truth of his mission upon it, was a denying the truth of his mission, and a falsifying his word\*. Thus he represents it, as if the evangelists had said, that Christ promised to appear publicly to the *Jews*, and particularly to their chief priests and rulers after his resurrection. But this is intirely his own fiction, our Lord made no such promise. He declared indeed, that a sign like that of the prophet *Jonas* should be given to *that evil and adulterous generation*, i. e. that sufficient evidence should be given to convince them of the truth of his resurrection. And such evidence there was given, if their minds had been open to conviction: And vast numbers of the *Jews* were actually convinced by it. But this writer carrieth it still farther, he thinks Jesus should have shewn himself to the *Jews* as their deliverer from the *Roman* yoke, and as their temporal king, that he might prove that he was the Messiah, and fulfill the prophecies.

A reflection occurs to me on this occasion, which you will allow me to mention, it relates to the several demands that have been

\* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 59, 61.

LETTER made by these gentlemen with regard to the  
 XI. evidence, which they pretend ought to have  
 been given to the *Jews* of our Saviour's resurrection. The author of *Christianity not founded on argument*, thinks, that Jesus ought to have taken one turn in the market-place in the presence of all the people, and that "this  
 " might have spared both the painful labours  
 " and lives of so many holy vouchers"\*. Mr. *Chubb* insists upon it, that when Christ was risen "he should have repaired to the house of  
 " some friend, and made it the place of his  
 " residence the time he staid upon earth, that  
 " so the rest of his friends, and all others  
 " might know where to see him, and have access to him" †. And if he had done so, and been publickly visited, and the people had gathered together in crowds, as might in that case have been expected, this must have awakened the jealousy both of the *Jewish* chief priests and rulers, and of the *Roman* government, and might, in the temper the *Jews* were then in, have probably produced tumults and insurrections, which would have brought a great slur upon Christianity at its first appearance. And so undoubtedly these gentlemen would have had it: for according to our author, if Jesus had appeared publickly to the *Jews* after his resurrection, this would not have been sufficient if he did not also head their armies. And then to be sure

\* *Christ. not founded on Argument.* p. 68.  
 posthumous works, Vol. 1

† *Chubb's*

this would have been insisted upon as a manifest proof, that the whole scheme of his religion was false, and a mere piece of carnal policy.

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I cannot help thinking upon the whole, that after all the clamour that hath been raised against it, the evidence which was actually given of our Lord's resurrection was the properest that could be given. His making a public personal appearance to the people of the *Jews*, would have been on many accounts improper, and might probably have had bad consequences. But, besides the evidence arising from the testimony of the soldiers, who had been set to watch the sepulchre, which was well known to the chief priests, and, notwithstanding all their precautions, had come to the knowledge of others too, besides this, his appearing in the manner he did to a considerable number of persons who had been intimately acquainted with him, to whom he frequently shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs during the course of forty days; his ascending afterwards into heaven in their sight, and the effusion of the Holy Ghost in his extraordinary miraculous gifts and powers, as he himself had promised, upon his disciples the authorised witnesses of his resurrection, which was done in the most public manner possible, before many thousands of persons of all nations which were then assembled at *Jerusalem*; all this, with the following

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following divine attestations that were given them to confirm their testimony wherever they went preaching the gospel for many years together, to which testimony they unalterably adhered, in opposition to the greatest sufferings and prosecutions to which it exposed them; all this taken together furnished the most proper and convincing evidence, not only of Christ's resurrection but of his exaltation to glory. And accordingly we find in fact, that his resurrection was accompanied with such proof and evidence, as convinced many *Myriads*, for so it should be rendered, of the *Jewish* nation, and among them *great numbers of the priests*, *Acts* vi. 7. xxi. 20. and brought them over, contrary to all their prejudices, to acknowledge one that had been crucified by the heads of their own nation for their Messiah, their Saviour, and their Lord: and afterwards convinced vast numbers of the *Gentiles*, and gained them over to a religion the most opposite that could be imagined, not only to their prejudices and superstitions, but to their vices, and which exposed its professors to the most grievous reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings.

But to return to our author. Whosoever carefully considers and compares what he hath offered, may easily perceive, that whatever pretences he may make of demanding other and farther evidence of Christ's resurrection than was given, no evidence that could have been given

given of it would have satisfied him. If Jesus had shewn himself alive, not only to the *Jewish* rulers, but to every single person in the *Jewish* nation, he would have been as far from believing it as he is now. For he intimates, that it would be necessary that Christ should appear again in every age, and every country, and to every particular person; and that all the miracles should be wrought over again\*: And even this, upon his principles, would not be sufficient. For he lets us know more than once, that in these cases we are not to trust our own eyesight. He roundly asserteth, that “every miracle is an absurdity to common sense and understanding, and contrary to all the attributes of God” †. And that “pre- tended facts which are contrary to nature can have no natural evidence; and that these facts cannot be admitted on any evidence, because they in their own nature exclude all evidence, and allow of no possible proof” ‡. This point he hath laboured for several pages together, where he strongly asserteth, for I do not find that he bringeth any thing that can be properly called a proof, that miracles are impossible. And he had better have stuck entirely to this, since if he could but have proved it, he might have saved himself the trouble of writing the rest of his book.

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\* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 62. † Ibid. p. 51, 52.  
‡ Ibid. p. 73, 74.

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There is another extraordinary passage in this writer, which deserves to have a particular notice taken of it. After having treated the account given by St. *John* of the piercing of Christ's side with a spear, and of which he himself was an eye-witness, as a fiction, for no other reason, but because the other evangelists do not mention it; he insinuates, that if his side was not thus pierced, he might not *be really dead when he was put into the sepulchre*; and then no wonder that *he rose again* \*. Thus, it comes out, that he doubteth even of the death of Jesus, which neither *Jews* nor *Heathens* ever doubted of. Was there ever a more obstinate or unreasonable incredulity? He might as well doubt, whether there ever was such a person as Jesus, or his apostles, or whether ever the Christian religion was propagated in the world at all. And indeed, if, as he affirms, the resurrection of Christ was *the most incredible story that could be told*, and the evidence that was given for it was the *worst evidence that could be given* †, he might have argued more plausibly than he hath done in most other cases, that it was impossible, as the case was circumstanced, that such a silly story should ever make its way in the world, either among *Jews* or *Gentiles*, considering the religion that was founded upon it was absolutely contrary to their most prevailing prejudices, and had no worldly advantages on its side, but

\* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 50. † Ibid: p. 67. all



all the powers of the world engaged against it: That therefore it is absurd to suppose that Christianity made any progress at all in the first ages, though there is no fact of which we have fuller evidence. And then he would only have had one step to advance farther, and which is indeed the natural consequence of this, and that is to doubt whether there is any such thing as the religion of Jesus, or any persons in the world that now profess it.

I shall conclude my remarks upon this writer, with observing, that the very variations among the evangelists, which he produceth as so many contradictions do really confirm the truth of the main facts. What he seemeth to insist upon is, that every one of them should tell all the same facts, in the same order and manner, and with the same circumstances, neither more nor less; and that no one of them should mention any thing which is not related by all the rest. And if they had done so, then no doubt this would have been improved as a plain argument, that the whole was a concerted fiction; and that to derive a credit to it, it was pretended to have been written and published by four different persons at different times, whereas these four pretended historians were really but one historian, or if they were different, they only transcribed one another. But as the case now stands with the evangelists, there is a harmony in the main facts, and in the substance of Christ's discourses:

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ses: And yet at the same time there is a considerable variety in the order and manner of their narration: Such a variety as plainly sheweth these accounts to have been written by different historians not copied from one another; and that they did not write by concert, in which case they would have been more careful to shun all appearance of contradiction. They write with an unaffected simplicity, and with a confidence of truth, as becometh those that were fully assured of what they relate. Each writeth what he knew best, or what he thought properest to take notice of, and yet notwithstanding the seeming variations in the order of their narration, and that some facts, or circumstances of facts, are taken notice of by some of them which are not mentioned by others, it will be found, if narrowly examined, that there is no contradiction between them, and that their accounts may be fairly reconciled. And it is to be hoped, that this author's attempt to expose their authority, however ill intended, will only tend to strengthen it; since though his malice and prejudice are very apparent, and though it is plain that he came to examine their accounts, not with a calm, impartial, and dispassionate temper of mind, but with a resolution, if possible, to find out absurdities and contradictions in them, yet he has not been able to make good the charge. It turns out, that they are perfectly  
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consistent, and that their seeming contradictions admit of a just reconciliation.

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I have been carried farther than I at first intended in making observations upon this pamphlet, which gives a true sample of the deistical spirit, and may be regarded as one of the boldest and openest attacks that was ever made upon that grand article of the Christian faith, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I have been the larger and more particular in my remarks upon it, both because of the importance of the subject, which concerneth the very foundation of our holy religion, and because I thought it might be of use to take this occasion to obviate some of the most plausible objections that have been urged against it. And what hath been here offered may equally serve to take off the force of that part of Mr. *Chubb's* posthumous works which relates to the same point, and which he hath very much laboured.

But though this letter may seem already to have exceeded its due bounds, it will be necessary, according to the method I have hitherto pursued, to take notice of the answers that were made to this book. Mr. *Samuel Chandler*, who had on some former occasions appeared to great advantage in the defence of Christianity, published on this occasion a valuable treatise, intituled, *The Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus re-examined, and their Testimony proved intirely consistent*, London, 1744. It is divided

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into eight chapters. In the first, it is shewn, that the sufferings and glory of Christ were foretold by the ancient prophets. In the second, that Christ plainly foretold his own sufferings and death, and resurrection, to his own disciples. In the third, that he declared his death and resurrection publicly to the *Jews*. In the fourth, it is proved, that the *Jewish* rulers and *Pharisees* procured a guard to be set on the sepulchre of Jesus; and a solid answer is returned to the author's objections against it. The fifth chapter relateth to the appearance of the angels to the soldiers; the propriety of which is vindicated against his exceptions. The sixth chapter is concerning the appearances of the angels to the women after the resurrection. The seventh treats of the several appearances of Christ to the women and to his disciples, and this author's charge of inconsistencies in the evangelic accounts is distinctly considered. In the eighth chapter, Mr. *Chandler* concludes with summing up the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, which he hath done with great clearness and judgment.

About the same time there was another answer published by a learned and ingenious but anonymous author, which is intitled, *The evidence of the Resurrection cleared, in answer to the Resurrection of Jesus considered*. He follows the author of that pamphlet closely, and shews, that he grossly misrepresents the arguments in the *Trial of the witnesses*, which he undertakes

undertakes to answer, and that he uses the evangelists still worse. The things which we have mentioned, as taken notice of by Mr. *Chandler*, are also considered by this writer, particularly it is clearly proved, that Christ foretold his death and resurrection, both to his own disciples and to the *Jews*. And the author's reasoning and exceptions against the story of setting the guard, and sealing the stone, are shewn to be vain and groundless. The accounts given by the evangelists of the appearances of the angels to the women, and of Christ to them and to the disciples, are distinctly considered, and the seeming variations, which the author pretends to be so many contradictions, are accounted for, though in a way somewhat different from Mr. *Chandler*. The solutions of these difficulties proposed by each of these learned writers, are very ingenious, and may suffice to obviate the charge of contradictions the author hath brought against the evangelists; but some of them are judged not to be quite so clear and natural, as those afterwards given by Mr. *West*. This anonymous writer concludes with a distinct examination of what the author of *the Resurrection of Jesus considered*, had offered against miracles in general. He hath clearly and judiciously exposed the weakness and fallacy of those reasonings, whereby that author pretended to prove, that miracles are impossible both in a physical and moral sense; that they are contrary to God's immutability; that

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they are perfectly needless, and answer no valuable end at all; and that if they were once necessary, they would be always necessary. Besides the two answers above mentioned, there was another then published, which I have not seen, and of which therefore I cannot give a particular account, though from the character I have heard of it, as well as from the known abilities of the author, I make no doubt of its being well executed. It is intitled, *An Address to Deists, being a Proof of revealed Religion from Miracles and Prophecies, in answer to a book intitled, The Resurrection of Jesus considered.* By John Jackson Rector of Rosington. London, 8vo, 1744.

Some time after there was another book published, which was also occasioned by *the Resurrection of Jesus considered*, and which particularly engaged the attention of the public, both by its own excellence, and because the author of it was a Lay-man. It is intitled, *Observations on the History and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, by Gilbert West, Esq; London, 1747. He very justly commends the two learned and ingenious answers above-mentioned, as containing a solid confutation of many Objections against Christianity advanced by the author of *the Resurrection of Jesus considered*; but declares himself not to have been so fully satisfied with the manner of their clearing the sacred writers from the contradictions charged upon them. This put

him upon examining the Scriptures themselves, LETTLER XI. and comparing the several accounts of the evangelists with each other, which he hath done with great exactness. And the result of his Inquiries was, that by carefully distinguishing the different appearances and events recorded by the evangelists, several of which had been hitherto confounded, he hath happily removed the difficulties and inconsistencies charged upon them, and hath taken away the very foundation of the principal objections that have been so often repeated almost from the beginning of Christianity to this day. I shall not enter upon the particulars of his scheme, which may be seen with great advantage in his book. I shall only observe, that he hath not made use of strained and arbitrary suppositions, but such as seem clearly to arise from the accounts of the evangelists, carefully considered and compared.

By comparing the several parts of the history together, he hath made it to appear, that the women came at different times to the sepulchre, and in different companies, and not all at once; as many have supposed; that there were several distinct appearances of angels, of which he reckons three, besides that to the *Roman* soldiers, *viz.* to the other *Mary* and *Salome*, to *Mary Magdalene*, to *Joanna* and others with her; that these several facts were reported to the apostles at different times, and by different persons: that there were two distinct

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This learned gentleman hath made excellent and judicious reflections upon the several incidents in the history of the resurrection, and upon the order in which they happened, and in which the several proofs of the resurrection were laid before the apostles. He shews, that the discovery of it which was made to them was wisely ordered to be gradual; and that as they were to be the chosen witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, there was a great propriety in the several steps that were taken to give them the highest conviction of it. There is a train of witnesses, a succession of miraculous events,



events, mutually strengthening and illustrating each other, equally and jointly concurring to prove one and the same fact. And whereas their doubting and unbelief, spoken of by the evangelists, seem principally to have consisted in this, that though they might believe that Christ had appeared to those who declared they had seen him, yet they did not believe that he had appeared to them with a real body, therefore, in condescension to their infirmity, he gave them the fullest evidence of the reality of his bodily appearance.

The proofs of Christ's resurrection laid before the apostles are digested by Mr. *West* under four heads. 1. The testimony of those that had seen him after he was risen. 2. The evidence of their own senses. 3. The accomplishment of the words he had spoken to them, while he was yet with them. 4. The fulfilling of the things which were written in the law of *Moses*, and in the *Prophets*, and in the *Psalms* concerning him; of which Mr. *West* hath given a judicious summary.

Upon recapitulating the several particulars which constitute the evidence of the resurrection, he concludes, that never was there any fact more fully proved than the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and that those who were appointed to be the witnesses of it had every kind of proof that in the like circumstances the most scrupulous could demand, or the most incredulous imagine.

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Having considered the proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as they were laid before the apostles, he proceeds to consider some of the arguments that may induce us at this distance of time to believe that Christ rose from the dead; and these he reduceth to two principal heads. The testimony of the chosen witnesses of the resurrection recorded in the scriptures, and the existence of the Christian religion.

With regard to the former, he sheweth that the apostles and evangelists had the two qualities necessary to establish the credit of a witness, a perfect knowledge of the facts he gives testimony to, and a fair unblemished character; and that their testimony is transmitted down in writings either penn'd by themselves, or authorized by their inspection and approbation. He offereth several considerations to shew the genuineness of those writings, and takes notice both of the internal marks of the veracity of the sacred writers, observable in the scriptures, and of the external proofs of their veracity and inspiration; especially the exact accomplishment of the prophecies recorded in those writings. He instances in those relating to the different states of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, different not only from each other, but from that in which both were at the time when those prophecies were written. He observes, that there are several particulars relating to the condition of the *Jewish* nation, which were most expressly foretold; as the destruction of the

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the city and temple of *Jerusalem*, and the signs preceding that destruction, the miseries of the *Jews* before, at, and after the famous siege of that city; the general dispersions of that people, the duration of their calamity, and their wonderful preservation under it; and finally their restoration. And since the other parts of these predictions have been exactly accomplished, there is great reason to think, the last will be so too in the proper season.

He concludes the whole with the argument drawn from the present existence of the Christian religion; and sheweth that without supposing the truth of Christ's resurrection, there is no accounting for the propagation and present existence of Christianity in so many regions of the world. To set this in a proper light, he representeth in an elegant and striking manner, the great difficulties this religion had to struggle with at its first appearance, and the inabilities of its first preachers, humanly speaking, to oppose and overcome those obstacles. They had the superstition and prejudices of the *Jews* to encounter with. And at the same time, religion, custom, law, policy, pride, interest, vice, and even philosophy united the heathen world against Christianity. It's opposers were possessed of all the wisdom, power, and authority of the world. The preachers of it were weak and contemptible, yet it triumphed over all opposition. And this, as the case was circumstanced, affordeth a manifest

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Thus have I endeavoured to give some idea of this excellent performance, and have been the more particular in my account of it, because a work of this kind, done by a layman, is apt to be more taken notice of, and received with less prejudice. And for the same reason, though it does not come so directly within my present design, I hope you will indulge me in giving some account of a short, but justly admired treatise which appeared soon after, and was also written by a learned layman, *Sir George Littleton*. It is intitled, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, in a letter to Gilbert West, Esq;* London, 1747. The great advantage of this performance is, that the evidence for Christianity is here drawn to one point of view, for the use of those who will not attend to a long series of argument. The design is to shew, that the conversion and apostleship of *St. Paul* alone considered, is of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation; this design is very happily executed. He first considereth the account *St. Paul* himself hath given of the miraculous manner of his conversion: And thence argueth, that it must of necessity be, that the person attesting these things of himself either was an impostor,

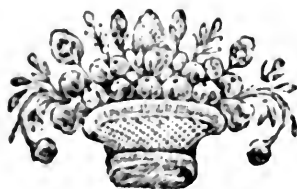
impostor, who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive; or he was an enthusiast, who by the force of an overheated imagination imposed on himself; or he was deceived by the fraud of others; or lastly, what he declared to be the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen; and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation. That he was not an impostor, he proves by shewing, with admirable clearness and strength, that he could have no rational motive to undertake such an imposture; nor could have possibly carried it on with any success by the means we know he employed. With equal evidence he sheweth that St. *Paul* was not an enthusiast, that he had not those dispositions which are essential ingredients in that character; and that he could not possibly have imposed on himself by any power of enthusiasm, either with regard to the miracle that caused his conversion, or to the consequential effects of it, or to some other circumstances which he bears testimony to, in his *Epistles*; especially the miracles wrought by him, and the extraordinary gifts conferred upon him, and upon the Christian converts to whom he wrote. To suppose all this to have been only owing to the strength of his own imagination, when there was in reality no such thing at all, is to suppose him to have been all this time quite out of his senses. And then it is absolutely impossible

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impossible to account, how such a distemper'd enthusiast and madman could make such a progress, as we know he did, in converting the *Gentile* world. He next proceeds to shew, that *St. Paul* was not deceived by the fraud of others; if the disciples of *Christ* could have conceived so strange a thought as that of turning his prosecutor into his apostle, they could not possibly have effected it in the manner in which it was effected, with the extraordinary consequences that followed upon it. It is evident then, that what he said of himself could not be imputed to the deceit of others, no more than to wilful imposture, or enthusiasm. And then it followeth, that what he relateth to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen, and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation. He concludeth with some good observations to shew, that the mysteries of the Christian religion do not furnish any just reason for rejecting the strong and convincing evidence with which it is attended. That there are several incomprehensible difficulties in deism itself; such as those relating to the origin of moral evil, the reconciling the prescience of God with the free-will of man, which *Mr. Locke* owns he could not do, though he acknowledged both, the creation of the world in time, or the eternal production of it. And yet no wise man, because of these

difficulties, would deny the being, the attributes, or the providence of God.

But it is time to conclude this long epistle; and here I intended, as you know, to have closed my account of the Deistical writers. But as you insist upon it, that in order to complete this design, it will be necessary to take a more particular notice than I have done of Mr. *Chubb's Posthumous Works*, this will engage me to continue my correspondence on this head for some time longer.





## L E T T E R   X I I .

*An account of Mr. Chubb's Posthumous Works; his specious Professions, and the advantageous character he gives of his own writings. He doth not allow a particular providence, or that prayer to God is a duty. His uncertainty and inconsistency with respect to a future state of existence, and a future judgment. He absolutely rejects the Jewish revelation. His objections against it briefly obviated. He expresses a good opinion of Mahometanism, and will not allow that it was propagated by the sword. He seems to acknowledge Christ's divine mission, and sometimes gives a favourable account of Christianity. But it is shewn, that he hath done all he can to weaken and expose it, and to subvert it's credit and divine authority.*

S I R,

LETTER  
XII.

**A**MONG the Deistical Writers of this present age, Mr. *Chubb* made no inconsiderable figure. He was, though not a man of learning, regarded by many as a Person of strong natural parts and acuteness, and who had a clear manner of expression. He was the author of a great number of tracts, in some of which



which he put on the appearance of a friend to LETTER  
XII. Christianity; though it was no difficult matter to discern that his true intention was to betray it. One of the most remarkable of these tracts was his *True Gospel of Jesus Christ asserted*, in which, under pretence of asserting the gospel of Christ in it's genuine simplicity, he really endeavoured to subvert and expose it. This was answered by Mr. *Joseph Hallet*, in a valuable tract intitled, *The consistent Christian, being a confutation of the errors advanced in Mr. Chubb's book intitled, The true Gospel of Jesus Christ asserted, relating to the necessity of faith, the nature of the Gospel, the inspiration of the Apostles, &c. with remarks on his Dissertation on Providence: 8vo, 1738.* Another noted tract of Mr. Chubb's was, his *Discourse on Miracles*, in which he proposed to give a representation of the various reasonings that relate to the subject of miracles. But it is manifest, that his intention was not to clear, but to perplex the subject; and to shew, that the proof from miracles is not at all to be depended upon. To this there was a solid and full answer returned by Mr. *Abraham Le Moine*, which was published at *London: 8vo, 1747.* Several of Mr. Chubb's tracts were also answered by Mr. *Caleb Flemming*; but his answers I have not seen. What I propose to consider are those that are called his *Posthumous works*, some of which were printed in his own life-time, and the rest carefully corrected and prepared

LETTER prepared by himself for the press, and published after his death, in two volumes, 8vo, London, 1748. The first volume begins with a short tract, intitled, *Remarks on the Scriptures*. But the far greater part of this volume, and the entire second volume, is taken up with what is called the "Author's Farewell" to his readers, comprehending a variety of "Tracts on the most important subjects of religion." It is divided into eleven large sections, and the principal design he appears to have had in view, is to destroy, as far as in him lay, the credit and authority of the Christian revelation. I know of no answer that has been published to this book, and therefore shall be more particular in my remarks upon it, to obviate in some measure the mischief it is fitted to produce.

It is plain, from several hints which he hath given us, that he looked upon himself to be a writer of no small importance. He declares, that he has *treated* the several subjects he has *discussed* with *plainness and freedom*, and of course *must have ministered to the pleasure of the intelligent part of mankind*, whether they *approved his sentiments, or not* \*. He begins the first section of what he calls his *Farewell to his readers*, with expressing his hope that his "correspondence with them by writing for many years past, has been not altogether

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 1. p. 64, 65.

“useless nor unacceptable to them \*.” And <sup>LETTER</sup> <sup>XII.</sup> in the last section of his *Farewell*, which he calls his *conclusion*, he expresses himself as one that in these his last writings, was leaving a very valuable legacy to the world. I know few authors, who have taken leave of their readers with a greater air of solemnity than he has done. He calls God to witness to the goodness of his intentions; and declares, that in what he has offered to the world, he has “appealed to the understanding, and not to the passions of men †.” That “with sincerity and truth he can say, he has had a real concern and regard to the present well-being of his fellow-creatures, as well as to their future happiness.” And that as he was “in the decline of life, and perhaps not far from the conclusion of it, and being in the full exercise of his intellectual faculties, which were not in the least clouded or impaired, he chose to take his leave of the world as a writer, hoping that what he has offered to public consideration, has had, and may have, some good effect upon the minds and lives of his readers ‡.” And he concludes the whole, with again assuring his readers, that he has laid before them in the *plainest manner* he was able, both in this discourse, and in what he had before published to the world, *those truths* which he thought to be of *the highest*

\* Chubb's posth. works, p. 17. † 152 vol. 2 p. 170.  
355. ‡ Ibid. p. 357, 349, 344

LETTER XI. *importance.* And so, saith he, “I bid you  
 “ farewell, hoping to be a sharer with you of  
 “ the divine favour, in that peaceful and happy  
 “ state, which God hath prepared for the virtu-  
 “ ous and faithful, in some other future world.”

Who that considers these solemn professions, would be apt to suspect that this very author, in these his farewell discourses, has not only used his utmost efforts to expose Christianity and the holy Scriptures, but has endeavoured to weaken some of the most important principles of natural religion?

He had in one of his tracts formerly published, shewn himself to be no friend to the doctrine of a particular providence. And there are several passages in his *Posthumous Works*, which look that way. He plainly intimates, that he looks upon God, as having nothing now to do with the good or evil that is done among mankind †. And that men’s natural abilities or endowments of body or mind, their fortunes, situation in the world, and other circumstances or advantages by which one man is distinguished from another, are things that entirely depend upon second causes, and in which providence doth not interpose at all ‡. And when he endeavours to shew, that no proof can be brought for a future state from the present unequal distributions of things, his argument amounteth in effect to this, that providence

† Chubb’s posth. works. vol. 1. p. 127. ‡ Ibid. p. 225.  
 hath

hath nothing to do with these present inequal-  
lities, nor concerneth itself with some men's  
being in a prosperous condition or circum-  
stances, and others in a calamitous or suffer-  
ing state \*. He evidently supposeth all along,  
that God doth not interpose in any thing  
where second causes are concerned †: So that  
all agency of divine providence in disposing,  
governing, and over-ruling second causes, in  
which so much of the wisdom of God's provi-  
dential administrations doth consist, is upon his  
scheme absolutely excluded.

