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S E R I E S  
O F  
L E T T E R S,  
A D D R E S S E D T O  
S O A M E J E N Y N S, E S Q;  
O N O C C A S I O N O F  
H I S V I E W  
O F T H E  
I N T E R N A L E V I D E N C E  
O F  
C H R I S T I A N I T Y.

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By A. MACLAINE, D. D.  
Minister of the English Church at the Hague.

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*Non tali auxilio - - - VIRGIL.*

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THE SECOND EDITION, CORRECTED.

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L O N D O N:  
Printed for CHARLES BATHURST, in Fleet-street:  
M.DCC.LXXVIII.

\*<sup>1</sup> ADAMS 264.10

A  
Q U O T A T I O N  
B Y W A Y O F  
P R E F A C E.

THE mistaken principles of one Christian Writer have been detected and exposed by other Christian Writers without reserve. But Infidels, indissolubly leagued together by the single tie of unbelief, studiously avoid confuting one another: this conduct shews a determined resolution to support a beloved cause by *all possible* means; and the cause, which inspires its votaries with *such* a resolution, is not likely to be the *cause of truth*.

GERARD'S *Dissert. on Christ.* p. 354.



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Hague, &c.

LETTER I.

To SOAME JENYNS, Esq.

S I R,

**Y**OUR *View of the Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion* had passed through four editions, before it came to my hands. My distance from the place of publication, and some other circumstances, prevented my meeting with it sooner; though my zeal for the cause it main-  
A 3 tains,

tains, and the well-acquired fame of its author, has rendered me impatient to be acquainted with its contents. I had been told that your Defence of Christianity was *new*; and, when the Book arrived, I found it to be so, with a witness; for, though some of these novelties had appeared in the writings of a singular and excentrick Genius upon the Continent, it remains still dubious, whether they were designed, by him, to do honour to Christianity, or to undermine its credit. And indeed, Sir, I must own, that I had read two thirds of *your* Book, before I knew whether I should place it on the same shelf with the Treatise of Gilbert West, or certain Writings of Samuel Chubb; and I begin these Letters by begging your  
 pardon

\**1. Houghton.*  
 + *Samuel Chubb*

pardon for having suspended, during some moments of a disagreeable uncertainty, the justice that is due to your upright intentions.—An accidental circumstance put me in a mood that contributed not a little to the injury I was likely to do you. I had been reading the account, given by Mr. Edward Gibbon, of the Progress of the Christian Religion; in which the gravest subject, and one of the gravest kinds of writing, are both dishonoured by a perpetual and unnecessary sneer.\* This had struck me

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\* I say an *unnecessary* sneer, because Mr. Gibbon lives in a country where a man may write and speak as he thinks, without danger or molestation. He was, therefore, under no necessity of aping the manner of some of the French Philosophers,

so much, that, when I took up *your Book*, and saw the *strange things* you were advancing in defence of Christianity, I began to suspect that *you* were sneering also. This idea acquired a certain degree of probability from the many accounts I have had of your fly wit, and your easy and elegant pleasantry; it did not, however, square so well with  
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losophers (as they are pleased to call themselves) who cover their infidelity with a sedate and well-disguised irony, to escape the secular arm of Religious persecution.—It is true, a sneer may have its place and time; but surely its *place* cannot be historical narrative, through which, at least, it never ought to reign; nor is it a *time* to sneer, when Christianity is the subject of discussion, because this Religion has a professed relation to the most solemn and important interests, and has, in effect, been a source of consolation and hope to the wisest of mankind in all ages.



what I have also often heard of you, Sir, even that you possessed the happy and agreeable art of being *merry* and *wise*.

The perusal of your whole Work dispelled all my doubts. I perceived, at length, that you were in earnest ; but I began to apprehend, lest that numerous class of our common adversaries, who are rather *practical* than *persuaded* Infidels, should, on perceiving the same thing, begin to be merry. The *honest* people of this class are never so rejoiced, as when they see an ill-judged defence of Christianity. It makes them (I know not why, but the case is really so) go to the gaming-table with less reluctance, and to the scenes of lewdness with more tranquillity. They foolishly persuade them-

felves, that a cause, which is preposterously defended, must be a bad one; and, putting between conscience and futurity this new re-inforcement of illusion, they return, with a new-flushed confidence, to enjoy as many moments of pleasure, as they can, before the bubble of existence breaks.

An illusion of this kind, Sir, may be confirmed by your reputation, and the shining abilities you have discovered in treating other subjects.—For, if it should appear, that, with all your genius and learning, you have defended Christianity upon principles that lead (as men may be differently disposed) to enthusiasm or to scepticism, many will be ready to conclude, that the Gospel, and not you, is chargeable with these consequences.

It

It is painful to me to assume the tone of censure and criticism, and that more especially, where a person of your superior merit and abilities is concerned; but I have the interest of Christianity too much at heart, not to protest solemnly against your method of defending it. Your *view* of its Internal Evidence is certainly exceptionable in many respects. In general, your reasoning is neither close nor accurate. Your illustrations run wide of the principles they are designed to explain and enforce. One would be tempted sometimes to think, that you, yourself, lost sight of *these* principles in the midst of the desultory detail of arguments and observations, which you bring to support them; and, while we admire several fine touches

touches of genius, wit and eloquence, that strike us in the midst of this splendid confusion, we lament the want of that luminous order and philosophical precision, that are indispensably required in a work of this kind—You look like a man who has been suddenly transported into a new scene of things, where a multitude of objects strike him at once, and who begins to describe them, before he has had time to consider their arrangement and their connexions. Or, to use another figure that comes nearer to your particular case, you look like a zealous and spirited volunteer, who has embarked in a vessel, surrounded with enemies and assailed by tempestuous weather, and begins to defend and work the ship, without that experience  
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in the art of Navigation, or the science of Defence, that is necessary to ensure success and victory.

I congratulate you, Sir, at the same time, upon your entrance into our *Ark*, which does not depend for the final issue of its course on *our* manœuvres. It is firmly and compactly built, though you and I may not consider, under the same point of view, either the *principles* of its construction or its various *tendencies*; and, in spite of the storms of infidelity and vice, (which beat against it, and retire in froth) it will conduct us both, I hope, to that peaceful harbour, where tumult and disorder shall cease for ever.

This may suffice, Sir, for my first introduction to your acquaintance: in my following Letters I shall enter  
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professedly upon the examination of your Work, and conclude at present, by assuring you, that I am, with the most sincere esteem for your virtues and talents, Sir,

Your most humble and

obedient Servant,

A. M.

LETTER

## L E T T E R II.

S I R,

ONE of the first things, that struck me in your Work, is the Proposition you advance, page 5, *viz.* “ that the *credibility* of Miracles and Prophecies *depends* upon the *internal marks* of Divinity that are stamped upon the Christian Religion.” This assertion, had it fallen from the pen of an ordinary Writer, would have passed without examination for a palpable error in reasoning; but, coming from you, it carried a certain aspect of authority that made me review the principles of Evidence; but thus I came, though without precipitation, to the same conclusion.

I shall

I shall not here observe, that you fall into, what the Logicians call, a vicious circle, while, after proving the Divinity of the Doctrine by miracles, you prove the credibility of miracles by the Doctrine. This inaccurate and confused manner of reasoning you have in common with too many of the Defenders of Christianity. I shall leave this consideration aside, and shew that miracles derive no *positive* proof at all from the nature of doctrines or precepts, or what we call the *internal* Evidence of a Religion.

Miracles are *facts* out of the common course of nature, and therefore can rest upon no evidence but that of *testimony*, handed down from the *ocular* witnesses in the *faithful* records of History. Facts in the course of nature  
derive



derive a certain degree of probability from analogy, and are thus rendered credible by observation and experience: but facts, out of the course of nature, have no such characters of credibility to support them, and must therefore depend on testimony alone. What we call the internal marks of Divinity in the Gospel give no credibility to miracles, properly speaking; they only shew that the nature of the doctrines or precepts of a Religion *furnish* no reason to make us *suspect* that the miracles are false; they only prevent objections against them; they only hinder any proofs of their falsehood from coming from that quarter:—but this does not give them any degree of *positive* evidence. Nay, more,—if

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you

you can prove from the internal Characters of the Christian Religion, that its origin is *supernatural*, then miracles are useless; and, if useless, improbable, in consequence of that known maxim, that *infinite Wisdom does nothing in vain*. But indeed to a Deist, who demands strict evidence, and will not put up with *sentimental* arguments, you will not be able to prove from (what are commonly called) the *internal* characters of Christianity, unsupported by miracles, that the origin of that Religion is supernatural. And from some of the internal characters, which *you*, Sir, attribute to Christianity, I fear a dextrous adversary might even form objections against its divine origin.

What I call, and what are generally called the *internal characters* of Christianity,

anity, that display its *excellence*, and, in conjunction with miracles, shew its *Divinity*, are—the *just, rational, and sublime* representations it gives of the attributes in general, and particularly of the goodness and mercy of the *Supreme Being*;—the *suitableness* of its *declarations* of mercy, grace, succour, and immortality to the *guilt, infirmities, and boundless desires* of the human mind;—the purity and sublimity of its *moral precepts*, which are adapted to ennoble and improve human nature, and to lead it to true perfection and felicity;—and the *motives* that it exhibits to enforce the practice of universal virtue. Now what do these *internal* characters prove? This only; that such a Religion, according to *our* conception of things, is *not unworthy* of God; or,

in other words, that *we* see nothing in such a Religion that is inconsistent with *our* ideas of the Divine Nature and perfections. They prove no more, according to the plainest rules of Evidence. But to prove that a Religion is not *unworthy* of God (for any thing we know) is a very different thing from proving that it comes from him by an *immediate* and *supernatural* interposition.

Many things may appear *worthy* of God, in consequence of our *general* conceptions of his goodness, which *that* all-wise goodness, (in consequence of relations and connexions unknown to us, and of larger views of publick utility than we can comprehend) may not think proper to effect. It would be consistent with *our*

notions

notions of the Divine benignity, that the Indians were enlightened with the knowledge of the truth, and that the immense Continent of Africa was instructed in the doctrines of celestial Wisdom; but *he*, whose goodness is infinitely more pure, disinterested, and extensive than *ours*, does not think fit to distribute his benignity in the *measure* and *time* that *we* would prefer.

We may transfer the same method of reasoning to the internal Characters of a Religion. These, considered *merely* in themselves, \* prove only the excel-

B 3 lence

\* I shall consider in its place (for I chuse to *step* rather than *run* through this important subject) these internal Characters combined with the Characters and Capacities of the first Founder and Ministers of the Gospel; and *then* we shall see how *internal* Evidence is affected by *external*.

lence of precepts and the *utility* of doctrines. They shew us, that these precepts and doctrines contain nothing that is unworthy of our purest notions of the Supreme Being; and we may say the same thing of many of the precepts and reasonings of Socrates and Cicero. But this does not prove that the Teachers of such precepts and doctrines have received an *express Commission* from above to propagate them among men. This *Commission* can be ascertained by miracles *alone*. The pretensions of these teachers to a Divine Commission, though seconded by abundant marks of probity, candour, and benevolence, are not sufficient to prove this Commission. They may be *sincere*, but *mistaken*. The goodness of their intentions, and even the benevolent

lent Warmth of their Zeal, may more or less deceive them in this matter. There are degrees of enthusiasm, which, though very remote from frenzy or disordered reason, are nevertheless delusive: and how can I be certain, that this is not the case with the Teachers in question? This certainly can never be complete as long as I consider *only* their doctrines and their moral characters. (The evidence, that will arise from considering their capacities, shall be considered presently.) All that this point of view exhibits is reducible to the following propositions, which might be addressed to them even by a mind desirous of believing: “ Your pre-  
 “ cepts are excellent, *whatever* be the  
 “ authority on which you propagate  
 “ them—Your promises of pardon  
 B 4 “ and

“ and immortality are transporting—  
 “ they answer the natural and bound-  
 “ less desires of the human mind ; but  
 “ neither *these* circumstances alone,  
 “ nor your sincerity added to them,  
 “ are sufficient to give me a *full per-*  
 “ *suaſion* of *their* accomplishment, or  
 “ of your Commission to declare it.  
 “ I ſee no more than a poſſibility of  
 “ this, until the Being, who alone  
 “ can *pardon* and *vivify*, gives me  
 “ ſome more expreſs proof, that the  
 “ accomplishment of ſuch promiſes  
 “ are conformable to the general plan  
 “ of his Government, and that thus  
 “ both his wiſdom and power are en-  
 “ gaged to fulfil them.”

I here conſider, Sir, the amount of  
 internal Characters, as you only can  
 make uſe of them againſt a Deift, and  
 mean



mean to shew you, that this use is only a negative one ; that is, that it prevents objections *being raised* against miracles from the precepts and doctrines of Religion ; but can give no *direct* or *positive* evidence in favour of the credibility of these miracles.——

What ! (will you say) is it not *worthy* of God to confirm such an excellent Religion by miracles ? My answer is, that I have not been let into the secrets of the Divine Government, the perfect knowledge of which can only empower us to pronounce any procedure *worthy* or *unworthy* of his perfections. According to *my* view of things, it is not *unworthy* of the perfections of the Deity to confirm such a Religion by miracles ; and even *this* is something : but I am too ignorant to pronounce absolutely, that such a confirmation is  
*worthy*

worthy of God, and that his perfecti-  
 ons require it, until I see the miracles  
 themselves, or know by sufficient Testi-  
 mony that they have been performed.  
 Instead, therefore, of saying, Sir, that  
 the *credibility* of miracles *depends* upon  
 the internal Characters of Christianity,  
 you ought to have said (if I am not  
 much mistaken) that *internal Characters*  
 hinder the doctrines and precepts of  
 the Gospel from *jarring* with the con-  
 clusion deducible from miracles in fa-  
 vour of its *Divine* origin.

There is, Sir, I acknowledge, in  
 the precepts, truths, and promises  
 of the Gospel, a kind of evidence  
 of a Divine origin, that may be  
 called *sentimental*; but as this is rela-  
 tive to a certain cast of mind, to cer-  
 tain degrees of feeling and sensibility,  
 that are neither *universal*, nor *required*  
*in*

*in all*, we must not bring it, without the utmost caution, before the severe tribunal of Evidence. The consequences of employing it would be dangerous; and though I should grant that *this* is not a certain proof of its falsehood; yet it is at least a reason for using it sparingly. There is no doubt but that, when the precepts, truths, and promises of the Gospel, influence the heart, affections, and actions, they ennoble the *mind*, inspire grand ideas of *its* Author and its destination, and excite that serene hope, that calm satisfaction, that sense of dignity, and that anticipating impression of future felicity, that none but the virtuous Christian can feel: and there is no doubt but that *this state* of mind is, to *him* that possesses it, a new source, or at least a strong re-inforcement of Evidence.

Evidence. It gives new strength to all the proofs alledged in favour of Christianity: it collects every ray of Evidence in the heart, and thus delightfully persuades the virtuous Christian, that Christianity is the offspring of Heaven, as well as the friend of man. When the Christian sees the harmony that reigns between the truths, the precepts, and the promises of his Religion, and the grand scenes it opens beyond time—When he observes the candour of its Founders, the plainness of their style and manner, and yet the sublimity of the views they unfold of the Counsels of the Deity; he *feels* that this Religion is Divine: he has an intimate conviction, that it is not the fruit either of error or of imposture: the moral improvement, and the noble pleasure it administers

nisters to his heart, carry to that heart a sentimental testimony of its truth.

But, after all : supposing (which I scarcely believe \*) that such a *sentimental* persuasion of the Divinity of Christianity could be obtained by a view alone of its internal Characters; yet this will not do against an Objector, who will tell you, that he has no such *demonstrative* feelings, and will conclude, perhaps from the stress laid on them, that Christianity is *not founded in argument*. Present to him those truths, precepts, and promises of the Gospel, that excite such feelings, and let us suppose that, in this system of Religion, there are neither miracles, nor pretensions to miracles.—What will he reply ?

\* Is this sentimental persuasion in any heart totally independent of the belief that Christ rose from the Dead ?

reply? He will reply, that Christianity is excellent, but *not* Divine:—He will perhaps acknowledge, that Jesus and his Apostles were among the Moralists what Archimedes and Newton were among the Mathematicians:—He will observe, that the precepts of Christ *may be* within the sphere of human Capacity, whose *degrees* are *various* in different persons, and whose limits, even in this part of the great scale, it is so difficult to ascertain.—And, as to the express promises of *pardon* and *immortality*, the Objector will tell you, that they are yet *to be* accomplished, and that the certainty of that accomplishment is only deducible from those samples of power that were displayed by Christ, when he calmed the tempests, healed the sick, arose from the dead, and sent down upon his Church the Spirit

Spirit of Wisdom, Victory, and Power. It was then (will he say, and I think with truth) that Christ, properly speaking, shewed his Divine Commission.

If, indeed, we consider the *internal* Characters of *excellence* and *sublimity*, that are stamped upon the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel, *in comparison* with the *rank* and *capacities* of those who promulgated them to the world, a contrast will arise, to our view that changes the nature of the argument. The apparent Son of a Jewish Carpenter dies upon the Cross, by the hands of Persecution: He leaves behind him, for his Disciples, a few fishermen, and persons in low life, remarkable for nothing, while he was with them upon earth, but profound ignorance, natural incapacity, dulness of apprehension and erroneous views of their Master's



ter's doctrine, intentions, and kingdom. Now it is by these, *manifestly* ignorant, dull, and incapable persons, that the sublime doctrines and truths of the Gospel are recorded and published. Here, I say, the tenor of the argument changes, and here the proof of a *supernatural* dispensation properly commences. Why?—Because we have here a real miracle, and miracles alone are the *direct* proof of a Commission *immediately* Divine. So that, the moment we consider the internal nature of the Doctrine and Precepts of Christianity, in comparison with the Characters, Situation, and Capacities of the *Teachers* of this Religion, we have got a step out of (what is commonly called, the sphere of internal Evidence,) and find ourselves in the sphere of miracles. This comparison leads us to Divine  
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Inspiration, which is a real miracle; and every miracle comes under the class of *external Evidence*.

The result of the matter then is, that, as the purity of the metal does not establish its *true* and *permanent* value, nor assure its *currency*, before it be stamped externally with the mark of the Sovereign, so the intrinsic excellence of the Doctrines and Precepts of a Religion, though they may procure it certain marks of respect and attachment, and make it pass for an useful rule of conduct, will not prove its Celestial origin, nor give it the authority of a Divine Revelation. The pure metal will have a certain degree of merit from its subserviency to *ornament* or *utility*,—but there will be no *authoritative* obligation to make it an instru-

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ment

ment of Commerce, nor can men be sure that its value will be always real.

To speak without figure or comparison, the internal Characters of greatness, simplicity, utility, and importance, may shine forth in a system of Religion and Morality. That system may be honourable to the Divine Perfections, for any thing we know to the contrary; it may tend to the real improvement of human nature, by its happy influence in teaching man humility, affording him consolation, exciting in him hope, and pointing out the rule he ought to follow, and the mark to which he should tend;—but all these marks of intrinsic excellence, unattended with visible and extraordinary interpositions, may appear to many, as not beyond the reach and dictates of human Wisdom; and the judgment

ment of mankind may be various on this head, in proportion to their different degrees of sagacity in discerning the marks and characters of truth.

Such is the case with what is commonly called the *internal Evidence* of the Christian Religion—it is insufficient to demonstrate the Divinity of any Religion.

But, Sir, what you lay down, as internal proofs in favour of the Gospel, are, if I am not mistaken, something worse than insufficient for this purpose; they would (were they really to be found there) rather turn to its discredit.—This I shall shew in a following Letter.

## L E T T E R III.

S I R,

**T**HE Analogy of Revealed with Natural Religion; and the government of Providence, was one of the facts which learned men have employed to remove the prejudices of sober Theists against the Gospel of Christ. It is one of the essential Characters of a *true* Revelation, that it be conformable with the purer dictates and essential principles of Natural Religion, and that it be not in contradiction with the fundamental principles of human knowledge.—Though it may *perfect* natural light, it must not *contradict* it; though it may unfold to view *new* facts relating to our felicity and destination, yet all its Dispensations must carry a  
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proportion to our present state of being, and connect it with our future prospects; and thus make the whole of our existence a series or chain, of which the first link is formed in ignorance and corruption, and the succeeding ones ascend towards perfection and felicity. Without this method of proceeding, the work of God is neither uniform nor consistent;—Nature and Grace are in contrast and contradiction.—How *your* ideas of the Internal Characters of the Christian Religion square with this, I leave you to judge.

