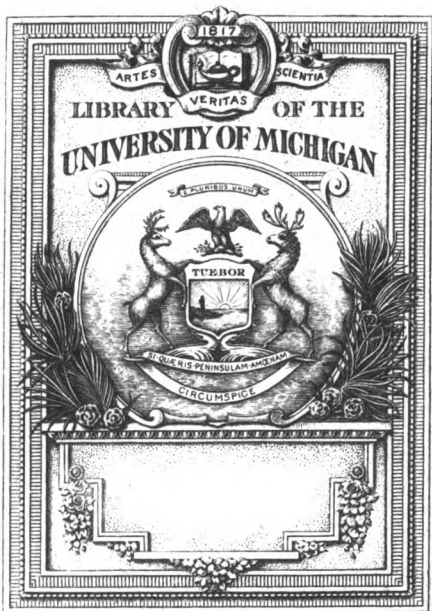

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THE GIFT OF
J. H. Russell

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1787

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L E T T E R S

T O A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

P A R T I.

CONTAINING

An Examination of the principal Objections to the Doctrines of *Natural Religion*, and especially those contained in the Writings of Mr. HUME.

THE SECOND EDITION.

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

AC. IMP. RETROP. R. PARIS. HOLM. TAURIN. AUREL. MED.
PARIS. HARLEM. CANTAB. AMERIC. ET PHILAD. SOCIUS.

SEILICET HAUD SATIS EST RIVOS SPECTARE FLUENTES—
FONTEM IPSUM SPECTARE JUVAT.

ANTI LUCRETIUS.

B I R M I N G H A M,

PRINTED BY PEARSON AND ROLLASON, FOR J. JOHNSON,
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1787

TO

WILLIAM TAYLEUR, Esq,
OF SHREWSBURY.

DEAR SIR,

I Shall think myself highly honoured, if, in dedicating this work to you, I can perpetuate the memory of our friendship, and at the same time procure for revealed religion the advantage that it may derive from the knowledge of your zealous attachment to it.

We live in an age in which many persons of a philosophical turn of mind are disposed to reject revelation. This you and I equally lament. But we consider it as a temporary circumstance, since the

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prin-

principles of true philosophy lead to the most satisfactory conclusion in favour of it; and therefore we doubt not but that, in due time, the justness of the conclusion will be apparent to all who give sufficient attention to the subject.

It is, we are sensible, either a misunderstanding of the nature and object of revealed religion (arising from the manifold corruptions and abuses of it) or an inattention to the nature of its evidence, that is the cause of the present unbelief. But when these corruptions and abuses shall be clearly traced to their source, and this source shall appear to be something quite foreign to the genuine principles of this religion; and when the evidence of the facts, on which the truth of it depends, shall appear to rest on the very same foundation

ation

D E D I C A T I O N. ▼

ation with all our *faith in history*, nothing will be wanting to the complete satisfaction of the truly philosophical and the candid.

In the mean time, it is, no doubt, to be lamented, that so many of those persons who are joined with us in the investigation of natural phenomena, who, together with ourselves, receive so much pleasure from the discovery of the laws to which they are subject, should be so far disjoined from us, when we begin to look a little farther into the same glorious system; that they should attend with rapture to the voice of nature, and not raise their thoughts beyond this, to the author of nature. It gives us equal concern, that others should acknowledge the voice of God in his works, and yet turn a deaf ear when the same great Being condescends to display his power,

and to signify his will, in a still more direct and emphatical manner, and respecting things of infinitely more moment to us than any thing that can engage our attention here.

We are concerned to perceive that every thing that is the object of our senses, and that relates to this life, should be so highly prized by them; and yet that they should shew a perfect indifference with respect to the continuance of life, in a future and better state, in which we shall have an infinitely wider field of enquiry, and which we shall enter upon with the advantage of all the experience that we have acquired in the methods of investigation here.

But this circumstance has arisen from influences which we trust are daily diminishing. True philosophy necessarily inspires

spires the greatest veneration for the constitution and laws of nature. It therefore leads to devotion, and consequently to the practice of all virtue. And when the pious philosopher shall be convinced that there is nothing *irrational* in that religion which alone teaches the great doctrine of *a future life*, he will, at least with that candour, and that cool and dispassionate temper, which accompanies him in all his other enquiries, attend to the evidences of it. And when he shall find that he is so far from being required, on his approaching the province of revelation, to depart from those *rules of philosophizing* which have the sanction of all our experience, that the pursuit of them necessarily carries him into it (so that he must even cease to be a philosopher, if he refuse to be a christian) he will rejoice in the union of

two such characters, and will continue his researches with double satisfaction; confident that whatever may be begun and left imperfect here, will be resumed and completed hereafter; that nature, and the author of nature, will be for ever the delightful objects of his veneration, and furnish an inexhaustible source of employment, and of happiness.

We are ignorant, indeed, of the particulars of our condition in a future state (and the wisdom of divine providence is conspicuous in this our ignorance) but we may assure ourselves that, continuing to be a part of the same great system, of which the present state is only the commencement, and under the government of the same great and good Being, we shall be possessed of whatever shall be requisite for
our

our own happiness, and of the means of promoting the happiness of others.

You, Sir, have always been happy in your attachment to mathematical and philosophical studies, but more so in your just preference of theological ones. These employ, and brighten, the evening of your life, as they did that of the great Newton, whose example, if it were necessary, would alone be a sufficient justification of us, in uniting two pursuits which are too often considered as the reverse of each other. You, therefore, naturally join with me in wishing to recommend to others those studies which give so much satisfaction to ourselves.

Your attachment to the cause of genuine christianity was conspicuous in your relinquishing

* D E D I C A T I O N .

quishing a trinitarian form of worship, and adopting an unitarian one, in your own family, till you had procured it a more public and permanent establishment. Fortitude in such a cause as this, while the world in general is too ready to acquiesce in every thing that has the countenance of *fashion* and of *power*, is truly worthy of a christian philosopher; and such an example as you have set cannot be too generally known, being so rare, and therefore so much wanted. The great Newton, though an unitarian, had not the courage to declare himself, and act as one.

Notwithstanding the present general aversion to theological enquiries, among persons engaged in philosophical pursuits, we are by no means singular in our respect for them; and such examples as yours, when

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D E D I C A T I O N. xi

sufficiently known, must contribute to make us still less so. With the view of accelerating so desirable an event was this work composed; and should it, in the smallest degree, be the means of accomplishing so great an end, it will give me more satisfaction than any other of my publications.

With the greatest respect, I am,

Dear Sir,

Your most obliged humble servant,

J. P R I E S T L E Y.

B I R M I N G H A M,

F E B. 1, 1787.

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LETTERS

T H E
P R E F A C E
T O
P A R T I.

IT will, I think, be acknowledged by all persons who are capable of reflection, and who *do* reflect, that, in the whole compass of speculation, there are no questions more interesting to all men than those which are the subject of these *Letters*, viz. Whether the world we inhabit, and ourselves who inhabit it, had an intelligent and benevolent author, or no proper author at all? Whether our conduct be inspected, and we are under a righteous government, or under no government at all? And, lastly, whether we have something to hope and fear beyond the grave, or are at liberty to adopt the Epicurean maxim, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die?* This may strike us more forceably if we

B. attend

attend a little to the principles of human nature.

The great superiority of man over brutes consists in the greater *comprehensiveness of his mind*, by means of which he is, as it is commonly expressed, capable of *reflection*, but, more accurately speaking, capable of contemplating, and, therefore, of enjoying, the *past* and the *future*, as well as the *present*. And, what is most extraordinary and interesting to us, this power, as far as appears, has no limits.

In infancy we feel nothing but what affects us for the moment ; but *present feelings* bear a less and less proportion to the general mass of sensation, as it may be called, consisting of various elements, the greatest part of which are borrowed from the *past* and the *future* ; so that, in our natural progress in intellectual improvement, all temporary affections, whether of a pleasurable or of a painful nature, will come at length to be wholly inconsiderable ; and we shall have, in
a greater

a greater degree than we can at present conceive, an equable enjoyment of the whole of what we *have been*, and *have felt*, and also of what we have a confident *expectation of being*, and of feeling, in future.

Our progress, however, in this intellectual improvement is capable of being accelerated, or retarded, according as we accustom ourselves to reflection, or live without it. For certainly, though, while we retain the faculties of memory and reasoning, we cannot, whether we chuse it or not, wholly exclude reflection on the past, or anticipation of the future (and, therefore, some kind of advance in intellectual improvement, is unavoidable to all beings possessed of intellect) yet it is in our power to exclude what is of great moment, viz. all that is *voluntary* in the business; so that being, in a great measure, deaf to what is behind, and blind to what is before, we may give ourselves up to mere sensual gratifications, and, consequently, no question concerning what is *past*, or *future*, may interest us. In this state of mind a

man may think it absurd to trouble himself either about how he came into the world, or how he is to go out of it.

It would be too hasty, however, to assert, that it can only be in this very lowest state of intellect, a life of mere sensation, or very imperfect reflection, that any person can be unconcerned about the belief of a God, and the doctrines of natural religion. For a man may get above mere sensual indulgence, and give great scope to his intellectual faculties with respect to some objects, and be wholly inattentive to others. And it is in the power of little things, by wholly occupying the mind, not only to exclude the consideration of greater things, but even the idea of their being greater.

This, indeed, comes within the description of a kind of proper *insanity*; but then it may be justly asserted, that, in a greater or less degree, all persons who do not prize every thing according to its real value, and regulate their pursuits accordingly, are insane;

lane; though, when the degree is small, it passes unnoticed, and when the consequences are inconsiderable, it is far from being offensive. Nay, in some cases, the world derives great and manifest advantage from a partial disorder, as it may be called, of this kind. For great excellence in particular arts and sciences is perhaps seldom attained without it. Indeed, it cannot be expected, that a man should greatly excel in some things without neglecting, and, consequently, undervaluing others.

We are shocked at a man's insanity only when it makes him inattentive to things that immediately concern him, as to the necessary means of his subsistence or support, so that he must perish without the care of others. But when the interest, though real, is *remote*, a man's inattention to it passes unnoticed. By this means it is that, without being surprised, or shocked, we every day see thousands, who profess to believe in a future world, live and die without making any

provision for it; though their conduct is much more inexcusable than that of the atheist, who, not believing in futurity, minds only what is present.

But though the conduct of the atheist be consistent with itself, it must give concern to those who are not atheists, and who have a just sense of the importance of the belief of a God, of a providence, and of a future state, to the present dignity, and the future happiness of men.

An atheist may be temperate, good-natured, honest, and, in the common, and less extended sense of the word, a *virtuous* man; because, if he be a man of good understanding, of naturally moderate passions, and have been properly educated, the influences to which he will have been exposed may be sufficient to *form* those valuable and amiable habits, and to *fix* him in them. But, notwithstanding this, an atheist has neither the *motive*, nor the *means*, of being what he

he might have been, if he had not been an atheist.

An atheist cannot have that sense of *personal dignity* and *importance* that a theist has. For he who believes that he was introduced into life without any design, and is soon to be for ever excluded from life, cannot suppose that he has any very important part to act in life; and, therefore, he can have no motive to give much attention to his conduct in it. The past and the future being of less consequence to him, he will naturally endeavour to think about them as little as possible, and make the most of what is before him. But the necessary consequence of this is the *debasement of his nature*, or a foregoing of the advantages that he might have derived from that power of comprehension, which will have full scope in the theist; the man who considers himself as a link in an immensely connected chain of being, as acting a part in a *drama*, which commenced from eternity, and extends to

eternity; who considers that every gratification, and every action, contributes to form a *character*, the importance of which to him is, literally speaking, infinite; who considers himself as standing in the nearest and most desirable relation to a being of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; a being who gives unremitted attention to him, who plans for him, and conducts him through this life, who does not lose sight of him even in the grave, and who will, in due time, raise him to a life, which, with respect both to gratifications and pursuits, will be of unspeakably more value to him than the present, and whose views with respect to him and the universe are boundless.

A man who really believes this, and who gives that *attention* to it which its great importance to him manifestly requires, must be *another kind of being* than an atheist, and certainly a being of unspeakably greater dignity and value. His *feelings* and his *conduct* cannot but be greatly superior.

This,

This, however, from the nature of the thing, must depend upon the *attention* that a theist gives to his principles, and to the situation in which he believes himself to be placed. And, therefore, it is very possible that a merely *nominal believer* in a God may be a *practical atheist*, and worse than a mere speculative one, living as *without God in the world*, intirely thoughtless of his being, perfections, and providence. But still, nothing but *reflection* is wanting to reclaim such a person, and recover him to a proper dignity of sentiment, and propriety of conduct; whereas an atheist thus sunk has not the same *power of recovery*. He wants both the *disposition* and the necessary *means*. His mind is destitute of the *latent seeds* of future greatness.

If, according to the observation of Lord Bacon, it be *knowledge* that constitutes *power*: if it be our knowledge of the external world that gives us such extensive power over it, and adds to our happiness in it, knowledge
so

so materially respecting ourselves, our general situation, and conduct, must have great power over *ourselves*. It must, as it were, new make us, and give us sentiments and principles greatly superior to any that we could otherwise be possessed of, and add to our *happiness* as much as it does to our *dignity*.

If, as Mr. Hume observes, in his *Essay on the Natural History of Religion*, p. 114, “the good, the great, the sublime, and the ravishing, be found evidently in the genuine principles of theism,” I need not say that there must be something *mean, abject, and debasing*, in the principles of atheism. If, as he also says, p. 116, a people intirely devoid of religion are sure to be but “a few degrees removed from brutes,” they must be this, or something worse than this, who, having been acquainted with the principles of religion, have discarded them. The consistency of these sentiments with those advanced in other parts of Mr. Hume’s writings, it is not my business to look to,

I shall

I shall think myself happy if, in these *Letters*, I have advanced any thing that may tend either to lessen the number of speculative atheists, or, which is no less wanting, convert nominal believers into practical ones. It is not, in general, *reason* and *argument*, but the pleasures and bustle of the world that prevent both ; and proper moderation in our desires and pursuits, accompanied with serious reflection, would be of the greatest use in both cases. I wish to give occasion, and to furnish the means, for this cool recollection of ourselves.

It is the too eager pursuit of pleasure, wealth, ambition, and I may add of the arts, and even of science (theological science itself not wholly excepted) that is our snare. All these may equally *occupy the mind*, to the exclusion of the greater views that open to us as *men*, and subjects of moral government ; who are but in the infancy of an endless, and, therefore, an infinitely important existence. All these pursuits are equally capable of con-
fining

fining our attention to what is immediately before us, and of hiding from our view whatever in the past, or the future, most nearly concerns us to attend to.

The great *book of nature* is always open before us, and our eyes are always open upon it; but we pass our time in a kind of *reverie*, or absence of thought, inattentive to the most obvious connexions and consequences of things. The same is the case with the *book of revelation*. But it is the former only that I have a view to in the present publication.

My design, however, is to proceed to consider the speculative difficulties which attend the doctrines of *revelation*, with philosophical and thinking persons in the present age, if the reception of this part shall give me sufficient encouragement to proceed farther. But if I succeed in this first part, I shall consider my great object as nearly attained; there being, as I have reason to think, many
more

more atheists at present, than mere unbelievers in revelation, especially out of England; and, for my part, I cannot help considering the difficulties that attend the proof of the Jewish and christian revelations, as not greater than those which relate to the doctrines of natural religion.