Agreeably to this he discardeth all hope or  
expectation of divine assistances in the practice  
of that which is good; though he owns, that  
something of this kind hath been generally  
believed in all religions. This is the design of  
a considerable part of the first section of his  
Farewell to his readers §; which would de-  
serve to be particularly examined, if this were  
a proper place for it. I shall only observe,  
that what he seems to lay a principal stress up-  
on to set aside the notion of divine influences  
or assistances is, that we have no way of cer-  
tainly distinguishing them from the operations  
of our own minds; whereas, supposing this  
to be the case, all that it would prove is not  
that there are no gracious assistances or influ-  
ences communicated at all, but that they are

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. I p. 314, 295. † See concern-  
ing a particular providence Woolaston's relig. nat. delineated, p.  
98. & seq. § Chubb's posth. works, vol. I. p. 114. & seq.

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And as he allows no particular interposition of divine providence in human affairs, it is not to be wondered at, that he has done what he can to shew, that prayer to God is no part of natural religion \*. He supposes it as a thing certain, that God doth not fulfill our requests by granting what we pray for, since things will go on in their natural course, whether we pray to God, or not. He owns indeed, that prayer, considered as a *positive institution*, may be of use by *introducing proper reflections, and thereby proper affections and actions*; and provided it be made use of only for this purpose, without expecting to obtain any thing from God in consequence of it, he thinks it cannot be said to be a *mocking of God*; but yet he apprehends that even in this case, there is still an impropriety in it, and puts the question, whether such an impropriety should be a *bar to prayer*, or whether it be *displeasing to God*? and he plainly intimates, that in his opinion it is so †. I need not take particular notice of the objections he hath urged against the duty of prayer, which have been often sufficiently obviated ‡. But I think it is evident,

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 1. p. 287, &c. † Ibid. p. 283, 284. ‡ See particularly relig. of nat. delin. p. 125, 126. and especially Benson's ingenious tract "on the end and design of prayer."

that there is little room left upon this author's scheme for what hath been hitherto looked upon by the wisest and best of men to be a principal part of true piety, or of the duty we owe to God, *viz.* a constant religious dependence upon his wise and good providence, a thankful sense of his goodness, and gratitude to him for the benefits we receive, a patient submission and resignation to his will under afflictions, an ingenuous trust and alliance in him, and a looking up to him for his gracious assistances to help our sincere endeavours.

The doctrines concerning the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions, are justly regarded as important parts of natural religion, and have been acknowledged to be so by some of the *Deists* themselves. Mr. *Blount*, in a letter to the right honourable and most ingenious *Strophon*, in the *Oracles of reason*, says, "There are many arguments from reason and philosophy to prove the immortality of the soul, together with its rewards and punishments; but that there is no argument of greater weight with him, than the absolute necessity and convenience that it should be so, as well to complete the justice of God, as to perfect the happiness of man, not only in this world, but in that which is to come". Another deistical writer observes, that to say, "man's soul dies with the body is a desperate conclusion, which

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XII. “ lays the foundation of human happiness \*.”

And one would think, by some passages in Mr. Chubb's book, that he was of the same opinion. He begins the first Section of his Farewell, with assuring his Readers, that what he hath *principally aimed at in all his writings*, has been both to *evince*, and to *impress deeply upon the mind* a just sense of those truths, which are of the highest concern to them. And one of those truths which he there expressly mentioneth is this, “ that God will reward or punish men in another world, according as they have by their good or bad behaviour, rendered themselves the proper objects of either in this” †. And he repeats this again in very strong expressions at the end of his tenth section, where he proposes to set before the reader, the *sum total*, as he expresseth it, of his principles ‡. And again, in what he calls his conclusion, he speaks of God's calling our species to an account for their practice and behaviour, “ at which tribunal, saith he, he will most certainly deal with me, and the rest of mankind, in justice and equity, according to the truth and reality of our respective cases”. And in the very last words of his Farewell to his readers, which I cited before, he declares his hope “ to be a sharer with them of the divine favour in that peaceful and happy state,

\* Letter to the Deists, p. 25. cited by Hallyburton. † Chubb's posth. works, vol. 1. p. 97, 99. ‡ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 348, 349.

“ which



“ which God had prepared for the virtuous  
“ and faithful, in some other future world” †.

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And yet, notwithstanding these express and repeated declarations concerning a future state of existence, and a future judgment and retributions, he hath taken pains to unsettle the minds of men in these important points.

In his fourth section, in which he professedly enquireth concerning a future state of existence to men, he representeth it as absolutely doubtful, whether the soul be material or immaterial; whether it be distinct from the body, and if it be, whether it is equally perishable as the body, and shall die with it, or shall subsist after the dissolution of the body. These are points which, he says, he cannot possibly determine, because he has nothing to ground such determination upon. And at the same time he declareth, that “ if the soul be perish-  
“ able with the body, there can surely, be  
“ no place for argument with regard to a fu-  
“ ture state of existence to men, or a future  
“ retribution, because when the human frame  
“ is once dissolved by death, then man ceases  
“ to be and is no more” ‡. In what follows, he declares himself quite unsatisfied with the arguments which are brought to prove, that the soul is not material, or that matter is not capable of intelligence. And though he doth not take upon him expressly to determine that point, it is easy to see that he inclineth most

† Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2. p. 355. ‡ Ibid. vol. 1. p. 312. 313.

LETTER to the materialists \*. And after having declared, that the philosophical arguments and reasonings on this head are too abstract and subtil for him to understand, and that therefore he cannot form any judgment about them, nor draw any conclusion from them, he adds, that divine revelation does not afford a proper ground of certainty with respect to man's future existence, because we cannot come to any certainty with regard to the divine original of any external revelation †. He finds fault with St. Paul for saying, that *life and immortality is brought to light by the gospel*; and will not allow that the resurrection of Christ, supposing it true, though he takes a great deal of pains to shew that it is not so, proves either the possibility or certainty of a resurrection and a future state ‡. Thus it appears, that, in this section, where he professedly treateth of a future state of existence to men; he does all he can to render it absolutely uncertain, and to shew that no proof can be given of it, either from reason or revelation. And yet that he may make a shew of saying something, he concludes this section with observing, that from man's being an accountable creature, there arises a probability, that there will be a future state of existence to men. The farther consideration of which he reserves for the following section, which is concerning a future judgment and retribution.

\* Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 1. p. 317. 318, 324. 325.  
 † Ibid. p. 327, 328. ‡ Ibid. p. 333, & seq.

In this therefore, which is his 5th section, <sup>LETTER VII</sup> the reader might perhaps expect some determination of this point; and yet though this is a pretty long section, the proper subject of which is the future judgment, it is managed in such a manner, as to leave the reader at an uncertainty about it, and as much at a loss as before. He begins indeed with observing, that "man, by his faculties and endowments, is an accountable creature, accountable for his behaviour to all whom it may concern, namely to the intelligent world, and also to the deity, who is the most perfect intelligence\* ". But he absolutely discards the proof that is drawn from the present unequal distributions of divine providence. This argument he states very unfairly, and endeavours to place it in a ridiculous light. He compares men's different conditions here on earth, to that of horses, some of whom meet with bad masters, and others happen to have good ones: and pretends, the argument would equally conclude for a future retribution with regard to all other animals, as it does for the species of mankind †. But admitting there will be a future retribution, he thinks it may be doubted, whether it shall be universally extended to all our species. He plainly intimates, that, in his opinion, those, who die in their youth will not be called into judgment, nor those who act a very low part in life; and

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 1. p. 387. † Ibid. p. 395.

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seems to think, that those only shall be called to an account whose lives have been of much greater consequence to the world, and who have been greatly subservient to the public good, or hurt of mankind \*. So that, according to his representation of the case, supposing there were to be a future judgment and retribution, it is what the generality of mankind would have little concern in. And as, upon his scheme, there are but few who shall be called to an account, so it is but for some particular actions that they shall be accountable. He observes, that no man ever intended to do dishonour to God, or to be injurious to him, however foolishly they may have used the names or terms by which the deity is characteriz'd; and that therefore there will be no inquiry at the last judgment about such offences as these; *i. e.* about blasphemies against God. The only offence man can be guilty of against God, is, he thinks, the want of a just sense of his kindness and beneficence, and the not making a public profession of gratitude to him. And whether this will make a part of the grand inquest he declares himself unable certainly to judge, but he plainly insinuates that in his opinion it will not; since “ among men it “ has been looked upon, to be a mark of “ greatness of soul, rather to despise and “ overlook such ingratitude, than to shew

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 1. p. 400.

“any resentment of it †.” The only thing LETTER  
XII. therefore for which he supposes men shall be accountable, is for the injuries or benefits they do to one another. And even as to these, he seems not to allow, that the good or evil, particular persons do to one another, will come into judgment, but only “the good or bad part men act by voluntarily contributing to the good or hurt of the common-weal ‡”. He afterwards setteth himself to shew, that things would be as well ordered in the world without the supposition and expectation of a future judgment, as with it; that men’s duties and obligations would still be the same, and so would the motives to adhere to virtue, and to avoid vice. Nor is the belief of it of any great advantage to society \*. To all which it may be added, that here again in treating concerning a future judgment, he takes care to repeat what he had said in the foregoing section, *viz.* that if the soul be perishable, and is dissolved with the body, then this world seems to be *man’s all*, and that on such a supposition, a *resurrection* or *restoration*, and a *future retribution* seems to be excluded. And at the same time he declareth, that whether the soul perisheth with the body or not, is a thing which admitteth of no proof †. So that, upon the whole, he really leaveth it as a matter quite uncertain, whether there shall be

† Chubb’s posth. works, vol. 1. p. 391, 392. † Ibid. p. 395.  
397. \* Ibid. p. 401, 410. † Ibid. p. 399.

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a future judgment or not. And yet when he has a mind to make a boast of the good tendency of his principles, he is for making a merit of it, that it is one of those important truths, which he has taken pains to inculcate on the minds of men.

I have insisted the longer upon these things that I may unmask the fair pretences of this author, who sets up for an uncommon degree of openness and candour. His admirers may hence see how consistent he is, and how far his professions are to be depended upon.

I shall now consider what he hath offered in this his solemn *Farewell to his readers*, with regard to revealed religion.

As to revelation in general, he seems to make a very fair concession. "When men" (saith he) "are sunk into gross ignorance and error, and are greatly vitiated in their affections and actions, then God may, for any reason I can see to the contrary, kindly interpose by a special application of his power and providence, and reveal to men such useful truths, as otherwise they might be ignorant of, or might not attend to; and also lay before them such rules of life as they ought to walk by; and likewise press their obedience with proper motives, and thereby lead them to repentance and reformation"\*.

But, as if he was afraid that in this he had made too large a concession, he

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 1. p. 292, 293.

adds, "but then that it is so, and when it is so, will in the nature of the thing be matter of doubt and disputation". And in his sixth section, where he treateth expressly of revelation, he asserteth, that in what way soever God communicateth knowledge to men, "it must be a matter of uncertainty whether the revelation be divine or not; because we have no rule to judge, or from which we can with certainty distinguish divine revelation from delusion". And that if this be the case with those who receive the revelation at first hand, then surely it must be uncertain to those who receive it from them\*. Thus, though he seems to grant, that God may on some occasions *kindly interpose by a special application of his power and providence*, to reveal to men useful truths, and to direct and excite them to their duty; yet he will not allow that he can communicate the knowledge of his will in such a way, as to give them a sufficient satisfying assurance that it is a divine revelation, and came from him. This is a most presumptuous and unreasonable limitation of the divine power and wisdom, and is in effect the same thing as to say, that he cannot communicate any revelation of his will to mankind at all; even though his goodness should dispose him to do so, and their circumstances should require it. Dr. *Tindal* had in effect said the same thing with our author, and what he of-

\* Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 2, p. 5.

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obviated in the answers that were made to  
him\*.

From the question concerning revelation in general, Mr. *Chubb* proceeds in his sixth section, to make some observations on the *Jewish*, *Mahometan*, and Christian revelation in particular.

The first of these he absolutely rejecteth. He pretends that God's moral character is sullied by it: That St. *Peter* and St. *Paul* condemn it as unworthy of the Deity; that it had a vast multiplicity of rites and ceremonies, which he supposes to be perfectly arbitrary, and instituted without any reason at all; that it represents God as acting partially in choosing the *Jewish* nation to be a peculiar people; and that, in that constitution a twelfth part of the people lived idly on the labour of the rest; that the appearances of God to the patriarchs, to *Moses*, &c. could only belong to a local circumscribed deity; and that the God of *Israel* was not the supreme Being, but only some tutelar subordinate god, consonant to the *Pagan* idolatry; and that his conduct in ordering the *Israelites* to extirpate the *Canaanites* was inconsistent with the moral character of the Deity. This is the sum of what he urges for several pages together in his sixth section with regard to the *Jewish* revelation †. And he had insist-

\* See Conybeare's defence of revealed religion, chap. vii. Answer to Christianity as old as the creation, vol. 2, chap. i.  
† *Chubb's* posthumous works, vol. 2, p. 19—29.



ed upon the same things before at greater length in his second section \*, where he also condemns the punishing idolatry with death under the *Jewish* constitution as unjust, and as tending to justify persecution for conscience sake. These, and other objections to the same purpose, had been urged with great vivacity by Dr. *Morgan* in his *Moral Philosopher*; and were fully considered and obviated in the first and second volumes of *The divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*. Mr. *Chubb* has thought fit to repeat the objections, without giving any new strength to them that I can find, or taking off the force of the answers which had been returned.

Referring therefore to what I have more largely insisted upon in the books now mentioned, I shall at present only observe in brief, that the idea given of God in the *Jewish* Scriptures, of his greatness and majesty, of his power and wisdom, of his justice, goodness, and purity, and of his universal presence and dominion, is the noblest that can be conceiv'd by the human mind, and the most fitted to produce holy affections and dispositions towards him. That nothing can be more evident, than that the God proposed to the *Jews*, as the proper object of their worship, is the one living and true God, the sovereign Lord of the universe, who created all things by his power, who preserveth and governeth all things by his provi-

\* *Chubb's posthum. works. vol. i. p. 189—231.*

dence.

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dence. That as to the divine appearances mentioned in the Old Testament, no argument can be brought to prove, that the sovereign Lord of the universe may not see fit on some occasions to exhibit himself by a visible external glory and splendor, in order to strike men with a more strong and lively sense of his immediate presence; or that he may not in that case make use of a glorious subordinate being or beings of an order superior to man, and some such beings have been acknowledged by the best and wisest men in all ages, in delivering messages in his name. That it is no way inconsistent with God's universal care and providence towards mankind, to make extraordinary discoveries of his will to particular persons, or to a people, or to give them wise and excellent laws, and establish a constitution among them, the fundamental principle of which is the acknowledgment and adoration of the one living and true God, in opposition to all idolatry. Nor is there the least shadow of reason to prove, that he could not in such a case make the observation of this the principal condition on which the national privileges and benefits he thought fit to confer upon that people should be suspended; in which case, whosoever was guilty of idolatry under that peculiar constitution, was justly obnoxious to the penalties inflicted upon the enemies and subverters of the community. That, as to God's choosing the people of *Israel*, they not only proceeded from ancestors eminent for piety and virtue,

virtue, and pure adorers of the Deity, but may be justly supposed at the time of God's erecting that sacred polity among them, to have been, notwithstanding all their faults, freer from idolatry and other vices, than any of the neighbouring nations. They seem to have been much better than the people of *Egypt*, from whence they were delivered; or than the *Canaanites* whose land was given them, and who appear to have been a most wicked and abandon'd race of men, universally guilty, not only of the grossest idolatries, but of the most monstrous vices and abominations of all kinds. And if God saw fit on that occasion, to order them to be extirpated, as a monument to all ages of his just detestation of such crimes and vices, this cannot be proved to be inconsistent with the character of the wise and righteous governor of the world: Though our author represents this as a millstone that hangs at the neck of the *Mosaic* dispensation. With respect to the laws that were given to the people of *Israel*, those of a moral nature, of which there is a comprehensive summary in the Ten Commandments, are unquestionably holy and excellent; the judicial laws are wise and equitable, and the positive precepts, though many and various, wisely suited to the state and circumstances of that time and people. The reasons of several of them may be assigned even at this distance, and that there were very proper reasons for the rest may be justly supposed. And St.

*Peter*

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XII. *Peter* and *St. Paul*, even when they represent them as burdensome, plainly shew, that they look upon them to have been originally instituted for wise ends, though no longer to be observed, when a more perfect dispensation was introduced, to which they were designed to be subservient. The appointing the Priests and Levites, and distributing them among the other tribes, is so far from being a just objection against that constitution, that it may be justly regarded as a wise and excellent institution, well fitted for preserving and spreading the knowledge of religion, and the law among the people, and instructing them in their duty. And the provision made for them was justly due, both as a reward for their service, and as an equivalent for their not having a distinct portion and share of the land assigned them with the other tribes. Finally, The *Mosaic* constitution was attended at its first establishment, with the most glorious and amazing demonstrations of a divine power and majesty; and which plainly shewed an extraordinary divine interposition. And these facts were done not in secret, but in the most open public manner, of which the whole nation were witnesses; and the memory of them constantly preserved, both by solemn public memorials, and in authentic records, which have all the characters of genuine antiquity, simplicity, and a sincere regard to truth, and have been always regarded by the whole nation with the profoundest

profoundest veneration. Nor is there any just LIT TER  
XII. foundation for the author's pretence, that the sacred history was entirely in the hands of the priests, or that from *Solomon's* time to the *Babylonish* captivity, none had access to it but the high-priest, and that in that captivity their law was entirely destroyed and lost \*. A supposition that has been frequently repeated by the deistical writers, though the absurdity of it has been fully exposed.

Though Mr. *Chubb* hath absolutely rejected the *Jewish* revelation, he speaks very favourably of that of *Mahomet* †. Among other instances of his regard to it, he takes upon him to pronounce, that "it cannot surely be true, that the great prevalence of *Mahometanism*, was owing to it's being propagated by the sword; because it must have prevailed to a very great degree before the sword could have been drawn in its favour." And yet it is a thing capable of the clearest proof, that *Mohometanism* from its first appearance was propagated by the sword. This was what *Mahomet* himself most expressly required and recommended, and he accordingly spread his religion considerably by force of arms in his own life-time; and immediately after his death, the chief apostles of *Mahometanism*, were captains and mighty generals, who spread their conquests far and wide. Our author concludes his ac-

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2 p. 26, 27.  
p. 30. &c.

† *Ibid.*

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As to the Christian revelation, it is evident he has done all in his power to expose it; and yet he seems plainly to acknowledge Christ’s divine mission. “ That there was such a person as Jesus Christ, and that he, in the main, did and taught, as is recorded of him, appears (saith he) to be probable, because it is improbable that Christianity should take place in the way and to the degree that it did, or at least that we are told it did, supposing the history of Christ’s life and ministry to be a fiction. He adds, that if such power attended Jesus Christ in the exercise of his ministry, as the history sets forth, then seeing his ministry and the power that attended it, seems at least in general to have terminated in the public good, it is more likely that God was the primary agent in the exercise of that power, than any other invisible being. And then it is probable, that Jesus Christ, upon whose will the immediate exercise of that power depended, would not use that power to impose upon and mislead mankind to their hurt, seeing that power appears to have been

† Chubb’s posth. works, vol. 2. p. 40.

“ well directed and applied in other respects, LETTER  
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 “ and seeing he was accountable to his prin-  
 “ cipal for the abuse of it”. He adds, “ from  
 “ these premises, or from this general view of  
 “ the case, I think this conclusion follows, *viz.*  
 “ it is probable Christ’s mission was divine; at  
 “ least it appears so to me from the light or in-  
 “ formation I have received concerning it \*.”

And as he seems here to acknowledge Christ’s mission to be divine, so he undertakes to give an account what was the subject of his mission, or what it was that he was sent to publish to the world. This he reduceth to three main principles, for which he referreth to a tract he had formerly published, intitled, *The true Gospel of Christ*, *viz.* 1. That nothing but a conformity of mind and life to the eternal rule of righteousness, will render men acceptable to God. 2. That when men have deviated from that rule, nothing but a thorough repentance and reformation will render them the proper objects of God’s mercy. And lastly, that God will judge the world in righteousness, and will render to every man according as his works shall be. He adds, that these propositions seem to him to contain the sum and substance of Christ’s ministry: and as they are altogether worthy of the deity, so he thinks, they may with propriety and truth be called, *the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. This is what he declares

\* Chubb’s posth. works, vol. 2. p. 41, 42, 43 compared with p. 394, 395, 396.

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in his second volume, p. 82, 83. And he had said the same thing before, vol. I. p. 98, 99, where he observes, that “these things contain the substance of what Christ was in a special manner sent of God to acquaint the world with.” And again, he declares, that by Christianity he means, “that revelation of God’s will which Christ was in a special and particular manner sent to acquaint the world with; and as far as the writings of the apostles are consonant with it, they come under the denomination of Christianity\*.” Where he seems fairly to own, that Christ was sent in a *particular and special manner to acquaint the world with a revelation of God’s will*. He also acknowledges, that “the writings of the apostles contain excellent cautions, advices, and instructions, which serve for the right conducting our affections and actions—That the Christian revelation, one would hope, was kindly intended to guide men’s understandings into the knowledge of those truths, in which their highest interest is concerned, and to engage them to be justly affected therewith, and act accordingly; and that it naturally tends to reform the vices, and rightly to direct the affections and behaviour of men.” And finally, “that it may perhaps be a piece of justice due to Christianity (could it be certainly determined what it is, and could it be

\* Chubb’s posth. works, vol 2. p. 346.

“ separated



“ separated from every thing that hath been  
 “ blended with it) to acknowledge that it  
 “ yields a much clearer light, and is a more  
 “ safe guide to mankind, than any other tra-  
 “ ditionary religion, as being better adapted to  
 “ improve and perfect human nature †.”

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These things would naturally lead us to think, that he had a friendly design towards Christianity and the holy Scriptures. But notwithstanding all these specious professions, whosoever reads what he calls his *Farewell to his readers*, with never so little attention, must be convinced, that the principal design of it was to subvert the credit and divine authority of the Christian revelation.

Though he declares, that he looks upon it to be probable that Christ's mission was divine, yet he has taken great pains to shew, that the proofs which are brought for it, are not at all to be depended upon. Having observed that the two principal arguments or evidences usually insisted on to prove the divine original of the Christian revelation, are prophecy and miracles, he uses his utmost efforts to invalidate both these. Two long sections of his *Farewell to his readers*, are employed this way, *viz.* the viith and viiith. And as to the *Resurrection of Christ*, he labours for near fifty pages together to represent it as an absurd and incredible thing \*.

† Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2. p. 297, 344, 347, 370. \* Ibi  
 vol. 1. p. 333, &c.

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In his ninth section, in which he proposes to treat of the personal character of Jesus Christ, he does all he can to expose the account given of his being born of a virgin, as a fiction \*. And whereas Christ is represented as having been perfect, and without sin, he will have it to be understood, not that he was absolutely sinless, but that no public or gross miscarriages could be charged upon him †. The highest character he seems willing to allow him is, that he was the “founder of the Christian sect ‡,” or, as he elsewhere expresseth it, that “he collected a body of disciples, and laid a foundation for a new sect among the *Jews* ||.” For he supposes that according to Jesus’s original intention, Christianity was only designed to be a *supplement to Judaism*, and that the *Mosaical* constitution was to continue always in full force, and that his gospel was to be preached only to the *Jews* in all nations, and not to the *Gentiles* at all, though the apostles afterwards deviated from his plan §. He owns indeed that he advanced some proper precepts of his own, in which he seemed to correct the constitutions of *Moses*; but he endeavours to shew that in these he made alterations for the worse, and that those precepts by which he is thought to have been most distinguished, instead of being more ex-

\* Chubb’s posth. works, vol. 2. p. 268---285. † Ibid. p. 269. ‡ Ibid. vol. 1. p. 50. || Ibid. vol. 2. p. 395. § *ibid.* p. 85, 86, 168.

cellent than those of other teachers and law-LETTER  
givers, are really less excellent, and less per-  
fect; and if taken in their proper and natu-  
ral sense, are contrary to the reason of things,  
and inconsistent with the welfare and happi-  
ness of mankind. This is the principal de-  
sign he appears to have had in view, in what  
he calls *Remarks on the Scriptures*; which is  
the first tract in his *Posthumous Works*. XII.

In some of the passages above cited, he seems to give a favourable account of Christianity, and proceeds so far as to specify what the true gospel of Christ is, and what that message is, which he allows Christ was sent of God to deliver to the world; yet in plain contradiction to himself, he asserts in several parts of his book, that it is utterly uncertain what message Christ was sent to publish to the world, or wherein true Christianity doth consist. This is what he particularly endeavoureth to shew in his sixth section\*. And in that very passage before cited, where he pretends that it is a *piece of justice due to Christianity*, to acknowledge, that it *yields a much clearer light*, and and is a *more safe guide than any other traditional religion*, he at the same time insinuates that it *cannot be defined or determined what Christianity is* †. He asserts, that “it has  
“ been so loosely and indeterminedly deliver-  
“ ed to the world, that nothing but conten-  
“ tion and confusion has attended it from its

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2. p. 72---122. † Ibid. p. 370.