Your *second proposition* sets the language of the Deity, in the Constitution of Nature, in a direct opposition with the language that is spoken in the Dispensation of Grace; a concession which the Deist will turn against the latter

with no small advantage. If the Religion contained in the New Testament be, as you affirm, “*intirely* “*new*, both with regard to its object “and doctrines, nay **TOTALLY** *unlike* “*every thing* which had ever before “entered into the mind of man;” it can carry with it no degree of evidence, but what arises from Miracles alone, as it can bear no conformity with our natural faculties; nor can it find a foundation in those primary notions and essential truths that are the principles of all knowledge and all evidence.

The *mere novelty* of a Doctrine is surely no proof, either of its Truth or Divine Origin: For, if it were, the fantastick dreams of Enthusiasts would often put in a claim to a divine authority. The Gospel is composed of *Facts, Doctrines, Precepts, and Promises.*

*mises*.—Novelty alone proves neither the reality of the first, nor the truth of the second, nor the obligation of the third, nor the certainty or future accomplishment of the last. *Facts*, whether ordinary or miraculous, must be proved by History; *Doctrines* and *Precepts* may be intrinsically useful and reasonable, but their Divine Authority can only be demonstrated by Miracles; and the certainty and accomplishment of *Promises* and *Threatenings* rest upon the same foundation. If, indeed, the Doctrines and Precepts of a Religion carry marks of sublimity, depth, and excellence, disproportioned to the capacities and abilities of the persons by whom it is published to the world, *then* they bear the characters of a Divine Revelation; but *then*, Sir, they come under your fourth *Proposition*,



and your second is totally insignificant and useleſs, becauſe mere novelty bears neither the characters of truth nor of authority. Mere novelty does not prove (as you affirm it does, in your concluſion) that the Chriſtian Religion could not have been the work of man, or any ſet of men, &c.

But it happens, unluckily for your hypotheſis, that thoſe Characters of *intire novelty* are not really to be found in the Religion of the New Teſtament, as that Religion is generally underſtood by Chriſtians, or as even you yourſelf have thought proper to repreſent it; and thus your ſecond Propoſition turns out insignificant in every point of view.

The great and diſtinguiſhing-Characters of the Goſpel are the *poſitive declarations* of mercy to the penitent,  
of



of succour to the humble, and of life eternal to all sincere Christians, conveyed through the intercession, and ratified by the death and resurrection of a Mediator. This pardoning mercy, this gracious succour, this eternal recompence to sincere though imperfect obedience, are clearly revealed: they constitute the clear and essential articles of the Christian Faith; and they administer to man, in this feeble dawn, this infancy of his existence, the richest source of consolation, and the noblest incentives to virtue and moral improvement. These Doctrines accompanied with a Moral Law pure and perfect, with the most sublime representations of the unity and perfections of the Supreme Being, and the most awful and striking accounts of a judgement to come, which is to determine  
the

the felicity of the righteous, and cover impenitence with confusion and misery, make the sum and substance of the Christian Religion. Now, though all these objects are presented to us in the New Testament with such full and comfortable evidence as dispels anxiety and doubt in an humble and candid mind, and with an interesting assemblage of circumstances, that confirm their certainty, and disengage them from all the absurdities and errors that accompany the conjectures of short-sighted mortals; yet it is not true to affirm, that they are *utterly unlike any thing that before had ever entered into the mind of man*. The hopes of mercy, founded on the clemency and placability of the Deity, or of inferior Beings, who were worshipped as his Ministers, appear to have taken place  
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in almost all Religions ; and, if the light of reason was capable of deducing from the Works of God any arguments in favour of his goodness, this must have led mortals to hope, at least to conjecture, that supreme goodness would temper the severity of (what we call) strict justice, in favour of the penitent offender. I am the more inclined to entertain this opinion, when I consider the notion which several eminent Sages of Antiquity seem to have had of the justice of God : they call it the *punishing branch or species of the Divine goodness* ; and thus they came nearer to the true sense of the term *Justice*, in its application to the Deity, than certain Theologians, who apply that term to the Supreme Being in the stiff, rigorous, *Law-sense*, in which it is used at Guildhall, or in  
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the Old-Bailey. The Divine attribute of Justice is, certainly, in its primary and general sense, no more than the *love of righteousness and virtue*, and a propensity to promote them; and in a secondary and more confined sense, (or in some of its particular exertions) it denotes the union of wisdom and goodness in the punishment of disorder and vice, to repair evil where it could not be prevented.

The sacrifices of the Heathen Religions were founded on this notion, whether it was derived from argument or tradition; and therefore it is not true, that the express promise of pardon to the penitent, which is one of the distinctive Characters of the Christian Religion, is *totally unlike every thing which had before entered into the mind of man*. The Gospel, indeed,  
 admi-

administers here a much more solid foundation of comfort, than could be administered either by Natural Religion, or by human tradition; because, notwithstanding the propensity of Divine goodness to pardon the penitent offenders of this globe, (which is deducible from reason) the ends of the Divine Government, and the general good of the universal system, might (for aught that we could know with certainty) have demanded their punishment—and, as to human tradition, the uncertainty of its origin rendered it but a feeble ground of consolation or hope. Thus the hopes of mortals were mixed with uncertainty; and, to the thinking mind, doubt about a matter that so essentially concerns us, as the pardon of sin, must have produced anxiety. And this is the peculiar excellence

lence of the Gospel, that by a positive declaration, conveyed by a Celestial Envoy, it confirms the expectations that Nature suggested, and dispels the fears of anxious mortals; and therefore is not *totally unlike* whatever entered into the mind of man with relation to this point.

The same may be said of the express promise of *succour to the humble*, which is made in the Gospel. It is analogous to the notions that were generally entertained by the wisest Philosophers of the Heathen World, with respect to the infirmities of human nature, and the necessity of a divine influence to sustain the feeble steps of man in the paths of virtue. The ancient and modern Platonists assert the reality of this influence in numberless passages of their Writings; and what they

they advanced from the conjectures of reason has been happily confirmed by Divine Revelation.

With respect to the *Doctrine of Immortality*, and a future state of rewards and punishments, you yourself, Sir, acknowledge, that it was taught by some of the Philosophers of Antiquity, though mixed with much doubt and uncertainty ; and thus you cannot say, that this essential and capital part of the Christian Revelation was *totally unlike every thing which had ever entered into the mind of man*.

Nor is the morality of the Gospel, though carried to a much higher point of purity and perfection, than even the science of morals appeared in the best productions of the Pagan Sages, *totally unlike* what we find in the Writings of Plato, Xenophon, and Cicero ;  
and



and as much may be said of the Scripture Doctrines concerning the perfections of the Supreme Being.

Thus then it appears, that some of the *leading* and *fundamental* doctrines of Christianity, as they are understood by the generality of the Christian World, were delineated (indeed in a feeble and imperfect manner) in the opinions that were entertained relative to Religion and Morality in the times that preceded the Gospel. What, therefore, is *intirely new* in the Gospel, is not, as you observe, its system of Religion, but the particular nature, characters, and circumstances of the Celestial Envoy, who taught, confirmed, and propagated this Divine Religion upon earth, by his Ministry while alive, and by his power, when he



he had been raised from the Cross to everlasting dominion.

But this, perhaps, you will not think sufficient to invalidate your second Proposition; because I have not taken *your* view of the Christian system into consideration, in shewing that the doctrine of the Gospel is *analogous*, instead of being *utterly dissimilar* to all the notions of mankind, previous to its publication. I shall therefore now consider *your* representation of the Christian Religion, and hope to convince you, that, even upon *its* basis, your second Proposition does not hold true.

You affirm then, first, that “the  
 “ *object* of this Religion is *intirely new*,  
 “ and is *this*: to prepare us, by a  
 “ state of probation, for the king-  
 “ dom of Heaven.” And you

D

affirm,

affirm, that, “ previous to the  
 “ preaching of Christ and his Apof-  
 “ tles, no fuch prize was ever  
 “ hung out to mankind, nor any  
 “ means prefcribed for the attainment  
 “ of it.”——To have reasoned with  
 precision, you ought, Sir, to have  
 kept clofer to the terms of your Pro-  
 pofition, and faid, that a ftate of pro-  
 bation for futurity was *totally unlike*  
*every thing which had before entered*  
*into the mind of man.* However, as I  
 cannot fuppose that you defigned to  
 retract this Propofition when you came  
 to explain it, I fhall, in difcuffing this  
 point, keep to *thofe* terms, which you  
 have fomewhat changed and foftened ;  
 though in reality, even with thefe mo-  
 difications, the *Propofition* is ftill inca-  
 pable of defence.

*A ftate of probation for a future  
 fcene*

scene was certainly one of the most natural conjectures that could enter into a reflecting mind, who believed a Deity, or Deities, and had any notions, however imperfect, of a moral Government in the Universe. It seems agreeable to the reason of things, that all rational Creatures whatsoever should, for some time, be in a state of trial, as we can scarcely, if at all, form a notion of a finite Being's arriving at either knowledge, or virtue, but by progressive observation, experience, and practice, proceeding from small and imperfect beginnings. This idea is confirmed by what we observe of the proceedings of Providence in the Natural World. Though Beings of different degrees of excellence are formed by creating wisdom, power, and goodness, yet it is remarkable that

the most excellent have their feeble beginnings, as well as those of the lowest order. The lofty Oak rises gradually to its pre-eminence in the forest from a small seed, as well as the most diminutive plant : In all the Orders of Being known to us, the *Law* of gradual improvement is the same, from a mite to a Newton ; and it probably takes place in all spheres, from a Newton to the highest of finite Beings. Every thing in the nature, state, and circumstances of Man, in particular, administers, to the most *superficial* Observer, the strongest intimations of this. A Nature, susceptible of virtue or vice, as the influence of reason, or the impulse of passions, predominate, capable of being adorned with useful knowledge, or vilified by brutal ignorance, placed in a state where a variety  
of

of objects, relations, and circumstances, furnishes the means of moral improvement or degradation ; and thus susceptible of high degrees of *well-being* or *suffering*. All this points out *trial* actually existing, a state of probation, relative to some important end and purpose. This end and purpose cannot be only the improvement attainable in this present life ; the improvement of our powers and faculties is scarcely arrived at any degree of perfection, the virtues, acquired by reflexion and experience, have scarcely time to display their energy and beauty, when we are called away from this transitory scene ; and, if there were not one more exalted and happy to succeed it, the efforts and improvement of the virtuous and the wiser part of mankind would be to no purpose. Now this

view of the state of man, as a Being capable of degrees of perfection, which none attain to in a present life, cut off from that life in the midst of his progress, and (which is the case of the Virtuous) at the very time when he has acquired, by trial, the capacity of adorning and enjoying existence in the best manner:—this view, I say, must have intimated to the wise and attentive Observer, in all ages, the notion of a future scene; where *enjoyment* will answer *improvement*, and improvement shall be carried to higher degrees of perfection. I don't mean, that this Conclusion would occur to the generality of mankind:—It might occur to the attentive Observer of nature, and the visible constitution of things; and that it did occur to many of the ancient Philosophers, is evident from their writings.

It is true, there has been much learned dust raised in the controversy between some late Writers about the Opinions of the Ancients in relation to the *immortality of the soul*, and a *future state of rewards and punishments*. It is, however, agreed on all sides, that *both* were taught by the Philosophers, and embraced by the people. And, though it should be granted that several Philosophic sects did not believe any thing more than the immortality of the soul, and its *infusion* into the common eternal Principle, or τὸ ἐν, and only taught the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, on account of its influence on the happiness and order of civil society; what then? This is no more a proof, that all the Philosophers of antiquity disbelieved this doctrine, or taught it only with political views,

than the Deism of several of our modern Sages, and perhaps of some of our modern Priests, will be a proof to Posterity, that Christianity was not believed in Europe in the eighteenth Century.—Besides, it is evident, that, generally speaking, the Infidelity of the Philosophers rather regarded the fabulous accounts of the Poets, and the absurd notions of the vulgar, with respect to the nature, place, and manner of future rewards and punishments, than the reality of these rewards and punishments.

Now it is evident, that future rewards and punishments, in their very nature, imply a previous state of probation and trial, in which the Virtuous run a race, encounter difficulties, and overcome temptations to obtain the prize. And, supposing the notions  
of



of this state of probation and these consequent rewards ever so imperfect, and blended with ever so many absurdities and errors; and granted, (which we must do) that they were rather objects of probable conjecture, than of perfect certainty; it still remains a groundless and indefensible Proposition to assert that the state of probation, as it is described in the Gospel, is *totally unlike any thing that had ever before entered into the mind of man*, or is a Doctrine *intirely new*.

And, indeed, Sir, all your illustrations of this *second Proposition* either shew that you forgot its strict contents, or that you were sensible of its weakness. For, in these Illustrations, \* you only shew that Christianity has great advantages over the doctrines of

\* Page 21, 22, 23, 4th Edit.

the ancient Philosophers, both in its direct and ultimate end, and in the excellence of the means it employed for its attainment; and this is undeniable, but it does not prove what your Proposition announced.

Is it possible then, that the notion of this state's being a state of probation should never have entered into the mind of man, when, as you tell us yourself, “this notion is confirmed by every  
“ thing which we see around us—that  
“ it is the only key, which can open  
“ to us the designs of Providence in  
“ the œconomy of human affairs, the  
“ only clue that can guide us through  
“ that pathless Wilderness, and the  
“ only plan on which this world could  
“ possibly have been formed, or on  
“ which the History of it can be com-  
“ prehended or explained.”

The

The next thing you mention, in proof of your *second Proposition*, is, that “the Doctrines of this Religion are “equally new with the object.” To prove this, instead of pointing out these Doctrines with order, and defining them with precision, you give us the following miscellaneous bundle of vague assertions: “The Doctrines of “this Religion (say you) contain ideas “of *God*, of *Man*, of the *present* and “a *future* life, totally unheard of, “and quite dissimilar from any which “had ever been thought on, previous “to its publication.” As yet we have only assertion.—Where are your proofs? Of the four objects, with respect to which you maintain that the Doctrines of the Gospel are new and unheard of, you begin with the two last,

contrary to all method, and tell us, \* that “no other (Religion) ever drew  
 “so just a portrait of the *worthlessness*  
 “of this world, and *all* its pursuits,  
 “nor exhibited such *distinct, lively,*  
 “and *exquisite* pictures of the joys of  
 “another, of the Resurrection of the  
 “dead, the last Judgment, and the  
 “Triumphs of the Righteous in that  
 “tremendous day.”

Here, again, we have still assertions, and no proof; and even your assertions are strangely expressed. “Pray  
 “worthy Sir, what do you mean by  
 “the *worthlessness* of this world?” The  
 term to me appears neither *philosophical*  
 nor *theological*, nor *clear*; it even fa-  
 vours of invective and ill humour; or,  
 at best, supposes the object to which

it is applied divested of every kind of excellence and merit. The world, physical and moral, is the 'only object from whence we derive the knowledge and proofs of the existence and perfections of a Supreme Being; and surely, in this point of view, it cannot be a *worthless* world.—The world again, amidst all its imperfections, exhibits noble scenes of beauty and grandeur, harmony, and order; rich materials for the acquisition of useful and delightful knowledge; and many sources of pleasure and enjoyment, suited both to our inferior and more refined faculties and powers;—in this second point of view, it is not surely a *worthless* world,—and farther; still, the world is (as you say and I too) a state of trial and probation for nobler scenes of Being in futurity;—and, as  
this

this is an appointment of infinite wisdom and goodness, it cannot be in this sense that you consider our globe as a *worthless* world; for this would be contradicting what you had before advanced.—If, by the *worthlessness* of the world, you mean that its external advantages are transitory in their duration, incapable of satisfying the desires, or completing the felicity of a rational and immortal Being; that they are mixed with disappointments, perils, pain, suffering, and various sources of distress; that folly and vice, in various forms, are interspersed with pretty certain appearances of wisdom and virtue;—if you mean this,—all this is true; but even then the expression is harsh, and the Doctrine is not new nor peculiar to the Gospel. The observation and experience of mankind, in all ages, have  
ren-

rendered this truth palpable, and the complaints and sighs of the human race have ever been abundant on this subject, nay—perhaps, exaggerated.

As to what you call the *distinct*, *lively*, and *exquisite* pictures of the joys of a future world, of the Resurrection of the dead, and a last Judgment, that are drawn in the Gospel;—they will not detain us long. They are indeed infinitely superior to the fictions of the Poets, and the notions of the Philosophers of ancient times; but this does not prove that *they are totally unlike every thing of that kind that had before entered into the mind of man*; and this they ought to be, in order to serve as examples of the truth of your second Proposition.—In speaking of these pictures, you employ the terms *distinct*, *lively* and *exquisite*; the two latter terms

terms are proper,—for the pleasures of futurity are described in Scripture in terms mostly metaphorical, that they might be proportioned to our present mode of conception; but a *distinct* account of these pleasures has been withheld by the sacred Writers for the wisest reasons. *It does not yet appear*, says an inspired Apostle, *what we shall be*; and another Apostle, who, favoured beyond the lot of Mortality, obtained a transitory sight of the invisible World, declared, that the things he perceived there were *unutterable*. All that we can collect from the literal expressions of the sacred Writers, on this subject, is, that our knowledge and benevolence shall be increased and purified from every mixture of error and malignity, and that sin and suffering shall have no place in those  
 happy



happy Regions. This is surely a great deal:—but the Declaration is general, communicates no *new* ideas with respect to all the *particulars* of future enjoyments; and you know, Sir, that particulars alone constitute *distinct* and *adequate* ideas. The Figures and Parables, employed to represent the Kingdom of Heaven, give us reason to expect something very great and glorious in a future scene, but leave us in the dark about the place, manner, objects, connections, and other circumstances of an interesting kind. Our blessed Saviour, in his Parables of the *Talents*, seems to represent it as an active state, but gives no intimation of the objects on which this activity shall be employed.—The Apostles represent it under the general notion of *reward*, under the compa-

E rison

rison of *seed-time* and *harvest*;—and, if St. John, in the Revelations, descends sometimes into a seeming detail of particulars, yet, undoubtedly, these are no more than allegorical visions designed to intimate the sublime scenes of future Glory, of which the images used by the Apostle are intended to give us only a general and confused idea, which is, however, adapted to excite delightful hopes. Any thing that we can conclude about these matters is from the probable conjectures of Reason, from some feeble conclusions founded in analogy; and surely no words could be more proper to shew us that the sacred Writers never intended to convey *distinct* ideas of the Celestial felicity, than those of the Apostle to the Corinthians, (if his words relate to a future state) when

he

he said, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him.* 1 Cor. ii.

9. You quote this passage in another place, and tell us, that “it describes  
“sublimely the future joys reserved  
“for the Righteous, by declaring,  
“that *they are superior to all descrip-  
“tion,*”—whether this be a Bull or an Epigram, I shall not decide; but it shews that we must not look upon it as one of the *peculiarities* of the Gospel, that it describes *distinctly* the future felicities of the Righteous\*.

E 2

You

\* The truth of the matter is, that the Text here mentioned was not designed by the Apostle to describe, either *distinctly* or *indistinctly*, the joys and felicity of a future World, but to shew that the Chiefs and Leaders of the Jews, whom

You must not, however, imagine that I mean here to diminish the encomiums due to the Gospel on this head; for, on the contrary, these imperfect notices of the *particular circumstances* of our future felicity are evident marks of the Divine Wisdom. If this felicity were *distinctly* represented, it must have been described in its progressive growth through an endless duration; but how render such a description intelligible to mortals? The object is quite disproportioned to our faculties. The infant, in the cradle, might as easily comprehend the

whom the Apostle calls (in the verse preceding) the *Princes of this World*, had no notion of the scheme, the nature, the intention, and end of the Gospel Dispensation. For, if they had had any true conception of this, they *would not have crucified the Lord of Glory*.

plea-

pleasures and occupations of active youth, and the plans and enjoyments of maturer years, as we (in this feeble dawn of existence, in which our views, even of the objects that surround us, are confused and inadequate) could understand a description of the celestial happiness: for this happiness may be founded upon new inlets of perception and sensation, new aspects of love and benevolence, new modifications of a material frame, of which neither *Locke's* five *external* Senses, nor *Hutcheson's* eight or nine *internal* ones, will qualify us to entertain any, the most distant notion.