Whenever, therefore, I shall hear of the conversion of a speculative atheist to *serious deism* (an event which has never yet come to my knowledge) I shall have little doubt of his soon becoming a serious christian. As, on the other hand, the same turn of mind that makes a man an unbeliever in christianity has, in fact, generally carried men on to a proper atheism. But, in both cases, this progress in speculation requires some degree of *attention* to the subject; for, with a total *listlessness and unconcern*, a man may rest *any where*. He may understand the first book of Euclid, and have no knowledge of the second, and therefore, no opinion about any of the propositions in it.

In both parts of this work it is my wish to speak to *the present state of things*, and to consider the difficulties that really press the most, without discussing every thing belonging to the subject; for which I must refer to more systematic writers, and for a short view of the whole chain of argument, with some original illustrations, to my *Institutes of natural and revealed Religion*.

In some respects, I may, perhaps, flatter myself that I write with more advantage than any of those who have preceded me in the same argument, as I shall particularly endeavour to avail myself of the real service that infidelity has been of to christianity, in freeing it from many things which, I believe, all who have formally undertaken the defence of it have considered as belonging to it; when they have, in reality, been things quite foreign to it, and in some cases subversive of it. I shall hope, therefore, to exhibit a view of christianity to which a *philosopher* cannot have so much to object, every thing that I shall

shall contend for, appearing to me perfectly consonant to the principles of sound philosophy; and I shall use no other *modes of reasoning* than those that are universally adopted in similar cases, as I hope to make appear. Whether I succeed to my wish or not, I shall be *ingenuous*, and as impartial as I can. As to any bias that I may lie under, those who know me, and my situation, are the best judges; it being impossible I should be aware of this myself. Whatever cause we ourselves wish well to, we necessarily imagine we have sufficient reason for so wishing.

I am far from meaning to hold myself forth as an oracle in this business; but I shall be really obliged to any person who shall propose to me any objection that he really thinks materially to affect the credibility of the Jewish or the Christian system. No objection so proposed to me shall pass unnoticed, whether I be able to give satisfaction with respect to it, or not. If I myself feel the difficulty, I shall freely acknowledge it, and endeavour to estimate the force of it.

I, to-

I, together with the persons to whom I am addressing myself, am a speculative inhabitant of the earth, actuated by the same passions, engaged in a variety of the same pursuits, and (as we have not yet made any discovery that will enable us to cure the disease of *old age*, and to prolong life *ad libitum*) I, together with them, am hastening to the grave; and therefore I am equally interested with them to find whether any thing awaits us after death, and, if any thing, what it is. This is, in its own nature, a more important object of enquiry than any thing that we have hitherto so laboriously investigated. It behoves us, therefore, to be cool and patient, attentive to every circumstance that can throw light upon the great question, and to give one another all the assistance we can with respect to it.

Truth, and the *laws of nature*, are our common object; but we are necessarily more interested in the investigation, in proportion to the *magnitude* of the object, and the *concern* we have in it. In these questions, therefore

fore, there is a concurrence of every thing that can render the investigation interesting to us ; and as there is no interference of *particular interests* in the case, there is all the reason imaginable to lay aside every prejudice, to unite our labours, and give one another all the assistance in our power, either by *proposing difficulties*, or *solving* them. Assistance, in either of these forms, I sincerely intreat, and shall be truly thankful for.

With respect to this publication, concerning *natural religion*, it may not be improper to observe, as I did in my *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*, vol. I. p. 3. “ that, “ in giving a delineation of natural religion, “ I shall deliver what I suppose *might* have “ been known concerning God, our duty, “ and our future expectations, by the light of “ nature, and not what was *actually* known “ of them by any of the human race : for “ these are very different things. Many “ things are in their own nature attainable, “ which, in fact, are never attained ; so that

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“ though

“ though we find but little of the knowledge
 “ of God, and of his providence, in many
 “ nations, which never enjoyed the light of
 “ revelation, it does not follow, that nature
 “ did not contain, and teach those lessons,
 “ and that men had not the means of learn-
 “ ing them, provided they had made the
 “ most of the light they had, and of the
 “ powers that were given them.”

“ I shall, therefore, include, under the
 “ head of *natural religion*, all that can be
 “ *demonstrated*, or proved to be true, by na-
 “ tural reason, though it was never, in fact,
 “ discovered by it; and even though it be
 “ probable, that mankind would never have
 “ known it without the assistance of reve-
 “ lation.”

Mr. Hume acknowledges, that the hypo-
 thesis which would most naturally occur to
 uninstructed mankind, to account for ap-
 pearances in the world, would be that of a
multiplicity of deities; and of what mankind,
 who

who have been, as far as appears, altogether, or nearly self-taught, in this respect, have been capable, in many hundred, and, in some cases, probably, thousands of years, we have evidence enough. The experiment, as we may call it, has been tried both among the civilized and the uncivilized of our race.

Nothing, therefore, that I have advanced in this work, can be at all understood to lessen the great value of revelation, even admitting, what is far from being probable, that, in some very distant age of the world, men might have attained to a full persuasion concerning all the great truths of religion, as the unity of God, the doctrine of a resurrection to immortal life, and a state of future retribution. What the most enlightened of our race had conjectured concerning these things, in fact, led them rather farther from the truth, than nearer to it, and never made much impression on the generality of mankind.

Plain as the great argument contained in these *letters* is, viz. that which establishes the belief of a *God*, and a *benevolent providence*, I have not been able to reply to the objections that have been started on the subject, in such a manner as that I can promise myself will be perfectly intelligible to *all* my readers. But, in general, those persons, who cannot fully comprehend the answers, will not be able to see the force of the objections; and therefore, if they have no doubts themselves, and have no occasion to make themselves so far masters of the argument, as to enable them to satisfy the doubts of others, they may very well content themselves with entirely omitting, or giving but little attention to the third, fourth, twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth Letters.

I give this notice, lest persons not used to metaphysical speculations, looking into those particular Letters, and finding unexpected difficulties in the subject of them, should hastily conclude, that the whole is a business
of

of *subtle disputation*, with respect to which, they could never hope to attain to any satisfactory determination; and therefore, that they may as well leave it to be discussed by idle and speculative people, without concerning themselves about it. Whereas, nothing can be more momentous in itself, or more important to be known, and *attended to*, than the general doctrine of these Letters; and it equally concerns the wise and the ignorant, men of speculation or men of business, those who are capable of the greatest refinement, and those who cannot refine at all. For how different soever our turns of thinking, or modes of life, may be, we are all equally subjects of God's moral government, if there be a God, and a governor, and equally *heirs of immortality*, if there be any immortality for man.

Some may consider the critical review of Mr. Hume's metaphysical writings, in the last of these Letters, as ungenerous, now that he is dead, and unable to make any

reply. But this circumstance makes no difference in his particular case, as it was a maxim with him (and perhaps one instance of the great *wisdom* that Dr. Smith ascribes to him) to take no notice of any objections to his writings; and he has left behind him a guardian of his reputation, of ability, in my opinion, fully equal to his own, and whose friendship for him cannot be questioned.

I think it proper to observe in this place, that there is an inaccuracy in p. 398 of my *correspondence with Dr. Price*. There I say that “the reason, or account, of the existence of the *Divine Being*, cannot be the same with that of the existence of *space*, or *duration*.” Whereas, I should have said, that

that “ though there may be the same necessity for the existence of the deity, and for that of space, or duration, we are not able to *see* it.” And what I immediately subjoin, as a reason for the assertion, will better apply to this more accurate state of the case, viz. “ I can, in any case, form an idea of the non-existence both of all *effects*, and of all *causes*; and consequently both of the *creation*, and of the *creator*, and of the non-existence of the latter, just as easily as of that of the former; but still the ideas of *space* and *duration* remain in the mind, and cannot be excluded from it.” This correction will be found necessary to prevent an inconsistency between the assertion, as it now stands, and what is advanced on the same subject in this treatise.

It is also proper to give notice, that the edition of Mr. Hume’s *Philosophical Essays*, that I have quoted, is *the second*, of 1751, 12mo; and that of his *Four Dissertations*

is *the first* of 1757. My edition of the *Systeme de la Nature* is in two volumes, dated
• Londres, 1771. The first volume contains 397 pages, and the second 500.

LETTERS

L E T T E R S

TO A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

L E T T E R I.

Of the NATURE of EVIDENCE.

DEAR SIR,

I Am sorry to find that, in consequence of the books you have lately read, and of the company you have been obliged to keep, especially on your travels, you have found your mind unhinged with respect to the first principles of religion, natural as well as revealed. You wish me to attempt the solution of the difficulties you have proposed to me on those subjects; and I shall, without much reluctance, undertake to give you all the satisfaction that I am able.

You

You have not, that I know, any vicious bias to mislead you, by secretly inclining you to disbelieve a system which threatens vice with future punishment. And, though it is always flattering to a person of a speculative turn to be ranked with those whose mode of thinking is the most *fashionable*, being connected with ideas of liberality, courage, manliness, freedom from vulgar prejudices, &c. yet as you have not particularly distinguished yourself in this line, either by writing, taking the lead in conversation, or in any other way, I flatter myself that your bias of this kind (though it will draw you more strongly than you can be aware of yourself) may not be too strong for rational evidence, or such as the nature of the thing admits of.

Otherwise, you are not so little read in the world, as not to have perceived, that there are many prejudices which no *evidence* can overcome. No person can possibly be sensible of this in himself, but we all see it in others; and we see that it extends to subjects

jects of all kinds, theology, metaphysics, politics, and common life. These prejudices arise from what are commonly called *false views of things*, or improper associations of ideas, which in the extreme becomes *delirium*, or *madness*, and is conspicuous to every person, except to him who actually labours under this disorder of mind.

Now, as the causes of the wrong associations of ideas affect men of letters as well as other persons (though generally in a different way, and perhaps not, upon the whole, in the same degree) they may have the same bias to incredulity in some cases, that others have to credulity; and the same person, who is the most unreasonably incredulous in some things, may be as unreasonably credulous, and even superstitious, in others; so little ought we to take it for granted, that a man who thinks rationally on some subjects will do so uniformly, and may be confided in as a safe guide in all. This, however, is agreeable to other analogies, as with respect to courage; for the extreme of bravery in some respects

respects is often found united with the extreme of cowardice in others.

You know a friend of ours, by no means deficient in point of general understanding, who to the fashionable infidelity adds the fashionable follies of the age. Though he believes nothing of *invisible powers* of any kind, he has a predilection for a certain class of numbers in the lottery, and, when he is eagerly engaged in gaming, must throw his dice in particular, and what we think whimsical, circumstances. Now, what is this better than *whistling for a wind* (which, however, we find many sensible sailors continue to practice) the *Roman auguries*, or the weakest of the Popish superstitions ?

The fact is, that in some manner, which perhaps neither himself nor any other person can explain, he has connected in his mind the idea of some peculiar circumstances with that of a successful throw, and the idea of other peculiar circumstances with that of an unsuccessful one, just as we happen to connect in our minds the ideas of *darkness* and of

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apparitions ; which association, when it is once formed, often affects the mind more or less through life, and long after all belief in apparitions is given up, and even ridiculed.

I might enforce this observation, which is far from being foreign to our present purpose, by reminding you, that there are both able and upright men on both sides of what we think the clearest of all questions, in morals, theology, and politics. How often have you expressed your astonishment, that any person should hold the doctrine that you reprobate concerning the *Middlesex election*, and the *taxation of America*, and yet think himself the friend of liberty, and the enemy of all oppression and tyranny.

Had not mortality come in aid of the demonstrations on which the Newtonian system of the universe is founded, it is not certain that it would even yet have supplanted the Aristotelian, or Cartesian system, ill-founded as they were. But the old and incorrigibly bigotted abettors of former hypotheses leaving the stage, reason had a better chance with the younger, and the less biassed.

When

When you reflect on these, and many other facts of the same nature, you will not wonder much, that so many sensible men of your acquaintance, and men of an ingenuous and candid disposition in other respects, struck with the glaring absurdities and mischiefs of superstition, should think it wise and right to take refuge in irreligion; and, not seeing where they can consistently stop, even disclaim the belief of a God. Nor do I wonder that, being men of ingenuity, their reasonings on these subjects should have staggered you: All this may be the case, and yet those reasonings be altogether inconclusive.

As you profess you have no objection to my considering you as ignorant as I please in every thing relating to this subject, I shall, in order to lay the surest foundation of a truly rational faith, take the liberty to begin with explaining what appears to me to be the natural ground of *evidence*, or of the *assent* that we give to propositions of all kinds, that we may see afterwards how far it may be applied to the subject of religion.

Now

Now every *proposition*, or every thing to which we give our assent, or dissent, consists ultimately of two terms, one of which is affirmed of the other ; as that *twice two is four*, the *three angles of every right-lined triangle are equal to two right angles* ; *man is mortal*, *air is elastic*, &c. And the ground of our affirming one of these ideas of the other is either that, when they are considered, they appear to be, in fact, the same idea, or perfectly to coincide ; or else that the one is constantly observed to accompany the other. Thus the reason why I affirm that *twice two is four*, is, that the idea, annexed to the term *twice two*, coincides with the idea annexed to the term *four* ; so does the idea of the quantity annexed to the *three angles of a right-lined triangle* with that of *two right angles*. But the reason why I affirm that *man is mortal* is of a different nature, and is founded on the observation that all men are found to be so ; and I say that *air is elastic*, because every substance that bears that denomination is found to restore itself to its former dimensions, or nearly so, after having been compressed.

Propo-

Propositions of the former kind, if they be true at all, are universally and necessarily so, and the evidence for them is called *demonstration*. Of this kind are the indisputable propositions in geometry and algebra. But propositions of the latter kind are always liable to be corrected and modified by subsequent and more exact observations; because it is not by comparing our own ideas only that we come to the knowledge of their truth, and later observations may correct what was defective in former ones.

There are, however, propositions of the former kind, the proof of which is not strictly demonstrative, because the evidence of it does not arise from the comparison of our ideas, but from the testimony of others, the validity of which rests ultimately on the association of ideas; human testimony in certain circumstances not having been found to deceive us. Of this kind is the proposition *Alexander conquered Darius*. For the proof of it is complete, when it appears that the person, distinguished by the name of Alexander, is the same with him that conquered

quered Darius. But since the evidence of this can never be made out by any operations on my own ideas, I have recourse to the testimony of others; and I believe the proposition to be true, because I have all the reason I can have, to think that a history so authenticated as that of Alexander and Darius may be depended on.

Now it is not pretended, that the evidence of the propositions in natural or revealed religion is always of the former of these two kinds, but generally of the latter, or that which depends on the association of ideas; and in revealed religion, the evidence chiefly arises from testimony, but such testimony as has never yet been found to deceive us. I do not therefore say, that I can properly *demonstrate* all the principles of either; but I presume that, if any person's mind be truly unprejudiced, I shall be able to lay before him such evidence of both, as will determine his assent; and, in some of the cases, his *persuasion* shall hardly be distinguishable, with respect to its *strength*, from that which arises

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from a demonstration properly so called, the difference being, as mathematicians say, less than any assignable quantity. For no person, I presume, has, in fact, any more doubt either of there having been such a person as Alexander, or of his having conquered Darius, than he has of any proposition whatever. And yet sufficient and plenary as this evidence appears to me, it may fall far short of producing conviction in the minds of all; for, in some cases, we have seen that demonstration itself will not do this.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Your's, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R II.