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“ first promulgation to this time: And that  
 “ the books of the New Testament have been  
 “ so far from being a remedy to this evil,  
 “ that they have contributed to it\*.” Ac-  
 cordingly, he expressly calls the New Testa-  
 ment, that *fountain of confusion and contra-*  
*dition* † And, whereas Mr. *Chillingworth*  
 had said, that *the Bible is the religion of Pro-*  
*testants*, Mr. *Chubb* thinks, that “ unless it be  
 “ so interpreted, as to be made conformable  
 “ to the great rule of right and wrong, which,  
 “ he says, in some instances cannot be done  
 “ without force and violence, it must be an  
 “ unsafe guide to mankind ‡.” And that to  
 appeal to Scripture, “ would be a certain way  
 “ to perplexity and dissatisfaction, but not to  
 “ find out truth ||”. And before this he had  
 said, that the Bible “ has been the grand source  
 “ of heresies and schisms; and that it exhibits  
 “ doctrines seemingly the most opposite, some  
 “ of which are greatly dishonourable to God,  
 “ others the most injurious to men §”. I  
 think it is not easy to give a worse idea of the  
 Scriptures, than this author has done. If his  
 account of them be a just one, it must be very  
 dangerous to read them; and it would be a  
 kindness to keep them out of the hands of the  
 people. For he seems directly to charge all

\* Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 2. p. 57. 315. † Ibid. p.  
 246, 217. ‡ Ibid. p. 326. § Ibid. p. 335. § Ibid.  
 vol. 1. p. 6, 57.

this upon the Scriptures themselves, and not upon the fault of those that pervert and abuse them. And yet this very consistent writer declares against *locking up the Bible from the people*, and that "this is most unsafe, as it has put the people so far under the power of the clergy, as to involve them in the most gross ignorance and superstition, and the most absolute slavery both in civil and religious matters\*". Is not this plainly to acknowledge, that the being well acquainted with the holy Scriptures, is one of the best preservatives against ignorance, priestcraft, and superstition, and a great advantage and security to truth and liberty? And what then must we think of the attempt made by him and other deistical writers to expose and vilify the holy Scriptures, and destroy all veneration for them in the minds of men, which, if believed, must induce an absolute neglect, and even contempt, of those sacred writings? Ought not this, by his own acknowledgement, to be regarded as an attempt to bring us back into the *most gross ignorance, superstition, and slavery?*

As a farther proof of the author's good-will towards Christianity, it may be observed, that he represents it as favouring of enthusiasm. And he explains enthusiasm to be "a groundless persuasion, that the Deity dictates and impresses upon the mind of the promulger

\* Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 2. p. 327, 345.

LETTER<sup>XII.</sup> “ the subject matter of his ministry, and there-  
 fore such ministry is supposed to be not of  
 “ or from men, but of and from God\* ”. And  
 as he here supposes Christianity to be the pro-  
 duct of enthusiasm, so he elsewhere charges  
 the apostles and first publishers of Christianity  
 with imposture. He represents them as capa-  
 ble of giving a *false testimony* to serve the  
 Christian cause, and that they acted upon this  
 principle, that “ truth in some cases may and  
 “ ought to be dispensed with, and made to  
 “ give way to falsehood and dissimulation ”.  
 And upon this he asks, “ How then will the  
 “ miracles wrought by Jesus Christ and his  
 “ apostles be proved to be other than impos-  
 “ tures? Supposing them to be much better at-  
 “ tested than at present they appear to  
 “ be † ”.

These and other things that might be men-  
 tioned, may let us into the true spirit and de-  
 sign of this writer, and may help us to judge  
 of the protestations he has made with great so-  
 lemnity in the conclusion of his *Farewell to his  
 readers*. “ If any say, that what I have writ-  
 “ ten is out of disrespect to the person and mi-  
 “ nistry of Jesus Christ, the accusation is false ”.  
 And he adds, “ as upon the Christian scheme,  
 “ Jesus Christ will be the judge of quick and  
 “ dead; so I assure my readers, that in this  
 “ view, and upon this consideration, I have

\* Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 2. p. 49, 53.  
 p. 92, 93, 130, 151, 230, 231.

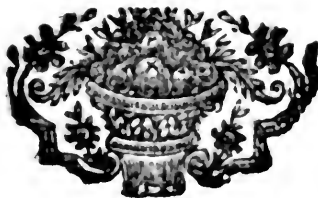
† Ibid.

“ no

“ no disagreeable apprehension on account of LETTER  
“ any thing that I have published to the XII.  
“ world\* ”.

Having given this general idea of our author's work, I shall in my next letter offer some remarks upon those parts of his book which may seem to require a more particular consideration.

- Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 2. p. 353.



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## L E T T E R XIII.

*Some farther remarks on Mr. Chubb's posthumous works. The unfair representations he makes of our Saviour's precepts in his sermon on the Mount. His gross perversions of Scripture. His charge against it as uncertain, and as having been greatly depraved and corrupted by the Church of Rome, considered. Observations upon the attempt he makes to invalidate the proof from prophecy and miracles. His pretence that the apostles quite changed the original plan of Christianity, and that they laid a scheme for worldly wealth and power, examined. His invectives against St. Paul shewn to be vain and groundless. He represents all religions to be alike with regard to the favour of God, and pretends to direct men to an infallible guide.*

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S I R,

**I**N my last, I gave a general account of Mr. Chubb's posthumous treatises. I shall now add some farther observations relating to some parts of those tracts which may seem to deserve to be more particularly considered.

Of this kind is the attempt he hath made to expose our Saviour's precepts in his admirable sermon on the Mount, which is designed to teach



teach the most pure and excellent morality. In several of these precepts, our Lord evidently maketh use of a proverbial way of speaking, short and comprehensive aphorisms, delivered in phrases, some of which may perhaps appear not so usual among us, but which were familiar to those to whom they were at first delivered. Every one knows, that, in such cases, every expression is not to be taken in the utmost strictness, but the general intention is to be regarded, which is plain enough to an honest and attentive mind. But this writer seems resolved to take them in the most absurd sense he can possibly put upon them. Thus, he interprets the precept against resisting evil, which is manifestly intended to check and suppress private revenge, and to teach us that wise lesson, that it is better in many cases patiently to bear injuries, especially in smaller instances, than to give way to a keen and forward resentment and retaliation of them; he interprets this as if it were designed absolutely, and in all cases, to forbid us to shun or guard against the evils and injuries offered to us, and required us rather to expose ourselves to those evils. But this certainly could not be the intention of that excellent teacher, who exhorteth his disciples to be *wise as serpents* in avoiding evil, as well as *innocent as doves*; and directeth them, instead of needlessly exposing themselves, when *persecuted in one city, to flee unto another*. The precept about loving our enemies is designed to refrain

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and heal that bitter and malevolent spirit, which men are so apt to indulge, and to carry benevolence to the noblest height. It teacheth us, that no private enmities or disgusts should cause us to forget the common ties of humanity: That with regard to our enemies themselves, we should be earnestly desirous of their amendment and true happiness, and should be ready, when a proper opportunity offers, to do them good offices, and to overcome their enmity with kindness, which is the noblest victory. But our candid author would have it to be understood to signify, that we should put no difference in our affection and esteem between good and bad men, but should have an equal complacency in persons of the vilest characters as in those of the best\*. And because our Saviour speaks of God's doing good in the methods of his common providence, even to the unthankful and the evil, he pretends, that, according to his representation, the perfection of the supreme Being consisteth in his being affected towards all intelligent beings alike, and shewing equal love and favour to the righteous and to the wicked; than which nothing can be more contrary to Christ's manifest intention, and to the whole tenour of his teaching and ministry. Our Lord's excellent discourse against anxious cares, and a distracting or distrustful thoughtfulness for to-morrow, he interprets as designed to recommend *thoughtlessness and indo-*

\* Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 1. p. 18, 19.

*lence,*

lence, and absolutely to forbid that *thoughtfulness and industry, which man's present indigent condition, and the present constitution of things makes necessary*\*. And the precept by which we are directed *not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth, but to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven*, which is plainly intended to check a too eager pursuit of worldly riches, and a placing our chief happiness in these things, he represents as if it were designed absolutely to condemn all worldly acquisitions, however lawfully obtained, and well used and employed. In like manner, he interprets what our Saviour saith in a parabolical way, *Luke xvi. 12, 13.* concerning inviting the poor, the blind, and the lame; and which, as may be gathered from the context by comparing ver. 7, &c. was designed to rebuke the vanity of expensive and ostentatious entertainments, whilst the poor and indigent were neglected; as if it were his intention that all Christians should deny themselves the pleasure of ever entertaining, or being entertained by friends, relations, and those of their own rank, and were to confine themselves wholly to the company, conversation and friendship of the *poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind* †. Though it is very evident from his own practice, that our Lord Jesus was far from discouraging an agreeable intercourse and conversation among friends, and the offices and entertainments of the social life.

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\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 1. p. 22, 23. † Ibid. p. 25, 26.

And

And I dare say, not one either of the *Jews*, or of his own disciples, ever understood him in this sense.

But Mr. *Chubb* takes upon him to pronounce, that these and the like precepts are all to be understood in the most strict literal sense, and do not admit of *any limitation*, or any palliating interpretation to be put upon them. And he represents them as the proper precepts of Christianity, *peculiar* as he expresseth it, to *the Christian sect*, and in which their founder's honour is peculiarly concerned; and pretends, that the observance of these alone, in the absurd sense he puts upon them, is what constitutes a true Christian. And as these are the precepts that are acknowledged to be peculiarly Christian, he thinks that from thence a judgment may be formed, whether there be any just ground for boasting, that Christian morals are much more excellent and perfect, than any other system of morals that hath been exhibited to men\*.

Nothing can possibly be more unfair and disingenuous, than this conduct of our author. No man of candour, who considers the deep wisdom and good sense which appeareth in our Saviour's discourses, can reasonably suppose that it was his intention to recommend such absurd instructions and advices as they must have been, according to this writer's representation of them. Our Lord's design in

\* *Chubb's posth. works*, vol. 1. p. 27, 28, 31, 69, 40.

his excellent sermon on the mount, was not, as he himself declares, to destroy the law and the prophets; it was to vindicate it from the narrow and corrupt glosses of the *Jewish* doctors. And what could be more worthy of a teacher sent from God, the great Saviour and lover of mankind, than to forbid the being angry without a cause, all injurious and reproachful expressions, all adultery and impurity, even in heart and thought; and to recommend purity, charity, meekness, benevolence, the forgiveness of injuries, and even a rendring good for evil, and overcoming evil with good? to warn men against an excessive love of worldly riches, which hath in all ages been the source of numberless evils, and disorders among mankind, and engage them to raise their affections and views to things of a far higher and nobler nature, things celestial and eternal? to direct men to a calm contentment and dependence on divine providence, in every condition, as the best preservative against those anxious distracting cares and sollicitudes, which, when they prevail, destroy the relish of life? What our Saviour hath delivered on these, and other heads of great importance to the happiness of mankind, is comprehended in short maxims, strongly and closely expressed, which makes them more apt to strike, and more easily remember'd; but without descending to particular exceptions and limitations, which for the

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most part common sense, and the nature of the thing easily direct to. He, who was perfectly acquainted with human nature, very well knew that there was no great danger of men's taking them in too strict a sense, and that they would be forward enough to find out limitations for themselves. And any one that impartially considers the variety of matters treated of, in that excellent sermon on the mount, such a vast extent of pure and noble morals comprized in so small a compass, and delivered with the most comprehensive brevity, will be apt to admire the wisdom of this heavenly teacher, and to have a just dislike of a writer that could turn those admirable lessons to the disadvantage of the holy Jesus, and the Christian religion. And I am persuaded, that any man who should treat the maxims and wise sayings of the philosophers or great men of antiquity, as this author has done those of our Saviour, would be regarded by all rational and thinking men among the deists themselves, as a rude and impertinent caviller. What renders Mr. *Chubb* more inexcusable is, that he himself seems to have been very sensible, that those precepts were not intended in the sense he has thought fit to put upon them. For though in what he calls *Remarks on the Scriptures*, he contends, as hath been shewn, that no other interpretation ought to be admitted; yet in another part of his *Posthumous Works*, viz. in the

ninth section of his *Farewell*, where he professes to treat concerning the personal character of Jesus Christ, he produces these very precepts as instances of Christ's figurative way of speaking, and plainly owns, that they ought not to be taken, nor were originally intended, in the strict literal sense he had put upon them. To this purpose he particularly mentions the precepts of not resisting evil, of loving our enemies, and giving to every one that asketh\*. And from thence concludes, that we must use our reason in judging of the sense of scripture, and of our Saviour's precepts; which will be readily allowed. The scripture undoubtedly supposeth us to be reasonable creatures, and our Saviour addresseth himself to us as such. But it by no means follows, as he insinuates, that because we are to use our understandings in judging of the sense of scripture, and all laws, that therefore our own reason could guide us as well without them, and that these precepts are of no use, and that it is of no advantage to have them enforced by a divine authority.

It may not be improper on this occasion to take notice of some other of his gross perversions of scripture: a signal instance of this kind we have in the same tract, in which he makes so strange a representation of several of our Saviour's precepts. Speaking of that noted

\* Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 2. p. 289, 293, 294, &c.

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passage, I *John* ii. 1, 2. *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not; and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.* He observes, that “this passage may be supposed  
 “to bespeak comfort and safety to a wicked  
 “Christian, *i. e.* to a wicked man who is a  
 “believer in Jesus Christ, and professes dis-  
 “cipleship to him. And that it is but for a  
 “man to apply these words of *St. John* to  
 “himself, and the practice of vice is made easy  
 “to him †”. That this could not possibly  
 be *St. John's* meaning in this passage, is evi-  
 dent from the whole tenour of his epistle, and  
 particularly from the words immediately fol-  
 lowing, in which he declares, *hereby we do*  
*know that we know him, i. e. Jesus Christ, if we*  
*keep his commandments. He that saith I know*  
*him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a*  
*liar, and the truth is not in him, ver. 3, 4.*  
 Our author himself is sensible, that the in-  
 terpretation he hath given of this passage, is  
 not consistent with what *St. John* hath said in  
 other parts of this epistle. But that gives him  
 no concern; it will only shew that *St. John*  
 contradicts himself; which is what he would  
 have him thought to do. And therefore with  
 an unparallel'd assurance he insuteth upon it,  
 that the account he hath given of *St. John's*

† Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 1. p. 37, 38.



meaning, is the true one, "Whatever St. *John*, or any other writers of the New Testament, in opposition to this, may have elsewhere said to the contrary." His manner of expressing himself plainly shews, that he is resolved this shall be St. *John's* sense, contrary to his own most express declarations, and to the entire strain of the New Testament; because he thinks it tends to expose Christianity, though in reality by such a procedure he has only exposed himself. But he urges, that "if Christ be the propitiation for all sins, then the most wicked Christian must needs be in a safe and comfortable state; and even wicked *Pagans* and *Infidels* as well as Christians, penitent and impenitent, because God would not be so unreasonable and unjust, as to take double satisfaction for the same offences." And in some other parts of his book, he inveighs against the doctrine of Christ's being the propitiation for sins, as contrary to truth, and the eternal reason of things\*. But in all that he has said on this head, he either discovers a gross ignorance of the scripture-doctrine of Christ's being the propitiation for our sins, or makes a wilful misrepresentation of it. Since nothing can be more evident than it is from the whole New Testament, that Christ's dying for our sins, was not designed to free men from an obligation to holiness and obedience, but ra-

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\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 1. p. 250. et vol. 2. p. 112, 113, 304.

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} it; and that, according to the gospel covenant,  
 none can expect an interest in the benefits  
 arising from Christ's sufferings and sacrifice, or  
 from his mediation and intercession, but those  
 that turn from their sins by a sincere repentance,  
 and who submit to be governed by his holy and  
 most excellent laws. The doctrine of Christ's  
 satisfaction, rightly understood, is so far from  
 giving the least encouragement to sin, that it  
 tendeth to impress men's hearts with the deepest  
 sense of the heinous evil and malignity of sin,  
 and of God's just displeasure against it. Not  
 only do those who teach that doctrine as delivered  
 in the scriptures, insist as strongly as any others  
 upon the necessity of repentance and personal  
 holiness, in order to our acceptance with God;  
 but they maintain that at the same time that  
 God promiseth pardon to the truly penitent, he  
 taketh care to dispense that pardon in such a  
 way, as to make an awful declaration of his  
 hatred against sin, and to vindicate the authority  
 of his government and laws. What can have a  
 greater tendency to prevent our abusing his  
 pardoning mercy, and to excite in us a holy  
 fear of offending him, than to consider that  
 he would not receive even penitent sinners to  
 his grace and favour, without a sacrifice of  
 infinite virtue offered up on their behalf,  
 consisting in the perfect obedience and sufferings  
 of the great Mediator? And that it was upon  
 the

the merit of his obedience and sufferings, that  
 that covenant was founded and established, in  
 which God hath graciously engaged to accept  
 of our repentance, and to reward our sincere  
 though imperfect obedience with eternal life?

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Many other instances might be mentioned  
 of Mr. *Chubb's* strange glosses upon scripture.  
 He seems particularly to take pleasure in mis-  
 representing and exposing the writings of *St.*  
*Paul*. Thus, because that great apostle in ar-  
 guing against the false *Jewish* teachers, who  
 insisted upon the observation of the *Mosaic* law  
 and ceremonies, as absolutely necessary to sal-  
 vation under the gospel, urgeth, that if they  
 were *justified by the law*, they were *fallen*  
*from grace, i. e.* from the grace of the gospel,  
 and the way of justification there proposed,  
*Gal. v. 4.* he charges him with maintaining  
 in the height of his zeal, that *obedience to the*  
*law of Moses was incompatible with salvati-*  
*on*; and that let men otherwise be never so  
 good and excellent persons, this error concern-  
 ing the obligation of the *Mosaic* law, would  
 exclude them from the favour of God, and  
 from eternal salvation. *And in this*, says he,  
*the Apostle must surely have greatly erred*\*. But  
 it ought to be considered, that those *Jewish*  
 teachers, whom *St. Paul* there opposes, are  
 represented as men of corrupt minds, who act-  
 ed from worldly and sinister ends and views, and  
 who were not strict in keeping the law them-

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2. p. 96, 97.

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selves, though they were for binding it upon others, *Gal. vi. 12, 13.* And the apostle there expressly declareth, that *in Christ Jesus*, or under the gospel dispensation, *neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, i. e.* neither the observance nor non-observance of these outward rites, *but faith which worketh by love*, or, as he elsewhere expresseth it, the *new creature, i. e.* a real sanctifying change of heart and life. See *Gal. v. 6. vi. 15. I Cor. vii. 19.* Again, he pretends that *St. Paul* represents the calling of the *Gentiles* as not originally designed by God, or as an effect of his goodness towards the *Gentiles*, but as springing only from his having *taken up a pique or resentment against the Jews*, which, he says, "is a spring of action much too low, and altogether unworthy of the supreme Deity\*." But nothing is more evident than that this apostle frequently ascribes the calling of the *Gentiles* to the free grace and gratuitous favour of God, and speaks of it in noble terms, as having been designed in the councils of the divine wisdom and love before the foundation of the world, *Eph. i. 3, 4, 5, 6. iii. 8, 9.* Farther to expose that excellent apostle, he represents it, as if in saying, that *if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable*, *I Cor. xv. 19.* he intended to signify, that the practice of piety and virtue is not in its own nature so eligible,

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2 p. 88.

or so conducive to the real satisfaction of this present life, as that of vice and sin. Nor will he allow that St. *Paul* in this part of the argument has any reference to the case of persecution; and yet certain it is, that he most expressly refers to it, ver. 29, 30, 31, 32. And his evident design is to signify the unhappy condition Christians would be reduced to, under the grievous persecutions to which they were then exposed, if it were not for their future hopes. But he especially finds great fault with St. *Paul*, for his doctrine concerning subjection to the higher powers, *Rom. xiii. 1—6.* as if it were calculated for promoting tyranny and slavery. This he insists upon for several pages together, in two different parts of his *Posthumous Works*; and yet the apostle's doctrine, rightly considered, is admirable. He shews, that obedience to the civil powers is a duty which Christianity enjoins; that it was not designed to exempt men from subjection to their lawful governors, though heathens, or to relax the bands of civil duty and allegiance. He doth not meddle with the questions concerning the rights of Senates, or particular forms of polity, but speaks of the duty of private persons, and therefore presses their obedience and subjection, without restrictions and limitations; and to have mentioned such restrictions, would certainly have been of bad consequence; especially considering the seditious dispositions of the *Jews*, and how they were

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XIII. } were then affected. But our author is not willing to allow that religion has any thing to do with obedience to our civil governors; and in express opposition to St. *Paul* declares, that government cannot be said to be the ordinance, or by the appointment, of God. He maintains that the proper argument for obliging men to subjection and obedience, is not government's being the ordinance of God, but its being necessary to the well-being of mankind. And does not the apostle manifestly urge this? He both raiseth our views to the original of government in the authority and appointment of God himself, and pointeth out to us the proper ends of government, and its great usefulness to mankind, and excellently argueth from both these. So that he is far from what this writer here thinks fit to charge him with, a *fallacious and injurious way of reasoning*.

He takes particular notice of the allegory St. *Paul* makes use of, *Gal.* iv. 21, &c. and uses his utmost endeavours to place it in a most ridiculous light. Nothing can be more unfair and disingenuous than the account he is pleased to give of it, in which he entirely misrepresents the design and strain of the apostle's discourse. But a particular examination of what he offers, with regard to this and several other passages of scripture, would carry me too far. It is sufficient to observe, that a careful and unprejudiced consideration of the context,

context, and a comparing one part of scripture with another, might easily have set him right as to the sense of most of the passages he mentions; or he might have found his difficulties cleared by able and judicious commentators, if he had been as willing to have his objections satisfied, as he was to raise them, or as a sincere enquirer after truth ought to be. Candid critics if they meet with a passage in *Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Tully*, or any other celebrated profane author of antiquity, which at first view has something in it that they cannot well explain or account for, are very unwilling to charge the original author with nonsense and absurdity, and think themselves obliged to use their utmost endeavours to find out a convenient or favourable sense of the passage in question. But with this writer, and many others of the same class, it seems to be a rule to interpret every passage of scripture in the most absurd sense that can possibly be put upon it.

Several passages were produced in my former letter, to which many others might be added, in which *Mr. Chubb* exclaims against the scripture as the source of endless contentions and divisions, as if it were to be charged with all the absurd and contradictory opinions, that have at any time been grafted upon it. This he represents, as owing to its being "expressed in a loose indeterminate way,

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“ way, which would be a defect in a human composition, but is scarce supposable in the case of a divine revelation \*”. But it is no argument, that a thing is loosely and indeterminately expressed, that men differ or contend about the sense of it. This is owing to other causes. Supposing a divine revelation given to mankind, never so clear and determinate, it could scarce be avoided, without a constant miraculous interposition, irresistibly impressing and overruling the minds of all men, but that there would be a difference of sentiments and opinions among mankind, about many things in it: And yet this would not hinder but that such a revelation would be of signal use for instructing men in things of great importance. The fallacy of such a way of arguing, as if men’s differing about any thing were a proof of it’s uncertainty, has been often exposed, as what would banish all religion, truth, reason and evidence out of the world. Yet this is a common-place with the Deistical writers, to which they have recourse on all occasions. Many had made use of it before our author: And since the publishing of his works, a late right honourable writer hath been pleased to renew the charge. I shall not here repeat what I have elsewhere offered in answer to his Lordship, and which will equally serve to obvi-

\* Chubb’s posth. works, vol. 2. p. 246, 247.



ate all that Mr. *Chubb* hath advanced on this head\*.

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The same observation may be made with regard to his attempts against the sacred canon. He pretends, as others had done before him, that there is no proof that the books of the New Testament were written in the first age of the Christian church; that there were many spurious gospels in the primitive times, and that the Christians had no way of distinguishing the genuine from the false. These, and other things to the same purpose, he very frequently repeats in several parts of his *Farewell to his readers*, as if he thought the frequent repetition of them would persuade his readers of their truth. But I shall not need to take any particular notice of them here, but refer to what was said on this subject in the fourth letter, where some account is given of the answers that were made to *Toland's Amyntor*. To which may be added what hath been lately offered in answer to the same objections when urged by the noble writer last mentioned†.

Mr. *Chubb* hath also raised a great clamour about the corruption of Scripture. He layeth it down as a principle, that if God gave a revelation for the use of mankind, he would take care that it should be transmitted safe and uncorrupted to all succeeding generations, and would by a particular and constant application of his power and providence have defended it

\* See Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's letters, p. 425, &c.

† *Ibid.* p. 98, & seq.

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from all injury, wherever it was promulged, and whatever language it was rendered into. He intimates, that God ought to have punished with a sudden death, as in the case of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, every man that had committed any error, either in transcribing or translating it. And if this had been the case, the consequence would have been, that no man would have ventured to transcribe or translate it at all. And this, no doubt, is what these gentlemen would wish; but there is no necessity for having recourse to such extraordinary methods; we have sufficient evidence to satisfy any reasonable person, that this revelation is transmitted to us, without any such corruptions or alterations as can destroy the usefulness of that revelation, or defeat the important ends for which it was originally given\*. This hath been often clearly shewn. Our author indeed pronounces with great confidence, that “it is  
 “ a thing abundantly evident, that the Christian  
 “ revelation hath been greatly depraved and  
 “ corrupted; that its pretended guardians have  
 “ extracted the mystery of iniquity from it. And  
 “ that we have received the books referred to  
 “ from that grand fountain of corruption  
 “ the *Church of Rome*, who must have been  
 “ naturally, and almost unavoidably led to  
 “ corrupt them in those times of ignorance, to  
 “ justify herself in all other corruptions and  
 “ abuses”. This he frequently repeats, as his

\* See concerning this above, p. 100, 101, 189, 190.

manner is, in several parts of his book, and it hath been often urged by the deistical writers †; and it must be acknowledged, that if a general corruption of the Scriptures could have been possibly effected, none had so good an opportunity, or a stronger temptation to attempt it than the *Church of Rome*. And yet it is evident in fact, that they have not corrupted the Scriptures in those instances in which it was most their interest, and we might imagine also most in their inclination, to have corrupted them. There might be some pretence for such a charge, if there had been any express and formal passages inserted in the New Testament, in favour of the papal supremacy, of St. *Peter's* having been Bishop of *Rome*, the worship of images, the invocation of saints and angels, purgatory, the communion in one kind, against priests marriage, and in favour of the monastic vows, &c. But our author hath not attempted to produce any passages of this kind, and he himself has observed, that “the New Testament was not sufficient to support the weight of the constitution of the *Church of Rome*, and therefore its builders prudently annexed tradition to it \*” He also finds fault with their locking up the Bible from the laity, as what hath put them so far under the power of the clergy, as to involve them in gross ignorance, superstition, and slavery. Thus, this very consistent

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† Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 2. p. 65, 66, 118, 121, 122.