Nay—were it *possible* to convey a *distinct* idea of the future felicity of Christians, it would not be *expedient*. It would pour upon our feeble eyeballs a blaze of light that would

dazzle and confound them ;—it would fill the mind with an astonishment that would over-power all its faculties ;—it would suspend our attention to some of the most essential relations and duties of life, and defeat, in many respects, the purposes of the state of probation in which we are placed ;—it would, at least, render our present condition disagreeable, and all our temporal enjoyments insipid.

It is therefore, in my opinion, an evidence, I will not say of the Divine Mission, but of the Wisdom of the Gospel-Writers, that they have not pretended, any more than their Master, to give *distinct* ideas of future felicity. The Philosophers and Poets of antiquity, and the more modern Apostles of Mahomet and Odin, have given

given much more circumstantial descriptions of *a* future state, than the Christian Writers ;—but they are false and extravagant.

There is something, indeed, distinguishing and peculiar in the Scripture-doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body ;—this is a Doctrine truly unknown to the ancient Sages, and it was delivered to the World by Divine Revelation, before the discoveries of corporeal transformations in the animal world had administered a presumption drawn from analogy in favour of this Doctrine. But we have already shewn that novelty alone does not prove either the truth or Divine Origin of any doctrine, and the Resurrection of the Body must rest upon a promise, ascertained to be Divine by a miraculous Testimony.

I proceed, however, to shew, that even the Doctrines you alledge as Illustrations of your *second Proposition* don't even bear the marks of that intire novelty you attribute to them.— I don't think myself obliged to examine the truth of what you advance, p. 27, where you tell us, that “no other Religion has ever represented the Supreme Being in the Character of three Persons united in one God ;” because, in a note on this passage, you have declared it improper and unnecessary to decide what *kind* of union this is. Many learned Men have pretended to find a Trinity in the Divine Effence clearly expressed in the sacred Books of the Chinese, Persians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Grecians : (not to speak of the Writings of the Old Testament, whose Declarations on this head



head I suppose you blend with those of the Ævangelists and Apostles :) Thus Plutarch tells us, that the Persian Oromasdes *thrice augmented, or triplicated* himself, De Iside & Osir. and the Persian Magi celebrate, to this very day, a solemn festival in honour of the Τριπλάσιος, or *Threefold Mythras*. It appears moreover, from the testimonies of learned Men, that what the Persians called *Oromasdes, Mythras, and Mythra*, were called by the Chaldeans *Life, Intellect, and Soul*; by the Chinese *Hi, Yi, and Ouei*; by the Egyptians *Eiñon, Emeph, and Ptba* \*; and the Hebrews *Ab, El,*

\* The Egyptians, according to the testimony of Damascius, looked upon these three Hypostasēs as one *Essence* incomprehensible, above all knowledge, and praised him under the name of *Darkness, thrice repeated.*

and

and *Ruach*. It is also well known that Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato had like ideas of a Divine Trinity. How far this *Tri-union* resembled what you represent as the Christian Doctrine on that subject, I cannot determine; because you have not thought it expedient to tell us whether you consider the unity of the Three Persons in one God, as an Unity of Counsel, Equality, or Essence; but it is evident, that the tenets of Eastern Nations, above mentioned, are far from being *totally unlike* the Doctrines of the Trinity\* in our Theological Systems;

\* If it is alledged, that this Doctrine of a Trinity was derived, by Tradition, from some Antediluvian Revelation; then the Doctrine is not peculiar to Christianity.—And besides: where are the proofs of this Tradition? We see, every

tems ; and they are sufficient to prove your precipitation, in asserting, that no other Religion, except the Christian, “ has ever represented the Supreme Being in the Character of “ Three Persons united in one God.”

Nay were it demonstrated, that the notions of a Trinity, which are to be found in the Theological Systems of the Pagan Sages, were derived from some primitive Revelation, Judaical or Patriarchal, yet their being previous to the Christian Revelation is still sufficient

every day, into what crude fancies learned Men are betrayed by investigations of this kind, where the traces are ambiguous and uncertain: we are greatly in the dark about the origin of many opinions, which various circumstances, unknown to us, may have contributed to propagate. Thank Heaven! the Divine Authority of the Christian Religion does not depend on any discussions of this kind,

ficient to invalidate your argument, unless you think fit to change the title of your Book, and call it *A View of the Internal Evidence not only of Christianity, but also of Judaism and every other Revelation.*

To this error, in point of *fact*, you have in the next paragraph added a striking one in point of *reasoning*, when you affirm, “ that no other Religion  
 “ has attempted to reconcile those  
 “ seemingly contradictory, but both  
 “ true Propositions, the *contingency of*  
 “ *future events* and the *fore-knowledge*  
 “ *of God*, or the *free-will of the crea-*  
 “ *ture* with the *over-ruling grace of*  
 “ *the Creator.*” That these Propo-  
 sitions are *both* true, I firmly believe,  
 as well as you ; that they are *both* as-  
 serted in *the sacred Writings* is equally  
*evident* ; and, if this is all you mean  
 by

by *their being reconciled* in these Writings, then we can have no controversy upon that head. But I, in my simplicity, have always imagined that by *reconciling* two Doctrines, in appearance contradictory, was meant the finding out an intermediate link that connected them together, some point of contact that made them cohere, some proposition that shewed, not only that they were both true separately considered, but were also consistent when compared together; and I must confess my ignorance, or arraign your sagacity so far, as to declare, that no such intermediate link or proposition have I ever found in the Holy Scriptures, nor any attempt made there towards its discovery. If such an attempt had been made, it would have been successful, and would have

have saved a world of trouble, wrangling, and subtlety to the *Necessitarian* Metaphysicians from Zeno to Leibnitz, and to the Predestinarian Divines from St. Augustin to Augustus Toplady. But the Sacred Writers knew too well the limits of the human understanding to attempt the solution of a question which is undoubtedly reserved for another and a more extensive scene of light and knowledge. Like the Properties of Asymptotes, the two Propositions in question are susceptible of demonstration, yet still remain *unreconciled* and incomprehensible—here below.

You add—“no other Religion has  
 “so fully declared the *necessity* of  
 “*wickedness* and punishments, yet so  
 “effectually instructed individuals to  
 “resist the one, and to escape the  
 “other.”

“other.” I suppose you meant to say the *necessity of connecting punishment with wickedness*, and yet you have let the phrase pass otherwise through four Editions. If this phrase be neither a slip of the pen, nor an error of the press, I must be so free as to ask you, what you mean by the *necessity of wickedness*? that by your explication of this we may know, what idea you intend to communicate by *effectual* resistance to what is *necessary*. For, if this necessity be *absolute*, then according to your Doctrine the Gospel has taught us to *resist* what is *irresistible*, and may equally teach us to *do* what is *impossible*. And, if by the ambiguous term in question, you mean what the Metaphysicians call *Hypothetical* or *Moral* Necessity, I must beg leave to tell you that this is not any necessity  
at

at all, unless you confound *necessity* with *contingence*, an abuse of terms, indeed, that is too common, both among Metaphysicians and Divines \*. I don't recollect, that the Scripture speaks any where of the *necessity* of Wickedness. It mentions often the tyrannical influence of vicious habits, and represents the difficulty of overcoming them in strong, figurative, and popular terms, which express a *certitude*, that, in some cases and some persons, they shall not be overcome, but imply, in a strict and Philosophical sense, neither the *impossibility* of resistance, nor the *necessity* of subjection. And it is not improper to

\* The division of necessity into *absolute* and *Hypothetical*, resembles that of the Irish Dialectician, who said that all honest men might be divided into just and unjust.

remark



remark here, that, if the word *certitude* were substituted in the place of *necessity*, it would remove much ambiguity and inaccuracy in both our Philosophical and Theological Disquisitions.

It is also going too far to say that “no other Religion pretended to give *any* account of the depravity of man, or to point out any remedy for it \*.” If by an *account* here you mean a narration, the assertion is contrary to fact; for the religious Annals of all the Eastern Nations, of the Chinese, Indians, Persians, and Grecians, more especially the systems of Pythagoras and Plato †, mention not only the depravity, but even

\* P. 28, 29.

† See the Phædrus of this Philosopher, and all his *Polit*,

the *fall* of intelligent and happy Beings from order and felicity. From what tradition they derived this fact, it is not easy to investigate at this time of day; but their knowing any thing at all of the matter is sufficient to invalidate your assertion that the Gospel alone “has pretended to give any account of the depravity of man,” unless by the Gospel you mean not only the New Testament, but all the traditions both of the patriarchal and even of the antediluvian ages.

But perhaps, by *giving an account* of the depravity of man, you mean *accounting for it*; i. e. shewing *how* it happened, and by *what methods* it was brought about. Now, even in this sense of the expression, it is not exact to affirm, that the Gospel *alone* “has ever pretended to account for the  
 2 “depra-

“depravity of man.” You might have been satisfied with maintaining, that the Gospel has accounted for it in the best manner, though the wisdom of the sacred writers has not thought proper to enter, on this head, into such a circumstantial detail as is adapted to remove all obscurity. \*

F 2

But,

\* I acknowledge, without hesitation, the *obscurity* of some of the narrations and doctrines of Scripture. Here below we *know but in part* the dispensation of grace, as well as the ways of Providence. Christianity is a plan of Divine Wisdom, that is to have its full execution in eternity; and it is, therefore, only in a future scene, that we can hope to see *distinctly* its various parts, and the harmony of the *whole*. The parts of this plan that are proportioned to our capacities, and conducive to our religious and moral improvement, are designed to occupy us *here*,—what is mysterious, at present, will nobly exercise our faculties *hereafter*.

But, however that may be, it is not true, that no attempt had ever been made to give *any* account of the depravity of man; since it is certain, that the fages of antiquity have pretended to account for the fall and depravity of man in their own way. Plato's account of the matter, among others, is curious. You may see it in several places in his writings. In his Phædrus more especially he imputes the fall of men from the ethereal and primitive earth, "to their neglecting to follow the *God-guide* into the *Supra-celestial* place, where truth was to be seen in its source: to their taking up with nectar and ambrosia (i. e. sensual and accidental felicity) in consequence of which they became heavy and sluggish, broke their wings, fell down upon the earth and entered  
 " into

Glasgow  
 Dog and  
 Toad  
 in a race  
 of decided  
 virtue  
 & happiness  
 of Man.

“ into human bodies, more or less vile  
 “ according as they had been more  
 “ or less elevated — Then it was that  
 “ good and evil were blended to-  
 “ gether.”

Equally groundless is the assertion, that no attempt had ever been made, before the Gospel, to point out *any* remedy for the depravity of man. No remedy, indeed, so effectual as that of the Gospel, was ever exhibited to the world ; but to say that no other was ever thought of, or even that the *remedy* of the Gospel was *totally dissimilar* to *every* thing that had been *thought* of previous to its publication, betrays a strange unacquaintance with, or at least an unaccountable inattention to the state of Philosophy and Religion, in the different periods of the world. In the fragments of the Orpheic, Pythag-

thagorean, Platonick, and Stoick Philosophy, in the accounts that Herodotus, Iamblichus, and Eusebius give us of the religious doctrines and moral precepts of the Egyptian Sages, we find the noblest rules laid down for the restoration of the soul to its primitive purity ; but these rules, indeed, were mixed with enthusiasm, and unsupported by any succours or prospects equal to those which Christianity administers. They were, however, far from being in opposition to these rules : they were not even *unlike* them. *Prayer*, *faith*, the *contemplation* of the Deity, *virtue* to purify from sensual folly, *truth* to recover the Divine Image, and *charity* and *love*, which are rays drawn from the essence of God, were the means prescribed by these Sages, to restore man from his depravity and  
 from

from the miserable consequences of his fall.

You add, in the very next paragraph, “ No other (Religion) has “ ventured to declare the *unpardonable* “ nature of sin, without the influence “ of a mediatorial interposition, and “ a vicarious atonement from the sufferings of a Superior Being.” How far the punishment of sin may be irremissible or unpardonable without a vicarious atonement, or the expiatory sacrifice of a superior Being, is a question, whose determination *a priori* is perhaps beyond the bounds of our feeble and short-sighted reason. *Known unto God alone are the depths and immensity of his ways*, and it does not belong to mortals to prescribe limits to the freedom of his grace, nor to the extent of his sovereign wisdom and power. He is bound by no necessity, but the moral one of acting conform-

ably to his sovereign perfections, and what these perfections require, is, in many cases, known to us only by divine revelation. The Scriptures point out the method, chosen by the Divine wisdom, mercy, and justice, for the salvation of sinners, even the mediation, sufferings, and death of Christ, our Redeemer, *who gave his life a ransom* for many, and who by his perfect sacrifice deprived death of its sting, and the grave of its victory. The Scriptures declare, that, through this mediation, the pardon of sin, the succours of grace, and the blessings of immortality, are administered to men. This declaration is sufficient for us: it is the object of our faith, and the principal source of consolation and hope to sinful man. It is therefore needless to carry our speculations farther, and to conclude positively, from the choice of this method, that sin was *absolutely*  
un-



unpardonable by any other, or by a sovereign act of the supreme Law-giver. If we consider this mediation of Christ as the best method of salvation, it may be then, in a moral and hypothetical sense, considered as *necessary*, and the *only* method morally possible, because it was  $\pi\rho\epsilon\pi\acute{o}\nu$  (Hebrews ii. 10.) i. e. worthy of God, and suitable to his perfections; and it is only in this hypothetical sense of *necessity* that it is allowable to maintain, that God could not have pardoned sin, without the expiatory sacrifice of the Redeemer. This affirmation rests upon the principle, that God cannot do any thing but what is worthy of his perfections, and what is the best, all things considered; and upon this principle it may be said, that God cannot do any thing but what he actually does, if, in the infinite resources of his wisdom, there be no two methods possible, that are  
 equally

equally adapted to bring about the same end,—which last circumstance we cannot positively determine.

To determine whether or not sin is *unpardonable* without an expiation, we must consider, before all things, what the *pardon* of *sin* means. But, before we can form a just notion of the nature of *pardon*, we must fix with precision our ideas of the nature of *punishment*, because *this* is what pardon is designed to remove. Punishment, in general, is a certain measure of suffering inflicted upon a free agent, in consequence of the violation of a law; and the *only* end of punishment, conceivable, is the maintenance of the authority and influence of law, or, in other words, to *ensure obedience*. If then we consider man in a state of nature, as a transgressor of the law of Reason, to which he is subjected in that state, this transgression is punished

immediately by remorse, the natural fruits of moral disorder ; and, in many cases, by physical evil, which is the effect of intemperance and vice.—But this is not all,—Remorse excites fear, or an apprehension, that, besides the internal remorse of conscience, which is one of the immediate sanctions of the law of nature, farther marks of disapprobation may be expected in a future state from the offended judge. This apprehension is justified by the following consideration, that the sanction of remorse is least felt, in this world, by the greatest offenders, and is diminished in proportion as the corruption and perverseness of the sinner increase, while, on the other hand, the external advantages of life, in consequence of the establishment of general laws, fall frequently to the lot of the vicious and the profligate. It is therefore concluded, that *external* punishment

nishment will, in futurity, be super-added to the natural effects of iniquity, as *positive* penalties are annexed to crimes in wisdom (and indeed in goodness to the community) here below, to support the laws of order, and to terrify spectators from transgression.

Now, Sir, you will please to remark that this *external* punishment *alone* can be the object of pardon: for this pardon cannot mean that the Law-giver and Judge *approves* of sin: nor can it mean, that he removes that self-disapprobation and remorse, which are the natural sanctions of his violated law in the heart of man; for these can only be removed by the restoration of a virtuous frame to the mind, by the diminution or cessation of a vicious taste, irregular propensities, corrupt habits, and bad actions. The *external* punishment that is annexed to sin, either for the correction  
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of the guilty, or the admonition of the spectators, is therefore the *only* object on which pardon can produce its effect. Now as this external punishment is annexed to sin, not essentially or in the *nature of things*, like remorse, but by *positive* appointment, as a method of government,—who will venture to assert that it *cannot* be modified or abolished for reasons of clemency and wisdom?—Who will affirm that this kind of punishment is irremissible? If, indeed, the punishment, here mentioned, were annexed to sin in the nature of things, and by the essential constitution of the human mind, then sin would be *unpardonable*, and even the intervention of a Mediator could not remove it; and thus we see that the intervention of Christ neither heals the remorse of conscience, until virtue is restored; nor prevents the arrival of many physical evils (and of death

death among others) that are *connected* with moral disorder in the present constitution of human nature. But I repeat it again, this external punishment, as it is distinct from the natural effects of sin, and is superadded to *these*, for purposes of example and admonition, may be suspended and remitted in certain cases, without the intervention of a vicarious atonement : and the justice of the Divine Legislator is no more impeached by this remission, than that of an earthly prince would be, who, from reasons of clemency or prudence, and in the case of malefactors, who are proper objects of mercy, mitigates and supercedes, without any atonement to government, the rigorous execution of penal laws. The harsh doctrine of what scholastick Divines call *vindictive justice*

*tice* has raised all this dust and perplexity about a subject that is as clear as the sun at noon-day. But it is to be feared, that this doctrine has been rather modelled on the angry and revengeful passions of men, than on the calm and benevolent rectitude of God; and certainly (as some represent it) it is as contrary to the genius of true Religion as it is to the principles of sound philosophy.—If men did but consider, that there is no fixed and intrinsic proportion between *external punishment* and moral evil or demerit,—that this varies according to characters, circumstances, times, and places, \* —nay, that the external punishment is

\* If in one country a degree of external punishment, as two, would be sufficient to prevent the prevalence of robbery and murder, while in another

is often increased by those very circumstances that diminish the demerit or guilt on which it is inflicted, † they would form more accurate notions of this matter: they would see that all such punishments may be varied, suspended, increased, or abolished, as the ends of government may require.

These observations, Sir, are neither designed nor adapted to diminish the

another country, a degree, as five, would be requisite to produce the same effect; the punishment of the *same* crime would and should vary in different countries.

† When the number of vicious examples encreases in a country, external punishments must encrease in severity: and yet the person, who transgresses under the influence and seduction of multiplied examples, is less guilty, and has less real demerit, than he who is profligate where the examples of iniquity are less frequent and numerous.

value



value and importance of that *inestimable sacrifice*, which the Divine Mediator made of himself for the sins of the world ; they only tend to prevent our forming false ideas of the principles on which the doctrine of mediation rests, and to shew us that the sacrifice of the cross was rather an expedient of *choice and wisdom* to support moral government, and display the tremendous fruits of sin and disorder, than a *matter of absolute necessity*, which inexorable justice required as an oblation for itself, considered without any regard to the effects which this expiatory sacrifice was to produce on the minds of men in general, and in particular upon the spectators of this awful scene. Nothing is more true than the declaration of the Apostle, *that it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, by bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their sal-*

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*vation perfect through sufferings.* Heb. ii. 10. The sufferings of Christ rendered him *perfect*, both as a Mediator who was to display the fatal consequences of sin under a righteous government, and as a model that was to hold forth to mankind the most sublime examples of patience and resignation, under the transitory evils of a probationary state.

But setting aside all this reasoning, is it true, Sir, in fact, as you affirm, “ that no other Religion, except the  
 “ Christian, has ever ventured to de-  
 “ clare the unpardonable nature of sin,  
 “ without the influence of a mediato-  
 “ rial interposition, and a vicarious  
 “ atonement from the sufferings of a  
 “ Superior Being ?” Though I should not pretend to deny entirely this affirmation, on account of the words *Su-  
 perior*

*perior Being*, yet I may observe, that the prevalence of *sacrifices*, and those expiatory, in all ages of the world known to us, seems to intimate an apprehension in the mind of man, that some vicarious atonement was requisite in order to the pardon of sin; and this is sufficient to invalidate your affirmation, if it be alledged as a proof of your *second Proposition*; for the prevalence of expiatory sacrifices in the heathen world, from the earliest time, shews, at least, that the doctrine, in question, is not “entirely unlike every thing that before had entered into the mind of man.” But what would you say, if, following tenets of the ancient eastern nations, mentioned above, we found vestiges of a *middle Being* of great dignity, whose suffer-

ings were supposed to contribute to the restoration of fallen intelligences?