Of the direct Evidence for the Belief of a God:

DEAR SIR,

HAVING premised the observations contained in the preceding letter on the nature of evidence, I proceed to observe, that no person can live long in the world without knowing that men make *chairs* and *tables*, build *houses*, and write *books*, and that chairs, tables, houses, or books, are not made without men. This constant and indisputable observation lays the foundation for such an association of the ideas of chairs, tables, houses, and books, with that of *men* as the makers of them, that whenever we see a chair, a table, a house, or a book, we entertain no doubt but, though we did not see *when* or *how* they were made, and nobody gives us any information on the subject, yet that some man or other *did* make them. No

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man

man can ever suppose that a chair, a table, a house, or a book, was either the production of any tree, or came into being of itself. Nothing, in the course of his own experience, or that of others, can lead him to imagine any such thing.

He afterwards sees birds build nests, spiders make webs, bees make honeycombs, &c. and accordingly he, as before, associates in his mind the ideas of all these things with that of the animals that made them; and therefore he concludes, when he sees a *honeycomb*, for instance, that *bees* have been at work upon it.

Finding, however, that some animals can, to a certain degree, imitate the works of others, and man those of most of them, he sees reason to limit his former conclusion, that such a particular animal, and no other, must necessarily have produced them, but (generalizing his ideas, from observing something of the same nature in whatever can produce the same thing, and calling it *similar power*) he says, that some being of *sufficient powers* has produced it.

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Advancing,

Advancing, as he necessarily must, in the habit of generalizing his ideas, he calls chairs, tables, nests, webs, &c. by the general term *effects*, and men, animals, &c. that produce them, by the term *causes*; and expressing the result of all his observations, he concludes universally, that *all effects have their adequate causes*. For he sees nothing come into being in any other way.

He likewise sees one plant proceed from another, and one animal from another, by natural vegetation, or generation, and therefore he concludes that every plant and every animal had its proper parents. But the parent plant, or parent animal, does not bear the same relation to its offspring that men do to chairs, books, &c. because they have no *design* in producing them, and no *comprehension* of the nature or use of what they produce. There is, however, some analogy in the two cases; and therefore the parent plant, or parent animal, is still termed a *cause*, though in a less proper sense of the word. However, admitting these to be called causes, it is still universally true, that

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nothing

nothing begins to exist without a cause. To this rule we see no exception whatever, and therefore cannot possibly entertain a doubt with respect to it.

Again, wherever there are *proper causes*, as of *men* with respect to *chairs, books, &c.* we cannot but be sensible that these causes must be capable of comprehending the nature and uses of those productions of which they are the causes, and *so far* as they are the causes of them. A carpenter may know nothing of the texture of the wood on which he works, or the cause of its colour, &c. for with respect to *them* he is no cause; but being the proper cause of the conversion of the wood into a chair, or table, he (or the person who employed him, or who first constructed these things, &c.) must have had an adequate idea of their nature and uses.

Observations of this kind extending themselves every day, it necessarily becomes a maxim with us, that wherever there is a fitness or correspondence of one thing to another, there must have been a cause capable of comprehending, and of designing that
fitness

fitness. The first model of a windmill could not have been made by an idiot. Of such conclusions as these we have so full a persuasion, from constant experience and observation, that no man, let him pretend what he will, can entertain a serious doubt about the matter. The experience and observations of all men, without exception, are so much alike, that such associations of ideas as these must necessarily have been formed in all their minds, so that there is no possible cause of any difference of opinion on the subject.

Thus far we seem to tread upon firm ground, and every human being, I doubt not, will go along with me. And if they go thus far, I do not see how they can help going one step farther, and acknowledge, that if a *table* or a *chair* must have had a designing cause, capable of comprehending their nature and uses, the *wood*, or the *tree*, of which the table was made, and also the *man* that constructed it, must likewise have had a designing cause, and a cause, or author, capable of comprehending all the

powers and properties of which they are possessed, and therefore of an understanding greatly superior to that of any man, who is very far, indeed, from comprehending his own frame ; being obliged to study it, and make discoveries concerning it by degrees, as he does with respect to other things most foreign to himself, in the general system of nature. And of the nature of the immediate *perceptive power* itself, it is no more possible that he should have any idea, than that an eye should see itself.

This reasoning, wherever it may lead us, I do not see how we can possibly refuse to follow, because it is exactly the same that we set out with, arising from our own *immediate experience*. No person will say that one table might make another, or that one man might make another. Nothing that man does approaches to it. And if no man now living could do this, neither could any man's father, or most remote ancestor ; because we see no such difference in any beings of the same species. Though, therefore, it should even be allowed, that *the species* had no beginning,

ginning, it would not follow that it could be *the cause of itself*, or that it had *no cause*; for the idea of a cause of any thing implies not only something prior to itself, or at least cotemporary with itself, but something capable at least of comprehending what it produces; and our going back ever so far in the generations of men or animals brings us no nearer to the least degree of satisfaction on the subject. After thinking in this train ever so long, we find we might just as well suppose that any individual man now living was the first, and without cause, as either any of his ancestors, or *the species itself*. For that there is such a contrivance in the structure of a man's body, and especially something so wonderful in the faculties of his mind, as exceeds the comprehension of *man*, cannot be denied.

For the same reason that the human species must have had a designing cause, all the species of brute animals, and the *world* to which they belong, and with which they make but *one system*, and indeed all the *visible universe*

universe (which, as far as we can judge, bears all the marks of being *one work*) must have had a cause, or author, possessed of what we may justly call *infinite power and intelligence*. For, in our endeavours to form an idea of something actually infinite, we shall fall greatly short of an idea of such intelligence as must belong to the author of the system.

It follows, therefore, from the most irresistible evidence, that the world must have had a designing cause, distinct from, and superior to itself. This conclusion follows from the strongest analogies possible. It rests on our own constant experience; and we may just as well say, that a *table* had not a designing cause, or no cause distinct from itself, as that the *world*, or the *universe*, considered as one system, had none. This necessary cause we call *God*, whatever other attributes he be possessed of.

Whatever difficulties we may meet with as we proceed, *so far* we must go, if we advance even the first step; and not to admit the first step, that is, not to admit that such
a thing

a thing as a *table* had a prior and superior cause, would be universally judged to proceed from some very uncommon disorder in the mental faculties, and to be incompatible with a sound state of mind.

I shall, in my next, proceed to consider the difficulties that have been started on this subject by metaphysical writers; and whether I be able to do it to your satisfaction or not, I will, at least, do it with all possible fairness. In the mean time,

I am, &c.

L E T T E R III.

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

DEAR SIR,

HITHERTO we have met with nothing that deserves to be called a *difficulty* in the proof of the being of a God; and if nothing more could be advanced on the subject,
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it would, I think, justify us in refusing to attend to any thing that could be said by way of *objection*; because so far we have what is fully equivalent to a *demonstration* of the existence of a primary intelligent cause. I shall now, however, proceed to the consideration of the principal difficulties that have been started on the subject.

The first in importance is, that, for the same reason that the universe requires an intelligent cause, that intelligent cause must require a superior intelligent cause, and so on *ad infinitum*, which is manifestly absurd. We may just as well, therefore, it is alledged, acquiesce in saying, in the first instance, that the universe had no cause, as proceed to say that the cause of the universe had none.

I answer, that to acquiesce in saying that the universe had no cause is, for the reasons that have been given already, absolutely *impossible*, whatever be the consequence. If, therefore, there be ever so little less difficulty on the other side of the dilemma, viz. that the cause of the universe had no cause, it is to that that we must incline.

Let

Let us see then whether there be any other supposition, which, though it be a *difficulty*, or *incomprehensible* by us, does not directly contradict our experience, or whether by some independent argument it may not be proved, that, incomprehensible as it is, there *must* have been an *uncaused intelligent being*.

Both these things have, in fact, been done before; but I shall here repeat them with illustrations, adapted to this particular difficulty; and, in order to this, I shall resume the argument in the following different manner.

Something must have existed from all eternity, for otherwise nothing could have existed at present. This is too evident to need illustration. But this *original Being*, as we may call it, could not have been such a thing as a table, an animal, or a man, or any *Being incapable of comprehending itself*, for such a one would require a prior, or superior author. The original Being, therefore, must have had this prerogative, as well as have been necessarily *uncaused*.

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It is not improper to call a Being incapable of comprehending itself *finite*, and a Being originally and necessarily capable of it *infinite*; for we can have no idea of any bounds to such knowledge or power; and, using the words in this sense, we may, perhaps, be authorised to say; that, though a finite Being must have a cause, an infinite one does not require it. Though it is acknowledged that these conclusions are above our comprehension, they are such as, by the plainest and the most cogent train of reasoning, we have been *compelled* into; and therefore, though, on account of the finiteness of our understanding, it may be said to be *above* our reason, to comprehend *how* this original Being, and the cause of all other Beings, should be himself uncaused, it is a conclusion by no means properly *contrary* to reason. Indeed, what the universally established mode of reasoning, founded on our own immediate experience, obliges us to conclude, can never be said to be contrary to reason, how *incomprehensible* so ever it may be by our reason.

That

That there actually is an *uncaused intelligent Being* is a necessary conclusion from what does actually exist; for a series of finite causes cannot possibly be carried back *ad infinitum*, each being supposed capable of comprehending its own effects, but not itself. Since, therefore, an universe, bearing innumerable marks of most exquisite design, *does exist*, and it would be absurd to go back through an infinite succession of finite causes, we *must* at last acquiesce in the idea of an uncaused intelligent cause of this universe, and of all the intermediate finite causes, be they ever so many.

* On this side there is only a *difficulty of conceiving*, but nothing *contrary to our experience*, and there is plainly no other choice left us. Our experience relates only to such things as are incapable of comprehending themselves, or finite, and therefore require a cause. Consequently, though this experience furnishes a sufficient analogy for judging concerning all other things which have the *same property*, it by no means furnishes any analogy by which to judge concerning what is
totally

totally different from any thing to which our experience extends ; things not finite, but infinite, not destitute of original self-comprehension, but possessed of it. Here is so great a difference, that as the one must necessarily be *caused*, the other may be necessarily *uncaused*.

Though nothing can properly help our conception in a case so much above the reach of our faculties, it may not be amiss to have recourse to any thing in the least degree similar, though equally incomprehensible, as it may make it easier to us to acquiesce in our necessary want of comprehension on the subject. Now, in some respects, the idea of *space*, though not intelligent, and therefore incapable of self comprehension, and no cause of any thing, is similar to that of the intelligent cause of all things, in that it is necessarily *infinite*, and *uncaused*. For the ideas of the creation, or of the annihilation of space, are equally inadmissible. Though we may in our imagination, exclude from existence every thing else, still the idea of *space* will remain. We cannot, even in idea, suppose
it

it not to *have been*, not to be *infinite*, or not to be *uncaused*. Now it may be, in fact, as impossible that an *intelligent infinite Being* should not exist, as that *infinite space* should not exist, though we are necessarily incapable of perceiving that it *must* be so.

If it be said that space is properly nothing at all, I answer, that space has real properties, as cannot be denied, and I know of no other definition of a *substance*, than that which has properties. Take away all the properties of *any thing*, and nothing will be left; just so also, and no otherwise, nothing will be left of *space* when the properties of length, breadth, and depth, are supposed to be taken away.

Secondly, it may be said, that *a whole* may have properties which the parts have not, as a sound may proceed from the vibration of a string, the component particles of which could not produce any, or as the faculty of thinking may be the result of a certain arrangement of the parts of the brain, which separately have no thought.

E

I answer,

I answer, that it cannot but be that every *whole* must have some properties which do not belong to the *separate parts*, but still, if all the separate parts require a cause, the whole must; and whatever peculiar powers belong to a whole, as such, they must be such as necessarily result from the arrangement of the parts, and the combination of their powers. But no combination or arrangement whatever of *caused Beings* can constitute an *uncaused* one. This affects us like a manifest contradiction.

To say, that the whole universe may have had no cause, when it is acknowledged that each of its parts, separately taken, must have had one, would be the same thing as saying, that a *house* may have had no maker, though the walls, the roof, the windows, the doors, and all the parts of which it consists, must have had one. Such a conclusion, with respect to a house, or the universe, would equally contradict our *constant experience*, and what we may call our *common sense*.

With respect to *thinking*, we only do not see *how* it results from the arrangement of
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matter,

matter, when facts prove that it *does* result from it, the properties of *thinking* and *materiality* being only *different*, not *contrary*; whereas *caused* and *uncaused* are the direct reverse of each other.

Supposing, however, that intelligence *could* result from the present arrangement of such bodies as the sun, the earth, and the other planets, &c. (which, however, is so unlike the uniform composition of a *brain*, that the argument from analogy entirely fails) so that all that is *intellectual* in the universe, should be the necessary result of what is not intellectual in it, and, consequently, there should be what has sometimes been called *a soul of the universe*, the hypothesis is, in fact, that of a Deity, though we ourselves should enter into the composition of it, and there would be a real foundation for religion. But our imagination revolts at the idea, and we are compelled, as the easiest solution of the phenomena, to acquiesce in the belief of an intelligent uncaused being, entirely distinct from the universe of which he is the author.

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Thirdly,

Thirdly, it will be said, that, as all the intelligence that we are acquainted with resides in the brains of men and animals, the Deity, if he be a Being distinct from the universe, and intelligent, must, whatever be his form, have in him something resembling the structure of the brain.

I answer, that the preceding train of reasoning proves the contrary. An uncaused intelligent author of nature, and one that is distinct from it, there must be. This Being, however, is not the object of our senses. Therefore the seat of intelligence, though it be something visible and tangible in us, is not *necessarily* and *universally* so.

Besides, it only follows from the Deity and the human brain being both intelligent, that they must have this in common, and something (if any such thing there be) on which that property depends; but this may not be any thing necessarily connected with what is visible or tangible, or the object of any of our senses. Many things have common properties that are very dissimilar in other respects. If we had known nothing
elastic

elastic besides *steel*, we might have concluded that nothing was elastic but steel, or something equally solid and hard; and yet we find elasticity belong to so rare a substance as *air*, and altogether unlike steel in every other respect. The divine mind, therefore, may be intelligent, in common with the mind of man, and yet not have the visible and tangible properties, or any thing of the *consistence* of the brain.

There are many *powers* in nature, even those by which bodies are acted upon, where nothing is visible; as the power of *gravitation*, and of *repulsion* at a distance from the visible surfaces of bodies. There are even such powers in places occupied by other bodies. Both gravitation and magnetism act through substances interposed between the bodies possessed of them and those on which they act. The divine power, therefore, may penetrate, and fill all space, occupied or unoccupied by other substances, and yet be itself the object of none of our senses. And what do we mean by *substance*, but that in which we suppose powers to reside; so that wherever

powers can exist, what we call the *substance* cannot be excluded, unless we suppose Beings to act where they are not.

Fourthly, it was said by the atheists among the ancients, that the universe might have been formed by the *fortuitous concurrence of atoms*, which had been in motion from all eternity, and therefore must, they say, have been in all possible situations.