\* Chubb's posthumous works, p. 58.

writer,

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writer, with a view to expose the New Testa-  
ment, would persuade us, that popery is taught  
and founded there, and yet would have the  
Bible kept in the hands of the people as a pro-  
per preservative against it.

The arguments in favour of the *Jewish* and  
Christian revelation from prophecy and mira-  
cles have always been looked upon to be of great  
weight; and Mr. *Chubb* hath taken great pains  
to invalidate both these. With regard to pro-  
phesy, which is the entire subject of the se-  
venth section of his *Farewell to his readers*\*,  
he pretends not to deny that there may be true  
prophecy; that God may certainly foreknow  
future events, and may enable persons to fore-  
tell them: But he denies, that the prediction  
of future events can be admitted as an evidence  
of divine revelation; because a prophecy can  
never be known to be a true prophecy till it be  
fulfilled; and therefore can never be a proof or  
evidence at the time of its delivery; because it  
must appear as yet uncertain. His argument  
here proceeds upon a wrong supposition, as if  
the advocates for revelation maintained, that  
the mere prediction of a future event, even be-  
fore the completion of it, were alone a suffi-  
cient proof to those who heard the prediction, of  
the divine mission of the persons who delivered  
it. This was far from being the only proof  
that was given either of the *Mosaic* or christian  
revelation. They were both of them at their

\* *Chubb's* posthumous works, p. 139—174.

first promulgation attested and established by an amazing succession of the most wonderful works, and which plainly argued an extraordinary divine interposition. Besides which, both *Moses* and the prophets under the Old Testament, and our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles under the New, were enabled to give many express predictions of future events; some of which related to things that were to happen in their own time, and received a speedy accomplishment; others related to events that were not to happen till some ages after the prediction, and these also received their accomplishment in the proper season. And this, added to the other evidences, exhibited a farther illustrious proof of a divine interposition in favour of the *Jewish* and Christian revelation, and shews, that the first publishers of it were extraordinarily inspired of God, who by the author's own acknowledgement can alone foresee and foretell future contingent events. Indeed, if it were only a single prediction or two, the fulfilling of them might be looked upon to be accidental, and to amount to no more than a lucky conjecture. But a series of prophecies, such as is set before us in the sacred writings, many of them relating to things of a most contingent nature, removed at the distance of several ages, and which depended upon things that no human sagacity could foresee, must be ascribed to an extraordinary divine assistance. And it cannot reasonably be supposed, that

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God would impart his own prescience to give credit to impostors, who falsely pretended to be inspired by him to deliver doctrines and laws to mankind.

As to that part of the evidence of Christ's divine mission, which resulteth from the prophecies of the Old Testament, this had been fully considered in the controversy between Mr. *Collins* and his adversaries, of which some account was given in the sixth letter. What Mr. *Chubb* hath offered on this head is very inconsiderable. But he has one reflection, that may deserve some notice; it is this: That, "supposing those prophecies to have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, they are not so much to be regarded as an evidence of the divine authority of the Christian revelation, as of the divine character of its primary promulger, who being a free being must have been at liberty whether he would have faithfully delivered those truths to the world, that had been delivered to him by his principal. And this, saith he, must of necessity be the case of all divine revelation \*". But, supposing there was a series of prophecy, relating to a wonderful person, who was to appear at a time prefixed as a divine teacher and Lord, and who was to erect a dispensation of truth and righteousness, and that his coming, person, offices, miracles, sufferings, and the glories that should follow, were described and pointed out by many remarkable

\* *Chubb's posthumous works, p. 152, 153.*

predictions, delivered at sundry times, and in <sup>LETTER</sup> divers manners, all which were fulfilled in Je- <sup>XIII.</sup> sus Christ, and in him only, this certainly must be looked upon as an illustrious attestation, not only to the divinity of his mission, but to the truth of the revelation he brought in the name of God. For it were most absurd to suppose, that God would have inspired so many persons, in different ages to foretell his coming and character as a divine teacher of truth and righteousness, if he had not perfectly foreknown that he would certainly fulfill that character, and fulfill the great trust reposed in him. And the preparing mankind for his coming by such a succession of prophecies, and pointing him out by the most glorious and peculiar characters, so many ages before his actual appearing, tended to give him an attestation of a most peculiar kind, and which was never equall'd in any other case.

With regard to the prophecies of *Daniel*, this author thinks it is impossible, "that God  
" should deliver a prophecy so darkly, as that  
" one man only, and he a prodigy, amidst the  
" millions of men that have taken place since  
" that prophecy was delivered, should be  
" able to discover the true sense and mean-  
" ing of it\*". Where he goes upon a sup-  
position, which is manifestly false, *viz.* that  
no man before Sir *Isaac Newton*, was ever able  
to discover the meaning and intent of *Daniel's*

\* Chubb's posth. works, p. 147, 148.

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prophecies. Many there have been who have laboured happily this way, both formerly and of late. And though there are several things in those prophecies, that are attended with great difficulty, there are others of the predictions contained in that book, which are so clear, that the application of them is comparatively easy. And they have been wonderfully verified in a manner which shews they could only have proceeded from that all-seeing mind which presides over contingencies, and clearly sees through the succession of ages. And the predictions there given relating to the Messiah, the design and end of his coming, and the desolation of the *Jewish* city and temple that should be connected with it, are of such a nature, as to give a most remarkable attestation to our Lord Jesus Christ, as the true promised Messiah. And it may be observed by the way, that this shews the vanity and falshood of another of our author's suppositions, who pretends that the *Jewish* expectation of the Messiah was solely owing to the notion they had of their being God's peculiar people, from whence it was natural for them to believe that God would raise them up a glorious deliverer, who should exalt their nation to the highest degree of prosperity and grandeur: and that the prophets humoured them in this their notion and expectation: For if this had been the case, the prophets would not have spoken of



a suffering Messiah; nor would they have foretold, as they have done, his being re-jected of the *Jews*, and the judgment which should be then executed upon that nation, and that the *Gentiles* should be partakers of the benefits of his kingdom.

This writer, who seems to value himself upon thinking out of the common way, can see nothing extraordinary in the predictions relating to the calamities and dispersions of the *Jews*, and their wonderful preservation under all their dispersions and calamities, for so long a succession of ages. And yet, certain it is, that their being so generally dispersed among all nations over the whole earth, and being still preserved as a distinct people, notwithstanding the unexampled discouragements, reproaches and sufferings to which they have been exposed, is one of the most wonderful things, taken in all its circumstances, that is to be found in the whole history of mankind. And as it hath no parallel, its being so plainly foretold above three thousand years ago, (for so long it is since the time of *Moses*, who first prophesied of it,) is a most signal instance of a true prophetic spirit, and could be only owing to the inspiration of that omniscient being, who *declareth the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things which are not yet done.*

I shall only take notice of one observation

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his Holy Spirit. And as those extraordinary gifts, of which this was one, were communicated by the laying on of the hands of the apostles in the name of a crucified and risen Jesus, the conferring these gifts on any of the Christian converts, may be justly regarded as a most illustrious proof of a divine interposition in favour of Christianity, and of the divine mission of the apostles, the first authorized publishers of it.

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Having considered the principal things this writer has urged on the head of prophecy: I shall take some notice of what he hath offered concerning the proof from miracles; This is the subject of his eighth section\*. He will not allow that miracles can be any proof of the divine mission of persons, or truth of doctrines. What he chiefly insisteth upon to this purpose is, that the power of working miracles may be equally annexed to falsehood and truth. And whereas it might be objected, that God will not suffer miraculous power to be misapplied, because were that the case, mankind would be greatly exposed to imposition; he answers, “that when a miracle is once wrought, it must and will be in the option of the operator to apply that power as he pleases, either well or ill, nor could God prevent it otherwise than by destroying his being or his agency”. But supposing, which is the present supposition, a real power

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2. p. 177—249.

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of working miracles communicated from God, with a view to give attestation to the divine mission of persons sent to instruct the world in important truths, it is absurd to suppose, that he would continue that power to them, if they applied it to the confirming of falshood; or that he would have given them that power for attesting truth, if he foresaw they would use it in favour of falshood; and in that case he must have foreseen it. With regard to the power of working miracles in the first age of the Christian church, it was not at the option of the persons who had that power, to use it when, or to what purpose, they pleased. They could only work those miracles, when, and upon what occasions it seemed fit to the Holy Ghost, that they should do them. In which case they had an extraordinary impulse, which is usually called *the faith of miracles*, which was a kind of direction to them, when to work those miracles, and whereby they knew and were persuaded that God would enable them to do them. The proper use and design of those miracles was to confirm the testimony given by the apostles to our Saviour and his resurrection, and the truth of the doctrines they taught as received from him. Nor can any one proof be brought, though he takes it for granted, that any false teachers in that age did, by virtue of any extraordinary gift or powers of the Holy Ghost communicated to them, work miracles to

con-

confirm the false doctrines they preached. ON LETTER  
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 the contrary, St. *Paul* appeals to the *Galatians* themselves, as in a matter of fact which could not be contested, that miracles were only wrought, and the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit communicated, in attestation to that true doctrine of the gospel which he had preached, and not to that *other gospel*, as he calleth it, which the false teachers would have imposed upon them, *Gal.* iii, 2, 5. But I have elsewhere considered this matter at large, and shall not here repeat what was there offered\*.

But what our author chiefly bends himself to prove is, that the accounts given us of the miracles recorded in the New Testament, are false or uncertain, and not at all to be depended on. To this purpose he mentions several of our Saviour's miracles, and repeats the same objections against them, that had been urged by Mr. *Woolston* before, and to which solid answers had been returned. Every thing in the evangelical accounts that appears to him strange or extraordinary, he rejects at once. I cannot here enter into a distinct consideration of the several particulars he alledgeth. I shall only mention one on which he seems to lay a greater stress than any of the rest, and which he insists upon more than once, as alone sufficient to destroy the credit of the evangelical histo-

\* See Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted, vol. i. p. 380—387.

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It relates to the account given of our Saviour's temptations in the wilderness. It will be readily owned, that the fact referred to is of a very extraordinary nature. But a thing may be very strange and wonderful, and yet very true, and is to be received as such, if it comes to us vouched by a sufficient authority. And in this case the authority is sufficient; for I think it cannot reasonably be doubted, that the account came originally from our Lord himself, since no other could be supposed to know it, and that it was well known to the apostles and disciples to have come from him. It is distinctly related by two of the evangelists, *St. Matthew* and *St. Luke*, and referred to by a third, *St. Mark*. *St. John*, according to the method he pursues, of insisting chiefly upon things not mentioned by the rest, had no occasion to take notice of it. There is not the least reason to suppose, that the evangelists would have inserted such an account as this, if they had not been assured that the information came from Christ himself; and his authority is a sufficient warrant for believing it; nor is our author able to prove, that there is any thing here ascribed to Satan, which he might not be able, or might not be permitted to perform. In what manner he pretended to shew to our Saviour *all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of them*, we are not told, nor is there any necessity here of taking the word

all in the strictest sense. But in what way so-  
 ever this was done, concerning which we can-  
 not pretend certainly to judge; this writer  
 doth not know enough of the case to pro-  
 nounce it impossible. Supposing there are evil  
 spirits, can any man take upon him positively  
 to determine, how far their power and ability  
 may extend? And that there are both good  
 and evil spirits superior to man, hath been  
 the general belief of mankind in all nations  
 and ages, and even of the best and wisest of  
 men; nor can a shadow of reason be brought  
 to prove the existence of such spirits to be either  
 impossible or improbable; though our author,  
 in his great wisdom, has all along rejected all  
 accounts where there is any mention made of  
 angels or devils, with as much confidence as if  
 he could clearly demonstrate, that there can-  
 not possibly be any such thing.

He frequently speaks of the weakness and  
 credulity of the sacred historians, and repre-  
 sents the accounts given in the Gospels, and  
 in the *Acts of the Apostles*, as mere fictions,  
*more like Jewish fables, or popish legends, than*  
*real facts* \*. Yea he expressly declares, “ that  
 “ some of the popish miracles, though gene-  
 “ rally rejected by Protestants as fraud and im-  
 “ posture, are better attested than any of the  
 “ miracles which were wrought, or supposed  
 “ to be wrought in the first century. And  
 “ that had the like strict scrutiny been made

\* Chubb, ubi supra, p. 192, 193.

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cient miracles would have been rejected †.”

But every thinking person will easily see a mighty difference in the case between miracles wrought before persons highly prejudiced in their favour, and in proof of the reigning religion, where power and interest is on their side, and where there is not a full liberty allowed to make a strict enquiry into the truth and reality of them; and miracles wrought in the view of enemies themselves, and where the public prejudices lie on the other side, and power, interest and authority are engaged against them. There will always be ground of suspicion in the former case, not equally so in the latter. The miracles said to be wrought in the *Romish* church, are done in countries where Popery is the established religion, and has power and the prejudices of the people, and an evident worldly interest on its side. And they are not performed openly in the view of Protestants and for their conviction, in places where there is a full liberty of examining into all the circumstances relating to them. Whereas the miracles whereby Christianity was established, were done openly, and in the view of enemies able and willing to have detected the imposture, if there had been any; they were done to establish a scheme of religion, the most opposite that could be imagined to the prevailing prejudices both of

† Chubb, ubi supra. p. 226, 227.



*Jews* and *Gentiles*, and even to the prejudices that had possessed the minds of the very persons by whom these miracles were wrought; and when all the power and authority of the world, as well as the influence and artifices of the priesthood, and every worldly advantage, lay wholly on the other side. And yet, vast numbers were brought over to receive a crucified Jesus as their Saviour and their Lord, in that very age, by the evidence of those miracles and extraordinary facts, concerning which, they had the best opportunity of being informed, in opposition to all their worldly interests, and their most inveterate prejudices. In vain then it is to enveigh, as this writer does, against the historians, and to pretend that "they were weak enough to give credit to any relations they might pick up, and had courage enough to put upon the world whatever might be put upon them\*" For the things related by them are of such a public nature, that if they had been false it would have been the easiest thing in the world for their enemies, of whom there were many, to have detected them; which would have crushed this religion in its infancy. Our author himself is sensible how difficult it would have been to impose facts of so extraordinary and so public a nature, as those recorded in the Gospels, and in the *Acts of the Apostles*, in the

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\* Chubb's posth. works. p. 194.

very age in which the facts were said to be done. And therefore without so much as attempting to offer the least proof, takes upon him to affirm, that the accounts of these facts were not published till a long time after, when there was no body alive that could contradict them; and he declares as positively as if he could prove it to be so, that they were not made public till the second century, which he represents as an age of fiction and forgery. This is what he particularly affirms concerning the accounts given in the *Acts of the Apostles*; though it is evident from the book itself, that it was written in the apostolical age, and before the second imprisonment or the death of St. *Paul*. In the second century, Christianity had already made a wonderful progress through the nations, of which there are unquestionable proofs. And by a strange absurdity, he supposes that the extraordinary facts whereby the Christian religion was attested and confirmed, were not published till that time, *i. e.* that they were not heard of or made public, till long after the founding of the Christian church, though it was wholly upon the credit of those facts that the Christian church was founded. He pretends farther that the accounts of these things “ were kept as a treasure in the hands of “ believers, not known to unbelievers, who “ therefore had it not in their power to confute “ them,

“ them, or detect the fraud †.” And yet cer-  
 tain it is, that the apostles went every where  
 preaching the religion of Jesus to an unbeliev-  
 ing world. All those to whom the first pub-  
 lishers of Christianity preached the gospel,  
 and published the accounts of the important  
 facts on which it was founded, were at first  
 unbelievers. And it was upon the convincing  
 assurance they had of the truth of these facts,  
 that they were brought over to embrace it,  
 and of unbelieving *Jews* or heathens became  
 Christians, or believers in Jesus Christ. And  
 whereas he adds, that “ those facts were not  
 published at, or near the place of the per-  
 formance, but in *Greece, Italy, &c.* where  
 the people could not contradict them;” he  
 seems not to have considered, that all these  
 things were first published in *Judea*, where the  
 first Christian churches were founded; and  
 that great numbers of *Jews* were converted  
 in the place where all the facts were done.  
 It was not till after they had been publish-  
 ed some years in *Judea*, that they were made  
 known to the *Gentiles*: And in all those coun-  
 tries where the gospel was preached, there were  
 vast number of *Jews* who had a continual cor-  
 respondence with those in *Judea*, and went  
 frequently to *Jerusalem* to the public feasts,  
 and could therefore easily procure informati-  
 on whether those facts were as they had been  
 represented.

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2. p. 203, 204, 205.

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I shall not need to make any observations upon what Mr. *Chubb* hath offered against the accounts given by the evangelists of our Lord's resurrection. For as he has only enlarged on some of the same objections which had been advanced by the author of *The Resurrection of Jesus considered*, it may be sufficient to refer to what has been said on this subject in the eleventh letter. But it will be proper to take some notice of the great change that he pretends took place in Christianity, whilst in its most primitive state, and upon which he seems to lay a mighty stress. He affirms, that "the apostles set out upon two principles, which may be considered as the foundation or corner stone of the Christian building. 1. That Christianity is a supplement to *Judaism*, and therefore was to be grafted upon it; and that the law of *Moses* was not to be abolished, but still continued. 2. That the gospel was a favour to be vouchsafed to the *Jews* only, and that to them only it was to be preached. And he pretends that the apostles were unavoidably led into these principles by their master himself\*." But that "in a little time they quite changed the original scheme or plan of Christianity, and dug up and destroyed the foundations they themselves had laid." And then he asks, "how do we know in what instances

\* Chubb's posth. works, p. 84. et seq.

“ they may be depended upon? and if they  
 “ acted wrong in this, how does it appear  
 “ that they ever acted right †?” This he  
 returns to on several occasions. But this  
 whole matter is entirely misrepresented: It  
 is plain from several hints given by our  
 Lord himself during his personal ministry, that  
 it was really his intention, and the design  
 upon which he was sent, to erect a new and  
 more perfect dispensation than the *Mosaical*  
 was, though it was not as yet a proper season  
 to make a public declaration of it. That his  
 gospel was to be preached not to the *Jews*  
 only, but also to the *Gentiles*; and that the  
 latter were to be taken into his church, and  
 to be made partakers of his benefits, and of  
 that great salvation he came to procure. Any  
 one will be convinced of this, who impar-  
 tially considers the following passages, *Matth.*  
*viii. 10, 11, 12. xv. 10, 11. xxi. 43. John iv.*  
*21, 23. x. 16.* The utmost that our author's  
 pretence can be made to amount to, is really  
 no more than this; that the apostles, for some  
 time after our Lord's ascension, were not en-  
 tirely freed from their *Jewish* prejudices. And  
 supposing, which was really the case, that the  
*Jewish* dispensation was originally from God,  
 and was designed to give way to the more per-  
 fect dispensation of the gospel, for which it was  
 preparatory, there was a great propriety in it

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† Chubb's posth. works, p. 89, 90, 91.

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Besides the two principles mentioned above, Mr. *Chubb* has thought fit to take notice of a third, which he also pretends was a fundamental principle of Christianity, as laid down by the apostles, *viz.* “ That the disciples of  
“ Christ were to have one common stock or  
“ property, of which the clergy were consti-  
“ tuted the trustees and directors.” And he thinks, that “ from this it appears, how ground-  
“ less that pretence must be, that the apostles  
“ and ministers of Jesus Christ could have no  
“ worldly advantage in view, when they went  
“ forth

“ forth to preach the gospel: Whereas no-  
 “ thing can be more evident than that they  
 “ had a fair prospect of, and a very plausible  
 “ pretence for, gathering great riches into their  
 “ hands, as keepers and managers of the  
 “ church’s property or treasure.” This he is  
 so fond of, that he insisteth upon it for several  
 pages together \*. And the author of the *Re-  
 surrection of Jesus considered*, had hinted at  
 the same thing before him, to shew, that the  
 apostles were interested witnesses, and that  
 therefore their testimony to Christ’s resurrec-  
 tion is not to be depended on †. But all this  
 is built on a false foundation, for there was no  
 divine or apostolical constitution obliging Chris-  
 tians to put their whole worldly substance in-  
 to the common stock, and to commit it to the  
 apostles as the directors. It appeareth plainly  
 from St. *Peter’s* words to *Ananias*, that it was  
 a matter which depended entirely on the free  
 choice of the Christian converts, and was the  
 effect of their voluntary zeal and charity; and  
 it was an illustrious proof of the strong con-  
 viction and persuasion they had of the truth of  
 the gospel, and of those great and extraordi-  
 nary facts by which Christianity was support-  
 ed. This was the more remarkable, as it was  
 at *Jerusalem* that this was done, soon after our  
 Lord’s resurrection and ascension, and the ex-

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\* Chubb’s posth. works, p. 102—110.  
 † *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, p. 68.

† *Resurrection of*

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extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of *Pentecost*, and where they had the best opportunity of knowing the evidences of those facts. But whatever was done this way, in the extraordinary circumstances in which the first Christians were placed, it is manifest from several passages in the New Testament, and particularly from St. *Paul's* directions to the *Corinthians*, that this was not designed to be generally obligatory upon all Christians. See *1 Cor.* xvi. 1, 2. *2 Cor.* viii. 9. And indeed, it seems to have been peculiar to those at *Jerusalem*; for which undoubtedly there were particular reasons. And even there, so far, were the apostles from claiming to themselves the direction of the public stock, that they expressly refused to have any thing to do with the management of it, that they might apply themselves to their proper work, the ministry of the word. And it was given into the hands of persons of unexceptionable characters, chosen by the Christian Society for that purpose, that they might impartially distribute out of the common stock to those that needed it, *Acts* vi. 1, 2, 3. If the apostles had been acted by worldly views, they would certainly have chosen a scheme of religion, more cunningly accommodated to the prevailing humours and prejudices of mankind. For what prospect could they have of persuading people to give up their treasures and worldly substance



stance into their hands, by preaching up to the *Jews* a person that had been condemned and crucified by the chief priests and rulers of their own nation for their Messiah, and preaching up to the *Gentiles* a crucified *Jew* for their Lord and Saviour? Our author himself is sensible of this, and therefore at the same time that he talks of the fair worldly prospects they had, he owns that these prospects must have depended upon their expecting success in their ministry, and upon their being persuaded that they had God and his promises on their side, and that Christ would be with them, as he had foretold, to the *end of the world*\*. So that, according to his own way of stating the case, and indeed according to the reason of the thing, their prospect of success was founded in the firm belief they had of the truth and divinity of Christ's mission, and of his resurrection and exaltation to glory. So inconsistent is this writer's hypothesis, that, in order to make good his charge of worldly interested views against the apostles, he is forced to go upon a supposition of the truth of the illustrious attestations that were given to the Christian religion, and which he elsewhere endeavours to invalidate. And yet, supposing the apostles to have believed what their Lord had told them, they could have no worldly advantages to expect; since he had assured them that they

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\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2. p. 103, 109.

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It is particularly evident, that this last mentioned great apostle could have no worldly advantage in view in embracing Christianity. His interests, reputation, and prejudices lay wholly the other way, and tended strongly to bias him against it. Nothing but conviction, and the power of evidence, could overcome his obstinacy; after which he became the most eminently instrumental to propagate the Christian religion in the world, of which he had been a most zealous persecuter before. And this seems to be the cause of that peculiar rancour and prejudice which this writer every where discovers against him. The best judges have admired the strength and closeness of *St. Paul's* reasoning; this particularly was the judgment of one of the best reasoners of the age, *Mr. Locke*, who studied his writings with great application. But our author has thought fit to represent him as a *loose, unguarded writer,*

ter, who did not attend to his own argument, or to the subject. He frequently charges him with drawing wrong conclusions from his premises; and that his epistles were crude, indigested performances, which were *probably sent as they were first wrote, without being revised by him*; and that this sometimes involved him in confusion. He endeavours to give the most absurd and ridiculous turn possible to several passages in his writings: Some instances of which were taken notice of above, to which many others might be added. Not content with this, he represents this excellent person, who was no less remarkable for his humility than for his many other virtues, as a vain-glorious boaster, and treats the account which, with a remarkable modesty, and as it were by constraint, he gives of his labours and sufferings, as *a bravado, and past all belief*\*. He accuses him and St. James, as guilty of the *most gross, and notorious dissimulation and hypocrisy*, and represents him as the great author of *pious frauds* in religion; and that he acted upon this principle, that truth in some cases may and ought to be dispensed with; and that therefore he and the other apostles were capable of giving a *false testimony to serve the Christian cause*†. But this certainly was not St. Paul's principle; he has condemned in the strongest terms those who

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2. p. 364, 365. † Ibid. p. 92, &c. 235, &c.