I might indeed, Sir, have spared myself the trouble of shewing, that novelty is *not* the distinguishing character of the system of doctrine, which you deduce as *new* from the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles, if your CONCLUSION, and the reigning principles of your Treatise, were consistent with what you acknowledge, p. 30. where you tell us, “ that the *credibility* of these wonderful doctrines depends on the opinions which *we* entertain of the *authority* of *those* who published them to the world.” I wiped my eyes twice or thrice, to be sure that I saw this passage well. The truth then, or internal evidence of these Doctrines does not depend on their *novelty*, but on the *authority* of the  
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the publishers. I think so too—but on what does the *authority* of the publishers depend? You will not say, I hope at this moment, that it depends upon the truth and internal evidence, or the *novelty* of the Doctrines, because we are too near the sentence where you declare the contrary.— You really say it, however, in the same breath, but in other words; and in one single sentence you make the Doctrines *dependent* and *independent* on the *authority* of the publishers.— Let us quote the whole passage, that the candid reader may judge whether or no I have misunderstood you: “Whether these wonderful Doctrines  
“are *worthy of our belief*\* must de-

\* The words *worthy of belief*, and *true*, are equivalent, when applied to the Doctrines of the Gospel, to their divine *authority* and *origin*.

“ *pend* on the opinion, which we en-  
 “ certain of the *authority* of those who  
 “ published them to the world; but  
 “ *certain* it is, that *they* are *all* so far  
 “ removed from every tract of the hu-  
 “ man imagination, that it seems  
 “ *equally impossible*, that they should  
 “ ever have been derived from the  
 “ knowledge or artifice of man.”

This is *saying* and *unsaying*, in a breath.  
 For, if the divine origin, or (which is  
 the same thing) the credibility of these  
 Doctrines, depends on the opinion we  
 have of the authority of their publish-  
 ers, then their *perfect novelty* is of lit-  
 tle or no consequence to their credibi-  
 lity; but, if their *perfect novelty*\*  
 shews that these Doctrines could not

\* Which is expressed strongly by their being removed from every tract of the human imagination.

be derived from the *knowledge* or artifice of men, then this novelty proves their divine origin, and, consequently, their credibility does not depend on the authority of their publishers.

Thus, Sir, I have done with your second *Proposition*. All that I have said relating to it, is rather designed to rectify, than to refute it. For, though I am persuaded that the essential Doctrines of the Gospel, considered in themselves, are not either by their novelty or nature sufficient to prove their Divine Origin and Inspiration, yet, when I consider the beautiful simplicity with which they are delivered, and the amazing success with which they were propagated, and when I compare these two circumstances with the character, abilities, and means of the persons that

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publish-



published them to the World, I see then, indeed, strong presumptions in favour of their truth, that is, of their Divine Origin and Authority. I go still farther, and pray God to forgive the ignorance or disingenuity of those, who pretend to believe firmly, that twelve obscure, illiterate men, twelve despised Galileans, without rank or power, interest or dexterity, opulence or authority, learning or eloquence, opposed and vanquished the prejudices of the World, triumphed over the power of custom, education, and interest, exposed themselves to death in the most dreadful forms, in the service of an Impostor, who had deceived them, and in whose cause they had nothing to expect in this World but Martyrdom, and in the  
 next



next but condemnation for maintaining a lye.

After having treated, in your manner, the Doctrines of Christianity, you proceed to some observations on the personal Character of its Author. You alledge that this Character is *new* and *extraordinary*, and so indeed it is. You wave, however, the proofs of this, deducible from the supernatural Birth, the forty days Fast, the various Miracles, the Death and Resurrection of the Divine Saviour, which are the chief circumstances, that constitute the *New* and the *Extraordinary* in his Character. Your reason for not employing these proofs, which are *so much*, nay perhaps chiefly to the purpose, is, “because these circumstances will (*say you*) have but little effect upon the minds of unbelievers, “ who,

“ who, if they believe not the Religion,  
 “ will give no credit to the relation  
 “ of these facts.” You think, then,  
 that, at this time of day, it is possible  
 to believe this Religion (i. e.) to be-  
 lieve its Divine Authority and Origin :)  
 previously to the belief of Christ’s  
 Miracles and Resurrection, tho’ it was  
 to these Miracles and this Resurrec-  
 tion that Christ himself appealed for  
 the truth of his Religion, or (which  
 is the same thing) the Divinity of his  
 Mission.—This is singular enough :—  
 but what is still much more so, is, to  
 see you attempting to prove to these  
 people, who reject the Miracles and  
 Resurrection of Christ, that his Cha-  
 racter was *new* and *extraordinary*. For,  
 when you have proved this to Deists,  
 what then? Will this lead them to  
 believe the Truth and Divinity of the  
 Reli-

Religion, when, rejecting the Miracles and Resurrection of its Author, they can only consider him as an Enthusiast or an Impostor? But perhaps you imagine, that, when you have proved the Character of Christ to be *new* and *extraordinary*, this will engage them to believe his Miracles. This, Sir, would be really trifling with the principles of evidence, in a strange manner. You cannot think that the idea of Christ's Character, as new and extraordinary, is more adapted to prove the truth of his Resurrection, than the ocular testimony of five hundred Witnesses transmitted in the Annals of History:—you cannot think that it is a stronger proof of this event than the conduct, zeal, and intrepidity of the Apostles (who would not have sacrificed all the blessings of this

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this life and the hopes of another, in order to support the cause of a dead Impostor who had cruelly deceived them) or than the amazing power and success that attended the Ministry of these Apostles with all the opposition and malignity of the World set in array against them.

But after all—when you come to prove that the Character of Christ is *new* and *extraordinary*, you make use, for this purpose, of a most exceptionable argument. You prove it by affirming that he is the Founder of a Religion which is totally unconnected with all human Policy and Government, and, therefore, totally uncondusive to any worldly purpose whatever.—If you had been able to prove this pernicious Paradox, *You would almost have persuaded me to be a Deist.*

But

But here, as in some other places, you forget what you designed to prove, and entertain us with many good things, which we don't *deny*, but which have no relation to what you *affirmed* and were to *prove*. This Paradox, however, deserves a particular consideration, and therefore I shall make it the subject of a following Letter.

LETTER

*Excellent,* LETTER IV.

S I R,

**I**T has always been to me a most pleasing object of contemplation, and not only so, but a strong confirmation of my religious faith, to observe the beautiful connexion and harmony that reigns in the ways of God to man, and even in the different states, through which human nature passes to moral improvement and felicity. I have always considered the state of nature, as improved by, and consequently in harmony with, the state of civil society; and I have always been accustomed to consider the *latter* as deriving its principal security, its most amiable embellishments, and its sweetest comforts, from the doctrines

trines and precepts of the christian religion. I have always thought that the good christian must be a good citizen, and that therefore the gospel promotes directly the original purposes of civil polity, and increases the influence of laws and government upon even the present felicity of man. Nay still more: as I am persuaded, that the *essential* principles and felicity of human nature must be the same in all its states, and only differ in the degrees of their perfection, I have always considered the practice of the civil and social virtues, in the community of which we are members *here*, as an essential preparation for that more perfect community of which we hope to be members *hereafter*. For, certainly, Sir, there must be an intimate connexion between our present  
and



and our future state of being, unless you suppose such chasms and abrupt transitions in the scale of existence, and in the progressive course of God's moral government, as are totally unlike any thing we have yet perceived in the works of nature, providence, or grace. Rational and moral intelligences, who have lived here below in social connexions, cannot, in any future period, be formed into a society; whose essential principles are totally new, and either contrary to, or different from, the essential principles of human society here below. In a future period, indeed, accidental circumstances may be changed, new sources of enjoyment may be opened, certain relations, which take place here below, and which are not essential to the nature, but are only appropriated

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to the imperfect state of moral society, may be abolished and succeeded by others more noble and more perfect; but the essential principles that constitute *here* the happiness of human society shall remain for ever.—From all this I conclude, that the truths and precepts of christianity, though they have their great and ultimate end in a future state, are nevertheless adapted, and, indeed, designed to produce the happiest effects upon the conduct of men in their present civil and social relations. This truth, however, does not rest only upon the general principles now mentioned: it is susceptible of demonstration: you seem to acknowledge it in several places, and yet it totally overturns your bold

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assertion, \* that Jesus Christ founded a religion, “ which is *totally* unconnected with *all* human policy and government, and therefore totally *unconducive* to *any* worldly purpose whatever.”

The citizen of Geneva †, who, with an unaccountable spirit of paradox and inconsistency, has lavished on christianity the most pompous encomiums, and attacked it in the most indecent terms of reproach, preceded you, Sir, in this very strange representation of the gospel. How such a representation could come into the head of a man of your penetration and discernment is above my comprehension. There are some mistakes, Sir,

\* P. 33. † J. J. Rousseau.

so palpable, that one is almost ashamed to correct them. It is irksome to be under the necessity of demanding attention to the plainest truths, to the most palpable and striking connexions of things;—to beg that you would recollect the ends and purposes of government, and the happy fruits that might be expected from civil associations, seconded by the influence of religion and morals.

If you meant by the paradox I here combat, that the religion of Jesus is not connected with any *external forms* of government,—that it does not favour the constitution of a monarchy more than that of a republick,—that it has no relation to many of the subaltern springs of the political machine, no-body would have contested your as-

fertion, though some might ask how it came to obtain a place in your book? Or, had you meant by the passage under consideration, that the christian religion makes little account of extensive dominion, overgrown opulence, commercial schemes, and perpetual efforts towards new acquisitions, we should have left the proposition unnoticed, as harmless, because it is not in these circumstances, but in others, that shall be mentioned in their place, that we must seek for the chief *reasons* and *purposes* of civil associations.—The christian religion has no connexion with the *abuses* which, through the passions of men, have defeated the *true* purposes of civil government, or have substituted *false* ones in their place; but does this prove that it is totally *unconnected* with  
 all

all human government, and uncondusive to any worldly purpose whatsoever? I thought, indeed, that I had mistaken your meaning for a while—and I was led to this thought, by perceiving that there was no sort of connexion between what you affirmed and the arguments used to support it. I said to myself, Mr. Jenyns, by the bold words above quoted, means only, that Jesus did not purpose, like Numa, Mahomet, or Moses \*, to aspire to the rank of a civil legislator or sovereign, and also that the christian religion contains precepts more refined and noble, both relating to religion

\* If it is a proof of the divinity of the christian religion, that it stands unconnected with all human and civil government, the monastick establishments bid pretty fair for a celestial origin!

and morality, than are to be found in any human systems of legislation : and this, indeed, Sir, is all that you prove, or attempt to prove, in the fifteen pages that follow the assertion now under consideration. This is also undoubtedly true ; but as there is a great difference between these two propositions, *christianity is superior to all the systems of human legislation,*—and *christianity is unconnected with all human government, and totally uncondusive to any worldly purposes whatever,* I was tempted, in order to give your reasoning some appearance of consistency, to explain the latter by the former, in order to render it admissable. But, when I proceeded farther, and heard you avow to an objector \*, “ that

\* P. 133—136. 4th Edition.

“ God built the world upon *one plan*,  
 “ and a religion for it on *another*—  
 “ that he had revealed a religion,  
 “ which not only *contradicts* the prin-  
 “ cipal passions and inclinations that  
 “ he has implanted in our nature, but  
 “ is *incompatible with the whole œconomy*  
 “ of that world in which he has  
 “ thought proper to place us,” I found  
 that I had not mistaken your meaning,  
 and also, that your meaning is pernicious  
 to the cause of Christianity in  
 the very highest degree.

At first sight, this representation,  
 which sets nature and grace, providence  
 and revelation at variance, and exhibits  
 the plan of the divine government under  
 the aspect of a house divided against  
 itself, has a most unphilosophical and  
 forbidding appearance;



but, when we come to examine it in detail, it is glaringly false in all its parts.

To prove this I shall shew, *first*, that the true ends of civil government are best promoted, nay can only be accomplished by the spirit and influence of the christian religion; and, *secondly*, that this religion neither *contradicts* the natural passions and inclinations that God has implanted in us, nor prohibits the pursuit and enjoyment of the comforts and advantages of human life.—When these two points are proved, it will, I think, be evident, that the gospel is neither *unconducive* to every worldly purpose, nor incompatible with the whole œconomy of a present state.

Here,



Here, indeed, you oblige more or less to *preach*; I hope, however, that you will not disdain to *bear*.

Civil society was formed as a preservative against disorder and injustice, and thus was designed to augment the comforts and happiness of human life. As *natural society* was the consequence of a gregarious principle or instinct in the human mind, *civil government* was the result of reflexion on the means of rendering natural society agreeable and happy. It is, however, certain, that the external laws and institutions of civil society were, and still are, insufficient for promoting its complete felicity, nay even such a degree of felicity as actually takes place in it. On the one hand, its establishment multiplied the duties of men, by multiplying their relations; on the other,  
by

by encreasing the wants of mankind, in proportion as the useful and elegant arts struck out new sources of enjoyment, it encreased and inflamed those very appetites and passions, for the correction and restraint of which it was formed.—In this state of things, society stands in need of the succour and influence of many virtues, for which its civil laws and institutions make little or no provision; such as piety, fidelity, equity, candour, gratitude, temperance, and benevolence. Civil laws, I say, make no provision for those virtues; nay, they extend their protection (which is their only remunerating sanction) to the hypocrite, the ungrateful, the intemperate, the perfidious, and the avaricious, if they only guard, prudently, against audacious and violent attempts upon the

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the lives and properties of their fellow-citizens. There are also numberless ways in which the passions of men may disturb the order, peace, and happiness of civil society, which the precepts and sanctions of human laws can neither prevent nor remedy. Anger and revenge, envy and hatred, avarice and intemperance, immorality and licentiousness, may poison the fountains of publick felicity, without any restraint from the authority of civil government. If you attend to this, and consider the spirit and genius of christianity, how can you say, that this doctrine is *unconnected* with the ends of civil government, and is uncondusive to any worldly purpose? You seem to have forgot that christianity confirms by positive precepts, encourages by sublime promises, and

enjoins under pain of the most tremendous evils, those virtues of piety, candour, gratitude, temperance, and benevolence, that strengthen all the bonds of civil government, are the essential foundations of temporal prosperity, and promote all the true and solid interests of human society. The duties of subjection to earthly governors are expressly enjoined by the divine author of our religion: his precepts have a direct tendency to render magistrates respectable and subjects obedient, and to restrain those passions that produce anguish and misery in private life, and desolation on the publick theatre of the world. His exhortations to *humility* are not designed to render men *abject*, mean-spirited, and pusillanimous, but meek, modest, vigilant, pacifick, and humane;—and  
 are

are there not many valuable and important purposes answered by these virtues, even in the œconomy of a present world? Don't you see by this, that the precepts of the gospel are not designed to disengage men from the duties and occupations of civil life, or from all concern in the affairs of the world? They indeed, engage christians to perform these duties, and to manage these occupations and concerns, like immortal beings, with a view to futurity and to the approbation of HIM, who has appointed their stations on this transitory scene; and this, surely, is the most effectual way to perform these duties in the noblest and most perfect manner.— Nay more, as I have already observed in the beginning of this letter, it is by fulfilling, from pious and virtuous motives,

motives, the duties of magistrates, subjects, fathers, children, husbands, wives, masters, servants, fellow-citizens, friends, and sociable members of the great family of human life, that we are prepared for exercising the same benevolence and virtue in other forms, and in more perfect relations, in a future and more exalted sphere. Hence the œconomy of time looks towards eternity, and the prospect of eternity influences our conduct in the œconomy of time, while the religion of Jesus connects these œconomies, as correspondent and contiguous links in the immense scale of being; so far is it from being true, *that God* (as you oddly express it) *has constituted a world upon one plan, and a religion for it on another.* This view of things led one of the most eminent geniuses of

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of the present age to express himself in the following terms, “ How admirable is the christian religion, which, while its great object appears to be the attainment of future felicity, has nevertheless the greatest tendency to promote our happiness in a present world ! \* ”

I said, Sir, in the *second place*, that the christian religion neither *contradicts* the *natural passions* and inclinations that God has implanted in us, *nor prohibits* the pursuit and enjoyment of the comforts and advantages of human life. And it is, indeed, singular enough, that I should be obliged to prove this to *you*, in the same manner as if I were writing to a Carthusian monk or a solitary hermit. In treat-

\* This eminent genius was Montesquieu.



ing this part of your subject, you go upon the principle above-mentioned, even that “ God constituted a world “ upon *one plan*, and a religion for it “ on *another*,” — a strange principle, indeed! this, at first sight, seems to be a method of proceeding that favours of inconsistency, if by the *world* you understand not only the material system of nature, but the moral and rational creatures that belong to it. At least, the principle requires illustration, and I cannot say, that your manner of explaining it removes its difficulties. The matter is nice and delicate, and deserves a particular discussion.

To explain the principle or proposition, you tell us, that “ the religion “ of Jesus not only contradicts the “ principal passions and inclinations “ which



“ which God has implanted in our na-  
 “ tures, but is *incompatible* with the  
 “ *whole œconomy* of the world, in which  
 “ he had placed us\*.” It is true,  
 this phrase, and the strange principles  
 it is designed to explain, are put in the  
 mouth of an objector. But this ob-  
 jector is your second, instead of being  
 your adversary. You adopt both his  
*principle* and his manner of explaining  
 it, and declare that they express the  
 true spirit of christianity. You even  
 re-inforce the hypothesis of the objec-  
 tor by phrases of the very harshest  
 kind. Allow me to examine what he  
 and you say on this head.

To prove that christianity contra-  
 dicts our natural passions, and is in-  
 compatible with the whole œconomy

\* P. 133.

of a present world,—your objector and you alledge in the first place, “ that  
 “ the *love of power, riches, honour,*  
 “ and *fame*, which are the great in-  
 “ citements to generous and magna-  
 “ nîmous actions, are by this (i. e.  
 “ christian) institution all depreciated  
 “ and discouraged.” Now, Sir, I  
 really don’t find the mere love or de-  
 sire of the objects above-mentioned  
 either depreciated or recommended in  
 scripture; and, indeed, these desires  
 are of such a nature, that they neither  
 deserve esteem nor contempt; they  
 are, in their *proper measure and degree*,  
 the innocent propensities of nature to-  
 wards those comforts of life, which  
 God and Christ, by the mouth of an  
 apostle, have permitted mankind *richly*  
*to enjoy*\*.—If, indeed, by the love of

\* 1. Tim. vi. 17.

power, you mean *excessive ambition*: and, by the love of riches, fordid *avarice*, or even an immoderate attachment to opulence; and, by the desire of honour and fame, you understand *vain-glory*; then I acknowledge, that these desires are depreciated and discouraged by the sacred writers. But why?—Not on account of their *objects*, but on account of their *degree*; not as natural passions, but as *natural passions* become *excessive*, and swelled beyond their subordination to nobler principles and finer affections. And truly, Sir, I never heard any body, before yourself, style *generous* and *magnanimous* the actions that proceed from the excessive love of power, riches, and honour alone: I have always been accustomed to hear these epithets given to deeds that carry in their motives a

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mixture,

mixture, at least, of benevolence, disinterestedness and publick spirit. And farther, by opposing the *excess* of these natural and innocent desires, christianity does not act in contradiction with the *œconomy of the world*, or the present plan of providence; it only opposes the abuses of men, which I hope you will not be so inconsiderate as to confound with that œconomy. If there be any passages of scripture, where the love of power, riches, or fame are discouraged, without an eye to the degree or excess of the desire, it is only in the *particular* case of the first heralds of the gospel, whose singular situation required an inattention to the external comforts and advantages of life. But this inattention was never designed as a rule to christians in succeeding times, who are not  
called.

called to perpetual scenes of suffering and martyrdom, nor obliged to sacrifice every worldly prospect to the establishment of the gospel; for the gospel is firmly established; and neither the mockeries of indecent wit, nor the frenzy of infidelity and vice, shall ever prevail against it.—Is it possible, Sir, that you can really think, that the maxims and precepts of the gospel were designed to prevent our enjoying the benignity of providence here below, or to restrain us from desiring and relishing the pleasures which the supreme benefactor has connected with the wise and moderate use of his gifts? Considering this world as a state of passage (and, indeed, it is an inexplicable scene in any other point of view) is it not agreeable to every precept of scripture and every dictate of

common sense, that we should render that passage as comfortable as may be, without amusing ourselves so inconsiderately on the road, as to lose sight of our true country, or neglecting to acquire and maintain a taste and frame of mind suitable to the nobler pleasures it exhibits to our hopes? Ought a child to renounce the innocent sweets of infancy, or a youth to reject the harmless pleasures of life's early prime, because he is soon to pass to more grave and solid occupations and enjoyments of a maturer period? This would be preposterous. The gospel, therefore, in pointing out, as its principal and great object, a life to come, did not mean to annihilate (as you strangely insinuate by your unguarded expressions) either the *relations* or *enjoyments* of this present life; but only

to modify our conduct in the *one* and our attachment to the *other* in such a manner as to render them compatible with, nay, preparatory to our future felicity. The views and precepts of christianity were designed to set bounds to those appetites, whose excessive indulgence degrades reason, extinguishes piety, troubles the order of society, and ends in the ruin of human nature; they were designed to moderate that ambition, which, when left to itself, engenders perfidy, cruelty, and injustice, and is a source of innumerable evils both in private and publick life. In a word, they were designed to make us use the *good things of this life*, without considering them as our supreme felicity, but to esteem them in subordination to the nobler and more substantial sources of happiness, which



we expect in a future and more perfect state. Thus the doctrines of grace, instead of engaging us to reject with a morose and cynical austerity the gifts of providence, teach us to enjoy and to appreciate them with wisdom, and thus, instead of opposing the œconomy and pursuits of a present world, have a happy and salutary influence on our condition in it.