But, besides many other improbabilities, which may make it doubtful whether any person was ever really satisfied with the hypothesis, those who advanced it were not philosophers enough to know what *atoms* are. If we have any ideas to words, atoms must mean *solid particles of matter*, that is, masses of matter; which, however small, are perfectly *compact*, and therefore consist of parts that have strong powers of *attraction*. But what reason have we, from experience, to suppose it possible, that these small masses of matter could have these powers without communication *ab extra*?

In what respects could those atoms differ from pieces of wood, stone, or metal, at present;

sent; and is a piece of wood, stone, or metal, capable even of comprehending, much less of communicating its own powers, any more than a magnet? As well, therefore, might a magnet have been originally existent, as any coherent atom, or an atom possessed of the most simple powers whatever. In fact, we may just as well suppose a *man* to have been that originally existent being, as either of them.

Besides, admitting the existence of these original atoms, can we suppose them to have been moved any otherwise than as such bodies are moved at present, that is, by an external force. It is directly repugnant to all our experience to suppose any such thing, and could they be arranged in a manner expressive of the most exquisite design, without a mover possessed of competent intelligence?

Thus far, I flatter myself, I have advanced on sufficiently solid ground, in proving that there must have been an originally intelligent cause of the universe, distinct from the universe itself; or that *there is a God*. In proceeding farther I cannot promise to be always quite so clear, but I will promise to

be *ingenuous*, pursuing such analogies as I am able to find, and no farther than they will naturally lead me.

Whether what I have already advanced will appear as satisfactory to you as it does to me, I cannot tell. If your mind be as unbiassed, as I am willing to hope it is, I think it must make some impresson; for there is a strong natural evidence in favour of the belief of a God, and only something *incomprehensible* to us, but by no means contrary to evidence, or reason, against it. And there is something so pleasing in the idea of a supreme *author*, and consequently, as I shall show, of a supreme *governor* of the world, to virtuous and ingenuous minds, infinitely preferable to the idea of a *blind fate*, and a *fatherless deserted world*, that if the mind was only *in equilibrio* with respect to the argument, it would, in fact, be determined by this bias. A truly ingenuous mind, therefore, will not only decide in favour of the belief of a God, but will so decide with joy.

I am, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R IV.

Of the necessary Attributes of the original Cause of all Things.

DEAR SIR,

IN the preceding Letters I hope I have removed your greatest difficulties with respect to the belief of an *original intelligent cause of the universe*; having proved that, how incomprehensible soever such a Being may be to us, yet that such a Being must necessarily exist. My argument in short was this. There are in the universe innumerable and most evident marks of *design*; and it is directly contrary to all our observation and experience, to suppose that it should have come into being without a cause adequate to it, with respect both to power and intelligence. A Being, therefore, possessed of such power and intelligence *must* exist. If this Being, the immediate maker
of

of the universe, has not existed from all eternity, he must have derived his being and powers from one who has; and this *originally existent and intelligent Being*, which the actual existence of the universe compels us to come to at last, is the Being that we call *God*.

It is of no avail to say, that we have no *conception* concerning the original existence of such a Being, for our having *no idea at all* of any thing implies no impossibility, or contradiction whatever. This is *not* ignorance, and an ignorance which, circumstanced as we are, we can never overcome; and the *actual phenomena* cannot be accounted for without the supposition of such a Being. Incomprehensible as it may be, in ever so many respects, it is an hypothesis that is absolutely necessary to account for evident *facts*. We may, therefore, give what scope we will to our astonishment, and admiration, yet *believe* (if we be guided by demonstrative evidence), *we must*. And it is a belief mixed with joy, as well as with wonder. Let us now consider what may be either necessarily inferred,

or is with the greatest probability implied, in the idea of this *original cause of all things*.

The first observation I would make is, that this Being must be what we term *infinite*; that is, since he is intelligent, there can be no bounds to his intelligence, or he must know all that is capable of being known; and since he is powerful (his works corresponding to what we call effects of power) his power must be infinite, or capable of producing whatever is possible in itself.

Since the reason why we cannot help concluding that a man, or any other Being that we are acquainted with, could not be this originally existent Being, is the *limitation* of his knowledge and power (not being capable even of comprehending any thing equal to himself) and since this must have been the case with respect to any other Being, how great so ever, who had not this self-comprehension, the originally existing Being must necessarily have this power. A Being perfectly comprehending himself and every thing else cannot have knowledge less than what may, in one sense at least, be termed
infinite,

infinite, for it comprehends *every thing* that exists. Admitting this, we cannot suppose that it does not likewise extend to every thing that *necessarily follows* from all that actually exists; and after this, we shall not know how to suppose that he should not be able to know what would be the result of any *possible* existence, for we cannot think this to be more difficult than the former.

Besides, in pursuance, in some measure, of this argument, we cannot help concluding, that a power capable of producing all that actually exists (so immense and wonderful, is what is known of the system of the universe) must be equal to any effect that is *possible in itself*. At least, if this inference be not strictly *necessary*, yet, having been compelled to admit the existence of a power so far exceeding all that we can comprehend, and all that we can imagine, when we even strain our conceptions to form an idea of infinite, we can see no reason why it should not be actually and strictly so.

Nay, having arrived at the knowledge of a Being who must have the power of self-

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comprehension, and also that of producing all that exists, we seem to require some external positive *cause of limitation* to his knowledge and power; which external positive cause we look for in vain. We therefore cannot feel the least reluctance in acquiescing in the belief that the original author of all things is infinite in knowledge and power. Having proved him to be capable of knowing and doing *so much*, we should, from a natural analogy, even revolt at the idea of his not being able to know and to do even *more*, if more were possible. This persuasion we arrive at by pursuing the most natural train of reasoning, and the most obvious deductions from the premises before us; so that any other inferences would be *unnatural*. We need not scruple, therefore, to consider it as an undoubted truth, however exceeding our comprehension, and therefore our power of *proper demonstration*, that God, the originally existing Being, or the first cause of all things, is a Being of strictly infinite power and knowledge.

Secondly,

Secondly, he must be *omnipresent*, or occupy all space, though this attribute is equally incomprehensible by us with the infinite extent of his power or knowledge.

That God must be present to all his works is a necessary conclusion; while we all admit that no power can act but where it is. Besides, existing, as he does, without any foreign cause, by what we call (though inaccurately, as all our language on this subject must be) *a natural necessity*, there can be no reason why he should exist in one place and not in another. He must, therefore, exist equally in all places, even through the boundless extent of infinite space, an idea just as incomprehensible, as his necessary existence, but not more so. After this, the probability will be, that his *works*, as well as *himself*, occupy the whole extent of space, infinite as it must necessarily be, and that as *he* could have had no beginning, so neither had *his works*.

Having been obliged to admit so much that is altogether incomprehensible by us, it is by an easy chain of consequences that we
come

come to these farther conclusions, which are not more incomprehensible than the former. Nay, if the universe had bounds, we should, if we reflect on the subject, be apt to wonder at those bounds, as much as we should wonder at any limitation to the knowledge of a Being who has the inconceivable power of self-comprehension, or at the limitation of his power, who has produced the universe.

Again, that a Being, infinitely intelligent and infinitely powerful, should remain inactive a whole eternity, which must have been the case if the creation had any beginning at all, is also an idea that we can never reconcile ourselves to. An eternal creation, being the act of an eternal Being, is not at all more incomprehensible than the eternal existence of that Being himself. Both are incomprehensible, but the one is the most natural consequence of the other. In fact, there is no greater objection to the supposition of the *creation* having been eternal, than to *duration itself* having been eternal; for there cannot be any assignable or imaginable

ginable period in duration, in which the creation might not have taken place*.

Thirdly, that this infinite Being, who has existed without change, must continue to exist without change to eternity, is likewise a conclusion that we cannot help drawing, though, the subject being incomprehensible, we may not be able to complete the demonstration. It is, however, little, if at all, short of the force of a demonstration, that the same *natural necessity* by which he always has existed, must, of course, prevent any change whatever. Besides, if any cause of change had existed, it must have operated in a whole eternity that is already past. We should also naturally conclude that, as no Being could *make* himself (since that would imply that he existed, and did not exist, at the same time) so neither can any being *unmake*, or materially change, at least not *annihilate* himself; and, being omnipotent, no

* This opinion of the infinity and eternity of the works of an infinite and eternal deity, though it seems to me to be the most probable, is by no means a necessary part of the system of natural religion. The belief of the existence of a God, and of a providence, may very well be held without it.

other

other Being, especially none that he himself has produced (and in reality there cannot be any other) can be supposed capable of producing any change in him. Whatever, therefore, the supreme Being is, and always has been, he ever must be.

Fourthly. There cannot be more than *one* such Being as this. Though this proposition may not be strictly demonstrable by us, it is a supposition more natural than any other, and it perfectly harmonizes with what has been strictly proved, and deduced already. Nay, there seems to be something hardly distinguishable from a contradiction in the supposition of there being *two infinite Beings of the same kind*, since, in idea, they would perfectly *coincide*. We clearly perceive that there cannot be two *infinite spaces*, and since the analogy between this infinite unintelligent Being, as we may call it, and the infinite intelligent one, has been seen to be pretty remarkable in one instance, it may be equally strict here; so that, were our faculties equal to the subject, and had we proper *data*, I think we should expect to

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perceive,

perceive, that there could no more be two infinite intelligent and omnipresent Beings, than there can be two infinite spaces.

Indeed, their being *numerically two* would, in some measure, limit one another, so that, by the reasoning we have hitherto followed, neither of them could be the originally existent Being. Supposing them to be equally omnipotent, and that one of them should intend to do, and the other to undo, the same thing, their power would be equally balanced; and if their intentions always coincided, and they equally filled all space, they would be as much, and to all intents and purposes, *one and the same Being*, as the coincidence of two infinite spaces would make but one infinite space.

I appeal to yourself, whether, after having admitted what the *actual phenomena* of nature compel us to admit, we could, without a real difficulty, and a manifest incongruity in our mode of reasoning, stop in any part of the progress through which I have now led you, whether every succeeding step has been a strictly necessary consequence of the preceding,

preceding, or not. Nay, the inferences have been so natural, that we cannot help suspecting that it is owing to the imperfection of our faculties, and our necessarily imperfect knowledge of the subject, that we do not *see* the inferences to be perfectly strict and conclusive.

We can hardly doubt but that a Being of infinite knowledge must clearly comprehend them all ; that such a Being must be able to perceive both that, independently of every thing else actually existing, *he himself* could not but have existed, that he could not but have had *infinite knowledge and power*, that he could not have been excluded from any part of even infinite space, that he could not but have acted from all eternity, that he could not be subject to any change, and that there could not be any other Being equal or comparable to himself, or that should not be dependent upon himself. We do not see the necessary connexion of all these properties, and therefore we cannot see *how* any other Being can ; but the case is such,

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that we cannot help suspecting that it is owing to our imperfection that we are not able to do it.

If you say that I have bewildered and confounded you with these speculations, you must, however, acknowledge, that it has been in consequence of following the best lights the subject could afford us ; and that to have come to any other conclusions we must, in all cases, have taken a less probability instead of a greater, and something less instead of something more, consonant to what we were, from the first, compelled by the plainest phenomena to admit.

You will please, however, to observe that, in all this, I do not pretend to prove *a priori* that, without any regard to the supposition of an external world, there must have been what may be called a *self-existent Being* ; but only that, having first proved, from the phenomena of nature, that there must have been an eternally existing intelligent Being, we cannot help concluding (at least according to the strongest probabilities) that, in
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consequence of being *originally existing*, and the intelligent cause of all things, he must be infinitely knowing and powerful, fill infinite space, and have no equal.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R V.

The Evidence for the GENERAL BENEVOLENCE of the Deity.

DEAR SIR,

I Flatter myself that, in the preceding Letters, I have removed, or at least have lessened, your difficulties relating to the arguments for the being and primary attributes of the Deity. It is true that I have led you into the region of *infinities* and *incomprehensibles*; but then *reason* herself conducted us thither, and we did not lose sight of her while we were there. Among infi-

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nites there are analogies peculiar to themselves, and those who cannot form an adequate idea of any thing infinite, may yet judge of those *analogies*, as well as of those of finites. Infinites frequently occur in geometrical and algebraical investigations, and yet the most clear and undeniable consequences may be drawn from them.

The phenomena of nature prove that there must have been some *originally existent Being*, and of such a nature, that it could not derive its existence and powers from any thing prior to it. Consequently, it could not be any thing of a finite nature, such as plants, or animals, or any thing that we see here ; for these, not being able even to comprehend their own constitution, must necessarily have derived it from some Being of superior knowledge and power ; and the idea of the degree of knowledge and power requisite to form such a system as this, of which we are a part, cannot be distinguished from that of *infinite*. Indeed, had it been, in any respect, finite, it would only have been in the condition of a plant, or an animal, of a more
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perfect kind, and therefore, like them, would have required a superior cause. The evident probability therefore is, that the original intelligent cause of all things, and who must necessarily have been *uncaused*, is, in the strictest sense of the word, *infinite* in knowledge and power; as, for reasons that have been given, he must likewise be infinite in duration, and extension, or commensurate with all time, and all space. And though we are utterly at a loss to conceive *how* so great a Being as this should himself require no cause, it is even demonstrable both that such a Being *doth* exist, and that he *could not* have any cause, and therefore, we *must* acquiesce in our inability of having any ideas on the subject.

This case is, however, evidently different from that of all finite Beings, all of which necessarily require a cause; and, though we cannot conceive it, the reason why this great Being requires none, may be *his being infinite*; just as space must necessarily have existed, and have been infinite, and without any cause whatever. A difficulty in con-

ceiving *how* a thing can be is no proof of its impossibility; and indeed there cannot be a clearer instance of it than the present. For nothing can be more evident than that such Beings as plants and animals must have had a superior cause; nothing also can be more evident than that they could not have proceeded from each other by succession from all eternity; and therefore nothing can be more evident, than that the primary cause of all these things must himself have existed from all eternity, without any thing prior, or superior to him, notwithstanding our utter inability to conceive *how* all this should be.

Since it is evident, from the innumerable marks of design through the whole system of nature, that the author of it is intelligent, and, consequently, had some *end* in view in what he did, let us, in the next place, inquire what this end probably was; and I flatter myself that, instead of meeting with more difficulties in this part of our inquiry, as has often been represented, we shall, in reality, meet with fewer than we have had before;

before ; and here analogy, founded on established associations of ideas, is our only guide.

Means and *ends* are perpetually occurring to our observation. Hence no habit is more fixed than that of distinguishing them, and of perceiving the relation they bear to each other. We hardly ever see the hand of man without perceiving marks of design, and they are not less evident in the works of God. That the *eye* was made for seeing, that is, perceiving the form and colour of remote objects, and the *ear* for hearing, or perceiving the sounds made by them, is no less evident than that the *pen* and the *ink* with which I write were made and provided for the purpose of writing.

We are likewise just as able, in many cases, to distinguish a *perfection* from a *defect* in the works of *nature*, as in those of *art*. For the analogy is so great, that we cannot help applying these terms to them, and reasoning in the same manner concerning them. If I go into a mill, and see every wheel in motion, and going with as little friction and noise as possible,

possible, I conclude that every thing is as the maker intended it, and that the machine is complete in its kind, answering the end for which it was made. But if I see a pinion break, and the motion of the machine in part obstructed by it, I immediately conclude that this was not intended by the maker, since it must contribute to unfit the machine for its proper functions.