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 XIII. of God, and *to do evil that good may come of it*; which is the great principle upon which pious frauds are built, *Rom. iii. 5, 6.* All that Mr. *Chubb* has advanced to prove the heavy charge he has brought against this great apostle is reducible to two facts. The one is his saying before the council, that *of the hope and resurrection of the dead he was called in question, Acts xxiii. 6.* Upon which our author observes, that in this “ he acted a deceitful part, “ and coined a lie to save himself, since he was “ not called in question about the resurrection, “ on, nor was this any part of the charge against “ him \*”. But that the preaching through Jesus Christ the resurrection of the dead, was one reason of the persecution which was raised against Christ’s disciples; and that this was what particularly excited the rage of the *Sadducees* against them, of which party the high priest, or at least many of those about him, and who were men of power and interest, appear to have been, is plain from the account given in the *Acts of the Apostles*, chap. iv. 1, 2, 3, v. 17. And it was very allowable for the apostle to take advantage of this, for creating a division among his adversaries, who were not themselves agreed what charge to bring against him. This is a proof of his prudence and address, and that he did not run upon his sufferings with a blind

\* *Chubb’s posth. works*, vol. 1. p. 330, 331. vol. 2. p. 238.

enthusiastic heat, but it is no proof of his dishonesty. The other instance, upon which the charge of hypocrisy and lying against St. Paul is founded, is taken from what he did at Jerusalem, by St. James's advice, in purifying himself in the temple, *Acts* xxi. 20—26 †. But if this had been fairly represented, it would have appeared that there was nothing in his conduct on this occasion inconsistent with honesty and integrity. What the Jewish Christians had been informed of concerning St. Paul, was, that he had taught the Jews which were among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs, ver. 21. They represented him as having taught, that it was absolutely unlawful for the Jews to circumcise their children, or to observe the Jewish rites. This accusation was false, St. Paul had not taught this; he only had argued against the necessity of observing that law, and had urged Jews and Gentiles to a mutual forbearance with one another in this matter. And what he did pursuant to the advice of St. James, shewed that he did not look upon it to be then unlawful to observe the Jewish rites; and that he judged it both lawful and expedient in some cases to observe them for avoiding scandal: And upon this principle he proceeded in circumcising Timothy. This whole matter had been set in a clear light, and the wisdom, and

† Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 1. p. 92, 93, 98.

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After what hath been observed, it will be no surprize to find, that this writer represents the being converted to Christianity as of no importance at all, and that he frequently lets us know that he looks upon all religions to be alike, with regard to the favour of God. “ The turning from *Mahometanism* to Christianity, says he, or from Christianity to *Mahometanism*, is only a laying aside one external form of religion, and making use of another, which is of no more real benefit, than a man’s changing the colour of his cloaths, by putting off a red coat and putting on a blue one in its stead \*”. And he elsewhere represents it as an indifferent matter, “ whether a man adopts *Judaism*, or *Paganism*, or *Mahometanism*, or Christianity”. And what is more extraordinary, he would put this upon us, as St. *Peter*’s sentiment as well as his own, and endeavours, after his manner, to prove it from that noted passage, *Acts* x. 34, 35. *of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with*

\* *Chubb*’s posth. works, vol. 2. p. 33, 34.

him. He pretends that St. *Peter* here teacheth, LETTER XIII.  
 “ that faith, in any religious leader, or his mi-  
 “ nistry, is altogether supernumerary, and that  
 “ he hath excluded both faith and infidelity  
 “ out of the case \*”. As if the apostle there  
 designed to tell *Cornelius*, that it was of no  
 manner of importance whether he believed in  
 Jesus Christ or not, which is to make him  
 speak in direct contradiction to the very de-  
 sign of his being sent to *Cornelius*, and of all  
 his subsequent discourse to him. St. *Peter*  
 signifieth indeed, in the words cited by this  
 author, that whosoever in any nation, like  
*Cornelius*, truly feared and worshipped God,  
 and practised righteousness, should be accepted  
 of him, though not belonging to the *Jewish*  
 nation, or initiated into the *Mosaic* polity:  
 But he certainly never intended to signify, that  
 the embracing Christianity was a matter of  
 mere indifferency. *Cornelius's* piety and good  
 dispositions would have rendered him accepta-  
 ble to God, though he had not heard of  
 Christ; but when he had an opportunity of  
 being informed, that very piety and fear of  
 God led him to receive those significations  
 of the divine will, and to believe in Jesus  
 Christ, whom he hath sent. And the great  
 importance and advantage of faith in Christ,  
 in such a case, is evidently supposed in St.  
*Peter's* whole discourse, who was extraordi-

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 1, p. 295—307.

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narily sent on purpose to instruct him in it. This writer thinks proper to find fault with the author of the *Acts of the Apostles*, for laying so great a stress on the conversion of *Jews* or Heathens to Christianity, which, in his opinion, is “of little consequence as to the  
“favour of God, or their future safety, be-  
“cause if they were virtuous and good men,  
“they were secure without such conversion,  
“and if they were bad vicious men, they  
“were not secured by it\*.” But if they were good men before, and were thereby put in the way of greater improvements in goodness, more fully instructed in religion, raised to more glorious hopes, and furnished with more excellent helps, and more powerful animating encouragements to all virtue and universal righteousness; or if they were bad men, involved in gross ignorance and idolatry, superstition and vice, which was the general character of the Heathens when the Gospel appeared, and by turning to Christianity, were brought to the knowledge and pure adoration of the only true God, and engaged to forsake their evil ways, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; and no other were accounted true Christian converts; this, by the author’s own acknowledgment, must have been a signal advantage. He himself had said a little before, “if

\* Chubb’s posthumous works, vol. 2, p. 33.



“ the revelation referred to could furnish me  
“ with useful knowledge, or with a better  
“ rule of life, or with more powerful excite-  
“ ments to the practice of virtue and true  
“ religion, than at present I am in possession  
“ of, and thereby I should be made a wiser  
“ and better man, than I acknowledge that  
“ such conviction would be beneficial to me  
“ in proportion to such improvement\*”. And  
this is evidently the case of the Christian  
revelation, wherever it is sincerely believed  
and embraced, and men give themselves up  
to its divine conduct. And therefore those to  
whom this revelation is offered, and who  
yet despise and reject it, are justly charge-  
able with great guilt. For it cannot be a slight  
guilt to reject the valuable means and helps  
which God hath in his infinite wisdom and  
goodness provided for promoting our spiritual  
improvement, and engaging and enabling us  
to work out our own salvation: Nor can any  
thing be more unreasonable than to pretend,  
as the enemies of revelation have often done,  
that because virtue and righteousness is what  
God approves, therefore faith is unnecessary,  
and of no consequence at all; the very con-  
trary follows from it. For if moral improve-  
ment and true holiness be of such vast im-  
portance, then certainly the best and pro-  
perest means for attaining to it are very need-

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\* Chubb's posthum. works, p. 32.

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ful, and to be highly valued; and such are the means and helps which the religion of Jesus affordeth, as laid down in the Holy Scriptures: and to reject those means and assistances, under pretence of obtaining the end without them, is a most absurd and criminal conduct, justly displeasing in the sight of God, and a most unworthy return to his infinite goodness.

I shall conclude my remarks on Mr. *Chubb's Posthumous Works*, with taking notice of a remarkable passage at the end of the eighth section of his *Farewell to his readers*. After having done all he could to expose the Scriptures, and shew that it is not safe to appeal to them, he draws this conclusion from the whole: That "this shews the great propriety of our returning back to that prior rule of action, which is the ground and foundation of moral truth, and consequently of moral certainty, *viz.* that eternal and invariable rule of right and wrong, as to an infallible guide, and as the solid ground of our peace and safety, which rule we are too easily diverted from\*." He seems to speak here, as if Christians, and those that were for adhering to Scripture as their rule, had no regard to the rule of right and wrong, or to the nature and reason of things, which is a gross misrepresentation; and as if

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2, p. 249.

the Deists were under the conduct of an infallible guide. Particularly it is to be supposed, that he would have it to be understood that he himself hath taken care to follow the infallible guide he recommends. But if we are to judge by the effect it has had upon himself, we have no great encouragement to entertain a very favourable opinion of the advantage we shall obtain by forsaking the Scripture, under pretence of following such a guide. For what is it, that his infallible guide has directed him to? It has inclined him to deny a particular providence, or that God now interposeth in ordering or governing the affairs of men, and the events relating to them, whether with regard to nations or particular persons, and consequently has directed him not to make a dependance on providence, a trust in God, or resignation to his will, any part of his religion. It hath taught him not to expect any gracious assistances from God, or to apply to him for them. It leaveth him at a loss whether it be proper to pray to God at all, and inclineth him to think that it is the safest way to let it alone. Nor doth this guide inform him, whether men's souls are material or immaterial, or whether they shall subsist after death, or shall die and perish with the body, or whether there shall be a future state in which God will call men to an account for their actions. Or if there shall be a future judgement,

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ment, his guide leadeth him to apprehend that it shall extend but to a small part of the human race, and but to a few of the actions they perform; that they shall not be called to an account for any blasphemies they may have uttered against God, or for any neglect of the duties that more immediately relate to the Deity, or for private injuries they do to one another, or for any actions at all but those which concern the public; and how far these are to extend, he hath not thought fit to inform us. I cannot see therefore but that it is much better to follow the light the Scripture affordeth us, which giveth us clear instructions in these and other things of great importance, concerning which our author's infallible guide, according to his account of the matter, hath given him no directions at all, or hath given him wrong ones.

I have now finished my observations on *Mr. Chubb's Posthumous Works*, which I have perhaps enlarged upon more than they really deserve. But I have chosen to do it, both because they seem to be of a dangerous tendency, and well fitted to do mischief, and have by some persons been very much extoll'd, and because there has been no answer, that I know of, given to those books. I do not love to make reflections that seem to bear hard upon any man's integrity; but I think it cannot be denied, that notwithstanding his  
great

great pretences to plainness and candour, and an impartial love of truth and liberty, there are very apparent marks of great dissimulation in his writings. The nature of this work would not admit of my entering into a more minute examination, but there are few things of consequence in his two volumes which are not here taken notice of. In my next I hope to conclude the account of the *Deistical Writers*, and to subjoin such reflections as seem naturally to arise upon this subject.

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## L E T T E R XIV.

Observations upon a pamphlet intituled *The Case of Deism fairly stated; and on the attempt against the Scriptures in Lord Bolingbroke's letters on the Study and Use of History. The account of the Deistical Writers closed. Reflections on the high encomiums they bestow upon themselves and their own performances. They differ among themselves about the most important principles of natural religion. The unfair methods they take with regard to Christianity. No writers discover stronger marks of prejudice. The guilt and danger of rejecting the Christian revelation. An aversion to the laws of the Gospel, one of the principal sources of infidelity. Terms proposed by the Deists for making up the difference between them and the Christians. Their pretence of placing religion wholly in practice and not in useless speculations, considered.*

S I R,

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I AM now hastening to a conclusion of the work in which you have engaged me; but though I confess myself heartily tired of it, and am very desirous to close the account; it will be proper to take some notice, and a short one will be sufficient, of a pamphlet that was omitted before, intituled, *The Case of Deism*

*Deism fairly stated*, &c. and which was published in 1746. This tract, though originally writ by another hand, is said to have been revised by Mr. *Chubb*, and to have undergone considerable alterations and amendments. There were several answers made to it, but the only one of them that I have seen, is that published by Dr. *Benson* in the second edition of his *Reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the scriptures*; to which there is added an appendix, in which he hath clearly obviated the principal things advanced in that pamphlet.

The objections there urged, are the same that had been repeated by almost every writer who hath appeared in this cause. The author argues against Christianity, because of the corruptions and abuses that have been made of it, and the great depravity of manners among Christians, which he mightily exaggerates. But if all that is pretended in this case were true, it would not prove that Christianity itself is false, or was not originally from God; it would only prove that professed Christians have very much degenerated, and are greatly fallen from the religion they profess. Whilst it can be shewn, as it may be with the utmost evidence, that Christianity doth not countenance these abuses and corruptions; that, considered in itself, and as contained in the scriptures, it is of the most excellent tendency; and that the uniform design of its doctrines, precepts, promises

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and threatenings, is to promote the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world, and to dissuade men from vice and wickedness; it is certainly very unreasonable and unfair to make Christianity answerable for the abuses and corruptions it condemneth. If every thing must be rejected which hath been abused, government and civil polity, knowledge and literature, religion, liberty, and reason itself must be discarded.

He argues also against the Christian revelation, because it was not sooner promulgated, and because it has not spread universally through all nations. This objection hath been frequently repeated and answered. It was particularly urged by Dr. *Tindal*, and fully considered, and obviated in the answers that were made to him; some notice has been taken of it above in my second letter in the *Observations on Lord Herbert's Scheme*. And it may be observed, that Mr. *Chubb* himself seems to think that no great stress should be laid upon it; and he will not take upon him to affirm, that the non-universality of a revelation is a just objection against its divinity\*.

The most remarkable thing in the *Case of Deism stated*, and indeed the only thing in it that has the appearance of novelty, is where he pretends, that "the Christian divines, in order to render Christianity amiable, have decked her with the graceful ornaments of moral

\* Chubb's posth. works, vol. 1. p. 218, 219.



“ precepts, whereas in Christianity the moral precepts are but borrowed ware, the property of the Deists, and as much distinguished from Christianity, as Christianity is from *Mahometanism*.” Thus he hath found out an admirable expedient to strip Christianity of what hath been hitherto esteemed one of its principal glories. The holy and excellent precepts, which the great author of our religion taught and enjoined in the name of God, and to inforce which by the most powerful and important motives, was one great design of his and his apostles ministry, do not, it seems, belong to Christianity at all. Moral precepts, according to this writer, make no part of divine revelation, though to clear and shew them in their just extent, and inforce them by a divine authority, and by the most prevailing motives, seems to be one of the noblest ends for which a divine revelation could be given to mankind. Supposing, which was really the case, that the world was sunk into an amazing darkness and corruption, there was nothing that was more wanted than to have a pure system of morals, containing the whole of our duty with respect to God, our neighbours, and ourselves, delivered not as the opinions of wise men or philosophers, but as the laws of God himself, and inforced by all the sanctions of a divine authority, as well as by all the charms of the divine grace and goodness. This is

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what has been done by the Christian revelation; and its great usefulness for this purpose, and the need the world stood in of it, is excellently represented by Mr. *Locke*, in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*, &c. in a long passage quoted at large by Dr. *Benson*, who very justly observes, that that great man hath fully obviated before-hand, all that the author of *the Case of Deism stated* has advanced on this subject\*.

There is one author more, that has very lately appeared in the Deistical cause, who may seem to deserve a particular notice, whether we regard his quality, and the figure he had made in the world by the eminence of his station, or his abilities and reputation as a writer. It is the late Lord Viscount *Bolingbroke*, who has thought proper in his letters on the study and use of history, lately published, to make an open attack on the authority of the sacred writings, and especially has used his utmost efforts to subvert the credit of the Scripture-history. But the method he has made use of to this purpose, seems not to be very well chosen, nor consistent with itself. A principal reason which his Lordship produces to invalidate the credit and authority of the Old Testament history, is, that the *Greeks* were not acquainted with it; and that their accounts, particularly with regard to the *Assyrian* empire, do not agree

\* Locke's works, vol. 2 p. 575.—579. fourth edit.

with the accounts given of it in Scripture. LETTER  
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 And yet he himself has taken great pains to shew, that the ancient<sup>t</sup> *Greeks* were fabulous writers, and that their accounts of ancient times, either with regard to other nations, or their own, were not at all to be depended on. And accordingly, he hath let us know, that if they had perfectly agreed with the accounts given in the *Jewish* Scriptures, he would have had very little regard to them, and would not have looked upon this to be any argument of their truth. Many learned writers have produced testimonies from heathen authors, tending to strengthen some remarkable passages in the Scripture-history \*. This, his Lordship finds great fault with, and charges it as a most partial and absurd conduct, to admit the testimony of the heathen writers, if they happen at any time to agree with the Scripture-accounts, and to reject their testimony when against them. But if the matter be fairly weighed, there is nothing in this but what is very reasonable. For, considering the strong prejudices of the *Heathens* against the *Jews*, whose whole religion and policy was so opposite to theirs, it is evident, that no great stress can be laid upon what they say against them and their history; and yet if any thing be found in their writings, which tends to confirm the

\* See particularly Grotius de veritate religionis Christi. lib. 1. sect. 16.

D d 4

facts

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— quicquid Græcia mundus

audit in historia.

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facts recorded in the *Jewish* sacred books, it is just to take advantage of this; since it is plain this could not be owing to any favourable prepossession towards the *Jews* or their histories, but to the force of truth, or to some traditions which they looked upon as authentic. For, though the testimonies of enemies are not much to be regarded, when they are to the prejudice of those for whom they have a declared aversion, yet the testimony of enemies in favour of those to whom they are known to be enemies, have been always looked upon to be of great weight.

In order to invalidate the Scripture-history, his Lordship has thought fit to repeat what had been often mentioned by the writers on that side, That the *Jewish* sacred books were lost in the *Babylonish* captivity; that there have been such corruptions and alterations in the copies, that there can be no dependence upon them; that there is no proof of the gospels having been written in the apostolic age; that they were not distinguished from the spurious gospels; that there had been formerly evidence against Christianity, but that it was destroyed; that the Christian clergy, through whose hands the Scriptures have been transmitted to us, were guilty of numberless frauds and corruptions; and that the many differences among Christians about the sense of Scripture shew that it is absolutely uncertain; and that there is now no certain standard  
of

of Christianity at all. These and other objections which his Lordship hath displaid with no small ostentation, I shall not here take any particular notice of, having considered and obviated them in the *Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's letters on the study and use of History, especially as far as they relate to Christianity and the holy scriptures*, published at London, 8vo, 1753. About the same time the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Clogher published a *Vindication of the Histories of the Old and New Testament, in answer to the objections of the late Lord Bolingbroke*. In which he hath both detected and exposed several mistakes his Lordship had fallen into with respect to other ancient authors whom he cites, and hath vindicated the sacred writings against the attempts made in those letters to invalidate their credit and divine authority. These with Mr. Harvey's *Remarks on Lord Bolingbroke's letters — as far as they relate to the History of the Old Testament*, are the only answers I have seen, and you will excuse my not taking a more particular notice of them, as I have already exceeded the bounds I at first intended.

I shall therefore here close the account of the *Deistical Writers*, who have appeared among us for above a century past, and shall take this occasion to subjoin some reflections.

If we were to judge of the merit of these writers, by the encomiums they have bestowed

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ed upon their own performances, and the account they have given of their designs and views, we should be apt to entertain a very favourable opinion of them, as persons to whom the world is under great obligations. Dr. *Tindal* begins and ends his book with declaring, that his scheme *tends to the honour of God, and the happiness of human societies*; that there is none who wish well to mankind, but must also wish his hypothesis to be true; and that it most effectually prevents the growth both of scepticism and enthusiasm. The *Moral Philosopher*, every where speaks very advantageously of himself, as having nothing in view but to vindicate and promote the cause of *real religion, and moral truth and righteousness*. The author of *Christianity not founded on Argument*, spends some pages in recapitulating and extolling his own work. The same observation may be made concerning the author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*. He declares, “ that reason is his only rule, and “ the displaying truth his only aim: That his “ design is to recover the dignity of virtue, “ and to promote that veneration for wisdom and truth, which have been destroyed “ by faith\* ”. And he concludes with expressing his hope, that his “ treatise will be of real “ service to religion, and make men’s practice better, when they find they have no-

\* Resurrect. of Jesus consid. p. 7, 72.

“ thing else to depend upon for happiness, here  
 “ and hereafter, but their own personal righ-  
 “ teousness, with their love of wisdom and  
 “ truth †” In like manner Mr *Chubb* has in  
 his *Farewell to his readers*, with great solemnity, told the world how much they are obliged to him for having taken care to leave them his instructions in matters of the highest importance.

Nor only do these gentlemen join in representing themselves as persons of extraordinary penetration, and of the most upright intentions; but they sometimes seem to claim a kind of infallibility. They talk of having their *understandings irradiated with the beams of immutable eternal reason*, so that *they are sure not to run into any errors of moment*. And that they have an *infallible mark and criterion of divine truth*, in which *men cannot be mistaken* \*. They propose to direct men to *the eternal and invariable rule of right and wrong*, as to an *infallible guide*, and as the *solid ground of peace and safety* ‡. They assure us, that *Deism*, or the religion they would recommend, is “ bright as the heavenly light,  
 “ and free from all ambiguities; that it makes  
 “ all men happy that embrace it; that it perfectly satisfies all doubts, and procures the  
 “ troubled soul unshaken rest †”.

† Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 82. \* Christianity as old as the creation, p. 336. edit. 8vo. Mor. Phil. vol. 1. p. 92.  
 ‡ Chubb's posth. works, vol. 2. p. 249. † Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 9.

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And as they take care to recommend themselves, and their own writings to the esteem and admiration of mankind, so they give a very disadvantageous idea of those that stand up as advocates for revealed religion. They speak in a sneering contemptuous way of such books as *Stillingfleet's Origines Sacrae*, Dr. *Clarke's Discourse of natural and revealed religion*, *the Analogy of Reason and Revelation*, &c. and the excellent discourses at *Boyle's lectures* \*. A writer of great note among them thinks fit to represent the Christian divines, as for the most part, *mortal enemies to the exercise of reason*, and *below brutes* ||. Another charges them, as acting as if they *wanted either understanding or honesty*. And he assures us, that "those who think most freely have the least share of faith, and that in proportion as our understandings are improved, faith diminishes". The same writer expressly calls it *foolish faith*; and saith, that "in this glorious time of light and liberty, this divine hag, with her pious witchcrafts, which were brought forth in darkness, and nourished by obscurity, faint at the approach of day, and vanish upon sight †". And a late right honourable author charges both clergy and laity that believe Christianity, as having been hitherto either *not impartial, or sagacious enough to*

\* Christ. not founded on argument. || Christ. as old as the creation, p. 250, 251. † Resurrect. of Jesus confid. p. 4, 8, 72.



take an accurate examination, or not honest enough to communicate it \*.

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After such specious professions, it would be natural to expect, that these gentlemen should oblige the world with clearer directions than have been hitherto given to lead mankind to truth and happiness. But this is far from being the case: They indeed all join in endeavouring to subvert revealed religion, but they are by no means agreed what to substitute in its room. They often speak magnificently of keeping close to the *eternal reason and nature of things*, and profess a high esteem for what they call the *uncorrupted religion of reason and nature, which is always invariably the same* †. But when they come to explain themselves more particularly, it is not easy to know what they intend by it. Some of them have reckoned among the principles of natural religion, and which are of great importance to mankind, the belief of God's universal and particular providence, his moral government of the world and of mankind, the obligations we are under to pray to him and worship him, the natural differences of moral good and evil, man's free agency, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions. Others of their applauded writers deny several of these principles, or, at least, represent them as

\* Lord Bolingbroke's letters on the study and use of history, vol. 1. p. 181.      † Chubb's posthumous works, vol. 2. in the appendix.

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absolutely uncertain. And though, when they want to make a fair appearance to the world, these principles are to pass as making a part of the Deist's creed; yet it cannot be denied, that the general effect and tendency of their writings has rather been to unsettle these foundations, and introduce an universal scepticism and indifference to all religion. When such persons therefore set up for benefactors to mankind, it puts one in mind of the boasts of the *Epicureans*, who spoke in high terms of the obligations the world was under to their great master *Epicurus*, for undertaking the glorious work of rescuing mankind from the unsufferable yoke of superstition, by freeing them from the fear of God, and the apprehensions of providence, and a future state of retributions. And even with regard to those of the Deists, that put on the fairest appearances, I think it may be truly said, that it is not among them that we must look for the best and most perfect scheme, even of natural religion. What has been done to greatest advantage this way has been done by Christian writers, who have produced the noblest systems of natural religion, and have taken pains to establish its great principles on the surest foundations. And to what can this be reasonably ascribed, but to the clearer light which the Christian revelation hath thrown upon this subject, and the excellent helps and assistances it hath brought us? It appeareth then, that if it be of any advantage

vantage to mankind to have natural religion set in a clear light, and strongly enforced, the Deists have no right to appropriate the honour of this to themselves, or to set up for benefactors to mankind on this account. Much less have they reason to value themselves upon their opposition to the Christian religion. If the account some of themselves have given of the nature and design of Christianity be just, they must be very badly employed that endeavour to subvert its credit and authority. Lord *Herbert* calls it the *best religion*, and saith, that all its doctrines, ordinances, precepts, sacraments, aim at the establishment of those five important articles, in which he makes all religion to consist \*. Dr. *Tindal* owns, that “Christianity itself, stripped of all  
“ additions that policy, mistake, and the cir-  
“ cumstances of time have made to it, is a  
“ most holy religion †”. The *Moral Philosopher* frequently expresseth himself to the same purpose; and Mr. *Chubb* acknowledgeth that  
“ Christianity, if it could be separated from  
“ every thing that hath been blended with  
“ it, yields a much clearer light, and is a  
“ more safe guide to mankind, than any o-  
“ ther traditionary religion, as being better  
“ adapted to improve and perfect human na-  
“ ture ‡”. If therefore they had laid out their pains in endeavouring to separate true

\* Herbert relig. laici. p. 9, 10. † Christ. as old as the creation, p. 382. edit. 8vo. ‡ Chubb's posth. works. vol. 2. p. 370.

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original Christianity from the corrupt additions that have been made to it, and to engage men to a stricter adherence in principle and practice to the religion of Jesus in its primitive purity and simplicity, as delivered by Christ and his apostles in the New Testament, they might have had some pretence to the character they seem willing to claim; of friends and benefactors to mankind. But the method they have taken is very different: At the same time that they have affected to commend pure original Christianity, they have used their utmost efforts to subvert its divine authority, and thus to deprive it of its influence on the minds of men, and set them loose from all obligations to believe and to obey it. This is a manifest proof, that it is not merely the corruptions of Christianity, that they find fault with, but the Christian revelation itself, which they have not scrupled to represent as the product of enthusiasm or imposture.

Various are the ways they have taken to destroy its credit and authority, as sufficiently appeareth from the account which hath been given in the foregoing letters. And considering how many writers have appeared in this cause within this century past, and what liberty they have had to propose their reasonings and their objections, it can hardly be supposed they have left any thing unattempted that had the face of argument, by which they thought they could answer their end. And there-

therefore if it appears, as I hope it does, upon the view which hath been taken of them, that their most plausible objections have been solidly answered; it is to be hoped, that their attempts, however ill intended, will turn to the advantage of the Christian cause; as it will thence appear, how little its enemies have been able to say against it, considered in its original purity, even where they have had the utmost freedom of proposing their sentiments. They have appealed to the bar of reason; the advocates for Christianity have followed them to that bar, and have fairly shewn that the evidences of revealed religion are such as approve themselves to impartial reason, and if taken together are fully sufficient to satisfy an honest and unprejudiced mind.