You see, Sir, that I am not ashamed to profess myself one of those whom you call, with a sneer \*, the good managers, who chuse to take a little of this world in their way to heaven. This, I am, from principle; for in fact I have little of the world to take; I am neither a lord of the board of trade, nor a member of parliament,

\* P. 135.



nor a man of fortune; and therefore, when I say, that it is lawful for the christian to be concerned in the affairs of the world, and to enjoy its advantages, I speak *disinterestedly*; nay, I defend *your* practice against your principles. And it is the easiest task I ever undertook. The only difficulty that perplexes me here is, how to do this consistently with civility. It would be harsh to say, that you don't understand the sense of the scripture-texts you have employed to maintain your opinion, and yet it would be much more so to affirm that you do. Without determining, which of the two is really the case, permit me to tell you, what every curate tells his parishioners often in a year, that the term *world* is frequently used in scripture for the *corrupt maxims* and the *vicious customs*  
of

of the world, and as often for the *persons*, whose conduct in life is directed by these customs and these maxims; and also for the licentious abuse of, or excessive attachment to, the good things of a present life. In one or other of these senses is the word taken, in all the passages you have alledged, to prove that christianity is in direct opposition to the œconomy of a present world. Now from these passages I conclude quite the contrary; even that christianity has the most friendly aspect upon the true interests of a present world, by its tendency to abolish those corrupt maxims and vicious customs, that are the most fatal enemies to our temporal, as well as to our eternal felicity.—And where the *love of the world* and *the things of the world* is prohibited in the sacred writings

ings (if the precept does not relate to the *peculiar* case of the first teachers of christianity) the word *love* is undoubtedly used to denote an *undue* and *excessive* attachment to the riches, pleasures, and honours of the world. I will even furnish you with two texts much more to your purpose (not in reality but in appearance) than any you have quoted. The first is that passage of the gospel, in which Jesus Christ declares that, in order *to be his disciple, a man must hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also* \*. In the view of such a commentator as you, Sir, here is a text that annihilates, in a moment, all the most intimate and tender relations of a present world. What do I say?—

\* Luke xiv. 26.

It does more than annihilate them. Nature and reason point out love and benevolence as the result of these relations; but, if you quoted this text as you have quoted the others, you would represent christianity as connecting with *these* relations malignity and *hatred*.—When St. John said, \* *Love not the world, nor the things of the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*; he said something very emphatick. It is similar to the vow you made by your godfathers at your baptism, *to renounce the world, the devil, and the flesh*. You don't, however, suppose, that a man is obliged, by this vow, to live in the world, as if he were out of it, —to refuse a commission of the peace; a seat in parliament, a pension, or a

\* 1st Ep. ii. 15.

peerage,—

peerage,—to throw his *guidos* into the fire, or to break his statues, like an iconoclast; to shut his heart to the tender connexions of love, and to the *amiable* charities of human nature. It was not certainly this monastick frenzy that St. John had in view; nor did he mean that we should extinguish every elegant taste, and every natural passion, when he said, *Love not the world, nor the things of the world.* He tells us himself, in the very next verse, his true meaning, and leaves no doubt remaining about the ideas he designed to express by the term *world*, when he calls it *the lust of the flesh*, the *lust of the eye*, and *the pride of life*. i. e. luxury and lasciviousness—the avaricious pursuit of opulence—and the indulgence of vanity and ambition. But, according to you, these declarations

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tions of scripture must ever forbid ANY reconciliation between the pursuits of this world and the christian institution \*. I was going to tell you, Sir, that such a spirit of criticism, applied to such a book as the New Testament, would draw the most palpable absurdities from the purest expressions of celestial wisdom. But, when I was coming down upon you with this formidable remonstrance, I perceived, that, in the very next page, you had changed entirely the state of the question by expressions quite different from the former. These different expressions, I presume, are designed to convey different ideas. In justifying *there* the incompatibility of the gospel with *the pursuits of the world*, you put, before the word *pursuits*, the epithet

\* P. 141.

*vain*, which, indeed, ends our dispute; though I must tell you that this reconciliation is made at the expence of all your preceding reasoning on this part of your subject. Who doubts, Sir, of christianity's being *adverse* to the *VAIN pursuits* of this world? Who doubts of its being conformable, in this respect, as well as in all others, with reason, wisdom, and experience, which, indeed, teach us (as you justly observe) "that these *vain pursuits* are  
 " begun on false hopes, carried on  
 " with disquietude, and end in disap-  
 " pointment?" No christian, surely, will deny that the professed incompatibility of Christ's religion with the *little wretched and iniquitous business* of the world is far from being a defect in this religion; though I think you  
 rather

rather hasty in advancing \*, “ that,  
 “ were there *no other* proof of its *di-*  
 “ *vine origin*, this alone would be  
 “ *abundantly sufficient* †.” But why,  
 worthy Sir, did you not inform us  
 before-hand, that by these expressions,  
*the plan on which God constituted the*  
*world*; the *whole æconomy of a present*  
*world*; the *pursuits and advantages of*  
 the world; you meant only the *vain*  
 pursuits, and the little, wretched, ini-  
 quitous business of the world? You  
 may perhaps reply by asking me, why  
 I had not the patience to wait until you

\* P. 142.

† It is not enough to prove the divine origin  
 of any doctrines or precepts, that they be in-  
 compatible with the *little, wretched, iniquitous*  
*business*, or *vain pursuits* of the world;—for, at  
 this rate, the morals of Seneca would lay an  
 undoubted claim to divine inspiration.

had



had explained yourself? I was not so impatient as you may think. I read your book twice with the closest attention, before I sat down to write these letters; and I was at much pains to combine the jarring variety of your expressions in such a manner as to draw from them a consistent series of thought and reasoning; but I cannot say, that I succeeded; and I really, to this moment, am not sure of what you mean by the *æconomy* and *plan* of a *present world*. For, if I should take these words (in the sense you seem to attribute to them, p. 141) to mean the *vain pursuits* and the *iniquitous business* of the world, I get into another difficulty, and don't see how christianity, by contradicting *these*, contradicts the *principal passions* and *inclinations*

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*God has implanted in our nature* \*, provided these passions and inclinations be well regulated, and exercised upon their proper objects with due proportion. There is no passion nor inclination in man, which, when regulated by reason and christianity, may not tend both to private and publick good, even in the œconomy of a present world. I do not believe, indeed, that, in a present state, the highest degrees of this private or publick felicity will, or, morally speaking, can take place; but I still maintain that the highest degrees of harmony and felicity, both private and publick, that *can* take place here below, are attainable only by the practical influence of the precepts and doctrines of the

\* P. 133.

christian religion, and that christianity is, therefore, so far from being incompatible with, that it is friendly to the *true œconomy* of a present world, i. e. to the most comfortable state of which it is susceptible. For, by the *œconomy of a present world*, I understand the association of free, rational, and sociable beings, susceptible of pleasure and pain, in a material world, for the ends of concord and mutual good offices, and for the enjoyment of as much satisfaction as is attainable in a state of passage.—Here then you seemed to be enclosed: but you will get out again by telling us that, by the *love of power, riches, and honour*, you mean an *excessive love*; and that, by the *œconomy of the present world*, you mean the perversion of the ends and purposes of human associations;—but then your

proposition that *christianity* is uncondusive to any worldly purposes is proved false, and it appears only incompatible with the abuses of men, which is not a very wonderful discovery.

You give us, indeed \*, several hints of your taking the *economy of the world* in this sense, and especially when you tell us that government, which is essential to the nature of man †, *cannot be managed without certain degrees of VIOLENCE, CORRUPTION, and IMPOSITION; yet (say you) all these are strictly forbidden.* If you had told us

\* P. 134.

† I did not know before that civil government (for that is manifestly here meant) was essential to the *nature* of man, though it is avowedly adapted to promote his security and comfort.

what

what kinds of *violence* and *imposition* are prohibited in the gospel, we should perhaps find that they are not (any more than *corruption*) essentially necessary to the management and administration of civil government. Violence, in restraining injustice and punishing transgressors, is, indeed, *necessary*, but it is not *forbidden*: unjust and despotick violence is *forbidden*, but it is not *necessary*. And I am persuaded that *corruption* (whether you understand by that word bribery in particular, or a want of principle in general) is so little necessary to move the springs of government, that religion and virtue would do the business much better, if governors and governed were actuated by its influence; and this is sufficient to refute all you say upon the subject.

Again—when you say that *non-resistance to evil, perpetual patience, and a neglect of all we eat, drink, and wear,* must subject individuals to perpetual insults, put an end to commerce, manufactures \*, and industry, you maintain a proposition which I shall not dispute: but when you affirm that these are recommended and enjoined in the gospel, as obligatory upon *all* christians in particular, and *all* nations in general, and *that*, without any modification and restriction arising from a difference in times, persons, places, and circumstances, you affirm what the gospel no-where enjoins, and what common sense (a respectable critick in the class of interpreters) palpably disavows. It was, indeed, one of the leading rules of conduct prescribed to

\* P. 135.

the apostles by their divine master, that, in the *propagation of the gospel*, no kind of external force or violence should be employed, because it was beneath the dignity of a divine revelation to depend, for its *first* reception, on any efforts of human power. It was also expedient that the heralds of this religion, which was to sow, in the œconomy of *time*, the seeds of that BENEVOLENCE, that shall shed its fruits through the endless scenes of *eternity*, should give to the world extraordinary examples of mildness, patience, and benignity. The rules relative to this conduct are expressed in the injunctions of our blessed Saviour, by the phrases of *not resisting evil*—of *turning the left cheek*, &c.—of *doing good to those that hate us*, and several others



of a like kind. If from these phrases you conclude, that the christian religion forbids the magistrates to punish the crimes that threaten the destruction of society, or an individual to repel, even by violence, the assaults of an unjust aggressor, who attempts to involve him and his family in calamity and ruin, you make the gospel an asylum to the profligate, and its author an enemy to the order and happiness of human society. But you ought to know, Sir, that *punishment* may be executed without a *spirit of vengeance*; that *injuries* may be repelled without malignity, that personal insults of *little consequence* to private or publick happiness may and ought to be borne with patience, and that an enemy, even when he has forfeited our esteem,

may



may have a claim to acts of humanity and benevolence.

It is particularly to be observed, that, in the precepts which seem favourable to *non-resistance*, Christ has particularly in view what was practised among the Jews under the law of *retaliation*. Under the credit of this law, many resented the smallest injuries with a malicious and revengeful spirit, and claimed, with rigour and violence, an indemnification from the public tribunals for trifling violations of their pretensions or rights: so that the disciples were warned by their benevolent master to avoid the unrelenting and vindictive spirit of the Jews, and to restrain the inhuman and tumultuous impulse of malignant passions; not to renounce a wife, decent,  
and

and rational self-defence, on the proper occasions.

This is certainly all that is required in these injunctions of *non-resistance* and *patience* in their application to the generality of christians ; granting that they were to be practised with a peculiar degree of self-denial by the first ministers of the gospel. By any other rule of interpretation, we will be obliged to maintain, that the christian must at this day HATE his father, mother, sisters, and brothers\*, that the bread of the last supper was Christ's real body †, that the design of Christ was not to spread peace upon earth ‡, but war and desolation. As to the  
neglect

\* Luke xiv. 26.

† Matth. xxvi. 26.

‡ Matth. x. 34.

*neglect* of all that we *eat, drink, and wear*, it might, indeed, have been enjoined almost literally upon the *first* preachers of the christian faith, whose whole attention was to be employed in diffusing the light of the gospel, amidst such scenes of peril and suffering as were incompatible with any concern about the external comforts or elegancies of life.—And yet, even with respect to *them*, it may be alleged, that these passages are not to be urged in all the extent of the letter, and are only designed to prevent an undue anxiety about the external circumstances of their state and condition; but the first dictates of common sense shew that this instance of self-denial is not and cannot be required from the very best and most eminent christi-

Christians in our day, and many of the express declarations of scripture shew that no such obligation is imposed upon them.

I wonder, Sir, that, since you went so far out of the walk of true criticism as to avail yourself of certain forms of expression, that are either proverbial and figurative, and therefore not to be understood literally, or evidently confined to particular persons, and therefore not universal in their application, you did not alledge the solemn declaration of Christ before Pilate, that *his kingdom was not of this world*. This *sounds* as well for your cause as any other text; and yet it makes nothing at all for your purpose. That you may not, however, be tempted, on  
any

any future occasion, to make use of it to shew that christianity is *unconducive to any worldly purpose*, I shall point out here its true signification in order to secure it on the side of those who defend christianity on more rational principles, than those which your book *seems* to contain.

When Christ made that sublime declaration, *my kingdom is not of this world*, it is palpably evident, that he understood by this the following things — that *it* did not derive its *origin* from efforts of human policy, but from the miraculous interposition of God alone — that *its* great *end* and *design* went far beyond the ends and purposes of civil associations, and aimed at nothing less than to deliver mortals from the  
punish-

punishment of sin, the tyranny of vice, the power of death, and the fear of judgment, and to prepare them, by holiness and virtue, for happiness and immortality—that *its laws* instead of being confined to the outward actions of men (like those of civil legislators) were addressed to the inward principles and affections of the heart—that *its power* different, both in its means and effects, from the power of the world, was rational, gentle, persuasive, and invisible, forming its conquests by that *word* of truth that enlightens the understanding, and that spirit of grace that improves the heart,—and that its *rewards* are spiritual and rational, and its *duration eternal*. Such, Sir, are the essential ideas contained in the sublime declaration of the Son  
of

of God before the Roman governor. But, because the kingdom of Christ is infinitely superior to the kingdoms of this world in its origin, ends, laws, power, rewards, and duration, does it follow from thence, that it has no connexion with the felicity of earthly empires, and with the true interests of civil society here below?—Or that even the true subjects of this kingdom ought to be alienated from all concern in the interests and affairs of a present world? No, Sir; this conclusion, as I have already shewn, is unreasonable; it favours more of mystical enthusiasm or monastick austerity, than of the benevolent, humane, and liberal spirit of the christian religion.

LETTER

## L E T T E R V.

S I R,

**I**N my former letter, I considered largely your second proposition, and shewed the insufficiency of the arguments by which you support it, as well as the indefensible nature of the proposition itself. In effecting this, I was obliged to follow you into your CONCLUSION, where you had scattered a part of these arguments. I now return to wait upon you with some remarks, not upon your *third proposition* itself, which I think true and unexceptionable in all its parts; but on the examples and arguments you employ to illustrate and defend it. These I think



think partly illusory, and partly preposterous; and you appear to me, in this part of your work, to bestow upon christianity encomiums which it must disavow.

You very justly observe in your third proposition, “ that a system of  
 “ ethics may be collected from the  
 “ New Testament, in which every  
 “ moral precept, founded on reason,  
 “ is carried to a higher degree of pu-  
 “ rity and perfection, than in any other  
 “ of the ancient philosophers of pre-  
 “ ceding ages.” You also explain perfectly well what you mean by moral precepts founded on reason, when you tell us they are such as “ enforce  
 “ the practice of those duties that rea-  
 “ son informs us must improve our  
 “ natures, and conduce to the happi-  
 L “ nefs

ness of mankind, such as piety to God, *benevolence* to man, justice, charity, temperance, and sobriety, and so on.”—The latter part of your third proposition is expressed in these terms: “every moral precept *founded on false principles*, is entirely omitted.” Now by precepts, founded on false principles, you profess to mean “those which recommend fictitious virtues, productive of none of these salutary effects” (above-mentioned).—And these fictitious virtues, which, according to you, are no virtues at all, are *valour*, *patriotism*, and *friendship*;—you even go so far (which, indeed, is surprising) as to affirm that these *fictitious virtues* are incompatible with the *genius of the christian religion*, and, if this be true, you

do them too much honour to call them even *fictitious virtues*; you ought to have spoken out boldly, and called them *vices*, or at best *defects*.

This, however, is carrying matters too far. The three moral objects in question are certainly very ambiguously understood, and their splendid names are bestowed; in the common conversation of the world, upon efforts, passions, and connexions, that have not a spark of virtue in them: for the fearless and brutal temerity of the duellist is called *valour*; the popular noise of the corrupt and ambitious is esteemed *patriotism*, and connexions, cemented by interest, licentiousness, or caprice, are unworthily honoured with the name of *friendship*. The abuses of men be to themselves; let

them not, however, betray us into false judgments ; let them not lead us to confound the nature of things with the errors of human fancy, nor to imagine that there is no genuine coin, because we meet with a multitude of counterfeits.

It is singular enough, that the omission of *patriotism* and *friendship*, among the duties enjoined in the gospel, was sneered at by Lord Shaftsbury as a defect in that institution, and is admired by you as a proof of its perfect purity and divine origin. The truth of the matter is, that you are both mistaken. This omission was the dictate of common sense, which shews that *his* sneer was as ill-founded as it was insolent ; but it does not suppose, that the qualities in question

tion are all of them *fictitious virtues*.  
 Your reflexion is certainly not just : at  
 best it favours of exaggeration.

With respect to *valour*, I hope to  
 convince you that all you say on that  
 head is ambiguous and inconclusive ;  
 —and then I shall shew its true na-  
 ture, and its perfect conformity with  
 the genius and spirit of the christian  
 religion. First, you say, “ that va-  
 “ lour or active courage is *for the most*  
 “ *part* a constitutional virtue, and  
 “ therefore can have no more claim to  
 “ *moral* merit than wit, beauty, health,  
 “ or strength, or any other endow-  
 “ ment of the mind or body.” If  
 you had said, that it was *entirely* a con-  
 stitutional virtue, your conclusion  
 would have had a greater appearance  
 of accuracy ; for, granting it to be a

constitutional virtue only *for the most part*, this supposes that there is a part of it which is not constitutional, and this, of consequence, may have a degree of merit proportioned to the motives and principles that excite it. After all, Sir, the subject of constitutional qualities or virtues is one of the nicest and most difficult topicks in the sphere of moral enquiry. Are not all qualities and all virtues *more or less* constitutional \*, i. e. must there not be in our  
 mental

\* The term *constitutional* is applicable to those propensities, dispositions, capacities, and qualities, (or to that measure of each of them) which a moral being has acquired without any effort of its own activity, without previous reflexion and culture,—from whatever source these propensities and acquisitions may have immediately proceeded, whether from the original frame of  
 the

mental constitution, or in its union with our material frame, or in both, some previous disposition to all the virtues we possess, which reflexion improves, and culture brings to maturity?—Whether this previous disposition comes from nature or grace is a point whose discussion is of no moment in the present question; in either case it is the work of God, and not of man; but this does not hinder the *quality* or the virtue from being *amiable, praise-worthy, and excellent* \*;

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the mind, the organisation of the body, or from *both* in union.

\* Suppose a being, (an angel, for example) originally created, if that be possible, in a high degree of perfection, with a *confirmed* taste for sanctity and order, and a predominant spirit of benevo-

(for I don't understand the word *meritorious* out of its *law-sense* in any other signification). When the previous or (if you please) the *constitutional* disposition, is approved by a *reflex act* of the mind, and cultivated and improved in consequence of this reflexion, this renders the virtue *voluntary*, and thus *imputable*, and thus *meritorious*, if you will oblige me to use that word.—Now valour, active valour, in this point of view, is not more necessarily constitutional than any other virtue, than patience, resignation, or benevolence. You cannot shew me, that it arises from any particular arrangement or modification of

benevolence and wisdom,—would not all these qualities be, in a certain sense, *constitutional*? But would they be less amiable on that account?

matter



matter and motion; you cannot point out any such mould in which *moral qualities* are cast, and therefore your word *constitutional* denotes at best an *occult cause*, and conveys no distinct notion that can be an object of examination. Hence your first observation is erroneous, and, if the author of christianity had omitted the recommendation of valour, on account of its being constitutional, he must have omitted, for the same reason, patience, contentment, resignation, and almost all the virtues.