In like manner, judging of the works of God as I do concerning those of man, when I see a plant in its vigour, and an animal of its proper size and form, healthy, and strong, I conclude that these are as they were intended to be, and that they are fitted to answer the end of their creation, whatever that was. These, therefore, I attend to, and not to trees that are blighted, or animals that are maimed and diseased, when I wish to form a right judgment of the design of their maker. And indeed, we do see that, in general, plants and animals are, to a considerable degree, healthy, and that the sickly and diseased among them, are exceptions to the general observation.

Now,

Now, what is health, but a state of *enjoyment* in beings capable of it, and what is *disease*, but a diminution of enjoyment, if not a state of actual *pain*. Since, then, the obvious design of the animal economy was *health*, and not *sickness*, is it not evident that the intention of their maker must have been their *happiness*, not their *misery*? I do not know any conclusion more obvious, or more satisfactory than this. What the supreme Author of all things may *farther intend* by the happiness of his creatures, whether a gratification to *himself*, or whether it proceeds from a disinterested regard to *them*, I cannot pretend to judge; but that the happiness of the creation was intended by the author of it, is just as evident as that the design of the millwright was that the wheels of his machine should keep in motion, and not that they should be obstructed.

If, notwithstanding this obvious design, deduced from the consideration of the animal economy, any of them, or all of them, should not be found in a state of actual health and enjoyment, I should rather infer that
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their author had missed of his aim, and was disappointed in what he had in view, than imagine he had not *intended* their health and their happiness: as though I should find that all the mills in my neighbourhood stood still, and could not be kept in motion, I should be still satisfied, from their construction, that they were intended to keep in motion, but that the artificer had been disappointed in his object. However, in nature, it is a fact that a state of health (that is tolerable, though not perfect health) is general, and a state of sickness comparatively rare. Upon the whole, therefore, the creation is happy, though not perfectly so; and the obvious end of the creation is, in fact, in a great measure, answered.

It is another argument for the benevolence of the Deity that many, and perhaps all pains and evils (the causes of pain) tend to check and exterminate themselves; whereas pleasures extend and propagate themselves, and that without limits.

Pain itself is an affection of sentient Beings. Now, all sentient Beings that we
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are acquainted with (in whatever manner that effect is produced) endeavour to shun pains and procure pleasures, and all the known causes of them. And as our knowledge and power, in this respect, advance with our experience, nothing is wanting to enable us to exterminate all pain, and to attain to complete happiness, but a continuance of being.

Mental pains do as certainly tend to check and exterminate themselves as the corporeal ones. For the sensations of shame and remorse always lead us to avoid whatever it be in our conduct that has exposed us to them ; and the satisfaction we feel from having acquitted ourselves with integrity and honour, does likewise encourage us to act the part that will best secure the continuance of that most valuable species of human felicity.

Where volition is not concerned (though the laws of volition are as much as any thing else in the system of nature the laws of God) and mere mechanism takes place, it is acknowledged by physicians that all diseases are the effort of nature to remove some obstruction,

struction, something that impedes the animal functions, and thereby to defer the hour of dissolution, and to recover a state of more perfect health and enjoyment; so that nothing is wanting to the removal of all this class of evils, but a perfect *conformation* and sufficient *strength* of those parts of the animal frame in which the disorder is seated, with sufficient *time* for them to discharge their proper functions. But the intention of nature, that is, of the God of nature, who works by general laws (in which, of course, there are many exceptions) is the same whether the animal survive the struggle, which is generally the case, or whether it sinks under it. A hundred diseases terminate favourably for one that is fatal. Every cold is the beginning of a fever, but very seldom proceeds so far as to receive so alarming an appellation.

If we look into the external world, we shall see equal reason to be thankful for cold weather, storms, and tempests, with every thing else that we sometimes complain of, as far as we are able to understand their
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real tendency, and ultimate effects. And they are not only less evils in lieu of greater, but also (like the disorders to which the animal frame is subject) tend to remove some obstruction, and to diffuse more equally either the *electric matter*, or something else, the equal distribution of which is requisite to the good condition of the world.

If we consider *man*, the most important object in this part of the creation, we must consider corporeal pleasures as being of the least consequence to his happiness, because intellectual gratifications are evidently of unspeakably more value to him. Man enjoys the time past and future as well as the present; and, in general, mankind are tolerably happy in this respect, deriving more pleasure than pain from *reflection*. Man always hopes for the best; and even past labour and pain is generally pleasing in recollection, so that whether he looks backwards or forwards, his views are upon the whole pleasing.

If we consider man in a moral respect, we shall find that for one man who really suffers from remorse of conscience, numbers think

so well of themselves, and of their conduct, that it gives them pleasure to reflect upon it; and, in fact, acts of kindness and benevolence far exceed those of cruelty; and in all respects *moderation* (which is the standard of virtue) is much more common than *excess*; and indeed if it was not so, excess would not be so much noticed, and censured as it is. Upon the whole, virtue seems to bear the same proportion to vice, that happiness does to misery, or health to sickness, in the world.

Besides, to judge of the intention of the Creator, we should not only consider the actual state of things, but take in as much as we can of the *tendencies* of things in future. Now, it requires but little judgment to see that the world is in a state of *melioration*, in a variety of respects; and for the same reason, it will probably continue to improve, and perhaps without limits; so that our posterity have a much better prospect before them than we have had.

A great proportion of the misery of man is owing to *ignorance*, and it cannot be denied

nied that the world grows wiser every day. Physicians and surgeons know how much less men suffer now than they did in similar cases formerly, owing to improvements in the science of medicine, and in surgical operations. To read of the methods of the ancients with respect to the stone in the bladder, is enough to fill one with horror. It was not till the time of Celsus that the practice of extracting the stone was known; and till of late years in comparison, it was not expected that one in twenty of those who submitted to the operation would recover; whereas it is now a tolerably safe operation; and besides, we are not without the hope of discovering methods of dissolving the stone, without pain, in the bladder. This is only one of many instances of improvements that lessen the sufferings of mankind. This skill is indeed in a manner confined to Europeans, but these occupy a considerable part of the globe, and the knowledge of Europeans will, no doubt, gradually extend over the whole world.

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Civiliza-

Civilization and good government have made great advances in Europe, and by means of this men live in a state of much greater security and happiness; and even the intercourse between distant places, and distant countries, is both safe and pleasurable; whereas in former times, this intercourse was hardly practicable. Let any person read of the state of Italy, and that of the continent of Europe in general, in the times of Petrarch, and he will be satisfied that the present state of things is a paradise in comparison with it.

War is unspeakably less dreadful than formerly, though it is a great evil still; and as true political knowledge advances, and the advantages of *commerce*, which supposes a peaceable intercourse, are more experienced, it is fairly to be presumed, that wars will not fail to be less frequent, as well as less sanguinary; so that societies of men, as well as families and individuals, will find it to be their common interest to be good neighbours, and national jealousy will give place to national generosity.

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The progress of knowledge, and other causes, have greatly improved the spirit of the various *religions* that have prevailed in the world. Those peculiarly horrid modes of religion which enjoined human sacrifices, as well as many abominable practices, have been long extinct; and persecution to death for conscience sake, by which the world suffered so much under the Pagan Roman emperors, and even the philosophical and mild Marcus Aurelius, as well as in the days of Papal tyranny, and under other ecclesiastical hierarchies, we have reason to think, will hardly ever be revived; the folly as well as the cruelty of these practices is so generally acknowledged. In consequence of this greater liberty of speculating upon all subjects, truth has a much fairer chance of prevailing in the world; and the knowledge and general spread of truth cannot fail to be attended with a great variety of advantages, favourable to the virtue and happiness of mankind.

We have no occasion to consider by what particular *means* these advantages have ac-

crued to mankind : for whatever the *secondary causes* may have been, they could not have operated without the kind provision of the first and proper cause of all ; and therefore, they are to be considered as arguments of his benevolence, or of the preference that he gives to happiness before misery.

Upon the whole, the evidence for the *general benevolence* of the deity seems to be abundantly satisfactory, and all that can be objected on this subject is to the *infinite extent* of it. And yet it should seem, that there can be no bounds to an affection that has been proved to be *real*. Why the Divine Being should love his creatures *to a certain degree*, and no more, why he should intend them a certain portion of happiness, and not a greater, is a question that cannot easily be answered. The probability, that an affection unquestionably real is actually unbounded, disposes us to inquire whether, notwithstanding appearances, this may not be the case here. And, though we cannot prove the strict infinity of the divine benevolence, or give so much evidence for it as

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we can for that of his power and knowledge; yet the probability will, I think, appear to be in favour of it, if we sufficiently attend to the considerations that I shall urge in my next.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R VI.

Arguments for the infinite Benevolence of the Deity.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING shown, in my last letter, that the supreme cause of all things must be possessed of at least *general benevolence*, in this I shall endeavour to shew that, notwithstanding some seemingly contrary appearances, this benevolence *may*, in a sufficiently proper sense, be considered as *infinite*. For this purpose I would wish you to attend to the following considerations.

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First.

First. That any *dependent Being* should be at all times infinitely happy, must necessarily be impossible; for such a Being must be infinitely knowing and powerful, that is, in fact, equal to the divine Being himself. The happiness of every individual must, therefore, necessarily be *limited*, either in *degree*, or by a *mixture of unhappiness*; and whether this necessary limitation is best made in one way or the other, can only be determined by the deity himself. However, the method of limitation by a *mixture of pain* will not, I dare say, appear uneligible to persons of competent judgment.

It is even a common thing in human life to prefer this *variety*, rather than an unvaried degree of *moderate enjoyment*. This mode of limitation being supposed preferable, nothing remains to be censured, but the *degree* of misery proper, or necessary, to be mixed with any proportion of happiness, and the *time*, and other *circumstances*, of the introduction of this misery. And in this no person, surely, will pretend to dictate to a
Being

Being of infinite wisdom, whose general benevolence is unquestionable. No objection of this kind, therefore, can deserve any reply.

In these respects, however, the probability *a priori*, in general at least, is in favour of what we see actually to take place; so that it is a fair presumption, that, as our experience advances, we shall see more and more reason to be satisfied with the dispensations of providence. Because, in general, we perceive a *gradation* in every thing from worse to better, which is a circumstance highly favourable to happiness, as it encourages *hope*, which is itself a principal ingredient in human happiness.

Several improvements in the state of the world in general have been mentioned already, and the like is no less manifest in the case of individuals; the sufferings of our infant state exceeding those that we meet with afterwards, all things considered. Supposing a state of health, and competent subsistence for all, which (being the evident in-

tion of nature) must here be supposed, our enjoyments are continually increasing in real value from infancy to old age. Let a child have the most perfect health, it is impossible to educate him in a proper manner, so as to lay a foundation for his own future happiness, without subjecting him to many disappointments and mortifications, with respect to which no satisfactory account can be given *him*, so as to make him acquiesce under them. Whereas, besides that the pursuits and enjoyments of manhood are in themselves greatly superior to those of childhood, we acquire by experience such a *comprehension of mind*, as enables us to bear without murmuring the evils that fall to our lot; and as this comprehension of mind extends itself every day, supposing what here must also be supposed (as being within the intention of nature) a rational and virtuous life, our stock of intellectual enjoyments is augmenting continually, so that the most desirable part of a well-spent life is *old age*. And it is evidently and highly so, provided
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that, together with health, a man enjoys what is also the intention of nature, the society of a rising and promising family.

The peculiar satisfaction with which a christian shuts his eyes on the world, will not, perhaps, be thought a proper article in this account ; though, whether these hopes be well or ill founded, they are *actually enjoyed* by great numbers of the human race ; and, together with every thing else that actually takes place, must have been intended for us in this life. However, I am well satisfied that a properly natural death, or death occasioned by the mere exhausting (as we may term it) of the vital powers, in a sufficient length of time, provided no superstitious fears accompany it, is not attended with aversion or pain.

Perhaps no part of the general system will appear at first sight more liable to objection than this circumstance of *death*, and the train of diseases that lead to it. But by this means room is made for a *succession of creatures*, of each species, so that the *sum of happiness* is, upon the whole, greater. With respect

respect to man, unless the whole plan of his constitution, and all the laws of his nature, were changed, it is unspeakably more desirable that there should be a succession, than that the same individuals should continue on the stage always. For a new generation learns wisdom from the follies of the old, which would only have grown more inveterate every year. Thus the whole species advances more quickly to maturity; and to the *species*, the obstinacy, and other infirmities of old age, will probably be ever unknown.

Secondly, pain itself, and *as such*, is not without its real use with respect to true happiness; so that, other circumstances (of which we can be no judges) being supposed right, we have reason to be thankful for the pains and distresses to which we are subject. For pain must not be considered only with respect to the moment of sensation, but also as to its future necessary effects; and according to the general law of our nature, admirably explained by Dr. Hartley, the impressions of pain remaining in the mind

fall at length within the limits of pleasure, and contribute most of all to the future enjoyment of life; so that, without this resource, life would necessarily grow insipid and tiresome.

However, without recurring to abstruse considerations, it is well known, that the recollection of past troubles, after a certain interval, becomes highly pleasurable; and it is a pleasure of a very durable kind. It is so generally known to be so, as to furnish an argument for bearing troubles, and making them less felt at the time of their greatest pressure. Thus Æneas, in Virgil, is represented as saying to his companions in distress, *post hæc meminisse juvabit*.

Nothing can be more evident than the use of pain to children. How is it possible to teach them sufficient caution against absolute destruction, by falls, burns, &c. but by the actual feeling of pain from these circumstances. No parent, or any person who has given much attention to children, will say that admonition alone would answer the purpose;

purpose ; whereas greater evils are most effectually prevented, in the admirable plan of nature, by the actual experience of less evils. What is more pungent than the stings of shame and remorse, in consequence of improprieties in conduct, and of vices ? But could prudence and virtue be effectually inculcated by any other means ? No person conversant in the business of education will venture to say that they could.

As the pains and mortifications of our infant state are the natural means of lessening the pains and mortifications of advanced life ; so I made it appear to the satisfaction of Dr. Hartley, in the short correspondence I had with him, that his theory furnishes pretty fair presumptions, that the pains of this life may suffice for the whole of our future existence ; we having now resources enow for a perpetual increase in happiness, without any assistance from the sensation of future pain. This speculation will probably appear before the public in due time, together with other observations relating to

to the extension and application of this wonderfully simple theory of the mental affections.

These considerations appear to me abundantly sufficient to convince us, that even the unlimited benevolence of the author of nature is not affected by the partial evils to which we are subject. But still it will be said, that a Being of pure and perfect benevolence might have obviated this inconvenience, by a different original constitution of nature, in which evils might not have been necessary, not being of any use to us as such.

But, I answer, this is more than we can pretend to say is even *possible*, or within the limits of infinite power itself; and there is this pretty good reason for presuming that it is so, which is, that in present circumstances we always see (wherever we can see enough to be in any measure judges) that the methods that are taken are the best for us, all other things connected with them being considered; and the same *disposition* in our author to provide the best for us in one
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case

case would lead him to provide the best for us in another : so that, if, *cæteris manentibus*, every thing is for the best, we may conclude that the *whole* is for the best ; the disposition of mind to make this provision being the very same in both cases.

Supposing it possible, therefore, for the Divine Being to have created men with all the feelings and ideas that are acquired in the course of a painful and laborious life; since it must have been in violation of all *general laws*, we have reason to conclude that laws, or general methods of acting, are preferable to no laws at all ; and that it is better, upon the whole, that the divine agency should not be so very conspicuous, as it must have been upon the plan of a constant and momentary interference.