Although therefore it cannot but give great concern to all that have a just zeal for our holy religion, that so many, instead of being duly thankful for the glorious light of the gospel which shineth among us, have used their utmost endeavours to expose it to contempt and reproach: Yet, on the other hand, it yields matter of agreeable reflection, that there have been as many valuable defences of Christianity published among us within this century past, as can be produced in any age. Besides those mentioned in the foregoing letters, there have been many excellent treatises setting forth the reasons and evidences of the Christian religion, which the nature of the

LETTER work I have been engaged in, did not lead me  
 XIV. to take notice of, as they were not written professedly in answer to any of those deistical books which I had occasion to mention.

It is a reflection that must obviously occur, upon a review of the account which hath been given of the authors who have appeared against Christianity, that they have been far from contenting themselves with sober reasoning, as might be expected in a case on which so much depends. The weapons they have chiefly made use of, are those of misrepresentation and ridicule, and often even low jest and buffoonery. This seems to be a presumption in favour of Christianity, that its adversaries are themselves sensible that little can be done against it, in a way of plain reason and argument. It is true, there are no writers who make greater pretensions to freedom of thought, or inveigh more strongly against prepossession and bigotry; so that one would expect that they should every where discover minds open to conviction and evidence: And yet it may safely be affirmed, that no writers whatsoever discover stronger signs of prejudice; and there is great reason to complain that they have not carried on the debate with that fairness and candour which becomes the importance of the subject\*.

Any one that is acquainted with their wri-

\* See this clearly shewn in Dr. Duchal's preface to his excellent sermons on the presumptive evidences of Christianity.

tings must be sensible, that it is not their way to make a fair and just representation of true original Christianity as contained in the Holy Scriptures. They throw it into false lights in order to expose it, and often charge it with corruptions and abuses, which they themselves well know do not really and originally belong to it. In some of their books which are written in the way of Dialogue, they introduce Christian dialogists, who are to make a shew of defending the Christian cause; but it is evident that it is only to betray it. These dialogists make a most despicable figure in their writings, and are scarce allowed to say any thing that discovers learning or even common-sense; nor ever fairly state the argument or evidence on the side of Christianity. Any one that has read *Tindal's Christianity as old as the Creation*, or the first volume of the *Moral Philosopher*, cannot but have observed this.

In their treatment of the Scriptures, they have every where discovered an eager desire and resolution to expose and run them down at any rate. In examining writings of venerable antiquity and authority, a man of candour and an impartial enquirer after truth, would be inclined to put the most favourable interpretation upon them that they will bear: But instead of this, these writers seem only solicitous to find out something that may make the scriptures appear ridiculous. They take pains to wrest and pervert them, as if they thought it meritorious

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DEEMER to treat those sacred writings in a manner that  
 would not be borne with regard to any other  
 books of the least credit. Of this many instances might be produced. If they meet with any passages of Scripture that have difficulty in them, and which at this distance it is not easy to explain; and some such passages must be expected in books of so great antiquity, written in times and places, as well as dialects, so different from our own; this is immediately improved, as if it were sufficient to shew that the whole sacred volume is false, or so corrupted as not to be depended on. Thus a late celebrated author who has endeavoured to expose the Scripture-history, has thought the curse said to have been pronounced by *Noah* upon *Canaan*, sufficient to destroy the credit of it: But not to repeat what has been offered for explaining, or vindicating that passage, supposing we were not able in any manner to account for it, would it not be far more reasonable, and becoming a man of sense and candour, to suppose that in so short a relation some circumstances are omitted, which, if known, would set it in a fair light, rather than on account of an obscure passage to reject and discard the authority of the whole?

What can be a plainer proof of the power of their prejudices, than to advance rules in judging of the truth and credibility of Scripture-history, which would be absolutely rejected and exploded, if applied to any other history



history in the world; and to reject the evidence as insufficient with regard to the facts recorded in the gospel, which they themselves would count sufficient with regard to any other facts done in past ages? What greater sign of prejudice, than when they are not able to invalidate the truth of the gospel-records, or to shew that they have not been safely transmitted to us, to fly out into general clamours and invectives against all historical evidence whatsoever, as absolutely uncertain? The author of *Christianity not founded on Argument* speaks out, and plainly declares that no man ought to believe any thing but what he sees with his own eyes. "To believe a thing," says he, because another man says he saw it, is a very unprecedented and new sort of logic\*." And it is a constant topic with these writers to declaim against every thing as uncertain that comes to us through the hands of fallible men. As if no man could be sure that there is such a place as *Paris* except he had been there, or that there had been such a person as *Queen Elizabeth*. Moral certainty is ridiculed and exposed; though nothing can be more plain from the very frame of our nature, and the circumstances in which we are placed by divine providence here on earth, than that the author of our beings designed that we should in many cases

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\* *Christianity not founded on argument*, p. 53.

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Many other things might be mentioned which shew the strength of their prejudices against Christianity. They often make use of arguments, which, if they were good for any thing, would hold for casting off all religion, all certainty of reason, all learning and instruction, and if pursued to their genuine consequences would introduce universal barbarism. And what a strange prejudice does this argue, to have such an aversion for Christianity, as to be willing to throw off all religion, learning, and knowledge, rather than admit it? If they can but expose revealed religion, it seems to give them very little concern, though natural religion falls with it: Some of their admired authors argue against all methods of education, all attempts to instruct children in the principles of religion or morality. This

\* See this excellently stated and cleared in *Dillon* on the Resurrection, part. 2d.

is an extraordinary refinement of the present age. The best and wisest men of all former ages have looked upon it to be a thing of vast consequence to season the minds of children betimes, with good and just notions of things. But some of our modern Free-thinkers have, in their superior wisdom, found out, that the best way would be to leave children entirely to themselves, without any instruction or cultivation at all. This is the scheme of the author of *Christianity not founded on Argument*; and another of their applauded writers, Dr. *Tindal*, seems sometimes to declare against all instruction by word or writing, as useless or needless, and as only tending to turn men aside from attending to the things themselves, and to the pure simple dictates of nature.

Their desire at any rate to subvert Christianity has involved them in many inconsistencies. Sometimes, to shew that there is no need or use of divine revelation, the powers of reason in matters of religion are mightily extoll'd, as if it were able to do every thing by its own force, without any assistance. At other times, to render us indifferent to religion, reason is degraded; and it is expressly declared, that, "it is not her proper province to judge of religion at all; nor is this an affair in which she has the least concern\*".

\* Christianity not founded on argument, p. 7.

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Sometimes all men, even those that cannot read their mother tongue are supposed to be so clear sighted, as to be able, without any instruction, to know the whole of religion. At other times, the bulk of mankind are represented as unable to know any thing of religion, and therefore not under any obligation to believe it, and as not capable of judging where there is any thing of induction or inference in the case.

If the doctrines of the gospel appear, upon a strict examination, to be such as right reason approves when once they are discovered, then it is argued that reason alone might have discovered them, and that a revelation in such cases is perfectly needless and of no use at all. But if there be any thing in these discoveries which was not discoverable by unassisted reason, and which we could not have known but by extraordinary revelation, this is made an objection against receiving it; and to believe in that case is branded as an implicit faith, and a giving up our reason.

Sometimes the apostles are represented as hot-brain'd enthusiasts, who really believed themselves to be inspired of God, and were so mad as to imagine that they wrought miracles, and had extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, when there was no such thing. At other times they are represented as artful impostors, who formed a scheme of worldly power and grandeur under spiritual pretences, and forged

ged facts and evidences which they knew to be false.

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The character of our blessed Lord, as set before us in the gospel, is so excellent and admirable, that the enemies of our holy religion know not well how to fix a stain upon it. But when they can find nothing in his doctrine, or in his temper or conduct, that favours of the spirit of this world, or of a carnal policy, they are willing to suppose, that under these specious appearances he concealed ambitious and interested views, which were to take effect in the proper time. Lord *Shaftsbury* had insinuated this; and it was a part of Mr. *Woolston's* scheme to charge Christ with a secret design of aspiring to temporal power and dominion; and with encouraging the *Jews* to take him for their king. The same thing is pretended by the *Moral Philosopher*, and by the author of *The Resurrection of Jesus considered*. Thus, this malignant insinuation is repeated by one of these writers after another, without any thing to support it but the malice of the accusers, and an earnest desire to find a flaw in the most perfect character: Since both the whole of his life and conduct, and the entire strain and tendency of the religion he taught, affords the strongest proofs to the contrary. And at this rate the best and noblest characters may pass for the worst; and the greater marks there are of self-denial and disinterested-

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Sometimes Jesus and his apostles are represented as teaching wholly in a way of authority, and never applying to men's reason at all, and even absolutely forbidding them to use their understandings. This is what the author of *Christianity not founded on Argument* has laboured to prove. At other times, it is asserted, as it is particularly by the *Moral Philosopher*, that Christ appealed wholly to men's own reason, and would not have them take any thing upon his authority at all as a teacher sent from God, or upon any other evidence than the reason and nature of the thing\*.

When they are not able to produce any ancient evidences against Christianity, they presume upon it as a certain thing, that there was evidence formerly against it, but that this evidence was destroyed, and that it was because of the strength of the evidence, that it was found necessary to destroy it. Thus, these gentlemen know how to turn, even the want of evidence against Christianity, into an argument against its truth. I shall not here repeat what has been elsewhere offered to shew the vanity and unreasonableness of this pretence †. I shall only observe, that according to their

\* *Moral Philosopher*, vol. 2. p. 23, 24, 41, 42. † Reflections on the late Lord Bolingbroke's letters, &c. p. 112, & seq.

usual way of repeating continually the same objections, this has been urged with great confidence by Mr. *Woolston*, by the author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, and very lately by a writer of quality, whom I have had occasion to mention more than once as having appeared in the same cause.

Many other instances might be produced by which it appears, that no writers whatsoever shew more apparent signs of strong prejudice and prepossession, than those that honour themselves with the title of *Free-thinkers*. It were greatly to be wished for their own sakes, as well as for the sake of others, whom they take pains to pervert, that they would endeavour to divest themselves of their prejudices, and would consider the evidences for Christianity, with that seriousness and attention which becomes them in an affair of such vast importance. I am sensible indeed, that many are ready to represent this as a thing of no consequence at all. They look upon all forms of religion to be alike with regard to the favour of God, and that it is perfectly indifferent what a man professes, provided he be a man of virtue\*. But real piety and virtue will engage a man to receive whatever he has reason to think is a true signification of the divine will. And if Christianity be indeed a true revelation from God, as it claims to be,

\* Concerning this see above, p. 395, 396, 397.

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and if the declarations there made in the name of God are to be depended upon, it cannot possibly be a matter of indifferency, whether those to whom it is published and made known, receive or reject it: The believing and receiving it, must in that case needs be of great consequence to our happiness, and to disbelieve and reject it is infinitely hazardous. It therefore highly concerneth us to enquire, whether Christianity be in reality a true divine revelation; whether the laws there prescribed in the name of God, be indeed his laws, and to be obeyed as such; whether the terms of acceptance there proposed be of his own appointment; whether the promises there made, are to be regarded as his promises, and the threatenings there denounced are to be considered as really enforced by his authority. For if they really be so, and we reject them without examination, or refuse to consider them as if they were not worthy of a serious thought, we shall be absolutely without excuse, and shall never be able to justify our conduct to God, or our own consciences.

A noted deistical author, after having insinuated that we need not give ourselves the trouble to enquire into the several pretended revelations, that have appeared in the world, yet thinks fit to own, that “when a revelation which assumes a divine character, comes to our own door, and offers itself  
“ to



“ to our consideration, and as it may possibly be what it is pretended to be, and as such we may possibly be interested in it, this may excite our concern to try and prove it; otherwise we can be under no obligation with regard to it\*.” Where he plainly supposes, that, in the case he puts we are under an obligation to try and prove a revelation which assumes a divine character, and offers itself to our consideration. And it strengthens this, if the revelation itself, supposing it to be really given by God, does in his name require and demand our attention and submission, as a condition of our being interested in his favour. In such a case, it must be no small guilt to disregard and reject it at once without a due inquiry, but especially to cast contempt and reproach upon it, and endeavour to engage others to reject it.

And the guilt and danger of rejecting that revelation is mightily heightened, if it should be found, that the true cause of that infidelity, and of the disregard shewn to that revelation, is the strength of vicious appetite, and an aversion to the holy and excellent laws which are there prescribed. And this, it is to be feared, is the case of the generality of those among us who reject the gospel-revelation. When we see them, under pretence of disbelieving the doctrines, discarding

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\* Chubb's posthumous works, vol. I. p. II.

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 and give themselves up to a boundless licentiousness; there is too just reason to apprehend, that the true cause of their dislike to the Christian revelation, is not so much their being dissatisfied with the evidences produced for it, as because they cannot bear the restraints it lays upon their corrupt lusts and passions. The real end they aim at is expressed by one of themselves to be, “to save a soul from the  
 “dismal apprehensions of eternal damna-  
 “tion”, to relieve a person, “from labouring  
 “under that uneasiness of mind, which he  
 “often is under, when pleasure and Chris-  
 “tianity come in competition\*.” And a late noble writer mentions it as an advantage of the way of thinking he recommends, that *the burning lake will then disappear*†. And if by shutting their eyes against the evidence they could alter the real state of the case, and render their condition safer than it would otherwise be; if their not believing *eternal damnation* would secure them against the danger of that damnation; it would be wisely done to take pains to disbelieve it. But if their unbelief in such a case, instead of making the danger less, only aggravates their guilt, and

\* See two letters from a Deist to his friend, p. 17, 19. cited by Dr. Waterland in his preface to the first part of *Script. vind.*

† Lord Bolingbroke's letters on the study and use of history, vol. 2. p. 221.

heightens their danger, and puts them off from taking the properest methods for avoiding it, the folly of such a conduct is very apparent. Christianity professes to direct to a true and certain way, both of avoiding that future punishment, and of obtaining the greatest glory and felicity that can possibly be proposed to the human mind. But if these gentlemen will rather venture to expose themselves to that future punishment, than endeavour to prevent it by a true repentance and by abandoning their vicious courses, and if they will choose rather to forfeit the hopes of everlasting happiness, than go on in that uniform course of piety and virtue that leads to it, there is no remedy, they must take the consequences. But certainly the bare possibility of the *wrath to come* is so dreadful a thing, that a wise man would not run the hazard of it for a few transient vicious gratifications. For what one of their own admired authors says, tho' in a sneering way, is a sober and momentous truth, and what the reason of mankind cannot but approve, that "where there is a hell on the other side, it is but natural prudence to take readily to the safest side\*."

I shall conclude this letter with taking notice of a proposal made by a *Deistical Writer*, for putting an end to the important controversy between the Christians and the

\* Christianity not founded on argument, p. 88.

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Deists. “ If those learned gentlemen, says he, “ that are the directors of others, will choose “ to give up speculative principles, and an “ historical faith, and insist only on that prac- “ tice which will recommend men in every “ religion to the favour of God, the good-will “ of men, and peace of their own conscience, “ and own, that the whole of the Christian “ religion, which is worth contending for, “ are all relative and social virtues, then the “ contention between the Christian and Deist “ will drop\*.” So then, we see here upon what terms the Deists are willing to be at peace with the Christian divines. They must give up *speculative principles* and an *historical faith*. By an *historical faith*, in these gentlemen’s language, must be understood faith in Jesus Christ, a belief of what is related in the gospels concerning him, concerning his person, ministry, miracles, sufferings, resurrection, ascension; and all this must be given up as of no consequence to mankind at all. And *speculative principles*, must also be abandoned. And what is intended by these, and how far this demand is to extend, is hard to know. With some that call themselves Deists, the most important principles of natural religion, the belief of a providence, of the immortality of the soul, and a state of future judgment and retributions, are looked

\* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 83.

upon to be needless speculations, and either denied, or treated as matters of doubtful disputation. But let us suppose that no stress is to be laid upon any doctrines or principles at all, and that practice alone is to be insisted on, though some principles seem to lie at the foundation of a good and virtuous practice, yet still it will be found no easy matter for the Christian and Deist to agree what that practice is which is to be regarded as necessary. This writer would have the divines own, that *the whole of the Christian religion, which is worth contending for, are all relative and social virtues.* Here is not a word said of the duties of piety and devotion, of love, reverence, adoration, submission, assiance, and resignation towards the supreme Being, or of prayer, confession of sins, thanksgiving, praise, and the outward acts of religious homage which we owe to God. Yet this is an important part of our duty, on which Christianity, and even right reason itself, teacheth us to lay a great stress; though it is treated by many among the Deists as a thing of small consequence. Nor is there any thing here said of the duties of self-government, chastity, purity, humility, temperance, and the due regulation of our appetites and passions. And when this comes to be explained, there is likely to be a wide difference between the Christians and Deists, as to the particulars includ-

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ed in this part of our duty. It is very probable, that these gentlemen will plead for allowing much greater liberties in indulging their sensual appetites and passions, than is consistent with the morals of the gospel, and with that purity of heart and life which Christianity requireth. And even as to relative and social virtues, in which this author makes the whole of religion to consist, the Deists have often objected against that forgiveness of injuries, that charity and benevolence, even towards our enemies themselves, that returning good for evil, which the great author of our religion hath urged upon his disciples, both by his doctrine and by his example. It is to be feared, upon the whole, that they will be as far from agreeing to the morals as to the doctrines of the gospel; and that some of its laws and practical precepts stand more in their way, and create greater prejudices against it, than its mysteries themselves, though it is a little more plausible and decent to put the reason of their rejecting Christianity upon the latter than upon the former.

This may help us to judge better whether there be any just ground for their pretences, as if the world were greatly obliged to them for endeavouring to take men off from useless speculations, and teaching them to lay the whole stress upon practice. The last mentioned author concludes his treatise against the resurrection of Jesus with declaring his hope,

hope, that it “ will be of real service to religion, and make men’s practice better, when they shall find they have nothing else to depend upon for happiness here and hereafter, but their own personal righteousness, with their love of wisdom and truth”\*.

And others of them have made the same boast, but very undeservedly. For can the necessity of personal obedience and righteousness be more expressly insisted upon than in the gospel of Jesus, or be bound upon us by stronger and more sacred arguments? Do these gentlemen pretend to teach more excellent morals than the Christian religion does, or to carry piety, charity, benevolence; purity of manners, and universal righteousness to a nobler height, or to enforce the practice of it by more powerful and prevailing motives? Or, do they propose to make men’s practice better by leaving them at large, without any express divine precepts determining the particulars of their duty, and by taking away the glorious hopes and promises of the gospel, which are designed to animate us to obedience, and the awful threatenings which are there denounced against vice and wickedness?

But enough has been said of these gentlemen and their pretences, and I intended here as a proper conclusion of this work to have given a summary representation of the prin-

\* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 82.

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principal arguments and evidences for the truth and divinity of the Christian revelation. But as you will probably think this letter to be already of sufficient length, I choose to reserve it for the subject of my next.



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## L E T T E R X V.

*An extraordinary revelation from God to mankind possible to be given. The propriety of such a revelation shewn. Those to whom it is made known indispensably obliged to embrace it. The marks and evidences by which we may be satisfied that such a revelation is really given, viz. when the revelation itself is of an excellent nature and tendency, and when it is accompanied by the most extraordinary divine attestations, especially miracles and prophecy. The propriety of the proof from miracles vindicated. Confession of some of the Deists themselves to this purpose. The revelation contained in the holy Scriptures confirmed by a series of the most extraordinary works which manifestly argued a divine interposition. The nature of the revelation itself considered. Distinguished into three periods, under each of which the religion for substance the same. First, The patriarchal religion. The second relates to the Mosaical dispensation. The third, which was the perfection of all the rest, is the Christian revelation. The god-like character of its author. The nature and tendency of the religion itself particu-*

*larly considered, and shewn to be worthy of God. It could not be the effect either of imposture or enthusiasm, and therefore must be of divine original. The Christian scheme of the Mediator wise and excellent. The difficulties attending it no just objection against Christianity. The conclusion.*

## S I R,

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**H**AVING finished the account of the *Deistical Writers*, it will not be improper to lay together some considerations relating to the reasons we have to believe that Christianity is a true revelation from God, and that therefore they to whom it is published and made known are under indispensable obligations to believe and embrace it.

With regard to revelation in general, the first thing that comes to be considered, is the possibility of it. That God can, if he thinks fit, make extraordinary discoveries of his will, and communicate important truths to one or more men, to be by them communicated to others in his name, cannot be denied with the least appearance of reason. For upon what foundation can any man go, in pretending that this is impossible? Is there any thing in it which implieth a contradiction either to the nature of God or man? This cannot be pretended, nor has any man attempted to shew that it involveth a contradiction. Accordingly, the possibility of a revelation has  
 2 been

been generally acknowledged by those who believe the existence of God and a providence, nor do I see how any man that acknowledgeth a God and a providence can consistently deny it.

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And as the possibility of God's making an extraordinary revelation of his will to mankind must be acknowledged; so the propriety of it, or that it is worthy of God to grant such a revelation, supposing, which hath been unanswerably proved to have been the case in fact, mankind to have been sunk into a state of great darkness and corruption in matters of religion and morals; and that if he should grant such a revelation for guiding men into the knowledge of important truths, or for enforcing their duty upon them, it would be a signal instance of the divine wisdom and goodness, cannot be reasonably contested. And indeed, this is no more than what some of the Deists themselves have thought fit to acknowledge. The *Moral Philosopher* expressly owns it; and a remarkable passage from Mr. *Chubb* to the same purpose was cited in my twelfth letter, p. 306, 307.

It greatly strengthens this, when it is considered, that several things there are of great importance to mankind to know, particularly concerning the attributes and providence of God; the most acceptable way of worshipping him; the extent of the duty we owe him, and the methods of his dealings towards

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his offending creatures; how far and upon what terms he will pardon their iniquities, and receive them to his grace and favour; what rewards it will please him to confer upon those that serve him in sincerity, though their obedience is mixed with infirmities and defects; and what punishment he will inflict upon obstinate presumptuous transgressors: I say, there are several things, with respect to these and such like matters, which as they relate to things invisible, or things future, and which depend upon God's most wise counsels, of which if left to ourselves we cannot pretend to be competent judges, we could not have a clear and full assurance of by the mere light of our own unassisted reason. It seems evident therefore that mankind stood in great need of an extraordinary revelation from God, and that this would be of the most signal advantage. And though it cannot without great rashness be pretended that God is absolutely obliged to give this advantage to any, or that if he gives it to any he is obliged to give it equally to all men, since it is manifest in fact that in the course of his providence much greater advantages are given to some than to others, with respect to the means of religious and moral improvement; yet it is reasonable to conclude that he hath not left all mankind at all times entirely destitute of an assistance of such great consequence and so much wanted. This affordeth a strong presumption that God hath at some time or other made discoveries of his will to mankind

mankind in a way of extraordinary revelation, additional to the common light of nature.

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It is also manifest, that supposing such a revelation to have been really given from God, and that men have sufficient evidence to convince them that it was from God, those to whom this revelation is made known, are indispensably obliged to receive and embrace it. This every man must acknowledge, who hath just notions of the Deity, or that God is the moral governor of the world, and hath a right to give laws to his creatures, and to require obedience to those laws. And it were the greatest absurdity to suppose, that men may innocently reject what they have good reason to regard as the signification of the divine will, made to them for this very purpose, that they should believe and obey them.

These are principles which cannot justly be contested; the grand question then is, whether any sufficient proofs or evidences can be produced, that such a revelation hath been really given, and what those proofs and evidences are. Some there are who seem not willing to allow that any persons, but those to whom the revelation is immediately made, can have sufficient evidence or proof to satisfy them that it is a true revelation from God. This is what Lord *Herbert* insisteth upon in his book *De Veritate*, and in several parts of his other works, where he makes it a necessary condition of a man's having a certain knowledge of a divine revelation, that

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that it be made immediately to himself, and that he should feel a divine afflatus in the reception of it. In this his Lordship has been followed by other writers that have appeared in the same cause. According to this scheme, it is vain for those that have received a revelation from God to offer to produce any proofs of their divine mission, since no proofs or evidences can be offered that will be sufficient, except every one of those to whom they impart this, have another particular revelation to assure them of it. This is in effect to pronounce, that supposing God to have communicated to any person or persons extraordinary discoveries of his will, to be by them communicated for the use and instruction of mankind, it is absolutely out of his power to furnish them with such credentials of their divine mission, as may make it reasonable for others to receive the doctrines and laws delivered by such persons in his name as of divine authority. But such an assertion cannot be excused from great rashness and arrogance, and is a most unwarrantable limitation of the divine power and wisdom. It will indeed be readily allowed, that supposing persons to declare with never so great confidence that they are extraordinarily sent of God, we are not to receive their bare word for a proof of it; and though they themselves should be firmly persuaded of the truth and divinity of the revelation made immediately to them, this their persuasion is not

a sufficient warrant for others to receive that revelation as true and divine, except some farther proofs and evidences are given. And it is reasonable to believe, that in that case, if God hath sent persons, and extraordinarily inspired them to deliver doctrines and laws of great importance to mankind in his name, he will furnish them with such proofs and evidences, as may be a sufficient ground to those to whom this revelation is not immediately made, to receive those doctrines and laws as of divine authority. And here in judging of these, it must be acknowledged, that great care and caution is necessary, since it cannot be denied that there have been false pretences to revelation, the effects of enthusiasm or imposture, which have given rise to impositions, that have been of ill consequence to mankind. And tho' that is not a just reason for rejecting all revelation at once, as false or uncertain, yet it is a very good reason for making a very careful inquiry into the evidences that are produced for any pretended revelation. And with regard to this it may be observed, that where persons pretending to bring a system of doctrines and laws, which they profess to have received by revelation from God, have had their divine mission confirmed by a series of the most extraordinary works, bearing the illustrious characters of a divine interposition, and which they have been enabled to perform in declared attestation to it; especially, if they

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they have been enabled also to make express predictions in the name of God, concerning things future, which no human sagacity could foresee; and if at the same time the revelation itself appeareth to be of a most excellent tendency, manifestly conducive to the glory of God, and to the good of mankind, and to the promoting the interest of important truth, righteousness and virtue in the world, and thereby answering the main ends of all religion; there seems in that case to be sufficient evidence to produce a reasonable conviction that this is a revelation from God, and consequently to justify and demand our receiving and submitting to it as of divine authority. For in this case, there seemeth to be as much evidence given to satisfy an honest and impartial enquirer as could be reasonably expected or desired, supposing a revelation really given. And that this hath actually been the case with regard to the revelation contained in the holy scriptures, the advocates for Christianity have set themselves to shew with great force of reason and argument.