But you go still farther and tell us not only that *valour* is constitutional, “ but that it is the usual perpetrator  
 “ of all violences which distract the  
 “ world with bloodshed and devasta-  
 “ tion, the engine by which the strong  
 “ plunder

“plunder the weak, the proud tram-  
 “ple upon the humble, the guilty  
 “oppress the innocent, the instrument  
 “of ambition, and so on.” As you  
 have not thought proper to define,  
 precisely, what you mean by the term  
*valour*, nor pointed out where it coin-  
 cides with, or differs from *fortitude*,  
*courage*, and *bravery*, you leave us to  
 take it in the vulgar sense, and here  
 it is obvious, that effects, quite con-  
 trary to those you have mentioned,  
 belong equally to valour. For, surely,  
*valour* has often been employed in de-  
 fending the innocent, in humbling the  
 proud, in punishing the guilty, and  
 in maintaining the liberties and felicity  
 of a people. So that, in this general  
 view, valour is as susceptible of good  
 effects as of evil ones, and is either  
 useful

useful or prejudicial to society, according as it is employed by benevolence and justice, or by lawless ambition, envy, or revenge. You make a very thin-spun and unsatisfactory distinction between *active* and *passive* courage; and I am sorry to be obliged to tell you, that all your illustrations of this distinction are full of sophistry and contradictions. You say, that *active* (by which I guess you mean military) courage, is what a christian can have nothing “to do with\*”; that “it arises from the meanest dispositions of the human mind, *passion*, “*vanity*, and *self-dependence* †; that it “is the *offspring* of pride and revenge “and the ferocity of a savage;” and yet you tell us that you do not “ob-

\* P. 56.

† P. 57.

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“ject to the PRAISE and honours be-  
 “stowed on the valiant,”—nay you  
 think these “a tribute due by those,  
 “whose *safety* and affluence they have  
 “promoted by their dangers and suf-  
 “ferings\*.”—Indeed?—By your ac-  
 count of them, however, they ought  
 to be driven out of human society to  
 howl in deserts with wolves, or, at  
 best, with lions. I shewed you suffi-  
 ciently in my former letter, how un-  
 accountably you interpreted those pas-  
 sages of the gospel, that forbid the  
 revenging injuries, into an *universal*  
 non-resistance. The Jews had abused  
 their law of retaliation in such a noto-  
 rious manner, and had taken such oc-  
 casion from it to gratify a malicious  
 and vindictive spirit, that the benevo-

\* P. 56.

lent Saviour thought proper to use the strongest terms to discourage a practice so contrary to the genius of his divine religion. But that these prohibitions should hinder the virtuous and christian prince from opposing the assaults and devastations of a licentious usurper, — that this should prevent the citizens of a free country from drawing the sword in defence of their sovereign, their freedom, their national happiness, against a lawless invader, — that such active opposition should be called the offspring of *pride, revenge, and savage ferocity*, — and that the impossibility of its arising from *any other* principles should be so boldly asserted: all this I could never have expected to see coming from any other quarter than fanatical quietism. I could never

ver have imagined that it would slip from the pen of Mr. Jenyns, and pass uncorrected through four editions of his work.

You may think perhaps, that you have annihilated all the esteem that is due to *valour*, when you observe in the following harmonious gingle of words, “ that, if christian nations were  
 “ nations of christians, all war would  
 “ be impossible, and *valour* could nei-  
 “ ther be of use or estimation, and  
 “ therefore could never have a place  
 “ in the catalogue of christian virtues,  
 “ being irreconcilable with all its  
 “ precepts.” You might as well prove that *industry* is not an useful and laudable habit, because, if all men were rich, there would be no occasion for it. Besides, if christian nations were  
 nations

nations of christians, there would be as little occasion for *mercy, forbearance, forgiveness of injuries*, as there would be for *valour*; but does this prove that, in the present state of things, these virtues are of no value?

The truth of the matter is, that *valour*, or the *exertion of vigour in a given cause, without being daunted by the prospect of danger, suffering, or death*, is neither a vice nor a virtue, though it has an aspect full of elevation of mind.—Valour is good or bad, laudable or condemnable, according to the cause in which it is employed, and the principles and motives by which it is excited and nourished. When it is employed in the cause of oppressed innocence, of oppressed nations, and that, not from the mere impulse of interest or thirst of fame, but from a generous regard  
to

to publick good, it then assumes the colour of virtue : because it denotes a mind that rises with dignity, above the narrow sphere of self-love. Valour, here, is blended with benevolence, and discovers the strength of that divine principle. If the natural fear of suffering or death be strong in the mind, and valour is excited merely by principle ; in such a case, it is the most beautiful exertion of benignity that can be imagined ; and is perhaps, of all other *energies*, that which gives human nature the highest aspect of dignity. But, if you will confound with *valour* the fearless *temerity* of an impetuous soldiery, it is no great merit in christianity to have omitted recommending it ;—and, if you take it in its true and moral sense, you will  
not



not find that christianity has, any where, discouraged it. The founder; indeed, of that divine religion, who, during his whole ministry, was apprehensive, lest the *false* notions of his kingly character should excite the Jews to rebellion, and animate them to the erection of a temporal monarchy, could not, with prudence, recommend (what you call active or fighting) *valour*, among the virtues he was perpetually inculcating. He, however, recommended those qualities; that are *essential* to the *morality* and excellence of valour, by exhorting his disciples *not to fear those* that can only *kill the body*; by forming their minds to the pursuit of happiness in objects independent on the world and its advantages,—by animating them

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to relinquish every external pleasure, and submit to the greatest extremities of pain and suffering, rather than deviate from the paths of virtue, or desert the cause in which they were engaged, which was the cause of divine benevolence and mercy. The honour and spirit of christianity is, in this point of view, the same with respect to its professors in all ages.—In short, magnanimity, firmness of mind, humanity, patience, and benevolence, enter, either as *principles, constituents,* or *concomitants,* into the idea of *true valour,* and therefore the divine author of our religion could not look upon it as a *false* or *fictitious* virtue.

It would be still more surprising (if *wit* did not often make *judgment* waver) to see you placing *patriotism* and

and *friendship* in this class of *false* and *fictitious* virtues. If there can be a frown in heaven, there certainly was one formed on the immortal brows of virtuous legislators and love-breathing seraphims, when they perceived a good man, like you, harbouring such a thought in his mind, or letting it drop from his pen. It is not, however, a flight of imagination that can correct an error in morals, and therefore I propose to enter into a particular discussion of this nice point.

If you had defined the terms *patriotism* and *friendship*, this might perhaps have prevented your attempts to eclipse the lustre of these manly and amiable qualities : at least, we would then have seen, whether or not you considered them, as the *effusions* of

universal *benevolence*, directing its exertions and energy to particular objects, in certain determinate circles, the one more and the other less extensive. If you had considered them in this point of view, it is impossible, that, in your sober senses, you could have represented them as *false* and *fictitious* virtues;—and if you regard *patriotism* as inconsistent with the love of mankind, and *friendship* as a connexion founded on interest, corruption, or caprice, then we can have no dispute: I can only charge you with an abuse of words, and put you in the hands of the grammarians.

Indeed. as to *patriotism*, you draw it in such colours as ought rather to have rendered it an object of prohibition, than a quality to be either recommended.

commended or encouraged: for you alledge, “ that it *commands us to OP-*  
 “ *PRESS all countries to advance the*  
 “ *IMAGINARY prosperity of our own,—*  
 “ to copy the mean partiality of an  
 “ English parish officer, who thinks  
 “ injustice and cruelty meritorious,  
 “ whenever they promote the interests  
 “ of his village.” Now, Sir, this is  
 patriotism, just as *fortitude* is cruelty,  
*humility* meanness, *economy* avarice, or  
*generosity* prodigality, *liberty* licentious-  
 ness, or the *spirit of faction* a zeal for  
 the publick good.

*Patriotism* is a zeal for the happiness  
 of the country to which we belong, and  
 where the most numerous, intimate, and  
 affecting, of our social connections, are  
 formed and cultivated. By this defini-  
 tion, patriotism is a branch of uni-

versal benevolence, and, instead of opposing, is adapted to promote, at least, in part, its great object. For what is the *object* of universal benevolence, but the *general good*, or the *good of the whole*? Now this general good is too extensive an end, to be directly accomplished by the efforts of any man; and it can only be promoted by every person's having a hearty affection for the society to which he belongs, and a warm zeal for its welfare. Universal benevolence is a generous sentiment, a noble affection; but its real exertion is beyond the sphere of humanity, and it can only become active and useful by its application to *particular* objects. A man would certainly make a ridiculous figure, who, under the pretext of being

obliged by christianity to exercise only universal benevolence, should neglect his *country*, and those *smaller societies*, to which alone the *useful* effects of his zeal can extend, and amuse himself with forming idle and romantick schemes for the benefit of *foreign nations*, or the *whole race* of mankind. In such schemes the individual or the smaller societies would be neglected, and the puny effort would be lost upon the whole. What would you think of a generous alms-giver, who should set apart a thousand pounds to be *equally* distributed between all the poor of all nations, tongues, and languages? All that is required to make *patriotism* a real and substantial virtue, is, its exerting its chief zeal, where it can be really effectual, even for the interests

of the community to which we belong, in a manner consistent with and subservient to the great law of universal benevolence. Such patriotism *may* exist, and it is evidently implied in the precepts of the gospel. It was not, indeed, necessary to make it the object of a positive precept. Why?—not as you strangely assert, because it is a *false* and *fictitious* virtue, but because it is included in the love of mankind,—is what all are powerfully inclined to from education, custom, and many other reasons, and particularly, because, at the time of our Saviour's appearance, the true spirit of patriotism was grossly perverted by the Romans, who were the plagues and scourges of mankind, and had transformed their country into a wicked faction against  
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the tranquillity and happiness of the rest of the world ; while the Jews were so partially fond of their own nation, that they looked upon themselves as the only favourites of Heaven, and were disposed, in erecting a temporal kingdom; to bind *the other nations in chains, and their nobles in fetters of iron.* At such a period, it was not expedient to recommend narrow views. It was, on the contrary, necessary to inculcate that universal benevolence that could only purify the principles of *patriotism* by opposing the progress of ambition, avarice, and luxury, which had spread such dreadful desolation and subverted liberty, justice, and all the social virtues. And, nevertheless, the divine founder of christianity, though he did not expressly enjoin patriotism

tristism by a peculiar and positive precept, gave encouragement to it by his example. He wept over Jerusalem under the view of the dreadful calamities that were hanging, like an awful cloud, over it, in the counsels of a righteous providence. He felt the tenderest emotions of humanity for that devoted nation, directed his zealous labours to reform the manners of its inhabitants, and, to make them happy, offered them his succours and protection, with that natural affection, that he so beautifully described by the pathetick image of a hen, *that taketh her chickens, and covereth them with her wings.*

You treat, Sir, the article of *friendship*, (even though you call it a *fictitious* virtue) with more tenderness, than  
that

that of *patriotism*; and here I suppose the generous feelings of your heart have modified the harshness of your system. You are, surely, too well acquainted with the amiable sympathies of human nature to esteem lightly a connexion, of which it may be as truly said, (as it has been of an attachment still more tender) that it is the *cordial drop*, which Heaven has thrown into the *cup of life* to render it palatable. And yet your notions of the merit of friendship are inaccurate in the highest degree.—That I may avoid both confused ideas and vague expressions on this delicate and interesting subject, it will be proper to determine precisely the *nature* and *properties* of friendship; and then we will see whether you have not been somewhat

what rash in asserting, that, *in its utmost purity*, it deserves no recommendation from christianity.

You might have saved yourself the trouble of telling us, that, “if friendships are formed from alliances in parties, factions, and interests, or from a participation of vices, they are then both mischievous and criminal;” for true friendship, and not its counterfeit, is the object under consideration. What then is true friendship, in its nature, foundations, in the circumstances that cement it, and the qualities that attend it?—My answer is,

*Friendship is a sincere, fervent, and permanent union of minds, formed by mutual affection and esteem,—founded on real worth, and cemented by intimate*

mate *acquaintance*, frequent intercourse, exchange of good offices, and similitude of taste, temper, and manners: it is inseparably *attended* with perfect *candour* and unreserved openness of heart,—interests itself with quick feeling and strong sensibility in the pleasures and pains of its object,—is raised above all suspicion and jealousy, above every mean and selfish view,—sheds indulgence upon infirmities and imperfections,—and, with the greatest tenderness and delicacy of affection, unites the interests of those whom it connects, and makes their joys and sorrows common.

Such, Sir, are the principal and essential lines of *true* friendship. The christian, indeed, must sacrifice the interest of his friend to that of his country, and must  
keep

keep the effusions of friendship in subordination to the supreme law of universal benevolence. This shews, that there are more sublime virtues than *friendship*; but it does not prove the latter to be a fictitious virtue. There is a variety of virtues constantly operating in the culture of friendship, such as candour, indulgence, beneficence, and all the characters of charity, so beautifully delineated by an inspired apostle.

I readily acknowledge, that *friendship* is less an object of precept than *patriotism*; because this latter, *in its very essence*, is a positive branch of universal benevolence; whereas neither benevolence, nor even benevolence joined with esteem constitute *wholly* the *peculiar* nature of *friendship*. This latter connexion, as it requires a consent and  
 harmony

harmony of minds, and other circumstances already mentioned which are not always in our power \*, cannot be inculcated as a matter of obligation or as an essential duty. But, though this be a reason for not making friendship

\* There are innumerable instances (as an excellent moralist observes) in which persons may find *several* among their acquaintance, and in the same sphere of life, whom they *highly esteem*, but not *one* proper to be chosen for a *close* and *intimate* friend; so that the recommending *private friendship*, in the general, must have been absurd, since it is only a rare and accidental obligation, and never falls in the way of a great part of mankind. And, besides, such a precept might have been attended with mischievous effects; for then the bulk of the world, thinking friendship a duty of religion, and a necessary branch of sublime and heroick virtue, would enter into rash, unconcerted, and disagreeable alliances, which would produce much disorder, &c.

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the object of a positive and indispensable precept, yet it is no reason for calling it a *fictitious virtue*; nor is its appropriating benevolence to one single object, or, at best, to a small number of objects, a reason for its not having been admitted among the precepts of christianity; for, where the circumstances, that give rise to friendship, take place, all the energies and effusions of the heart in that amiable union are *moral* and *benevolent*.

I wish, Sir, you had reflected a little, before you quoted \*, as authority on this point, the passage of St. Luke; where Christ says, *If you love them which love you, what thanks have you? for sinners also love those that love them.*

\* P. 61.

Does



Does this text prove that connexions of friendship have little pretensions to merit? No, Sir, this passage has no relation to *friendship*: it regards beneficence and liberality, as every commentator will tell you, and as the spirit and connexion of the words evidently shew. Sinners (by which term Christ here manifestly means, not imperfect creatures, but profligates) are not susceptible of friendship, whose basis must be virtue, of whatever materials the superstructure is composed:—*VERA amicitia non nisi inter BONOS.*

You have misunderstood here the words of Christ; but it is scarcely possible, that you can misunderstand his conduct with respect to (what you call) the *false* and *fictitious* virtue now under consideration. Can you give

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*friend-*

*friendship* these epithets, when you see the DIVINE MAN approaching to the grave of Lazarus,—when you behold the tears he shed over it,—and when you attend to the various affecting circumstances of this tender scene? There is *something more* here, than mere benevolence; and that *something* is intrinsically beautiful and engaging. He, whose benevolence, was not, like ours, limited and confined;—He, who could make the effects of that benevolence extend to all nations, and perhaps to all worlds;—He, nevertheless, took a tender part in the more limited *charities* of human life, and he consecrated *friendship* by his persuasive example. It was *thus* he loved Lazarus. Moreover,—when he chose twelve persons for his immediate

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diate followers, he made one of them his friend : and that friend leaned upon his breast at the last supper, adhered to him at the tribunal, where Peter denied him ; and was charged by him, in his dying moments, with the tender care of his domestick relations.

N 2      LETTER

## L E T T E R VI.

S I R,

**I**T is with a singular pleasure, that I find myself relieved from the irksome task of an opponent; though I shall be obliged to resume it, or something like it, before I come to the end of your book. Your excellent account of the *precepts* of the gospel gives me this relief. Your definitions, or rather descriptions, of the virtues that correspond with the great object and end of the christian religion are judicious and sentimental; they will force the assent of a good understanding, but their truth and excellence will be best comprehended by the feelings.

ings of a good heart. You have breathed into these descriptions the true and genuine spirit of christianity, and shewn in them, to man, the true lines of that immortal character, to which alone felicity and perfection are or can be annexed, in the moral government of God.

But, worthy Sir, when opposite to this lovely tablature of christian virtue you place, in contrast, the imperfect system of pagan morality, have you been enough upon your guard against exaggerated and delusive colouring? Do you not go too far, when you say \*,  
 “ that the most celebrated virtues of  
 “ the ancients were *high spirit*, intre-  
 “ pid *courage*, and implacable *resent-*

\* Page, 88.

“*ment?*” Methinks a flight reading, even of Cicero’s Offices, and the explication that you will there find of the *four* cardinal virtues would have been sufficient to prevent this singular assertion. Not that I have such high ideas of the pagan virtues, as some entertain;—not that I mean to compare them with the virtues of the gospel, which are much purer in their principle, and much more noble and extensive in their object; but that I think it hard to take from those, who were less favoured than we are, the little they had.—But you astonish me, indeed, when you add\*, “that the most celebrated virtues of the pagans are more opposite to the spirit,

\* P. 91, 92.

“ and

“ and more inconsistent with the end  
 “ of christian morality, than even  
 “ their most infamous vices ; and that  
 “ a *Brutus* and a *Cato* leave the world  
 “ more unqualified for, and more in-  
 “ admissible into the kingdom of hea-  
 “ ven, than a *Messalina* or an *Helioga-*  
 “ *balus*, with all their profligacy about  
 “ them.” This is such a paradox as

I don't remember to have met with  
 elsewhere. — Brutus (say you) mur-  
 dered the oppressor of his country :  
 you ought to have said killed, until  
 the *murder* had been proved : I don't  
 deny that it was *a sort* of murder.  
 However, if murder (in the usual ac-  
 ceptation of that word) is then only  
 committed, when a man takes away  
 the life of his fellow-creature, from  
 the impulse of cruelty, personal inte-

rest, or lawless resentment, the action of Brutus, which was, or is supposed to have been of a *publick nature*, in its motive and object, seems rather to deserve the name of homicide, committed through political fanaticism,—a pernicious passion, indeed, which is always subversive of civil order, though it does not always denote bad intention. Political fanaticism is the source of anarchy, as political superstition is the support of tyranny. If, however, in the action of BRUTUS, *a zeal for the REPUBLICK* was the predominant motive, whatever chastisement his homicide might have deserved from the civil magistrate, it could not pass for murder in the eye of the all-seeing Judge; much less ought you to have founded upon it a comparison between  
his



his moral character and those of a Heliogabalus and a Messalina to his disadvantage. It is well known, that the private character of Brutus was mild and amiable; and it is pretended, that, by the particular constitution of the Roman government, his killing Cæsar was a step susceptible of defence. This, indeed, I don't affirm; it is, however, certain, that the point has been disputed; but no dispute can arise about the incapacity of a Messalina, or of an Heliogabalus, to approach an abode where purity of heart and sanctity reign, especially if they pretended to enter there *with all their profligacy about them.*

For

For vice, though to a radiant angel  
link'd,

Would fate itself on a celestial bed  
And prey on garbage.

Shakespear's Hamlet.

You seem, Sir, to have a great aver-  
sion to war, and so has every man that  
has not blunted the precious feelings  
of benevolence and humanity : but this  
aversion has made you warm, and  
your warmth has introduced no small  
confusion into your ideas and reason-  
ings : how otherwise could you throw  
out such propositions as the following :  
“ *those that are actuated by valour, pa-*  
“ *triotism, or honour, may be VIRTU-*  
“ *OUS, HONEST, and even RELIGIOUS ;*  
“ *but they cannot be CHRISTIANS.*”

You, indeed, soon forget this propo-  
sition, and tell us, that *without chris-*  
tianity

*tianity* we can have *no religion at all*—  
*Pergis pugnantis secum frontibus adversis*  
*componere*: but you will be little  
alarmed at this contradiction, since  
you have (as we shall see presently)  
made a discovery in dialecticks, even  
this, that *contradictory propositions may*  
*be true*: this discovery annihilates the  
science, and, with it, all the founda-  
tions of truth and certainty; but it  
seems there is no help for that: and  
we have nothing left, but to call out  
with the poet, *quantum est in rebus*  
INANE ?