It is plain there could be little room for the exercise of *wisdom*, in God or man, if there had been no general laws. For the whole plan of nature, from which we infer design or wisdom, is admirable, chiefly on account of its being a system of wonderfully general and simple laws, so that innumerable
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ends are gained by the fewest means, and the greatest good produced with the least possible evil. And the wisdom and foresight of man could have had no scope, if there had been no invariable plan of nature to be the object of his investigation and study, by which to guide his conduct, and direct his expectations.

In comparison with the solid advantages we derive from the exercise of our faculties on this plan of general laws, how trifling are those that would accrue to us from even the frequent interruption, and much more from the total abrogation of them? What could we gain but that a child falling into the fire should not be burned, or that a man falling from a precipice should not be dashed to pieces? But all the accidents that happen of this kind, and which our reason is given us to enable us to guard against, are surely not to be bought off at such a price as this. How little do we suffer on the whole by accidents from *fire*, compared with the benefits we derive from it; and how much greater gainers are we still on the balance by the great *law of gravitation*.

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The advantage, if not the necessity, of general laws, is best seen in the conduct of a large family, of a school, or of a community; because the good of the whole must be consulted in conjunction with that of each individual; and we often find it to be wise and right to suffer individuals to bring themselves into difficulties, from which we would gladly relieve them, if we had not respect to others who are equally under our care. How often is a favourite child, or pupil, punished, or an useful member of society falsely convicted of a crime, suffered to die, rather than violate general rules, salutary to the whole. Now, as small societies cannot be governed without general rules, and particular inconveniencies; it may, for any thing that we know, be naturally impossible to govern the large society of mankind without such general laws, though attended with particular inconveniencies.

If it be said that the Divine Being might *conceal* his violation of the laws of nature for the benefit of individuals, I answer that those individuals would, without a second interference, lose the benefit they would have derived

derived from their sufferings as such (teaching them caution, &c.) and if the Divine Being did this in all cases, to prevent all evil, there would be no general laws at all; and who can direct him when to interfere, and when not? As to very rare cases, it is possible, though I own not probable (because it would imply a want of foresight in the original plan) that the Divine Being does interfere in this invisible manner.

If we consider the human race as the most valuable of the divine productions on the face of the earth, and intellectual happiness as the most valuable part of his happiness; if the training of men to great elevation of thought, comprehension of mind, virtuous affections, and generous actions, be any object with the great Author of all things (and the good of the whole seems to require that there should be a proportion of such exalted beings) this world, with all its imperfections, as we think them, is perhaps the best possible school in which they could be thus trained. How could we be taught compassion for others, without suffering ourselves, and where

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could the rudiments of the heroic virtues of fortitude, patience, clemency, &c. be acquired but in the school of adversity, in struggling with hardships, and contending with oppression, ingratitude, and other vices, moral evils as well as natural ones ?

If we suppose these truly great minds formed here, as in a *nursery*, for the purpose of future existence, respecting their own happiness, or that of others, the consideration will furnish another argument for the present state of things. What evidence there is of this being the case we shall see hereafter.

Upon the whole, it is very possible, notwithstanding some appearances to the contrary, that the affection of the universal parent to his offspring may be even *boundless*, or, properly speaking, *infinite*; and also that the actual happiness of the whole creation may be considered as infinite, notwithstanding all the partial evil there is in it. For if good prevail upon the whole, the creation being supposed infinite, happiness will be infinitely extended; and in the eye of a being
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of perfect comprehension, such as the Divine Being must be, capable of perceiving the balance of good only, it will be happiness unmixed with misery. Nay, supposing men (and it is of men only that I am now treating) to live for ever, if each be happy upon the whole, and especially if the happiness of each be constantly accelerated, each individual may be said to be infinitely happy in the whole of his existence; so that to the divine comprehension the whole will be happiness *infinito-infinite*. See Dr. Hartley's admirable illustration of this subject, in the second volume of his *Observations on Man*.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R VII.

The Evidence of the moral Government of the World, and the Branches of natural Religion.

DEAR SIR,

IF you will admit that I have proved to your satisfaction that there is a God, a first cause, possessed of infinite power, wis-

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dom and goodness, or only of such degrees of those attributes as, in a popular sense of the word, may be deemed infinite, that is, far exceeding our comprehension, nothing more will be requisite to prove every moral perfection, and that we are under a proper *moral government*.

Justice, mercy, and veracity, with every thing else that is of a *moral nature*, are, in fact, and philosophically considered, only modifications of benevolence. For a Being, simply and truly *benevolent*, will necessarily act according to what are called the rules of *justice, mercy, and veracity*; because in no other way can he promote the good of such moral agents, as are subject to his government. Even *justice* itself, which seems to be the most opposite to goodness, is such a degree of severity, or pains and penalties so inflicted, as will produce the best effect, with respect both to those who are exposed to them, and to others who are under the same government; or, in other words, that degree of evil which is calculated to produce the greatest degree of good; and

and if the punishment exceed this measure, if, in any instance, it be an *unnecessary*, or *useless suffering*, it is always censured as *cruelty*, and is not even called justice, but real injustice.

For the same reason, if, in any particular case, the strict execution of the law would do more harm than good, it is universally agreed that the punishment ought to be remitted, and then what we call *mercy*, or *clemency*, will take place; but it does not deserve the name of clemency, nor is it worthy of commendation as a *virtue*, but it is censured as a *weakness*, or something worse, if it be so circumstanced as to encourage the commission of crimes, and consequently make more suffering necessary in future. In short, a truly good and wise governor frames the whole of his administration with a view to the happiness of his subjects, or he will endeavour to produce the greatest sum of happiness with the least possible mixture of pain or misery.

But you will check me in the course of this argument, and say, that if moral go-

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vernment be the necessary result of benevolence, we ought to perceive some traces of this moral government before we can admit the supreme Being to be benevolent, and that this ought to be the principal argument for his benevolence.

I acknowledge it, but at the same time I must observe that any independent evidence of benevolence, such as I have produced, is a strong proof, *a priori*, that there will be a moral government; because, as I have just shewn, if benevolence be uniform and consistent, it must produce moral government, where moral agents are concerned; so that, having this previous reason to expect a moral government, we ought to suppose that such a government *does* exist, unless there be evident proof of the contrary. Because if this proof be indisputable, it must be concluded that the supreme Being is not benevolent, of which we are supposed to have already other independent evidence.

Now, the mere *delay of punishment*, which is all that we can alledge against the reality of a present moral government, is no evidence

dence against it, so long as the offender is within the reach of justice; because it may be an instance of the wisdom and just discretion of a governor, to give all his subjects a sufficient *trial*, and treat them according to their *general character*, allowing sufficient time in which to form that character, rather than exact an immediate punishment for every particular offence.

It is no uncommon thing with *men* not to punish for the first offence, but to give room for amendment; and it may be the more expected of *God*, whose justice no criminal can finally escape, and whose penetration no artifice can impose upon. Had human magistrates more knowledge, and more power, they might, in that proportion, give greater scope to men to form, and to shew, their characters, by deferring to take cognizance of crimes. It is because criminals may impose upon them by pretences of reformation, or escape from their hands, that it is, in general, wise in them to animadvert upon crimes without much delay, and with few exceptions.

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For any thing that appears, therefore, the present state of the world (notwithstanding, in some respects, *all things fall alike to all*, and a visible distinction is not always made between the righteous and the wicked; and even notwithstanding the wicked may, in some cases, derive an advantage from their vices) may perfectly correspond to such a state of moral government as a Being of infinite wisdom and power would exercise towards mankind. And if this only *may* be the case, any independent evidence of the divine benevolence ought to make us conclude that this *is* the case, and lead us to expect that, at a proper time (of which the Divine Being himself is the only judge) both the righteous and the wicked will meet with their just and full recompence.

But there is not wanting *independent*, and sufficient evidence, of a moral government of the world, similar to the independent evidence of the benevolence of its author. For, notwithstanding what has been admitted above, respecting the promiscuous distribution of happiness and misery in the world,

world, it is unquestionable, that virtue gives a man a better chance for happiness than vice.

What happiness can any man enjoy without *health*, and is not temperance favourable to health, and intemperance the bane of it? What are all the outward advantages of life without *peace of mind*; and whatever be the proximate cause of it, it is a fact, and therefore must have been the intention of our maker, that peace of mind is the natural companion of integrity and honour, and not of fraud and injustice. It is the fruit of benevolence; and of that course of conduct which arises from it, and by no means of malevolence. Do we not also see that a moderate competency, which is much more valuable than riches, is generally the reward of fidelity and industry, and that possessions acquired by dishonest arts are very insecure, if, on other accounts, a man could have any enjoyment of them. What but common observation has given rise to the common proverb, that *honesty is the best policy*?

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The best definition and criterion of virtue is, “ that disposition of mind, and that “ course of conduct arising from it, which “ is best calculated to promote a man’s own “ happiness, and the happiness of others “ with whom he is connected ;” and to prove any thing to be really and ultimately mischievous, is the same thing as to prove it to be vicious and wrong. The rule of temperance is to eat and drink so as to lay a foundation for health, and consequently enjoyment ; and intemperance does not consist in the pleasure we receive from the gratification of our appetites, but in procuring momentary pleasure with future and more lasting pain ; in laying a foundation for diseases, and thereby disqualifying a man for enjoying life himself, or contributing to the happiness of others who are dependent upon him. In the same manner we fix the boundaries of all the vices, and all the virtues. Virtue is, in fact, that which naturally produces the greatest sum of good, and vice is that which produces the greatest sum of evil.

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In short, the virtuous man is he that acts with the greatest wisdom and comprehension of mind, having respect to what is future as well as what is present ; and the vicious man is he that acts with the least just prudence and foresight, catching at present pleasure and advantage, and neglecting what is future, though of more value to him. It cannot, therefore, but be, that virtue must, upon the whole, lead to happiness, and vice to misery ; and since this arises from the constitution of nature, and of the world, it must have been the intention of the author of nature that it should be so.

Also, as from the *general* benevolence of the deity we inferred his *infinite* benevolence, so from his general respect to virtue we may infer his strict and invariable respect to it ; and as it cannot but appear probable that partial evils must be admitted by an all-powerful, and certainly a benevolent Being, because they may be, in a manner unknown to us, connected with, or productive of, good ; so there is an equal probability that, in the administration of a Being of infinite power . and

and wisdom (and certainly a favourer of virtue, as of happiness) all irregularities in the distribution of rewards and punishments are either only seemingly so, or merely temporary; and that, when the whole scheme shall be completed, they will appear to have been proper parts of the most perfect moral administration.

Since then it is a fact, that we are in a state justly intitled to the appellation of *moral government* (this being not only presumed from the consideration of the divine benevolence previously established, but also deduced independently, from actual appearances) there must be a foundation for what may be termed *natural religion*; that is, there is a system of *duty* to which we ought to conform, because there are *rewards and punishments* that we have to expect.

Our duty with respect to *ourselves* and *others* is, in general, sufficiently obvious, because it is, in fact, nothing more than to *feel*, and to *act*, as our own true and ultimate happiness, in conjunction with that of others, requires. With respect to the *Di-*
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vine Being, we must be guided by analogies, which, however, are tolerably distinct.

Thus, if gratitude be due to human benefactors, it must be due in a greater degree to God, from whom we receive unspeakably more than from man; and, in like manner, it must be concluded to be our duty to reverence him, to respect his authority, and to confide in the wisdom and goodness of his providence. For since he made us, it must be evident that we are not beneath his notice and attention; and since all the laws of nature, to which we are subject, are his establishment, nothing that befalls us can be unforeseen, or, consequently, unintended by him. With this persuasion, we must see and respect the hand of God in every thing. And if every thing is as God intended it to be, it is the same thing to us whether this intention was formed the moment immediately preceding any particular event, or from all eternity.

If reverence, gratitude, obedience, and confidence, be our duty with respect to God (which we infer from the analogy of those duties

duties to men) it is agreeable to the same analogy, that we *express* these sentiments in words; and this is done in the most natural manner, agreeably to the same analogy, in a direct *address* to the Author of our being; so that the principles of natural religion, properly pursued, will lead us to *prayer*.

That we should express our reverence for God, our gratitude to him, and our confidence in him, is generally thought reasonable; but it is said that we are not authorised to *ask* any thing of him. But even this is unavoidable; if we follow the analogy above-mentioned. Considering God as our governor, father, guardian, or protector, we cannot resist the impulse to apply to him in our difficulties, as to any other being or person, standing in the same relation to us. Analogy sets aside all distinction in this case; and if the analogy itself be natural, it is itself a part of the constitution of nature, and, therefore, sufficiently authorises whatever is agreeable to it.

It is no objection to the natural duty of prayer to God, that he is supposed to know our

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our wants, and to be the best judge of the propriety of supplying them. For we ourselves may have the same good disposition towards our children, and yet see sufficient reason for insisting upon their personal application to us, as an expression of their obligation, and a necessary means of cultivating a due sense of their relation to us, and dependence upon us.

The idea of every thing being *predetermined* from all eternity, is no objection to prayer, because all *means* are appointed as well as *ends*; and, therefore, if prayer be in itself a proper means, the end to be obtained by it, we may be assured, will not be had without *this*, any more than without any other means, or necessary previous circumstances. No man will refrain from plowing his ground because God foresees whether he will have a harvest or not. It is sufficient for us to know that there never has been, and therefore probably never will be, any harvest without previous plowing. Knowing this, if we only have the desire of harvest,

plowing

plowing the ground, and every thing else that we know to be previously necessary to it, and to be *within our power*, will be done by us of course.

It is possible, however, that were we as perfect as our nature and state will admit, having acquired all the comprehension of mind to which we can ever attain, and having a steady belief in the infinite wisdom, power, and goodness of God, with a constant sense of his presence with us, and unremitting attention to us, our devotion might be nothing more than a deep *reverence* and joyful *confidence*, persuaded that all the divine dispensals were right and kind; and in their calmer moments very excellent and good men *do* approach to this state. They feel no occasion to *ask* for any thing, because they feel *no want* of any thing. But the generality of mankind always, and the best of men not possessing themselves at all times with equal tranquility, must, and will, acquiesce in a devotion of a less perfect form. And the Divine Being, knowing this imperfect state
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of our nature, must *mean* that we should act agreeably to it, and *require* of us expressions of devotion adapted to our imperfect state.

This progress is also agreeable to the analogy of nature: for when our children are fully possessed of that affection for us, and confidence in us, which was the object and end of any formal prescribed mode of address, &c. we do not insist upon the *form*. We are then satisfied with their experienced attachment to us, and make them equally the objects of our kind attention, whether they apply to us in form for what they want, or not.

In all this, you see, we must content ourselves with following the best analogies we can find, and those are clearly in favour of a *duty to God*, as well as to man, and for the same reason, a duty and a behaviour similar to that which we acknowledge to be due to our parents, guardians, and friends, but differing in proportion to the infinite superiority of the supreme Being to every inferior Being, and the infinitely greater magnitude of our obligations to him. Let us now see

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whether there be any analogy, from the common course of nature, that can give us any insight into the *extent* and *duration* of the system of moral government under which we manifestly are. But this I shall reserve for the subject of another letter. In the mean time,

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

L E T T E R V I I I .