With regard to the external attestations given to the truth and divinity of the scripture-revelation, there is scarce any thing in which the *Doctrinal Writers* have been more generally agreed than in bending their force against the proof from miracles. The methods they have taken to this purpose have been various: Sometimes they have gone so far as to pretend to  
 prove,



prove, that miracles are absolutely impossible; at other times that they are needless and useless, and are incapable of shewing the divine mission of persons, or truth of doctrines, because there is no connection between power and truth, But though it will be readily acknowledged, that power and truth are distinct ideas, this does by no means prove, that the former can in no case give attestation to the latter. For if power be exerted in such a way as to manifest an extraordinary divine interposition in favour of a person professing to bring doctrines and laws from God to mankind, and be appealed to for that purpose, in such a case power so exerted may give an attestation to the truth and authority of those doctrines and laws. Some of the Deists themselves are so sensible of this, that after all their pretences they are obliged to make acknowledgments with regard to the use of miracles that are of no small disservice to their cause. They acknowledge that they may be of use to excite and engage attention to doctrines and laws, which supposes them to carry something in them of the nature of an attestation or proof, since otherwise no more regard ought to be paid to doctrines or laws on the account of miracles, than if they were not attended with miracles at all. The *Moral Philosopher* owns, that “miracles, especially  
“ if wrought for the good of mankind, are per-  
“ haps the most effectual means of removing  
“ prejudices, and procuring attention to what

LETTER " is delivered". Mr. *Collins* goes so far as  
 XV. to acknowledge, that miracles when done in  
 proof of doctrines and precepts that are con-  
 sistent with reason, and for the honour of God  
 and the good of mankind, ought to determine  
 men to believe and receive them; and that  
 Christ's miracles might have been sufficient, if  
 he had not appealed to prophecy, and laid the  
 principal stress of the proof of his divine mis-  
 sion upon it; as this writer pretends he did\*.  
 Mr. *Woolston* says, " I believe it will be grant-  
 ed on all hands, that the restoring a person  
 indisputably dead to life is a stupendous mi-  
 racle, and that two or three such miracles  
 well attested and credibly reported, are  
 enough to conciliate the belief; that the  
 author of them was a divine agent, and in-  
 vested with the power of God †" And  
*Spinoza* is said to have declared, that if he  
 could believe that the resurrection of *Lazarus*  
 was really wrought as it is related, he would  
 give up his system.

That God can, if he thinketh fit, alter or  
 suspend the course of natural causes in parti-  
 cular instances, must be allowed by all who  
 acknowledge that he is the Lord of nature;  
 and the Sovereign of the universe. And that  
 it may be agreeable to his wisdom; to do  
 so on some extraordinary occasions may ap-  
 pear from this consideration, that such inter-

\* Scheme of literal prophecy, p. 321, 322.  
 on miracles, p. 3.

† Vth discourse

positions may be of use to awaken in men a sense of a governing providence, and to convince them that the course of nature is not a fatal series of blind necessary causes, but under the regulation of a most wise and free, as well as powerful mind; which, as it hath very properly appointed, that things should ordinarily go on in an uniform course according to established laws, so can alter or overrule, interrupt or suspend the effect and influence of natural causes, and deviate from the usual course of things on special occasions for valuable purposes: And such a valuable purpose it would be for providence to interpose for giving an illustrious attestation to doctrines and laws of great importance to mankind, and to the divine mission of persons sent to instruct them in religion, to recover them from great errors and corruptions, and guide them to the true knowledge, obedience, and adoration of the deity; and to a holy and virtuous practice. Extraordinary miraculous interpositions in such a case would answer an excellent end, and be worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness. This seems to be a way of God's giving his testimony the most powerful and striking that can be, and which is peculiarly fitted for engaging mankind to receive and submit to such a revelation as of divine authority. And thus it was with regard to the miracles wrought at the first establishment of the *Jewish* and *Christian* dispensations.

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There was not merely a single extraordinary event or two, in which case it might have been supposed, that it was only some strange thing that had happened, of which no account can be given, and from which nothing certain can be concluded; but there was a marvellous succession and concurrence of the most extraordinary facts, done in the most open public manner in a great number of instances, and for a series of years together, all visibly tending to the same important end, *viz.* to give attestation to the divine authority of a system of doctrines and laws delivered in the name of God himself. And these facts were of such a nature, so manifestly transcending all human power, and which bore such evident marks of a divine interposition, that, taken together, they form as strong an evidence as could be reasonably expected and desired. And I believe few, if any, can be found, who are really persuaded of the truth of those facts, and do not also acknowledge the divine original and authority of the revelation thus attested and confirmed. And supposing such miraculous attestations to have been really given at the first promulgation and establishment of a system of doctrines and laws, which is declared to have come from God; this is sufficient to establish its authority not only at that time, but to succeeding ages, provided that the accounts of those doctrines, and laws, and of the extraordinary facts whereby they were attested,

tested, were faithfully transmitted in a manner which may be safely depended upon. And that this hath ██████ been the case with regard to the Mosaic and Christian revelation, hath been often clearly shewn.

With regard to the former, never were there in the world facts of a more public nature, than those by which the Mosaic law was attested. They were not merely things done in a way of secret intercourse and communication with the Deity, in which case there might have been some suspicion of imposture, but they were facts done openly in the view of all the people, who, let us suppose them never so stupid, could not possibly have been made to believe that all these things happened in their own sight, and that they themselves had been witnesses to them, if they had not been so. Nor can it be supposed that Moses, who was certainly a wise man, would have attempted so wild a thing as to have appealed to the people, as he does all along, for the truth of those facts, and to have put the authority of his laws upon them, if at the same time they all knew them to be false. If therefore Moses published those facts himself to all the people, the facts were true. And that he did himself publish those facts, we have the same proof which we have that he gave the laws. And that he gave the laws to the people of *Israel*; as the whole nation

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LETTER XV. who were governed by those laws have constantly affirmed, no reasonable man can deny. The accounts of the facts are so interwoven with the very body of the laws, that they cannot be separated. Some of the principal motives to engage the people to the observance of those laws are taken from those facts. Many of the laws were peculiarly designed to preserve the remembrance of those facts. And this was the professed end of the institution of some of their most solemn sacred rites, which were to be constantly observed by the whole nation in every age from the beginning of their policy. These laws and facts were not transmitted merely by oral tradition, which in many cases is a very uncertain conveyance, but were immediately committed to writing. And those writings were not kept secret, in the hands of a few, but from the time they were first written, were published to the people, who were commanded in the name of God to acquaint themselves with those laws and facts, and to teach them diligently to their children, and were assured that upon their preserving and keeping them, their prosperity and happiness, public and private, and all their privileges, depended. Accordingly in all the remaining writings of that nation, whether of an historical, moral or devotional kind, there is a constant reference not only to the laws as having been originally given by Moses in the name

name of God to their nation, but to the wonderful facts that were done in attestation to those laws, as of undoubted credit, and as things universally known and acknowledged among them. If those facts had been only mentioned in a few passages, it might possibly be pretended, that the accounts of them were interpolations afterwards inserted in these writings. But as the case is circumstanced, there is no room for this pretence. The facts are repeated and referred to on so many different occasions, that it appears with the utmost evidence that those facts have been all along known and acknowledged, and the remembrance of them constantly kept up among that people in all ages. Their peculiar constitution, whereby they were so remarkably distinguished from all other nations, was plainly founded upon the truth and authority of those facts, nor could have been established without them.

To all which it may be added, that the very quality of the writings which contain an account of those facts, or in which they are referred to as of undoubted truth, derives no small credit to them. A profound veneration for the Deity every where appears, together with a remarkable unaffected simplicity and integrity, and an impartial love of truth. It cannot reasonably be pretended, that they were forged to humour and flatter their nation, for with the utmost freedom they relate things

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XV. } greatly to the disadvantage of their national character. They represent impartially and without disguise their frequent defections from their law, their disobedience and ingratitude to God for all his benefits, and the great punishments inflicted upon them on that account. Besides which it is to be observed, that there are in those writings clear and express predictions of future extraordinary events, which no human sagacity could foresee, and which yet have been most remarkably accomplished. And particularly it is there most expressly foretold, that the people of *Israel*, for whom God had done such great things, should yet be distinguished with judgments and calamities above all other nations; that they should be dispersed all over the face of the earth, exposed to universal obloquy, and yet not be utterly lost or destroyed, but still preserved as a distinct people; which we see most signally verified at this day. A thing so wonderful, taken in all its circumstances, that this people may be regarded as a lively continued monument of the truth of their own antient sacred writings, and of the extraordinary facts there recorded.

As to the extraordinary and miraculous facts whereby the divine original and authority of the Christian revelation was attested and confirmed, never were there any facts that had clearer and more convincing evidence attending them. They were many in number, done for the most part in the most publick manner,  
and



and for a series of years together, and produced the most wonderful effects in bringing over vast numbers both of Jews and gentiles, in the very age in which the facts were done, and when they had the best opportunity of knowing the truth of those facts, to receive a crucified Jesus as their saviour and their Lord, than which nothing could be imagined more contrary to the prejudices which then universally obtained. The accounts of these facts as well as of the pure and excellent laws and doctrines in attestation of which they were wrought, were published in the very age in which these laws were delivered and those facts were done, and by persons who were perfectly acquainted with the things they relate. And the facts themselves were of such a nature, that they could not be deceived in them themselves, supposing they had their senses. Nor had they any temptation or interest to put them upon endeavouring to impose upon others by giving false accounts of those facts. For besides that the falshood of those accounts must, as the case was circumstanced, have been immediately detected and exposed, the religion which was confirmed by those facts, was in many things directly contrary to those notions and prejudices with which their own minds had been most strongly prepossessed, and which nothing less than the undeniable evidence they had of those facts was able to overcome. And it strengthens this when it is considered, that

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this religion, instead of promising them any worldly advantages, exposed them to the most cruel reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings, and to whatever is most grievous to human nature, which they endured with an amazing constancy, persisting in their testimony even to the death. To which it may be added, that if we examine the writings themselves, we shall find in them all the characters of genuine purity, integrity, undisguised simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth, that any writings can possibly have. And the whole scheme of religion there laid down is uniformly directed to the glory of God, and the good of mankind, and to serve the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world. Accordingly these writings were immediately received with great veneration in the very age in which they were first written and published, and from that time regarded as of undoubted truth and of divine authority. They were soon spread far and wide, read in the public religious assemblies of Christians, translated into various languages, and they have been constantly cited by great numbers of writers in every age since, whose works are still extant, many of whom have not only quoted particular passages, but have transcribed large portions of them into their writings, by which it incontestibly appears, that they were the same both with regard to the accounts of doctrines and facts that are now in our hands. They have been on numberless occasions

occasions appealed to by persons of different LETTER  
XV. sects, parties, and opinions in religion, so that it would not have been in the power of any party of men, if they had been so disposed, to have destroyed or corrupted all the copies, or to have made a general alteration in the scheme of religion there taught, or in the accounts of the facts there recorded. And it is evident in fact that no such alterations have been made, since religion there appeareth in its primitive simplicity, as it was in the first age of the Christian church, without any of the corruptions of latter ages. And, upon the whole, it may upon good grounds be affirmed, that the proofs which are brought to shew, that the scriptures are safely transmitted to us, are greater than can be produced for any other books in the world. This hath been often fully vindicated, and set in so clear a light, that the enemies of Christianity have had no other way of avoiding the evidence, but by most absurdly flying out ( as hath been observed before ) into invectives against all historical evidence, and against the credit of all past facts whatsoever. It may therefore be justly said, that no greater evidence of the truth of the extraordinary facts whereby Christianity was attested, can reasonably be desired, except all these stupendous facts were to be done over again for our conviction. And if one man thinks he may justly demand this, another man hath an equal right to demand it, and so every man may demand

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it. And those facts must be repeated in every age, in every nation, and in the sight of every single person, which would be the most absurd and unreasonable thing in the world, and the most unworthy of the divine wisdom.

This may suffice with regard to the extraordinary attestations given to the revelation contained in the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and which exhibit illustrious convincing proofs of its divine original. It will be proper next to consider the nature and excellency of the revelation itself, with the scheme of religion there delivered to us, and it will appear upon the most impartial examination to be worthy of God, of a most admirable tendency, and well fitted to answer the important ends for which we might suppose a revelation to have been given to mankind.

That we may have a juster notion of the religion held forth to us in the Holy Scriptures, it is proper to take a brief view of it from the beginning. The sacred volume opens with that which lies at the foundation of religion, an account of God's having created the world, which is there described in a plain and familiar manner, accommodated to the capacities of the people, and with a noble simplicity; as is also the original formation of man, who is represented as having been formed after the divine image, invested with a dominion over the inferior creation, with a reservation of the homage he

himself owed to God as his sovereign Lord, and constituted in a paradisiacal state, a happy state of purity and innocence. There is nothing in this but what is agreeable to right reason, as well as to the most antient traditions that have obtained among the nations. We are farther there informed, that man fell from that state by sinning against his maker; and that sin brought death into the world, and all the evils and miseries to which the human race is now obnoxious. But that the merciful parent of our being, in his great goodness and compassion, was pleased to make such revelations and discoveries of his grace and mercy, as laid a proper foundation for the faith and hope of his offending creatures, and for the exercise of religion towards him. Accordingly, the religion delivered in the Scriptures, is the religion of man in his lapsed state, and any one that impartially and carefully considers it, will find one scheme of religion substantially the same, carried all along through the whole, till it was brought to its full perfection and accomplishment by Jesus Christ.

This religion may be considered principally under three periods. The first is the religion of the patriarchal times, which consisted in the pure adoration of the Deity free from idolatry, in a firm belief of his universal and particular providence, a hope of his pardoning mercy towards penitent sinners, and a confiding

LETTER XV. ing in him as the great rewarder of them that diligently seek him; which reward they looked for not merely in this present world, but in a future state: For we are told, that they *sought a better country, that is, an heavenly.* These were the main principles of their religion, together with a strong sense of their obligation to the practice of piety, virtue, and universal righteousness. To which it may be added, that there seems to have been a hope and expectation from the beginning, originally founded on a divine promise, of a great Saviour, who was to redeem mankind from the miseries and ruins to which they were exposed, and through whom God was to make the fullest discoveries and exhibitions of his grace and mercy towards the human race, and to raise them to a high degree of glory and felicity. As to the external rites of religion then made use of, the most ancient rite of which we have any account, is that of offering sacrifice to God: And its having so early and universally obtained among all nations, and in the most ancient times, as a sacred rite of religion, can scarce be otherwise accounted for, than by supposing it to have been a part of the primitive religion, originally enjoined by divine appointment to the first ancestors of the human race, and from them transmitted to their descendents. This patriarchal religion, as it has been described, seems to have been the religion of *Adam* after his fall, of *Abel*, *Seth*, *Enoch*, and the antediluvian patriarchs;

archs; and afterwards of *Noah*, the second pa-<sup>LETTER</sup>rent of mankind, and of the several heads of <sup>XV.</sup>families derived from him, who probably carried it into their several dispersions. But, above all, this religion was signally exemplified in *Abraham*, who was illustrious for his faith, piety, and righteousness, and whom God was pleased to favour with special discoveries of his will. From him descended many great nations, among whom this religion, in its main principles, seems to have been preserved, of which there are noble remains in the book of *Job*. There were also remarkable vestiges of it for a long time preserved among several other nations; and indeed the belief of one supreme God, of a providence, a hope of pardoning mercy, a sense of the obligations of piety and virtue, and of the acceptance and reward of sincere obedience, and the expectation of a future state, were never entirely extinguished. And whosoever among the *Gentiles* at any time, or in any nation, was a fearer of God, and a worker of righteousness, might be justly regarded as of the ancient patriarchal religion, and was favourably accepted with God. But in process of time the nations became generally depraved, sunk into a deplorable darkness and corruption, and the great principles of religion were in a great measure covered and overwhelmed with an amazing load of superstitions, idolatries, and corruptions of all kinds.

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The second view of religion as set before us in the Scriptures is, that which relates to the *Mosaical* dispensation. This was really and essentially the same religion, for substance, which was professed and practised in the ancient patriarchal times, with the addition of a special covenant made with a particular people, among whom God was pleased for wise ends to erect a sacred polity, and to whom he gave a revelation of his will, which was committed to writing as the safest conveyance; whereas religion had been hitherto preserved chiefly by tradition, which was more easily maintained during the long lives of men in the first ages. This special covenant was no ways inconsistent with God's universal providence and goodness towards mankind, nor did it in any degree vacate or infringe the ancient primitive religion which had obtained from the beginning, but was designed to be subservient to the great ends of it, and to preserve it from being utterly depraved and extinguished. The principal end of that polity, and the main view to which it was all directed, was to restore and preserve the true worship and adoration of the one living and true God, and of him only, in opposition to that polytheism and idolatry which began then to spread generally through the nations; and to engage those to whom it was made known, to the practice of piety, virtue, and righteousness, by giving them holy  
and



and excellent laws, expressly prescribing the particulars of their duty, and enforced by the sanctions of a divine authority, and by promises and threatnings in the name of God. And also to keep up the hope and expectation of the Redeemer, who had been promised from the beginning, and to prepare men for that most perfect and complete dispensation of religion, which he was to introduce. And whosoever impartially examines that constitution must be obliged to acknowledge, that it was admirably fitted to answer these important ends. The laws of *Moses*, and the sacred writings of the Old Testament, teach us to form the justest and noblest notions of God, as having created all things by his power, as preserving and governing all things by his providence, as possessed of all possible perfections; infinitely powerful, wise, and good, holy, just, and true, a lover of righteousness, a hater of sin and wickedness; omnipresent, omniscient; to whom we owe the highest love, the profoundest reverence, the most absolute submission and resignation, and the most steady dependance. There is a strain of unequal'd piety every where running through those sacred writings. We are there taught to refer all to God, to do every thing we do as in his presence, and in a subordination to his glory. We have there also excellent precepts given us with regard to the duties we owe to our fellow-creatures. All social duties may  
be

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be regarded as comprehended in that admirable precept of the law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. A just, a kind, and benevolent conduct is prescribed, and not only are all injurious actions forbidden in the strongest manner, but even all inordinate desires and covetings after what belongeth to others, which lie at the foundation of all the injustice men are guilty of towards their neighbours. The ten commandments, which contain a comprehensive summary of the moral precepts, were, that they might make the greater impression, delivered with the greatest majesty and solemnity that can be conceived. There was indeed a variety of ritual injunctions prescribed under that constitution, the reasons of all which cannot be clearly assigned at this distance. But some of them were manifestly intended in opposition to the rites of the neighbouring nations, and with a view to preserve them as a distinct people, and keep them free from the infections of their idolatries. Others of their rites were instituted to keep up the memorials of the signal and extraordinary acts of divine providence towards them, especially those by which their law had been confirmed and established. And some of them seem to have been originally designed as types and prefigurations of good things to come under that more perfect dispensation which was to succeed. The rite of sacrificing, which had been in use from the most ancient times, and began

began to be greatly perverted and abused among the nations, was brought under distinct regulations, and only to be performed to the honour of the one true God, the great Creator and Lord of the universe. Polytheism and the worship of inferior deities was forbidden; no obscene or filthy rites, no unnatural rigors or austerities, no human sacrifices or cruel oblations, made a part of their religion, as among many other nations. And the absolute necessity of virtue and righteousness, in order to their acceptance with God, was strongly inculcated, and on this they were directed to lay the principal stress, and not merely on external rites or forms. This constitution is represented as having been introduced and established with the most amazing demonstrations and displays of God's supreme dominion and glorious Majesty, and with a visible triumph over idolatry in its proper seat, for so *Egypt* and *Canaan* may be looked upon to have been, and with the most awful manifestations of God's just displeasure against those abominable vices as well as idolatries, which were then making a great progress in the world, and of which the *Canaanites* were remarkably guilty.

What is especially observable is, that under that constitution, there was a succession of prophets who were sent to reclaim the people from the idolatries and corruptions into which they had

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had fallen, and to inforce upon them the practice of real religion and righteousness. Their writings every where abound with the sublimest descriptions and representations of the Deity; they discover a pure and ardent zeal for the glory of God, a noble impartial detestation against vice and wickedness, and a deep and earnest concern for promoting the interests of substantial piety and virtue, and taking men off from a too great dependence on outward forms and ritual observances. And what is peculiarly remarkable, they contain the most illustrious predictions of future events, many of them clear, express, and circumstantial, relating to nations, both their own and others, and to particular persons. Some of which events were to take place in their own times, or soon after, and were most remarkably fulfilled; and others were removed to the distance of several ages from the time in which those prophets lived and uttered their predictions, and though absolutely beyond the reach of any human sagacity to foresee, have also received their accomplishment. This shews that they were extraordinarily inspired by him who alone can foretell future contingencies; and their prophecies gave a farther proof and attestation to the divine original of the *Mosaic* constitution; since they were designed to engage the people to the observation of the excellent laws that had been

been

been given them; and they were also intended to prepare them for expecting a more glorious dispensation to be brought by a person of unparallel'd dignity, whose coming they foretold, and whom they described by the most remarkable characters. Some of these prophets described him by one part of his office and undertaking, and some by another. They pointed to the tribe and family from which he was to spring, the time of his appearance, the place of his birth, the miracles he should perform, the exemplary holiness of his life, his great wisdom and excellency as a teacher; they spoke in the highest terms of his divine dignity, and yet foretold that he was to undergo the most grievous humiliations and bitter sufferings for the sins of men; they testified not only his sufferings, but the glories that should follow; his wonderful exaltation, and the kingdom of righteousness and truth which he was to erect and establish; that the *Jews* would generally reject him, and that the *Gentiles* should receive his law, and be sharers of the benefits of his kingdom.

Accordingly the third period relates to that dispensation of religion which was brought by that glorious and divine person whom the prophets had foretold. This is properly the Christian dispensation, which was designed and fitted for an universal extent, and in which, considered in its natural purity, religion is brought to its highest perfection and noblest

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LETTER <sup>XV.</sup> improvement. An admirable wisdom, goodness and purity, shone forth in the whole conduct and character of the great author of it. He came in the fulness of time, the time which had been pointed out in the prophetic writings. In him the several predictions relating to the extraordinary person that was to come were fulfilled, and the several characters by which he was described were wonderfully united, and in no other. He appeared, as was foretold concerning him, mean in his outward condition and circumstances, and yet maintained in his whole conduct a dignity becoming his divine character. Many of his miracles were of such a kind, and performed in such a manner, as seemed to argue a dominion over nature, and its established laws, and they were acts of great goodness as well as power. He went about doing good to the bodies and to the souls of men, and the admirable instructions he gave were delivered with a divine authority, and yet with great familiarity and condescension. And his own practice was every way suited to the excellency of his precepts. He exhibited the most finished pattern of universal holiness, of love to God, of zeal for the divine glory, of the most wonderful charity and benevolence towards mankind, of the most unparallel'd self-denial, of the heavenly mind and life, of meekness and patience, humility and condescension. Never was there so perfect a character,

rafter, so god-like, venerable, and amiable, so remote from that of an enthusiast or an impostor. He himself most expressly foretold his own sufferings, the cruel and ignominious death he was to undergo, his resurrection from the dead on the third day, his ascension into heaven, the dreadful judgments and calamities that should be inflicted on the *Jewish nation*, and what seemed the most improbable thing in the world, the wonderful progress of his own gospel from the smallest beginnings, notwithstanding the persecutions and difficulties he foretold he should meet with. All this was most exactly fulfilled; he rose again on the third day, and shewed himself alive to his disciples after his passion by many infallible proofs, when their hopes were so sunk, that they could hardly believe that he was risen, till they could no longer doubt of it, without renouncing the testimony of all their senses. He gave them commission to go and preach his gospel to all nations, and promised that, to enable them to do it with success, they should be endued with the most extraordinary powers and gifts of the Holy Ghost. This accordingly they did, and though destitute of all worldly advantages, without power, riches, interest, policy, learning, or eloquence, they went through the world preaching up a crucified Jesus, as the Saviour and Lord of men, and teaching the things which he had commanded them; and

LETTER <sup>XV.</sup> by the wonderful powers which they were invested with, and the evidences they produced of their divine mission, they prevailed, and spread the religion of Jesus, as their great master had foretold, in the midst of sufferings and persecutions, and in opposition to the reigning inveterate prejudices both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*.