To return to the poor pagans, you  
are still more hard upon them, than  
the ardent and orthodox bishop of  
*Hippo*. He called their virtues *splendid*  
*sins*; you place them on a level with  
the most *infamous vices*; but then you  
make

make some amends for this hasty decision, and tell us \*, that men, *actuated* by them, may be virtuous, honest, and even *religious*: you, however, affirm, that they cannot be christians, though you charitably grant, that this title may belong to the *vicious* and *profligate*. You acknowledge, indeed, that the profligate man is a bad christian, and why not allow the patriot and the man of honour, at least, the same privilege? “Because,” say you, “a man †, whose *ruling* principle is  
 “honour,

\* P. 94, 95.

† Mr. Jenyns ought to have said, “a man who is *actuated* by honour.”—This was the expression used in the beginning of the argument, and it conveys an idea different from that which we attach to the terms *ruling principle*;  
 the

“honour, erects a standard of duty,  
 “diametrically opposite to the whole  
 “tenor of the christian religion.” If  
 honour is sought by virtuous and pious  
 deeds, this assertion is not true, at  
 least, it is not accurate; if it is sought  
 by rapine, faction, or bloodshed, it is  
*false honour*, and your proposition beats  
 the wind. Besides—no man ever  
 erected honour as a *standard* (by which  
 I suppose you mean a criterion or a  
 principle) of duty. *Honour* is the con-  
 sequence and not the principle of duty :  
 —it is the tribute of approbation or  
 applause that is bestowed by spectators  
 upon generous, virtuous, and, with  
 the former is particular, the latter is universal.  
 —A man may be *actuated* by a sense of honour,  
 without its being his *ruling principle* in the con-  
 duct of life.

your

your leave, upon christian deeds. In this point of view, it is one of the *good things* of a present life, and, if St. Paul is not mistaken, it will take place, in the purest and noblest scenes of future existence, when eternal life shall be administered to those, who, *by a patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, HONOUR, and immortality\**. But if you will persist to combat, under the name of *honour*, that vain-glory and those splendid titles, that are acquired by rapine and lawless bloodshed, your abuse of language, which naturally introduces confusion of ideas, must appear reprehensible to every judicious reader.

\* Rom. ii. 7.

Thus,

Thus, Sir, have I gone through your three propositions, with alternate feelings of pleasure and pain, arising from the singular mixture of piety, wit, error, wisdom, and paradox, that they exhibit to an attentive observer. There is a glare in the whole, that may dazzle the unwary ; and this effect it hath produced on a multitude of readers, if I have not been greatly misinformed. And it is surely to be lamented, that, after having said, in one moment, the most excellent things in defence of christianity, and *that* also in the most elegant, original, and affecting manner, you throw out, in another, the strangest representations of the spirit and genius of that divine religion.

But

But I hasten to your CONCLUSION,  
and this shall be the subject of my  
last letter.

LETTER



## L E T T E R VII.

S I R,

**T**H E first eighteen pages of your CONCLUSION contain an excellent summary of, what I would call, the *presumptive* evidence of the christian religion. You have reduced it to a narrow compass;—you have expressed it with perspicuity, warmth, and elegance;—and, if your VIEW had ended here, the candid reader would have risen from its perusal, with a lively sensation of conviction, that would have made him forget many of the things that staggered him in the preceding parts of your book. But you proceed farther—and, bring-

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ing us back into the cloudy region of paradox, you lose the ground you had fairly gained. You resemble an overwarm general, who, after having won the field, pursues injudiciously his enemy on disadvantageous ground, and is thus exposed to see his laurels wither in a moment, or, at least, lose much of their bloom. Such is, I fear, your case, in some of the answers you give to the deistical objector. You enable a vanquished enemy to return to the combat; you even sometimes put weapons into his hand; and, though these advantages will not enable him to regain the field, they will still keep him stickling and skirmishing, and give him a certain air of consequence in the eye of the superficial observer of things. In plain English, Sir, your  
manner

manner of answering the objections of unbelievers will often tend to multiply the cavils which deism draws from incidental objects, and thus perplex the feeble minds of well-meaning christians.

It has been alledged by unbelievers, “ that “ all revelation from God is in-  
 “ credible, because *unnecessary*, and un-  
 “ necessary, because the reason he be-  
 “ stowed upon mankind is sufficiently  
 “ able to discover all the religious and  
 “ moral duties, which he requires of  
 “ them, if they would but attend to  
 “ their precepts, &c” \*. Such ob-  
 jectors have been told a thousand times,  
 that the sufficiency of that reason, of  
 which they boast, is owing to the

\* P. 115.

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strength

strength it has, in fact, derived from divine revelation. Like the wiseacre, who thought the sun useless, because it shines only when we are favoured with the *light of the day*, they enjoy many rays both of intellectual and moral knowledge, of which they stupidly or perversely disavow the principal source. But since we know from whence they have obtained the principles of their religious knowledge, and know this not by conjecture, but by daily observation ; since we know, that they have learned from their cradles, under christian teachers, both in private and publick, the unity of God, the doctrine of repentance, remission, and immortality :—since we know, that the doctrines and precepts of christianity have been blended and

inter-

interwoven with the early growth of their reason, and the gradual improvement of their faculties ; since, I say, we know all this, the true way of going to work with the class of objectors, now under consideration, is evident and plain : we have only to call upon *them* to prove, that they would have had *day-light*, if there had been no *sun* : and that they and the body of the people would have acquired a complete knowledge of religious and moral duties, without the gospel.

It is not possible for me to demonstrate, nor even to prove, that a peasant *cannot* find out the longitude without succour : but, if the peasant pretends that he is equal to the undertaking, it lies upon him to prove that he is so. The case is quite parallel to

that implied in the objection before us. It is incumbent upon the deists to prove, that, without the gospel, they and the various inhabitants of the christian world would have arrived at the same degree of knowledge, both religious and moral, that we this day enjoy.—This they never have proved: this they never *can* prove: and yet, until they prove this, their *objection* to revelation, as incredible, because *unnecessary*, must have no weight, but to demonstrate their ingratitude and presumption.

Pardon me, Sir, for rectifying your argument: it was quite necessary for the true defence of our common cause to take this liberty. For your answer to the objection, as it stands at present, will expose you to much cavilling  
and

and chicane, nay, to some embarrassment from the quarter of infidelity. When you desire the objector \* “ to turn his  
 “ eyes to those remote regions of the  
 “ globe to which supernatural assist-  
 “ ance has never been extended, and  
 “ tell him that he will see there *men,*  
 “ endued with sense and reason *not in-*  
 “ *ferior to our own,* so far from being  
 “ capable of forming systems of reason  
 “ and morality, that they are this day  
 “ totally unable *to make a nail or a*  
 “ *hatchet;*” and when hence you con-  
 clude (from *particular to universal*)  
 “ that reason alone is neither sufficient  
 “ to offer to mankind a perfect reli-  
 “ gion, nor even to lead them to any  
 “ degree of civilisation;” when you

\* P. 116.

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thus



thus *premise* and thus *conclude*, do you think the objector will be silent? No such thing—He will tell you, that it is not true, that these men, who are unable to *make a nail or a hatchet*, are endued with sense and reason *not inferior* to ours. He will tell you, that their sense and reason may be similar in their nature to ours, though different, greatly different, in their degree *even of original* capacity, activity, and penetration, since there is an immense variety in the works of God, and whose classes of the same species may differ from each other in the degrees of original capacity and genius, as individuals are known to do. The deist will moreover tell you that, if your reasoning be good, NEWTON and LA CAILLE must have been mathematicians



maticians and astronomers by divine revelation, since the inhabitants of *Otabeite* and *New Zealand*, whose *sense* and *reason* (in your estimation) are *not inferior to theirs*, have never approached the simplest elements either of mathematicks or astronomy. There are, certainly, in this our globe, visible marks of *different* original capacities in different nations, which neither christianity, nor repeated attempts towards civilisation and culture, have been able to remove; and this is too palpable to need any proof.—I don't therefore see how, by your manner of stating the argument, you can get rid of this reply to your answer.

To have urged with success the argument in favour of christianity, drawn from the ignorance and errors (in religious

gious matters) of those nations that enjoyed no divine revelation, you ought to have taken a different method. Instead of resting your proof on the state of those barbarous nations who are placed on the very lowest line in the scale of humanity, you ought to have begun by Egypt, Greece, and Rome, the seats of learning and arts. You say, indeed \*, “ that human rea-  
 “ son in its highest state of cultivation,  
 “ among the philosophers of Greece  
 “ and Rome, was never able to form  
 “ a religion comparable to christi-  
 “ anity ;” but this is saying the thing very feebly ;—it is only shewing a small part of the truth : it is passing rapidly over the most glaring facts, that shew,

\* P. 122.

with a blaze of evidence, the inestimable advantages of the christian religion. You ought to have shewn that the progress of religious and moral knowledge, in these nations, bore no sort of *proportion* to their improvements in civilisation, literature, eloquence, and the useful and elegant arts of life : —so far from it, that the fairest aspects of *human* science were degraded by a motley mixture of the most disgusting forms of idolatry and superstition\*.

You

\* Some writers (says Mr. Hume) have been surpris'd, that the impieties of *Aristophanes* should have been publickly acted and applauded by the Athenians ; a people so *superstitious* and so jealous of the publick religion, that, at that very time, they put Socrates to death for his imagined incredulity. But these writers (continues he) consider not, that the *ludicrous familiar*  
images,

You ought to have shewn them altars raised to the unknown God, statues regarded as endued with divine power,

images, under which the gods are represented by that comick poet, instead of appearing impious, were the *genuine lights*, in which the ancients conceived their divinities. See HUME'S *Nat. Hist. of Religion*, 8vo edit. 1757.

It is here worthy of observation, that there is perhaps no book more adapted to shew the unspeakable advantages of a divine revelation, than this. The accounts we find here of the horrid and ludicrous representations of the deity, that prevailed in the most learned nations of the pagan world, are so striking, that a thinking mind, anxious about its destination, and desirous of an object of confidence adapted to secure its felicity, must rejoice in those views of an omnipotent, wise, good, and merciful Being, whom christianity exhibits to its faith and improved reason, as a protector, a father, and a guide, through life, death, and a boundless duration.

religious

religious services consecrated to vices in that very city, where Solon gave laws, where Socrates taught philosophy, where Plato and Xenophon displayed the treasures of their master's wisdom; where Sophocles and Euripides composed their tragedies, and where Phidias made the marble breathe life, character, and beauty in their most sublime and graceful forms. Plain fact would have here stopped the mouth of the objector, much more effectually than your general and inaccurate assertions, that "*reason, even when furnished with materials by supernatural aid, if left to the guidance of her own wild imaginations* \* , falls into more numerous and more gross

\* *The imaginations of reason* is a very strange expression.

" errors,

“ errors, than her own native igno-  
 “ rance could have suggested ;—that  
 “ she *persuaded* some that there is no  
 “ God ; others that there *can be* no fu-  
 “ ture state ;—that she has taught some  
 “ that there is *no difference* between  
 “ virtue and vice ; and that *to cut a*  
 “ *man’s throat and relieve his necessities*  
 “ are actions equally meritorious \*,  
 “ &c.” Dear Sir, if such is the  
 character of REASON, and if, as you  
 add, *she can shew*, that, “ there is  
 “ nothing in any thing,” and “ prove  
 “ *by recurring to first principles* that there  
 “ are *no principles* at all,” I really  
 think she ought to be burnt for a  
 witch, and that we should give our-  
 selves over tamely to the *Leviathan*, to

\* P. 120.

tell us, by the potent voice of authority, what is right and what is wrong, in philosophy and religion, as well as in politicks. But you would have done better if you had not confounded *false reasoning*, which alone can lead to all these absurdities, with the faculty of *reason*, which is the candle of the Lord in the breast of man.

This candle, indeed, had its light obstructed in the pagan world, by mists of ignorance; and, more especially, in the article of religion, false lights were held forth by the passions and prejudices of men, and the miserable inventions of political priestcraft.

It is truly strange to see such religious non-sense, such childish opinions, consecrated by publick authority  
and

and private devotion, amidst such displays of genius, activity, and taste, in the advancement of arts and sciences. The christian peasant, who knows that his God is one, eternal, without body, limits, or visible representation, that he loves order, loves his creatures, will pardon the sins of the penitent and sincere, and make them, after this state of passage, partakers of happiness and immortality, knows more of religion, than all the disciples of Socrates, and has more clear and consistent notions of the Deity than Socrates himself. If this peasant, with his present portion of knowledge, small as it may be, could be supposed to have existed at Athens, when Epimenides was letting loose his white and black sheep at the Areopagus, to direct the Athenians where they should sacrifice—Or,  
when



when this wise Areopagus condemned Stilpo to banishment for denying that the Minerva of Phidias was a real god, he would have burst out into a loud laugh.—All this shews, that Athens was the ground you ought to have chosen for your stand to repel the objection under consideration, by shewing that progress in the sciences and arts is compatible with the grossest ignorance in religion, and therefore, that the gospel might be highly advantageous, even where natural reason was in its greatest improvement.

But, indeed, *you* could not well make use of this ground, nor state the argument in this manner;—for, according to your notion of things, the Athenians were not even philosophers, historians, poets, legislators,

P

and

and artists, without the succours derived either immediately, or in a more remote manner, from divine revelation. This seems to be evidently your opinion, when you assert \*, that, “ though human reason is capable of  
 “ progression in science, yet the first  
 “ foundations must be laid *by super-*  
 “ *natural instructions.*” This is truly a singular assertion : *nec Deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus*, is a wise maxim, which you seem to have entirely forgot. Wants, observation, experience, genius, time, occasion, and circumstances are sufficient to account both for the rise and progress of human science in all periods of the world. It is true, that the christian religion gave occasion to the improvement of some branches of science.

\* Page 118.

When such grand truths, as the *unity* and *eternity* of God, the *remission of sin* by a *Mediator*, the *resurrection* and *immortality* of reasonable beings, were revealed as *facts*, they naturally excited, in thinking minds, a curiosity to know the foundations, which such facts might have in the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of things. Hence metaphysical science undoubtedly derived new degrees of improvement and precision. The *manner* also in which the divine promises, with respect to the future destination of man, might be accomplished, was a natural object of philosophical enquiry, and thus the gospel opened to human curiosity large fields of speculation, which have both improved the powers of the mind, and tended to

the advancement of moral and metaphysical science ; but it is, nevertheless, true, that all human sciences may have been, nay, were actually cultivated in a certain degree, without the intervention of supernatural instruction, to which source it is impossible to trace them with any measure of historical evidence, that is satisfactory or striking. You say, that there is no reason to be assigned, why one part of mankind should have made such an amazing progress in knowledge, while the other, formed *with the SAME natural capacities*, should remain in a state little superior to the brutes, “ except that the first have received “ divine communications, and the “ latter have never yet been favoured  
“ with

“with such assistance \*.” But it is denied, that the nations which live without government, letters, or laws, have the *same natural capacities*, which the others are endowed with, and it will be ever impossible to prove that they have. I repeat it again, as there is a striking difference between the *original* genius and capacity of individuals in one nation, so there may be, and no doubt is a diversity of the same kind between nations. Every appearance is in favour of this diversity: repeated observation and experience confirm it; so that your reasoning is built upon a circumstance which appears to be false, and which you never can prove to be true. This diversity

\* P. 119.

P 3

seems

seems to be the positive appointment of divine providence: it enters as an essential part in that plan of government in which variety of beings, capacities, characters, and talents, reduced to unity of design, will be seen one day to terminate in universal beauty, symmetry, and perfection.

So that, Sir, we may account for the diversity that is visible in the intellectual and moral state of different nations, for the improvements of some in knowledge, policy, legislation, and commerce, and the savage stupidity and ignorance of others, without having any recourse to the distinctions formed by supernatural instruction, granted to some and not vouchsafed to the rest. A diversity of original capacity will solve the problem sufficiently,

ently, as far as the phænomenon to be explained relates to human knowledge, and to the arts and sciences which have for their objects the embellishment and improvement of human society, by sources of pleasure, or objects of utility. The case with religious knowledge is different:—and therefore, having granted to your deist, whom you had brought to Athens, instead of Otaheite, that these elegant and learned Grecians owed all their improvements to the culture of their reason, you might have asked him, whence, amidst this improvement of reason, proceeded the absurdity of their theological opinions? He must answer,—from the *weakness* or *abuse* of reason; for there is no other possible answer to be given. Grant-



ing the *abuse* of reason, revelation must be esteemed at least advantageous;—granting its *weakness*, revelation must be allowed to be necessary; and thus, in both cases, the objection, now before us, falls to the ground.

I am, however, persuaded (and here, no doubt, you and I agree) that, with respect to a just idea of the object of religion, the *weakness* of reason is as demonstrable, as the ill use that has been made of it. And if a deist, acknowledging the abuse of natural reason in the pagan world, which is *a fact*, should, nevertheless, insist upon its capacity of arriving, without the assistance of revelation, at just notions of the supreme Being, and of religious duty, which is a question *of theory*, I would address myself

to



to the gentleman, in pretty much the following terms :

I see reason making great improvements in human science, whose objects are, in a certain degree within our reach as visible, or tangible, or knowable by observation, consciousness, or experience. The mind, possessed of leisure, may derive, from the contemplation of these objects, successive discoveries of their properties, connexions, and influence, and thus the mass of intellectual acquisitions may be going on towards the formation of a system. But as to divine knowledge or the knowledge of the supreme Being, in his nature and perfections, as he is in himself, and in his relation to us, and his designs with respect to our present state and future destination,

the

the case is somewhat different. This great Being is not the direct object of any faculty of perception, nor does he resemble any thing that is so. Men might have risen to some notion of superior power from the system of nature both physical and moral; but whether this power was lodged in one being, or in many, was not so easily to be ascertained, and still more does it appear beyond the reach of unassisted reason to stretch its conception to the nature and qualities of an absolutely perfect mind. Pure spirituality, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, and their astonishing source, necessary existence, are not commensurate to the human faculties. Samples of wisdom, power, and goodness, exhibited in the works of nature, and in the course of events, lead men to  
attri-

attribute these qualities to the Author of nature; but the various and contrary events of life, the mixture of evil with good in this imperfect state, gave rise, through human ignorance and error, to motley systems of polytheism and idolatry. Though the order and frame of the universe, when accurately examined, afford an argument that ought to lead a rational mind to the pure principles of natural religion, and carry it through the vast interval which is interposed between the divine and human nature, yet they did not produce this effect in the most enlightened nations of paganism: and this shews that supernatural instruction was *necessary* to shew us *what God is*, what he *requires of us for the present*, and what are his *designs* with respect to *our future condition* in the universe.

But,

But, when we talk of the christian revelation as *necessary*, we mean by this, that it is a dispensation of divine wisdom, without which *we* would not have enjoyed that measure of knowledge with which we are actually blessed, those guides to duty that direct our conduct, nor those views of futurity that purify, console, and enoble the mind. The end of Christ's mission was to raise *one part* of the human race to a high and distinguished degree of perfection and felicity. But it was not the design of the Deity to raise *all* mankind to this degree, any more than it was his intention that all men should become *philosophers*. The fact proves this demonstrably: the nations that have not been visited by the gospel, and the generations that  
have

have passed through this stage of humanity before the light of the gospel arose on the world, had *their* spheres of knowledge and means unknown to us ; they were less favoured than the christian, as the christian is less perfect than the angels, and the angels than the seraphims. But was the Deity to create no order of beings but seraphims ? It is questionable whether Christianity be adapted to the sphere of the Hottentot, or to that of other uncultivated and barbarous nations. But it was necessary to moral improvement and saving knowledge in that sphere of beings to which it has been vouchsafed, and those, who shut voluntarily their eyes on its divine lustre, will be called to an account, which will not be required from those that are placed lower in the  
scale

scale of being. Different spheres of beings and degrees of perfection were (as it would seem, and as has been already observed) necessary to the order and perfection of the universal system; but, in every sphere which enters into that system, the lot of the *individual* must be determined by the *means* he has enjoyed and his *improvement* or *neglect* of them. This will, one day, leave the children of infidelity under the light of the gospel, without excuse, and, it is to be feared, without consolation, while *wisdom will be justified of HER* children, by their faith and hope in this temporary state of trial, and by their approaching removal to a nobler scene of activity and enjoyment.