*Of the Evidence for the future Existence of
Man.*

DEAR SIR,

I Have already observed that benevolence, once proved to be *real*, can hardly be conceived to be other than *boundless*; and this must be more especially the case with the Supreme Being, who can have no rival, or be jealous of any Being whatever. Such
Beings

Beings as *we* are may really wish well to others, and yet may wish them only a *certain degree* of happiness; but then the desire of that limitation will be found, if it be examined, to be occasioned by something peculiar to our situation, as limited and imperfect Beings, and what can have no place with the Deity. His benevolence, if real, must, as we should think, be boundless. He must, therefore, wish the greatest good of his creation, and the limitation to the present *actual happiness* of the universe must arise from *perfection of happiness* being incompatible with the nature of created, and, consequently, finite Beings, and with that mixture of pain, which ~~may~~ be really necessary, according to the best possible general constitution of nature, to promote this happiness.

But pain, we have seen, tends to limit and exclude itself, and things are evidently in a progress to a better state. There is some reason, therefore, to expect that this *melioration* will go on without limits. And as exact and equal government arises from perfect benevolence (and even, independent of

the arguments for benevolence, does take place in some degree) we cannot, as it should seem, but be led by this analogy to expect a more perfect retribution than we see to take place here, and, consequently, to look for a state where moral agents will find more exact rewards for virtue, and more ample punishments for vice than they meet with in this world. I do not say that the argument from these analogies is so strong as to produce a *confident expectation* of such a future state; but it certainly, in fact, produces a *wish* for it; and this wish itself, being produced by the analogy of nature, is some evidence of the thing wished for.

Other analogies, it is acknowledged, tend to damp this expectation. We see that men, whose powers of perception and thought depend upon the organized state of the brain, decay and die, exactly like plants, or the inferior animals, and we see no instance of any revival. But still, while there exists in nature a power unquestionably equal to their revival (for it is the power that actually brought them into being at first) the former analogies

analogies may lead us to look for this future state of more exact retribution, to which we see something like a reference in this, and for a more copious display of the divine goodness, even beyond the grave.

On some, especially on persons conscious of great integrity, and of great sufferings in consequence of it, these analogies will make a greater impression, will produce a more earnest *longing*, and, consequently, a stronger *faith*, than others will have; and the same persons will, for the same reason, be affected by them differently at different times. This fluctuation, and degree of uncertainty, must make every rational Being, and especially every good man, who rejoices in what he sees of the works and government of God, earnestly long for farther information on this most interesting subject; and this farther information we may perhaps find the universal father has actually given us.

I think it of some importance to observe, that the degree of moral government under which we are (the constitution of nature evidently favouring a course of virtue, and

frowning upon a course of vice) is a *fact* independent of all reasoning concerning the existence of God himself, and, therefore, ought to determine the conduct of those who are not satisfied with respect to the proof of the being and attributes of God, and even of those who are properly *atheists*, believing that nothing exists besides the world, or the universe, of which we ourselves are a part.

Whether there be any *author of nature*, or not, there cannot be any doubt of there being *an established course of nature*; and an atheist must believe it to be the more firmly established, and see less prospect of any change, from acknowledging no superior Being capable of producing that change. If, therefore, the course of nature be actually in favour of virtue, it must be the interest and wisdom of every human Being to be virtuous. And farther, if it be agreeable to the analogy of nature, independent of any consideration of the author of it, that things are in an improving state, and, consequently, that there is a tendency to a more exact
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and equal retribution, it must produce an expectation that this course of nature will *go on* to favour virtue still more; and, therefore, it may be within the course of nature that men, as *moral agents*, should survive the grave, or be *re-produced*, to enjoy the full reward of virtue, or to suffer the punishments due to their vices.

It is acknowledged that we have no idea *how* this can come to pass, but neither have we, any knowledge how we, that is, the human species, came into being; so that, for any thing we know to the contrary, our *re-production* may be as much within the proper course of nature, as our original production; and, consequently, nothing hinders but that our expectation of a more perfect state of things, and a state of more exact retribution, raised by the observation of the actual course of nature, may be fulfilled. There may, therefore, be a *future state*, even though there be no God at all. That is, as it is certainly, and independently of all other considerations, our wisdom to be virtuous in this life, it may be equally our

wisdom to be virtuous with a view to a life to come. And, faint as this probability may be thought, it is however *something*, and must add something to the sanctions of virtue. Let not atheists, therefore, think themselves *quite secure* with respect to a future life. Things as extraordinary as this, especially upon the hypothesis of there being no God, have taken place, and therefore this, which is sufficiently analogous to the rest, *may* take place also.

Let any person only consider attentively the meanest plant that comes in his way, and he cannot but discover a wonderful *extent of view* in the adaptation of every part of it to the rest, as of the root to the stem, the stem to the leaf, the leaf to the flower, the flower to the fruit, the fruit to the seed, &c. &c. &c. He will also perceive as wonderful an adaptation of all these to the soil, and the climate; and to the destined duration mode and extent of propagation, &c. of the plant. He will also perceive a wonderful relation of one plant to another, with respect to similarity of structure, uses, and mutual

mutual subserviency. He will perceive another relation that they bear to the animals that feed upon them, or, in any other respect, avail themselves of them. In extending his researches, he will perceive an equal *extent of view* in the parts of the animal œconomy, their relation to the vegetable world, and to one another, as of the carnivorous to the graminivorous, &c. and of every thing belonging to them, to their rank, place, and use, in the system of the world.

After this, let him consider this world, that is, the earth, as part of a greater system, (each part of which, probably, as perfect in its kind) with the probable relation of the solar system itself to other systems in the visible universe. And then, whether he suppose that there is any *author of nature*, or not, he must see that, *by some means or other*, nothing is ever wanting, however remote in time or place, to render every thing *complete in its kind*. And if his mind be sufficiently impressed with these *facts*, and the consideration of the many events that daily take place,
of

of which he could not have the least previous expectation, and of the efficient or proximate causes of which he is wholly ignorant, and he will not think it impossible, that, if any other particular event, of whatever magnitude, even the re-production of the whole human race after a certain period, will make the system *more complete*, even that event may take place, though he be ever so ignorant of the proximate cause of it. That there is both a *power* in nature, and an *extent of view*, abundantly adequate to it, if he have any knowledge of *actual existence*, he must be satisfied. In proportion, therefore, to his idea of the *propriety and importance* of any future state of things, in that proportion will be his *expectation* of it. Our ignorance of the *means* by which any particular future state of things may be brought about, is balanced by our acknowledged ignorance of the means in other cases, where the result is indisputable; though we are continually advancing in the discovery of these means in our investigation of the more general laws of nature.

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A retrospective view to our former ignorance in other cases will be useful to us here. Time was when the total solution of a piece of metal in a chymical menstruum would seem to be as absolute a *loss* of it, as the dissolution of a human body by putrefaction, and the recovery of it would have been thought as hopeless. And, antecedent to our knowledge of the course of nature, the burying of a seed in the earth would seem to have as little tendency to the re-production of the plant. Where there certainly exists a power equal to any production, or any event, any thing that is *possible in itself* may be, and the difference in *antecedent probability* is only that of greater and less.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R

L E T T E R IX.

An Examination of Mr. Hume's DIALOGUES
ON NATURAL RELIGION.

DEAR SIR,

I Am glad to find that you think there is at least some appearance of weight in what, at your request, I have urged, in answer to the objections against the belief of a God and a providence; and I am confident the more attention you give to the subject, the stronger will those arguments appear, and the more trifling and undeserving of regard you will think the cavils of atheists, ancient or modern. You wish, however, to know distinctly what I think of *Mr. Hume's posthumous Dialogues on Natural Religion*; because, coming from a writer of some note, that work is frequently a topic of conversation in the societies you frequent.

With respect to *Mr. Hume's metaphysical writings* in general, my opinion is, that, on the

the whole, the world is very little the wiser for them. For though, when the merits of any question were on his side, few men ever wrote with more perspicuity, the arrangement of his thoughts being natural, and his illustrations peculiarly happy; yet I can hardly think that we are indebted to him for the least real advance in the knowledge of the human mind. Indeed, according to his own very frank confession, his object was mere *literary reputation* *. It was not the *pursuit of truth*, or the advancement of virtue and happiness; and it was much more easy to make a figure by disturbing the systems of others, than by erecting any of his own. All schemes have their respective weak sides, which a man who has nothing of his own to risk may more easily find, and expose:

In many of his *Essays* (which, in general, are excessively wire-drawn) Mr. Hume seems to have had nothing in view but to *amuse* his readers, which he generally does agree-

* See his *Life*, written by himself, p. 32, 33.

ably enough ; proposing doubts to received hypotheses, leaving them without any solution, and altogether unconcerned about it. In short, he is to be considered in these *Essays* as a mere *writer* or *declaimer*, even more than Cicero in his book of *Tusculan Questions*.

He seems not to have given himself the trouble so much as to read *Dr. Hartley's Observations on Man*, a work which he could not but have heard of, and which it certainly behoved him to study. The doctrine of *association of ideas*, as explained and extended by Dr. Hartley, supplies materials for the most satisfactory solution of almost all the difficulties he has started, as I could easily shew if I thought it of any consequence ; so that to a person acquainted with this theory of the human mind, *Hume's Essays* appear the merest trifling. Compared with Dr. Hartley, I consider Mr. Hume as not even a child.

Now, I will frankly tell you, that this last performance of Mr. Hume has by no means changed for the better the idea I had before
formed

formed of him as a metaphysical writer. The dialogue is ingeniously and artfully conducted. Philo, who evidently speaks the sentiments of the writer, is not made to say all the good things that are advanced, his opponents are not made to say any thing that is very palpably absurd, and every thing is made to pass with great decency and decorum.

But though Philo, in the most interesting part of the debate, advances nothing but common-place objections against the belief of a God, and hackneyed declamation against the plan of providence, his antagonists are seldom represented as making any satisfactory reply. And when, at the last, evidently to save appearances, he relinquishes the argument, on which he had expatiated with so much triumph, it is without alleging any sufficient reason; so that his arguments are left, as no doubt the writer intended, to have their full effect on the mind of the reader. Also though the debate seemingly closes in favour of the theist, the victory is clearly on the side of the atheist.

atheist. I therefore shall not be surpris'd if this work should have a considerable effect in promoting the cause of atheism, with those whose *general turn of thinking, and habits of life*, make them no ill-wishers to that scheme.

To satisfy your wishes, I shall recite what I think has most of the appearance of strength, or plausibility, in what Mr. Hume has advanced on the atheistical side of the question, though it will necessarily lead me to repeat some things that I have observed already; but I shall endeavour to do it in such a manner, that you will not deem it quite idle and useless repetition.

With respect to the general argument for the being of God, from the marks of design in the universe, he says, p. 65, “ Will any
 “ man tell me, with a serious countenance,
 “ that an orderly universe must arise from
 “ some thought and art, like the human,
 “ because we have experience of it. To
 “ ascertain this reasoning, it were requisite
 “ that we had experience of the origin of
 “ worlds, and it is not sufficient, surely, that
 “ we

“ we have seen ships and cities arise from
 “ human art and contrivance.”

Now, if it be admitted that there are marks of design in the universe, as numberless fitnesses of things to things prove beyond all dispute, is it not a necessary consequence, that if it had a cause at all, it must be one that is capable of design? Will any person say that an eye could have been constructed by a Being who had no knowledge of optics, who did not know the nature of light, or the laws of refraction? And must not the universe have had a cause, as well as any thing else, that is finite and incapable of comprehending itself?

We might just as reasonably say, that any particular ship, or city, any particular horse, or man, had nothing existing superior to it, as that the visible universe had nothing superior to it, if the universe be no more capable of comprehending itself than a ship, or a city, a horse, or a man. There can be no charm in the words *world* or *universe*, so that they should require no cause when they stand in precisely the same predicament with

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other

other things that evidently *do* require a superior cause, and could not have existed without one.

All that Mr. Hume says on the difficulty of stopping at the idea of an uncaused Being, is on the supposition that this uncaused Being is a *finite one*, incapable of comprehending itself, and, therefore, in the same predicament with a ship or a house, a horse or a man, which it is impossible to conceive to have existed without a superior cause. "How shall we satisfy ourselves," says he, p. 93, &c. "concerning the cause of that Being whom you suppose the author of nature.—If we stop and go no farther, why go so far, why not stop at the material world. How can we satisfy ourselves without going on in infinitum.—By supposing it to contain the principle of order within itself, we really assert it to be God, and the sooner we arrive at that Divine Being, so much the better. When you go one step beyond the mundane system, you only excite an inquisitive humour, which it is impossible ever to satisfy."

It is very true, that no person can satisfy himself with going backwards *in infinitum* from one thing that requires a superior cause, to another that equally requires a superior cause. But any person may be sufficiently satisfied with going back through finite causes as far as he has evidence of the existence of intermediate finite causes; and then (seeing that it is absurd to go on *in infinitum* in this manner) to conclude that, whether he can comprehend it or not; there *must* be some *uncaused intelligent Being*; the original and designing cause of all other Beings. For otherwise, what we see and experience could not have existed. It is true that we cannot conceive how this should be, but we are able to acquiesce in this ignorance, because there is no contradiction in it.

He says, p. 15, "Motion, in many instances from gravity, from elasticity, from electricity, begins in matter without any known voluntary agent; and to suppose always in these cases an unknown voluntary agent, is mere hypothesis, and hypothesis attended with no advantage." He

also says, p. 118, "Why may not motion
"have been propagated by impulse through
"all eternity?"

I will admit that the powers of gravity, elasticity, and electricity, might have been in bodies from all eternity, without any superior cause, if the bodies in which we find them were capable of knowing that they had such powers, of that *design* which has proportioned them to one another, and of combining them in the wonderful and useful manner in which they are actually proportioned and combined in nature. But when I see that they are as evidently incapable of this as I am of properly producing a plant or an animal, I am under a necessity of looking for a higher cause; and I cannot rest till I come to a Being *essentially different* from all visible Beings whatever, so as not to be in the predicament that they are in, of requiring a superior cause. Also, if motion could have been in the universe without any cause, it must have been in consequence of bodies being possessed of the power of *gravity*, &c. from eternity, without a cause.

But

But as they could not have had those powers without communication from a superior and intelligent Being, capable of proportioning them, in the exact and useful manner in which they are possessed, the thing is manifestly *impossible*.

What Mr. Hume says with respect to the *origin of the world* in the following paragraph, which I think unworthy of a philosopher, and miserably trifling on so serious a subject, goes intirely upon the idea of the supreme cause resembling such beings as do themselves require a superior cause, and not (which, however, *must* be the case) a Being that can have no superior in wisdom or power. I, therefore, think it requires no particular animadversion.

“ Many worlds,” he says, p. 106, “ might
 “ have been botched and bungled through-
 “ out an eternity ere this system was struck
 “ out, much labour lost, many fruitless
 “ trials made, and a slow, but continued
 “ improvement, carried on during infinite
 “ ages in the art of world making.”

" A man who follows your hypothesis,"
 p. III, " is able perhaps to assert, or con-
 " jecture, that the universe some time arose
 " from something like design ; but beyond
 " that position he cannot ascertain one single
 " circumstance, and is left afterwards to fix
 " every point of his theology by the utmost
 " licence of fancy and hypothesis. This
 " world, for ought we know, is very faulty
 " and imperfect, compared to a superior
 " standard, and was only the first rude essay
 " of some infant deity, who afterwards aban-
 " doned it, ashamed of his own performance.
 " It is the work only of some dependent
 " inferior deity, and is the object of deri-
 " sion to his superiors. It is the produc-
 " tion of old age and dotage, in some super-
 " annuated deity, and ever since his death
 " has run on at adventures, from the first
 " impulse and active force, which it re-
 " ceived from him."