If we examine the nature and tendency of the religion itself, which was taught by Christ, and by the apostles in his name, we shall find it to be worthy of God. It retaineth all the excellencies of the Old Testament revelation; for our Saviour came not to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfil them, and carry the scheme of religion there laid down to a still higher degree of excellency. The idea given us of God, of his incomparable perfections, and of his governing providence, as extending to all his creatures, particularly towards mankind, is the noblest that can be conceived, and the most proper to produce worthy affections and dispositions towards him. Great care is especially taken to instruct us to form just notions of God's illustrious moral excellencies, of his wisdom, his faithfulness, and truth, his impartial justice, and righteousness, and spotless purity; but, above all, of his goodness and love to mankind, of which the gospel contains and exhibits the most glorious and attractive discoveries and displays that were ever made to the world. The exceeding



riches of the divine grace and mercy are re-  
presented in the most engaging manner. Par-  
don and salvation are freely offered upon the  
most gracious terms; the very chief of sin-  
ners are invited, and the strongest possible as-  
surances given of God's readiness to receive  
them upon their sincere repentance and refor-  
mation; and at the same time, to prevent an  
abuse of this, the most striking representations  
are made of God's just wrath and displea-  
sure against those that obstinately go on in pre-  
sumptuous sin and disobedience. It is espe-  
cially the glory of the gospel, that the great  
realities of an unseen eternal world, are there  
set in the most clear and open light; there  
are clearer discoveries made, and far stronger  
assurances given, of that future life and immor-  
tality, than were ever given to mankind before.

As to the precepts of Christianity, they are  
unquestionably holy and excellent. The purest  
morality is taught in all its just and noble ex-  
tent, as taking in the whole of our duty to-  
wards God, our neighbours, and ourselves.

As to piety towards God, the idea there given  
of it is venerable, amiable, and engaging; we  
are required to fear God, but it is not with a  
servile horror, such as superstition inspires, but  
with a filial reverence. We are directed and  
encouraged to address ourselves to him as our  
heavenly Father through Jesus Christ the Son  
of his love, and in his name to offer up our  
prayers and praises, our confessions and thank-  
givings,

LETTER <sup>XV.</sup>givings, with the profoundest humility, becoming creatures deeply sensible of their own unworthiness, and yet with an ingenuous affiance, hope and joy. We are to yield the most unreserved submission to God as our sovereign Lord, our most wise and gracious governor, and most righteous benefactor; to resign ourselves to his disposal, and acquiesce in his providential dispensations, as being persuaded that he ordereth all things really for the best; to walk continually as in his sight, and with a regard to his approbation, setting him before us as our great all-seeing witness and judge, our chiefest good and highest end. Above all we are required to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and mind, and strength, and to shew that we love him by keeping his commandments, by aspiring after a conformity to him in his imitable perfections, and by endeavouring, as far as we are able, to glorify him in the world. As to the external worship of God, according to the idea given of it in the New Testament, it is pure and spiritual, and hath a noble simplicity in it. The numerous rites of the *Mosaical* dispensation, which, though wisely suited to that time and state, were marks of the imperfection of that œconomy, are now abolished. The ordinances of Christianity, as prescribed in the gospel, are few in number, easy of observation, and noble in their use and significancy.

Not only doth Christianity give the most excellent directions as to the duty we more immediately owe to God, but a mighty stress is there laid upon social duties and social virtues, which it hath a manifest tendency to promote and improve. The constant exercise of justice, and righteousness, and fidelity, is most expressly enjoined: the rendering to all their dues, and a diligent discharge of the duties of our several stations and relations, is bound upon us, not merely by civil considerations, but as a necessary part of religion. But what ought especially to recommend Christianity is, that a true and extensive benevolence is there carried to the noblest height; it strengthens the natural ties of humanity, and adds other sacred and most engaging ties to bind us still more strongly to one another. We are taught to love our neighbours as ourselves, to rejoice in their happiness, and endeavour to promote it, to do good to all as far as we have opportunity; yea, even to extend our benevolence to our enemies themselves, and to those that have injured us; and to be ready to render good for evil, and overcome evil with good. It tends to discountenance and suppress that malice and envy, hatred and revenge, those boistrous angry passions, and malevolent affections and dispositions, which have done so much mischief in the world.

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As to the exercise of self-government, Christianity is manifestly designed to improve and perfect human nature. It teaches us not only to regulate the outward actions, but the inward affections and dispositions of the soul; to labour after real purity of heart, simplicity and godly sincerity, as that without which no outward appearances can be pleasing in the sight of God. It strikes at the root of all our disorders and corruptions, by obliging us to correct and regulate that inordinate self-love, which causeth us to center all our views in ourselves, in our own pleasure, or glory, or interest, and by instructing us to mortify and subdue our sensual appetites and inclinations. It is designed to assert the dominion of the rational and moral powers over the inferior part of our nature, of the spirit over the flesh, which alone can lay a just foundation for that moral liberty, and that tranquillity of mind, which it is the design of all true philosophy to procure and establish. And whereas a too great love of the world, and its enjoyments, its riches, honours, or pleasures, is the source of numberless disorders in human life, and turns us astray in our whole course, it teacheth us to rectify our false opinions of these things, and not to seek happiness in them, but to set our affections principally on things of a far higher and nobler nature, things celestial and eternal. And with regard to the evils of this  
present

present life and world, it tendeth to inspire us with the noblest fortitude, and to render us superior to those evils, as being persuaded that God will cause them to work together for our good, and will overrule them to our greater happiness. It provideth the best remedy both against our cares and fears, especially against the fear of death itself.

All that are acquainted with the New Testament know, that this is a true though imperfect representation of the nature and tendency of the religion of Jesus; nor need I point to the particular passages that prove it. Indeed the excellency of the morals there prescribed is so evident, that the enemies of Christianity have been obliged to pretend that its precepts are carried to a too great degree of strictness, impracticable to human nature in its present state. But not to urge, that the rule set before us ought to be perfect, and that though perhaps none of us can in every instance fully come up to it, yet it tendeth to inspire a laudable ambition, and to put us upon a constant endeavour of going on towards perfection, that we may approach still nearer to the prescribed pattern of excellence; not to urge this, it deserveth special observation, that though morality is carried by our Saviour both in his precepts and example to the height of purity and excellence; yet it is not under pretence of extraordinary refinement carried to unwarrantable

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able extremes. It is not required of us to extinguish the passions, as the stoics pretended to do, but to govern and moderate them, and keep them within proper bounds. Christianity doth not prescribe an unfeeling apathy, or pretend to render us insensible to the evils of this present life; but directeth us to bear up under them with patience and constancy, supported by the considerations of reason and religion, and encouraged by the glorious prospects that are before us. We are taught to deny ourselves; but the intention is only that we should subject our inferior appetites to the nobler part of our natures, and that the pleasures and interests of the flesh and the world should be made to give way to interests of a higher nature, to the duty we owe to God, and to the love of truth, virtue, and righteousness, whenever they happen to come into competition. We are required not to make provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof; but we are not urged to macerate our bodies with excessive rigors and austerities, or to chastize them with bloody discipline. We are to be heavenly minded, and to set our affections upon the things which are above; but so as not to neglect the duties, businesses and offices of human life; an attendance to which is expressly required of us in the gospel-law. We are not commanded absolutely to quit the world, but, which is a much nobler attainment, to live  
above

above the world, whilst we are in it, and to keep ourselves free from its pollutions; not wholly to renounce our present enjoyments, but to be moderate in the use of them, and so to *use this world as not to abuse it.* All drunkenness and gluttony, and excesses of riot are forbidden, and we are required to exercise a regular sobriety and temperance in our food; but we are not commanded to abstain from divers kinds of meats, and are taught that *every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving,* for it is *sanctified by the word of God and prayer.* It is required of us, that we be chaste and pure, keeping *our vessels clean in sanctification and honour, and not in the lusts of concupiscence;* and yet an undue stress is not laid upon virginity or celibacy, as was too much done in after ages, but marriage is declared to be *honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.* Polygamy, which was formerly in some measure tolerated, is no longer so under the perfect institution of our Saviour. And the gospel precepts in this respect, though exclaimed against as harsh and severe, are really most agreeable to the original intention of marriage, and the ballance maintained by providence between the sexes. The Christian people are directed to pay a due reverence to their pastors, and to *esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake,* but they are not commanded to yield a blind submission to them;

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XV. them; and their pastors are forbidden to act as *Lords over God's heritage*, or as having *dominion over their faith*, but as *helpers of their joy*. And finally, it is evident, that in the whole scheme of the Christian religion, as taught by Christ and his apostles, there is not the least trace to be found of worldly ambition, avarice, or sensuality. Virtue is there placed on the best and most solid foundations; our duties are urged upon us in their proper order, they are traced from their true source, and directed to their proper end. We are taught to aspire continually to higher degrees of holiness and virtue, and not to take up with a meaner felicity than that which ariseth from a perfect conformity to God himself, and the eternal enjoyment of him. In one word, Christian morality, or the duty required of us, is summed up by our great heavenly teacher in love, love to God, and charity towards mankind, accompanied with real purity of heart and life. And all this is to be attended with an amiable humility. We must abound in works, but not glory in them: When we have done our best, and aspired to the noblest attainments that we are capable of in this present state, all vain-glorious boasting, all confidence in our own righteousnesses or merits, is excluded. On God and his grace we must place our dependence, and to this ascribe the glory.

What a lovely idea is here set before us of



moral excellence! And as the gospel precepts are so pure, prescribing our duty in its proper extent, so the strength and power of the motives there proposed, if duly attended to, will be found answerable to the purity of the precepts. And in this all the moral systems that natural religion or philosophy can furnish, are very deficient. Our duty is bound upon us in the holy scripture, by the express authority and command of God himself, which must needs give a mighty weight to the precepts and directions there prescribed. All the charms of the divine goodness, grace, and love are represented to our view, to lead us to repentance and holy obedience. The most perfect models are set before us; God himself is exhibited to our imitation as the great original of moral goodness and excellence, and the example of his well-beloved son, who was the living image of his own love, goodness and purity here below. Good men are honoured with the most glorious characters, and are invested with the most valuable privileges, that they may be excited and engaged to walk worthy of those characters and privileges, and of the *high calling wherewith* they are called. And for our greater encouragement, the most express assurances are given us of God's readiness to communicate the gracious influences of his Holy Spirit; not to render our own indeavours needless, but to assist and animate our sincere

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sincere endeavours. The important solemnities of a future judgment are displayed before us in the most striking manner, when every man must give an account of himself to God, and must receive according to the things done in his body, whether good or evil. Nothing can possibly be more noble and more engaging than the idea that is there given us of a glorious resurrection, and of that eternal life, which is prepared for good men in the heavenly world, which is represented to us not merely as a paradise of sensual delights, but as a pure and sublime felicity, fitted to animate the most virtuous and excellent minds. And on the other hand, the punishments that shall be inflicted on the obstinately impenitent and disobedient, are represented in such a manner as is most proper to awaken and deter presumptuous sinners, who will not be wrought upon by the beauty and excellency of virtue, and the charms of divine love and goodness.

Any man that impartially considers these things, if he be really and in good earnest a friend to virtue and to mankind, would be apt to wish the Christian revelation true, and to acknowledge the great advantage of it, where it is heartily believed and embraced. For, must it not be a mighty advantage to have the great principles of religion, which are of such vast importance to our happiness, confirmed by the testimony of  
 God

God himself? To have our duty urged upon us in his name, and plainly set before us in exprefs precepts, which must needs come with a far superior force, considered as enjoined by a divine authority, than as the dictates of philosophers or moralists? To have the most explicate declarations made to us in the name of God himself, concerning the terms upon which forgiveness is to be obtained, and concerning the extent of that forgiveness, with respect to which many anxious jealousies and fears might otherwise be apt to arise in our hearts? And finally, to be assured by exprefs revelation from God, of the nature, greatness, and eternal duration of that reward, with which he will crown our sincere, though imperfect obedience; a reward far transcending not only our deserts, but even all that we could expect, or were able to conceive?

And now upon reviewing this scheme of religion, which is undoubtedly the scheme of Christianity, as set before us in the New Testament, it is a reflection that naturally offereth itself, That supposing God had thought fit to make an extraordinary revelation of his will to mankind, it can scarce be conceived that it could be fuller of goodness and purity, that it could contain more excellent precepts, or set before us a more perfect model and example, or be enforced by more powerful motives, or be directed to nobler ends. Could such

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LETTER <sup>XV.</sup> such a scheme of religion as hath been mentioned, be the product either of imposture or enthusiasm? Its whole nature, design, and tendency manifestly shew, that it could not be the work of impostors, especially of impostors so wicked, as to forge a series of the most extraordinary facts, not merely a single imposture, but a chain of impostures, and solemnly attest them in the name of God himself, when they themselves knew them to be absolutely false. There is nothing in the whole contexture of this religion that favours of private selfish interests, or carnal views, or worldly policy. And is it consistent with the characters of impostors, without any regard to their own worldly advantage, to expose themselves to all manner of sufferings, reproaches, and persecutions, and even to death itself, for publishing a scheme of pure religion, piety, and righteousness, merely from a desire of promoting the glory of God, and the good of mankind? To which may be added, that the persons who, we know, first published this religion to the world, were absolutely incapable of inventing such an admirable scheme of religion as Christianity is. If they could have entertained a design of putting a religion of their own invention upon the world, it must have been, considering their notions and prejudices, very different in many things from that which is taught in the New Testament. Nor could they

they have had it in their power, if they had been willing, to have imposed such a series of facts in that age, many of them represented to be of a very public nature, if they had been false. And it is equally absurd to suppose this religion to have been the product of enthusiasm, as of imposture. Could enthusiasts produce such a beautiful and regular scheme, so consistent in all its parts, exhibiting such just and noble ideas of God and of religion, such a perfect rule of duty, in which moral excellence is raised to the highest degree of purity without running to extremes, and is enforced by such engaging motives, so admirably fitted to the excellency of the precepts? Surely this, which is so vastly superior to any scheme of religion or morals taught by the most wise and learned philosophers and moralists, could not be the work of enthusiasts, especially of such frantic enthusiasts as they must have been if they really believed that the wonderful facts recorded in the gospels were done before their eyes, and that they themselves were endued with such extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, and performed the most stupendous miracles, when there was no such thing. And since the gospel-scheme of religion was neither the product of enthusiasm nor of imposture, it was not of human invention; and as it cannot be supposed to have had its rise from evil beings, superior to man, who would never lend their as-

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XV. } assistance to enforce and establish such an excellent scheme of religion, virtue, and righteousness, it followeth that the account given by the first publishers of it was true, and that they received it, as they themselves declared, by revelation from God himself.

Upon the whole, taking all these things together, there seems to be as much evidence of the truth and divinity of the scripture-revelation, as could be reasonably expected and desired, supposing a revelation really given. For on the one hand, it hath the most excellent internal characters of truth and goodness in its nature and tendency, whereby it appeareth to be worthy of God, pure, holy, and heavenly, admirably calculated to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind, and the cause of righteousness and virtue in the world, and to prepare men by a life of holy obedience on earth for the eternal enjoyment of God in heaven. On the other hand, it was accompanied with the most illustrious external attestations, such as carried the manifest proofs of a divine interposition, and which it cannot reasonably be supposed God would ever give, or permit to be given to an imposture.

As to the Christian scheme of a mediator, the prejudices which some have been apt to entertain against Christianity on that account, seem principally to have arisen from misapprehensions or misrepresentations of that doctrine.

trine. It has been represented, as if the notion of a mediator between God and man, supposed the supreme Being, the father of the universe, to be in himself implacable and inexorable, and to have had no thoughts of mercy or pity towards sinners of the human race, till he was prevailed upon, contrary to his own inclinations, by the solicitations of a powerful mediator. But this is not the idea of the mediator given us in the Holy Scriptures. On the contrary, the very appointment of the mediator is there represented, as wholly owing to the free and sovereign grace and goodness of God, the father of all, who being full of love and compassion, and determined to shew mercy towards his guilty creatures, fixed upon this way of doing it, by sending his own son into the world, to recover them from their guilt, corruption, and misery, to holiness and happiness.

In what method it may please God to transact with guilty creatures, who have offended him by their transgressions and disobedience, and to dispense his acts of grace and favour towards them, we cannot take upon us certainly to determine, except he should please to reveal it. This dependeth upon what seemeth most becoming his own glorious majesty, and most meet to his infinite wisdom, for answering the great ends and reasons of his government; of which we cannot pretend, if left to ourselves, to be competent

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judges. But the making use of a mediator in the way the gospel informeth us, through whom his benefits are conferred upon us, and in whose name our prayers and services are offered to his acceptance, seemeth to be admirably fitted for preserving the dignity of his supreme authority and government, and an awful sense and veneration of his infinite majesty and greatness, his righteousness and purity in the minds of his creatures, together with a humbling sense and conviction of their own guilt and unworthiness, and the great evil of their sins and transgressions; and at the same time it greatly contributeth to dispell their guilty jealousies and fears, and to inspire them with ingenuous affiance in his grace and mercy, and a hope of his gracious acceptance.

Some notion of the propriety of a mediator, through whom we have access to God, and his benefits are communicated to us, hath very generally obtained among mankind, which probably might have its rise in a tradition derived from the earliest ages. But this, like other principles of that most ancient primitive religion, became very much corrupted among the nations, who worshipped a great number of idol gods, and idle mediators. Under the *Jewish* œconomy the great mediator was typified and prefigured both by *Moses* who was appointed to transact between  
God



God and the people, and especially in the office of the high-priest, and the solemnities of the service he was to perform on their behalf on the great day of expiation. And there was also preserved amongst them, a notion and expectation of a glorious deliverer described under the most divine characters, who was to appear in the fulness of time, and who, according to the prophecies concerning him, was to *make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness*: though they afterwards perverted the true sense of those prophecies to accommodate them to their own carnal prejudices, and to their worldly hopes and views.

But in the gospel this part of the divine economy is brought into the clearest light. And the idea that is there given of the mediator is the noblest that can be conceived; whether we consider the glorious dignity of his person, in which the divine and human nature is wonderfully united, or the offices ascribed to him, which are such as are admirably fitted to the great work upon which he was sent, the saving and redeeming mankind. What can possibly give us a higher idea of God's unparallel'd grace and goodness, than that for us men, and our salvation, he sent his own son to assume our nature, to instruct us as our great heavenly teacher, and bring the clearest and fullest revelation of the divine

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will that was ever given to mankind; and to make a declaration in the father's name, of his free grace and mercy towards sinners of the human race, and of the gracious terms upon which he will receive them to his favour, and give them eternal life; to guide and lead us by his own example, and exhibit in his own sacred life and practice, the most perfect model of universal goodness and purity, and of every amiable virtue, for our imitation; to make an atonement for our sins by his most meritorious obedience and sufferings, that he might obtain eternal redemption for us; to give us a certain pledge and assurance of a blessed resurrection, and of the happiness prepared for good men in the highest heavens, by his own resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven, and exaltation to glory; to rule us as the great king and head of his church, by his holy and most excellent laws and ordinances; and to appear for us in the heavenly sanctuary as our great advocate with the father, who ever continueth to interpose for sinful men, and in whose name we are to offer up our prayers, and to hope for the acceptance of our services. Add to this, that he is constituted the great dispenser of spiritual benefits, through whom God is pleased to communicate the blessings of his grace, and the aids of his Holy Spirit, for assisting us in  
our

our sincere endeavours, and training us up by a life of holy obedience for eternal felicity. And to compleat the glorious scheme, this great Saviour and Mediator is appointed to raise the dead, and judge the world in the father's name, and to dispense eternal retributions of rewards and punishments to men according to their deeds, the consideration of which must needs give a mighty weight to his authority and laws.

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These are things great and astonishing, and which could not have entred into the human mind, if God had not revealed them. But now that they are revealed, they form a most grand and harmonious system, the several parts of which are like so many links of a beautiful chain, one part answering to another, and all concurring to exhibit an admirable plan, in which the wisdom, the grace and goodness, and the righteousness of God most eminently shine forth. So that instead of being a just cause of objection against the Christian revelation, it rather furnisheth a new proof of its divine original, and that it was not a mere human invention, but came by revelation from God himself. A most glorious and amazing scene is here opened, which tendeth to fill the believing mind with the highest admiration and reverence, love and joy. It is true, there are great difficulties attending the Christian scheme of the Mediator, and the doctrine

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But there is nothing in it that can be proved to be contradictory or impossible, taking it in the simplicity in which it is delivered in holy writ, and not as it has been perplexed and obscured by the subtilties and rash decisions of men. And it would be a wrong and unreasonable conduct to reject a revelation of so excellent a nature, and such an admirable tendency, and enforced by so many convincing proofs and illustrious attestations, because there are some things in it of a high and mysterious nature, and attended with difficulties, which we are not well able to solve. For surely if we have good proof of its being a divine revelation, the authority of God is a sufficient reason for our receiving it, notwithstanding those difficulties. If we are resolved to admit nothing as true that hath great difficulties, nothing but what we are able clearly to explain, we must renounce all religion, and have recourse to atheism, which yet, besides its shocking and horrid consequences, hath the most unsurmountable difficulties of all. What is there more certain, and yet harder to form a distinct and consistent notion of, than absolute eternity? The immensity of the supreme Being, whatever way we take of explaining it, is attended with difficulties too big for the human mind. There is not any thing in all nature more evident than the characters

acters of wisdom and design in the frame of the universe, and yet there are many particular things relating to it, the design of which, it is scarce possible for us to account for in this present state, from whence persons of an atheistical turn have taken occasion to deny an infinitely wise presiding mind. The same thing may be said with regard to the goodness of God, which is established by the strongest proofs, and of which we feel the most lively sensations in our own breasts, and yet every one knows, who has carried his inquiries deep into these things, that there are many appearances, which we find it extremely hard to reconcile to our ideas of goodness, and which probably never will be fully cleared, till we have a more extensive view of the plan of the divine administrations than now we can attain to. There is nothing we are more intimately conscious of than human liberty and free agency, or which is of greater importance to the very foundations of government and morality; and yet if we consider it metaphysically, no subject is attended with greater difficulties, as the ablest metaphysicians and philosophers in all ages have acknowledged. The same may be said of the notion of spiritual and material substance, and the infinite divisibility of the latter, and of many other things of the like nature. It is a principle, which hath been admitted by the greatest masters of reason, that

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that when once a thing is proved by proper evidences, and arguments sufficient in their kind, we are not to reject it, merely because it may be attended with difficulties, which we know not how to solve. This principle is admitted in philosophy; it must be admitted with regard to natural religion; and why then should it not be admitted with regard to Christianity too?

As to the corruptions of Christians, and the abuses of Christianity, and the additions that have been made to it, which have furnished the Deists with their most plausible objections, it ought to be considered, that the Christian religion cannot in reason be made accountable for those abuses and corruptions. The proper remedy in that case is not to throw off all regard for the gospel, but to endeavour to recover men from their deviations from it. And in this, the pains of those that pretend to a true liberty of thinking might profitably be employed. If they have a true regard to the happiness of mankind, and to the cause of virtue in the world, the best way to answer that design is not to endeavour to expose the Scriptures to contempt, but to engage men to a greater veneration for those sacred oracles, and a closer adherence to them in doctrine and practice; not to attempt to set men free from the obligations of Christianity, but to do what they can, that the hearts and consciences of men may be brought under the power

power of its excellent instructions, and important motives, and may be governed by its holy laws, which would be of the happiest consequence both to larger societies and particular persons.

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To conclude: It is to be hoped, that the view that hath been taken of the attempts which have been made against Christianity among us beyond the example of former ages, instead of shocking the faith of true Christians will only tend to convince them that it standeth upon the most solid foundation, not to be shaken by the malice or subtilty of its ablest adversaries. The strange eagerness so many have shewn to subvert the credit and authority of the gospel, should awaken in us a well-conducted zeal for the interests of our holy religion, and should heighten our esteem for true uncorrupted Christianity as taught in the holy Scriptures. We can never be sufficiently thankful to God for so glorious an advantage as is that of the light of the gospel shining among us. This we should esteem the most valuable of all our privileges; and should regard every attempt to deprive us of it, as an attempt to deprive us of our happiness and glory, and to bring us into darkness and misery; to rob good men of their noblest joys and comforts, the most powerful helps, and the most animating motives to the practice of piety and

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 XV. } and virtue; and to free bad men from their apprehensions of the wrath of God and future punishment and thereby remove the most effectual restraints to vice and wickedness. The cause of Christianity is the cause of God. Let us therefore take the most effectual methods in our power to maintain and to promote it. And this calleth for the united endeavours of all that wear the glorious name of Christians. A great deal has been done in this age in a way of reason and argument. But this, however proper and laudable, is not alone sufficient. One of the most important services, which professed Christians can do to the religion of Jesus, is to act under the influence of the true spirit of the gospel, and to shew forth the beauty and glory of it in the whole course of a well-ordered life and conversation. In vain do those profess a zeal for this holy religion, who in their practice shew no regard to its excellent precepts. For Christianity is not a mere system of speculative notions, but a practical institution, a heavenly discipline, the proper design of which is to purify men's hearts, and reform their lives. And those good men, who are not able to do much for it in a way of argumentation, may yet effectually promote its sacred interests by walking according to the excellent rules of the gospel, and shewing the advantageous influence it hath upon their temper and practice, and thus making an amiable



ble representation of it to the world. God LETTER  
XV. grant that this may be the happy state of things among us: That the ministers of the holy Jesus may act suitably to their sacred character, by purity, humility, a heavenly mind and life, simplicity and godly sincerity, and a well regulated zeal tempered with charity, a zeal not merely for little things, the externals and circumstances, the modes and forms of religion, but for real vital Christianity, the great substantials and true godliness, and the principles which lie at the foundation of our most holy faith; and that the Christian people may be careful to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, by all the virtues and exercises of a sober, a righteous, and godly life. This would tend more than any thing else to stop the mouths of adversaries, and perhaps, as it did in many instances in the first ages of the Christian church, gain them over to a good opinion of that religion, which is fitted to produce such excellent fruits.

I have now finished the design I undertook; and if it may prove in any degree useful, and answer a valuable end, I shall not grudge the pains it has cost me. But whatever be the success of it, I have the satisfaction of having contributed my endeavours, as far as I was able, to serve a glorious cause. And what I desire for myself above all things, is, that I may feel the  
power

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power and influence of this excellent religion upon my own soul, animating and regulating my conduct in life, supporting and comforting me in death, and preparing me for that better world, which we are raised to the hopes of by the gospel.

I shall conclude this letter, and all that I have been writing on this subject, with assuring you, that I am,

*Worthy S I R,*

*Your's with great affection and esteem;*

J O H N L E L A N D.

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