POST-

## P O S T S C R I P T.

**T**HOUGH there are several things exceptionable in your answers to other deistical objections, which have been proposed and refuted times without number, yet I shall here curb the spirit of criticism; for to have been so long scuffling in polemicks is a thing very foreign to my turn of mind. It was my principal intention, in these letters, to consider what you had advanced with respect to the *internal evidence* of christianity. You have already my sentiments on that subject delivered with frankness and candour.

I can-

I cannot, however, take my leave of you, Sir, without a few remarks on your manner of answering the second and fifth objections brought by the deists against the divine origin and authority of the gospel.

My reason for this is, that the manner, in which you answer the one, diminishes the weight of *moral* evidence; and the principle, on which you repel the other, is subversive, I fear, of *all* evidence whatever.

The first of these objections is derived from the supposed errors, variations, and contradictions, that are to be found in the books of the Old and New Testament.—There are few objections against christianity, that have been answered in a more satisfactory manner than this has been; and you  
 have



have alledged several judicious considerations to destroy its force, particularly, with respect to those philosophical errors that have been admitted into common conversation in consequence of popular opinion, and which must be always adopted in a language that is addressed to the generality of mankind. As to the variations and contradictions that have been charged upon the sacred writers, they have been disingenuously exaggerated from the quarter of infidelity : such, however, as they are, they are sufficient to make the apologists for christianity more prudent and circumspect in determining the extent of divine inspiration, than they have generally been ; and the learned and judicious Dr. Watson has exhibited a laudable example

Q

of

of this circumspection in his masterly answer to Mr. Gibbons. He has struck wisely into the middle path ; but I fear, Sir, that you have run into an extreme on this delicate subject, or, at least, gone farther than is necessary, to avoid the inconveniencies that attend the hypothesis of certain doctors, with respect to the inspiration of the sacred writers. You maintain, that “ the truth of a revelation is not affected by the fallibility of those who wrote its history \*.” But this assertion cannot be admitted as a general principle : its truth depends upon the *degree* of fallibility in the historian, and upon the objects to which it extends : because, however *true* a reve-

\* P. 123.

lation may be in itself, i. e. with respect to the persons who have immediately received it, it cannot be *true*, with respect to you and me, or, in other words, we cannot be *persuaded* of its truth, but by our conviction of the accuracy and fidelity of those, who relate it; and this accuracy and fidelity cannot be fully ascertained, but by such a superintendent inspiration, at least, as secures the historian against all *essential* error. You affirm, that the truth of a revelation (i. e. the certainty of its divine origin) depends upon the internal evidence of its own supernatural excellence; this point, I hope, has been already sufficiently discussed in the preceding letters. But you go still farther, and boldly affirm, that this internal evidence in

favour of christianity would not be diminished, even on the supposition, “ that all the prophecies were only “ *fortunate guesses* or *artful applications*, “ all the miracles of the gospel legendary tales, (i. e. lyes) and all the “ books of scripture, instead of being “ written by their pretended authors, “ posterior impositions on illiterate and “ credulous ages \*.” What! Sir, could persons, notorious for lying and forgery, have been really cloathed with a divine mission? Besides, had the books of scripture been forged in later ages, and their authors been capable of fraud and fiction, the morality of the gospel, alone, could have pretended to the characters of a reve-

\* P. 131.

lation on account of its intrinsic beauty and excellence; but all the accounts of Jesus suffering, dying, and exalted, all the promises and facts, recorded in the gospel, must have been suspected as false and fabulous; and what, then, would your internal evidence prove? You insist again, “that  
 “a religion superior to all human  
 “imagination actually exists, and its  
 “intrinsic excellence is a proof of  
 “its divine origin, by whatever means  
 “it was introduced, or with whatever  
 “errors it was blended \*;” I must also beg leave to tell you again, that this religion consists of *facts*, as well as *precepts*; that the facts are ascertained by *veracity*, as the precepts are

\* P. 132, 133.

recommended by their intrinsic excellence, and the new authority they derive from the truth of the facts, which declare Christ to have been the Son of God; and that your proof of the divine origin of christianity is applicable to its precepts alone. If the facts are fabulous, the precepts may be excellent, but they cannot come recommended by a supernatural commission.

When you say, that, “ if the story  
 “ of Christ’s temptation, and several  
 “ other narrations of the New Testa-  
 “ ment were pious frauds, this would  
 “ not affect the excellence of christi-  
 “ anity, nor the authority of its foun-  
 “ der \*;” you say the most impru-

\* P. 125.

dent thing imaginable: for, if one miracle, positively related, be false, by what criterion will you convince us, that the others are true? If the evangelists tell us stories, when they say, that Christ cast (or cured men of) dæmons, what security have we for their having spoken the truth, when they tell us, that he arose from the dead? Now, if Christ did not rise from the dead, (whatever the excellence of his doctrine or precepts may be) *our faith is vain*, (i. e. without a foundation) St. Paul has declared this in express terms:—he rests the truth of christianity on this single fact.—But on your hypothesis (whose consequences certainly you did not attend to) this fact might be false, and yet christianity might be true;—I did



not think that there was *such great faith as this* in all England.

Your answer, Sir, to the fifth objection is still more reprehensible, than the concessions you make in your reply to the second; because, as I have said above, and mean now to prove, it strikes at the foundation of *all* evidence whatever. This objection against the divine authority of the gospel is, as you state it, founded upon \* “the  
 “incredibility of some of its doc-  
 “trines, particularly those of the  
 “Trinity and atonement for sin by the  
 “sufferings of Christ, the one *contra-*  
 “*dicting* all the principles of human  
 “reason, and the other all our ideas of  
 “divine justice.” If one of these

\* P. 159.



doctrines *contradict*s all the principles of human reason, and the other, all our ideas of divine justice, it is as impossible for us to believe them, in our character of reasonable beings, as it is to believe, that twice two makes five, or that an action may be just and unjust at the same time and in the same circumstances; for every proposition, that evidently *contradict*s the principles of reason, is equivalent to the two now mentioned. You don't seem, Sir, to have apprehended this, when you express yourself in the following manner: "That *three* beings should be " *one* is a proposition which certainly " contradicts reason, that is, *our* reason; but it does not from thence " follow, that it cannot be true\*."\*

\* P. 160.

No,

No, really? How in the name of wonder can it be possibly true, that *three* beings may be *one* being, if the term *being* bears the same sense in the subject and attribute of this proposition? Three beings can never be one being, but on the supposition that *one* signifies *three*, if the term *being* keeps its meaning: and, if you shift the meaning of the term, you only quibble, and make merry with your readers. If the proposition, in question, be true to any intelligence in the universe, without changing the ideas attached to the terms, a thing *may be* and *not be* at the same time, and thus that great and fundamental axiom, that is the root of all truth and all evidence, is plucked up at once, to the great consolation of the sceptical tribe, and  
the

the eternal confusion of all ideas and all knowledge. If you had been contented with saying, that a proposition may surpass the comprehension of our reasoning or judging faculties, and yet be true, you would have said what every one must allow. In such a case, the terms of the proposition convey to us no ideas, or confused ideas, because the clear ideas, that might be annexed to them by superior beings, are not commensurate to *our* faculties of perception; and, as we are thus incapable of understanding the terms of the proposition, we cannot judge of their connexion or disagreement as *subject* and *attribute*.—But when it is affirmed, that a proposition *contradicts* reason, or (if you please) *our* reason, it is supposed evidently, that the terms  
of

of the proposition are understood, the ideas they convey perceived, otherwise we could not decide, whether they contradicted our reason or not. Now, in such a case, these terms cannot contradict our reason, but by contradicting each other; and, when this happens, the proposition is false in the nature of things. It is not, Sir, for your satisfaction, but for that of such grown gentlemen and ladies as may look into these letters, without any previous knowledge of logical discussions, that I shall illustrate this reasoning by a familiar example. Suppose a man should utter this sentence, *a SQUARE figure is a CIRCLE*: this proposition does not surpass my reason, but contradicts it; that is, the idea of a *square* destroys the idea of a *circle*, and, on the other hand, the  
 idea

idea of a *circle* destroys that of a *square*, and therefore the proposition, being affirmative, is false in the nature of things, or, in other words, by the clear perception I have of the unchangeable nature and properties of these two figures. And, indeed, Sir, when we say, that a proposition contradicts reason, we neither mean by this term *our* reason, nor the reason of any other being, but the nature of things. It is in this sense that *reason* is always taken in such propositions; and in this sense of the term there is but ONE *reason* in the universe, as there is but ONE *truth*, ONE *justice*, ONE *moral goodness*, and so on.

What I have said here, concerning the contradictory terms of one proposition, is equally true, with respect to  
two

two contradictory propositions, of which by the unchangeable rules of right reasoning *one* always must be true and the *other false*. This consideration will ever prevent rational divines (a class of men whom the deists treat often rudely for reasons easily to be guessed) from defending the doctrine of the holy Trinity upon this erroneous principle, “ that *what is contradictory to our* “ reason may be *true* nevertheless.” The scripture no-where says, that *there are three Gods*; if it did, there would be a palpable contradiction in these divine oracles, which so often declare that *there is but one*. It is in conformity, therefore, with this unchangeable principle, even unity of essence in the Deity, that we must understand all the passages, where the  
 term

term *God* is attributed expressly or virtually to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. But chiefly it will ever be the care of modest wisdom to avoid *all* explication of a doctrine so profound, and whose terms convey ideas entirely beyond our conception. It is only, *then*, that this doctrine contradicts reason, when it is presumptuously explained, as if the terms and ideas, it comprehends, were commensurate to our capacity. When the interpreters of scripture have said, that there must be a *certain union* between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, which lays a foundation for ascribing to the two latter the names, titles, attributes, and works, which are elsewhere appropriated to the *one* only true God, they have said all that *can* be offered upon  
the



the subject, and all farther disquisitions,—whether metaphysical or philological, relating to it, must always end in froth. Such researches are no more than loss of time, which would be better employed in the improvement of *useful* knowledge, and the advancement of practical religion. The belief of such an union between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is not contradictory to reason, because there is no axiom or tenet in philosophy, no doctrine of scripture, which are incompatible with its existence. But the belief of the *manner* of this union or its *nature* is impossible, because we have no terms that can express it with accuracy, nor has the scripture given us one single ray of light in this matter. Its author knew too well the li-  
mits



mits of human understanding to speak of sounds to the deaf, or of colours to the blind.—But certain doctors have audaciously attempted to explain—what the inspired writers considered as beyond the extent of their commission, and you seem to know, Sir, very well, what the cause and spirit of religion have suffered by the controversies which their speculations have excited in the christian world.

Accordingly you distinguish wisely, with respect to a Trinity in the divine nature, between the *fact* and the *manner*. Yet, I rather wish, Sir, you had not said, that “the union of three  
“ beings in the divine essence is a  
“ proposition as plain, as that *three*  
“ *equilateral* LINES compose one trian-

R

“gle\* ;”

“*gle*\*;” for here you begin to explain; since, however you had a mind to explain, you should rather have said, that THREE *equilateral triangles* (and not *lines*) compose ONE *triangle*; as nothing less will satisfy those who take their explications of this doctrine from a certain oracle. It is true, that, by this, you would have illustrated the mystery in question, by a contradiction in terms; but there are many *good* people, who would have taken less offence at this, than they must necessarily do, when they see you falling perpendicularly into something like, or rather worse than *Sabellianism*. Here, indeed, you fall, when you explain the sacred *tri-union*

\* P. 167, 168.

by the similitude of *three* equilateral (I suppose you mean *equal*) lines composing *one* triangle, for here each line is not a triangle, neither has it any of the properties of a triangle; whereas, in the Trinity, each person has the properties of Deity.—You speak, Sir, more modestly, and, I will venture to say, more philosophically on this stupendous subject, when you say, “that we cannot comprehend how  
 “ far distinct beings, whose mode of  
 “ existence bears no relation to time  
 “ or space, may be united, and there-  
 “ fore we cannot deny such union,  
 “ though it must appear extremely  
 “ embarrassing to those, who imagine,  
 “ that all beings must exist in time  
 “ and space, as we do.” This is true with respect to the doctrine of the

Trinity, and it shews, that we should not enter into any researches concerning the ineffable union: but it does not shew that such an union *contradicts* reason, nor that a proposition, which contradicts reason, *may be true*.

Nevertheless, you alledge examples to prove this paradox; and these I am almost tempted to pass over in silence, since it must have surely been in an unguarded moment of lively fancy, that you made use of the three following,—*the being of a God—over-ruling grace and free-will—certain fore-knowledge of future events, and the uncertain contingency of these events*: these, say you, are to our apprehensions *absolute contradictions*, and “yet the truth of  
 “ every one of them is demonstrable  
 “ from scripture, *reason*, and experi-  
 “ ence.”

“ence.” It is passing strange, that a proposition, which is an *absolute contradiction* to our apprehensions, should be at the same time *demonstrable* by our reason; though it may happen, indeed, that a proposition may be demonstrated to contain a fact, the manner of whose existence is (not contradictory, but) incomprehensible; for I repeat it again, of all contradictory ideas and propositions, the one is true, and the other must be false, or, in other words, a contradiction in terms is a non-entity.

Your manner of proving, that the being of a God contradicts our reason is totally inconclusive: “that any  
 “*thing*, say you, should exist without  
 “a cause, — or that any thing  
 “should be the cause of its own ex-  
 R 3           “istence,

“istence, are propositions equally  
 “contradictory to our reason, yet  
 “one of them must be true or nothing  
 “could have ever existed.” If, in the  
 first of these propositions, by the *thing*  
 you mean an *effect*, (or created being)  
 which is properly correlative to the  
 word *cause*, the proposition, indeed,  
 implies a contradiction, but it has no  
 relation to the existence of God, who  
 is neither an *effect* nor a created being;  
 and, if in the place of the word *thing*,  
 you put the word *being*, the contra-  
 diction vanishes, however the fact may  
 surpass our comprehension. That a  
 being should exist without a cause, is  
 so far from implying a contradiction,  
 that it is rather a manifest contradic-  
 tion to our reason, that such an un-  
 caused being should not exist. For,  
 since

since no *thing* (or, in other words, no effect or finite being) can exist without a cause ; and, since the whole universe is composed of effects or finite beings, there must of necessity exist a being, on whom the *whole* depends : and, if *all* depends on him, he, himself, must be *independent*, and consequently uncaused.—

As to *over-ruling grace* and *free-will*, however impossible it may be for us to find out the link that unites the action of the one with the existence of the other, there is one consideration that dispels all appearance of contradiction between them ; and that is, that divine grace ever acts by a rational influence, by rational motives, and is ever attended by a spontaneous concurrence and voluntary determi-

R 4.

nation,



nation, in which the very essence of liberty consists. With respect to the contradiction between fore-knowledge of future events, and what you (very improperly) call the *uncertain* contingency of these events, I shall only observe, that contingency is not opposed to *certainty*, but to fatal, physical, and unchangeable necessity: hence it follows, that events may be *certain* as to their arrival, though contingent in their nature: and certainty is a sufficient foundation for fore-knowledge. This distinction does not, indeed, either remove or even much diminish the obscurity of the subject; yet, if I am not mistaken, it renders the contradiction, you speak of, rather apparent than real. I know there are philosophers, and even divines, whose  
 hypo-



hypothesis tends to deprive you of this example, by denying the foreknowledge of free actions and future contingencies. They maintain, that it is no more a defect in prescience not to foresee future contingencies, than it is a defect in omnipotence not to be able to do what is impossible;—they embrace your opinion with respect to the contradiction; but they draw from it a conclusion different from yours, and, be it said without offence, a more consistent one. But, for my part, I cannot admit the principle. In the prescience of future contingencies, I see a *Gordian knot*, rather than a contradiction: and, instead of cutting it with temerity, like the philosophers now mentioned, I shall wait with patience, until it shall please the divine wisdom

wisdom to untie it in his own good time.

As to the doctrine of Christ's suffering for sin, (which is the second thing mentioned in the objection now before us) the deist affirms, that it *contradicts* all our ideas of divine justice, and this you acknowledge and deny alternately more than once, in the compass of a few pages. "Reason, *say you* \*, in-  
 " forms us that the punishment of  
 " the innocent, instead of the guilty,  
 " is *diametrically* opposite to justice,  
 " rectitude, and all pretensions to uti-  
 " lity †." And yet you tell us in the following sentence, " that the short

\* P. 162.

† This proposition is only true, when the innocent is obliged by force, and *against his will*, to undergo *external* punishment for the guilty.

“ line

“ line of reason cannot reach to the  
 “ bottom of this question,” and a  
 little farther on, that “ a tax, if vo-  
 “ luntarily offered, may be *justly* ac-  
 “ cepted \* from the innocent instead  
 “ of the guilty, for any thing that  
 “ reason can decide to the contrary †!”  
 again, you alledge in favour of Christ’s  
 mediation, “ that all nations civilised  
 “ and barbarous, however differ-  
 “ ing in their religious opinions,  
 “ agreed in the expediency of ap-  
 “ peasing the Deity by *vicarious suf-*  
 “ *ferings* ‡:” you add, indeed, that  
 “ this notion could never have been  
 “ derived from reason, because it *con-*  
 “ *tradicts* it ||;” and yet you had said  
 a moment before, that our ignorance

\* P. 163. † P. 164. ‡ P. 165. || P. 164.

of circumstances is such, that “reason  
 “ cannot enable us to assert that this  
 “ measure, (i. e. *vicarious sufferings*)  
 “ is contrary to justice, or void of  
 “ utility. \*”—You say again, in an-  
 swer to your deist, that “the notion  
 “ of *vicarious sufferings* must either be  
 “ derived from *natural instinct* or from  
 “ *supernatural revelation* †.” But to  
 derive it from the latter is to suppose  
 what is in dispute, by attributing to  
 revelation the very thing which the  
 deist employs as an argument against  
 revelation: and if you say, that it  
 comes from natural instinct, it is sin-  
 gular, that this instinct, which you  
 call the operation of divine power,  
 should dictate what reason, the gift of

\* P. 164. † P. 166.

God,

God, disavows \*. What confusion and inconsistency in this whole disquisition!

Instead of granting to the objector, that the *vicarious sufferings* of Christ *contradict* all our ideas of divine justice, you might have shewn him, Sir, (as the excellent Bishop Butler † has done, with an uncommon strength of reasoning and a truly philosophical spirit) that these sufferings are analogous to the daily course of divine providence

\* Besides, by allowing that the notion of vicarious sufferings may have come from *natural instinct*, Mr. Jenyns invalidates his second proposition, that *the doctrines of christianity (among which he gives a distinguished rank to that of vicarious atonement) are totally unlike every thing which had ever before entered into the mind of man.*

† See his *Analogy*, &c. part II. ch. v.

in the government of the world, in which the innocent are appointed to suffer, in a thousand cases, for the faults of the guilty \*. Why this appointment has taken place, we cannot yet see *fully*; though a close observer of men and things will perceive many advantages arising from it in the course of providence. In the dispensation of grace, besides its tendency to vindicate the authority of the divine government, and deter God's creatures from sin, it may be founded on many other reasons, and attended with far-

\* The objection, had it any force, would be stronger, in one respect, against *natural providence*, than against the *christian dispensation*: because, under the *former*, we are, in many cases, necessitated, whether we will or no, to suffer for the faults of others, whereas the sufferings of Christ were voluntary. *Id. ibid.*

ther

ther efficacy, at present unknown to us, and which will appear in the proper time. But, to vindicate the divine rectitude and justice both in the course of providence, and in the dispensation of grace, it is sufficient to observe, that, finally and upon the whole, *every one* shall receive according to *his* personal character and conduct. The general doctrine of scripture declares, that this *final* and justly proportioned distribution shall be the *completion* of God's government; but, during the progress of this government in nature and grace, and in order to the completion of the whole scheme, *vicarious sufferings* may be fit and necessary, and this is enough to silence your objector.

We see but *in part*, here below, both in the government of nature, and in  
the

the dispensation of grace. Christianity, more especially, is a *scheme* of divine wisdom, that relates to eternity, and points thither for its completion. It is therefore only in a future scene that we can hope to see clearly the nature of each part and the harmony of the whole. What is plain, comfortable, and practical in this divine system is designed to occupy us *here*; what is mysterious, at present, will nobly exercise our enlarged faculties and powers *hereafter*.

T H E E N D.