In reading *Mr. Hume's life*, written by
 himself, one might be surpris'd to find no
 mention of a *God*, or of a *providence*, which
 conducted him through it ; but this cannot
 be

be any longer wonderful, when we find that, for any thing he certainly believed to the contrary, he himself might be the most considerable Being in the universe. His maker, if he had any, might have been either a careless playful infant, a trifling forgetful dotard, or was, perhaps, dead and buried, without leaving any other to take care of his affairs. All that he believed of his maker was, that he was capable of *something like design*, but of his own comprehensive intellectual powers he could have no doubt.

Neither can we think it at all extraordinary that Mr. Hume should have recourse to *amusing books* in the last period of his life, when he considered the author of nature himself as never having had any serious object in view, and when he neither left any thing behind him, nor had any thing before him, that was deserving of his care. How can it be supposed that the man, who scrupled not to ridicule his maker, should consider the human race, or the world, in any other light than as objects of ridicule, or pity. And well satisfied might he be to

have been so fortunate in his passage through the world, and in his easy escape out of it, when it was deserted by its maker, and was continually exposed to some unforeseen and dreadful catastrophe. How poor a consolation, however, must have been his *literary fame*, with such gloomy prospects as these!

What Mr. Hume says with respect to the deficiency in the proof of the *proper infinity* of the divine attributes, and of a probable *multiplicity of deities*, all goes on the same idea, viz. that the ultimate cause of the universe is such a Being as must himself require a superior cause; whereas, nothing can be more evident, how incomprehensible soever it may be, than that the Being which has existed from eternity, and is the cause of all that does exist, must be one that *cannot* have a superior, and therefore must be infinite in knowledge and power, and consequently, as I have endeavoured to shew before, can be but *one*.

“As the cause,” he says, p. 104, “ought only to be proportioned to the effect, and the effect, so far as it falls under our cognizance,

" nizeance, is not infinite, what pretensions
 " have we to ascribe that attribute to the
 " Divine Being? — By sharing the work
 " among several we may so much farther
 " limit the attributes of each, and get rid
 " of that extensive power and knowledge
 " which must be supposed in one deity." —
 This I think unworthy of a philosopher on
 so grave and interesting a subject.

It is owing to the same inattention to this
 one consideration, that, in order to get rid
 of the idea of a supreme intelligent cause of
 all things, Mr. Hume urges the superior
 probability of the universe resembling a
plant, or an animal. " If the universe," says
 he, p. 129, " bears a greater likeness to
 " animal bodies, and to vegetables, than to
 " the works of human art, it is more pro-
 " bable that its cause resembles the cause of
 " the former than that of the latter; and
 " its origin ought rather to be ascribed to
 " generation, or vegetation, than to reason
 " or design."

On this, Demea, the orthodox speaker,
 very properly observes, p. 137, " Whence
 " could

"could arise so wonderful a faculty but
 "from design, or how can order spring from
 "any thing which perceives not that order
 "which it bestows." In reply to which
 Philo contents himself with saying, *ib.* "A
 "tree bestows order, and organization, on
 "that tree which springs from it, without
 "knowing the order; an animal, in the
 "same manner, on its offspring," and p. 140,
 "Judging by our limited and imperfect ex-
 "perience, generation has some privileges
 "above reason; for we see every day the
 "latter to arise from the former, never the
 "former from the latter."

Manifestly unsatisfactory as this reply is,
 nothing is advanced in answer to it by either
 of the other disputants. But it is obvious
 to remark, that, if an animal has marks of
 design in its construction, a design which
 itself cannot comprehend, it is hardly possi-
 ble for any person to imagine that it was
 originally produced without a power supe-
 rior to itself, and capable of comprehending
 its structure, though he was not himself
 present at the original formation of it, and
 there-

therefore, could not see it. Can we possibly believe that any particular *horse* that we know, originated without a superior cause? Equally impossible is it to believe, that the *species of horses* should have existed without a superior cause.

How little then does it avail Mr. Hume to say, p. 135, that "reason, instinct; generation, vegetation, are similar to each other, and the causes of similar effects;" as if *instinct, generation, and vegetation*, did not necessarily imply *design, or reason*, as the cause of them. He might with equal reason have placed other powers in nature, as *gravity, elasticity, &c.* in the same rank with these; whereas all these must equally have proceeded from reason, or design, and could not have had any existence independent of it. For design is conspicuous in all those powers, and especially in the proportion and distribution of them.

Pursuing the analogy of plants and animals, he says, p. 152, "In like manner as a tree sheds its seeds into the neighbouring fields, and produces other trees; so the
" great

" great vegetable the world, or this pla-
 " netary system, produces within itself cer-
 " tain seeds, which being scattered into the
 " surrounding chaos, vegetate into new
 " worlds. A comet, for instance, is the
 " seed of a world, and after it has been fully
 " ripened by passing from sun to sun, and
 " star to star, it is at last tossed into the un-
 " formed elements, which every where sur-
 " round this universe, and immediately
 " sprouts up into a new system."

" Or, if we should suppose this world to
 " be an *animal*, a comet is the *egg* of this
 " animal; and in like manner as an ostrich
 " lays its egg in the sand, which, without
 " any farther care, hatches the egg, and pro-
 " duces a new animal; so ——— Does not
 " a plant or an animal;" p. 134, " which
 " springs from vegetation or generation, bear
 " a stronger resemblance to the world, than
 " does any artificial machine, which arises
 " from reason and design?"

Had any friend of religion advanced an
 idea so completely absurd as this, what
 would not Mr. Hume have said to turn it in-
 to

to ridicule. With just as much probability might he have said that Glasgow grew from a seed yielded by Edinburgh, or that London and Edinburgh, marrying, by natural generation, produced York, which lies between them. With much more probability might he have said that *pamphlets* are the productions of large *books*, that *boats* are young *ships*, and that *pistols* will grow into great *guns*; and that either there never were any first towns, books, ships, or guns, or that, if there were, they had no makers.

How it could come into any man's head to imagine that a thing so complex, as this world, consisting of land and water, earths and metals, plants and animals, &c. &c. &c. should produce a seed or egg, containing within it the elements of all its innumerable parts, is beyond my power of conception.

What must have been that man's knowledge of philosophy and nature, who could suppose for a moment, that a comet could possibly be the seed of a world? Do comets spring from worlds, carrying with them the seeds of all the plants, &c. that they contain?

tain? Do comets travel from sun to sun, or from star to star? By what force are they tossed into the *unformed elements*, which Mr. Hume supposes every where to surround the universe? What are those elements? and what evidence has he of their existence? or, supposing the comet to arrive among them, whence could arise its power of vegetating into a new system?

What Mr. Hume objects to the arguments for the *benevolence* of the Deity is such mere cavilling, and admits of such easy answers, that I am surpris'd that a man whose sole object was even *literary reputation* should have advanced it.

“The course of nature, p. 186, “tends not to human or animal felicity, therefore it is not established for that purpose.” He might as well have said that *health* is not agreeable to the course of nature, as that enjoyment and *happiness* is not, since the one is the necessary consequence of the other. “It is contrary,” he says, in fact, p. 193, “to every one’s feeling and experience to maintain a continued existence in this
“ world

“ world to be eligible and desirable. It is
 “ contrary to an authority so established as
 “ nothing can subvert.” And yet almost
 all animals and all men *do* desire life, and,
 according to his own account, his own life
 was a singularly happy and enviable one.

“ You must prove,” p. 195, “ these
 “ pure unmixed and uncontrollable attri-
 “ butes from the present mixed and confused
 “ phenomena, and from these alone ; a hope-
 “ ful undertaking.” If *evil* was not, in a
 thousand ways, necessarily connected with,
 and subservient to *good*, the undertaking
 would be hopeless, but not otherwise.

“ It seems plainly possible,” p. 205, “ to
 “ carry on the business of life without any
 “ pain. Why, then, is any animal ever ren-
 “ dered susceptible of such a sensation ?”
 But pain, *as such*, we have seen to be excel-
 lently useful, as a guard against more pain,
 and greater evils, and also as an element of
 future happiness ; and no man can pretend
 to say that the same end *could* have been at-
 tained by any other means.

“ The

“ The conduct of the world by general laws,” p. 206, “ seems no wise necessary to a very perfect being.” But without general laws there could have been little or no room for *wisdom*, in God or man; and what kind of happiness could we have had without the exercise of our rational powers: To have had any *intellectual enjoyments* in those circumstances (and the sensual are of little value in comparison with them) we must have been Beings of quite another kind than we are at present, probably much inferior to what we are now.

“ Almost all the moral as well as natural evils of human life,” (p. 213), “ arise from idleness; and were our species, by the original constitution of their frame, exempt from this vice, or infirmity, the perfect cultivation of the land, the improvements of arts and manufactures, the exact execution of every office and duty, immediately follows, and men at once may fully reach that state of society which is so imperfectly attained by the best regulated government.

“ But

“ But as industry is a power, and the most
 “ valuable of any, nature seems determined,
 “ suitable to her usual maxims, to bestow it
 “ on men with a very sparing hand.” And
 yet this writer can say, p. 259, that “ no
 “ state of mind is so happy as the calm and
 “ equable.” But would not more industry,
 and *activity*, necessarily disturb this calm
 and happy temperament, and be apt to
 produce quarrels, and, consequently, more
 unhappiness?

“ I am sceptic enough,” he says, p. 219,
 “ to allow that the bad appearances, not-
 “ withstanding all my reasonings, may be
 “ compatible with such attributes as you
 “ suppose; but surely they can never prove
 “ such attributes.” But if present appear-
 ances prove *real benevolence*, I think they
 will go very near to prove *unbounded bene-*
volence, for reasons that I have alleged be-
 fore, and which I shall not repeat here.

It is pretty clear to me, that Mr. Hume
 was not sufficiently acquainted with what
 has been already advanced by those who have
 written on the subject of the being and attri-

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butes

butes of God. Otherwise he either would not have put such weak arguments into the mouth of his favourite Philo, or would have put better answers into those of his opponents. It was, I imagine, his dislike of the subject that made him overlook such writers, or give but little attention to them; and I think this conjecture concerning his aversion to the subject the better founded, from his saying, p. 259, that “there is a gloom and melancholy remarkable in all devout people.”

No person really acquainted with true devotion, or those who were possessed with it, could have entertained such an opinion. What Mr. Hume had seen, must have been some miserably low superstition, or wild enthusiasm, things very remote from the calm and sedate, but chearful spirit of rational devotion.

Had he considered the nature of true devotion, he must have been sensible that the charge of gloom and melancholy can least of all apply to it. Gloom and melancholy certainly belong to the system of atheism, which

which entirely precludes the pleasing ideas of a benevolent author of nature, and of a wise plan of providence, bringing good out of all the evil we experience; which cuts off the consoling intercourse with an invisible, but omnipresent and almighty protector and friend; which admits of no settled provision for our happiness, even in this life, and closes the melancholy scene, such as Mr. Hume himself describes it, with a total annihilation.

Is it possible to draw a more gloomy and dispiriting picture of the system of the universe than Mr. Hume himself has drawn in his tenth dialogue? No melancholy religionist ever drew so dark a one. Nothing in the whole system pleases him. He finds neither *wisdom*, nor *benevolence*. Speaking on the supposition of God being omnipotent and omniscient, he says, p. 185, “ His power we allow infinite; whatever he wills is executed; but neither man nor any other animal is happy; therefore he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite; he is never mistaken in

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“ choosing

“ choosing the means to any end ; but the
 “ course of nature tends not to human or
 “ animal felicity ; therefore it is not esta-
 “ blished for that purpose.”

“ Look round the universe,” says he,
 p. 219, “ what an immense profusion of be-
 “ ings, animated and organized, sensible and
 “ active. You admire this prodigious va-
 “ riety and fecundity. But inspect a little
 “ more narrowly these living existences, the
 “ only beings worth regarding. How hostile
 “ and destructive to each other. How in-
 “ sufficient all of them for their own hap-
 “ piness. How contemptible, or odious, to
 “ the spectator. The whole presents no-
 “ thing but the idea of a blind nature, im-
 “ pregnated by a great vivifying principle,
 “ and pouring forth from her lap, without
 “ discernment, or parental care, her maimed
 “ and abortive children.”

Compare this with the language of the
 pious writers of the scriptures. “ Thou art
 “ good and doest good. The Lord is good
 “ to all, and his tender mercies are over all
 “ his works. The earth is full of the good-
 “ ness

“ nefs of the Lord. The eyes of all wait
 “ upon thee, and thou givest them their
 “ meat in due season. Thou openest thine
 “ hand, and satisfiest the desires of every
 “ living thing. The Lord reigneth : let
 “ the earth rejoice, let the inhabitants of
 “ the isles be glad thereof. Clouds and
 “ darknes are round about him, righteous-
 “ nefs and judgment are the habitation of
 “ his throne.”

In the scriptures the Divine Being is represented as “ encouraging us to cast all our
 “ care upon him who careth for us.” The true christian is exhorted to *rejoice evermore*, and especially to *rejoice in tribulation*, and persecution for righteousness sake. Death is so far from being a frightful and disgusting thing, that he triumphs in it, and over it. *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

Would any person hesitate about chusing to *feel* as these writers felt, or as Mr. Hume must have done. With his views of things, the calmness and composure with which, he says, he faced death, though infinitely short of the *joyful expectation* of the christian, could

not have been any thing but affectation. If, however, with his prospects he really was as calm; placid, and chearful, as he pretends, with little reason can he charge any set of *speculative principles* with a tendency to produce gloom and melancholy. If *his system* did not produce this disposition, it never can be in the power of *system* to do it.

Notwithstanding I have differed so much from Mr. Hume with respect to the principles of his treatise, we shall, in words, at least, agree in our conclusion. For though I think the being of a God, and his general benevolence and providence, to be sufficiently demonstrable, yet so many cavils may be started on the subject, and so much still remains, that a rational creature must wish to be informed of concerning his maker, his duty here, and his expectations hereafter, that what Mr. Hume said by way of cover and irony, I can say with great seriousness, and I do not wish to say it much otherwise, or better.

“The most natural sentiment,” he says, p. 363, “which a well-disposed mind will feel on this occasion, is a longing desire
“and

“ and expectation, that heaven would be
 “ pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate, this
 “ profound ignorance, by affording some
 “ more particular revelation to mankind;
 “ and making discoveries of the nature, at-
 “ tributes, and operation of the divine ob-
 “ ject of our faith. A person seasoned with
 “ a just sense of the imperfection of natural
 “ reason will fly to *revealed truth* with the
 “ greatest avidity. To be a philosophical
 “ sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and
 “ most essential step towards being a sound
 “ believing christian.”

I am, &c.

L E T T E R X.

An Examination of Mr. Hume's Essay on a particular Providence, and a Future State.

DEAR SIR,

YOU tell me you have been a good deal
 staggered with the eleventh of Mr.
 Hume's *Philosophical Essays*, on a particular
 L 4 *providence,*

providence, and a *future state*, thinking his reasoning, if not conclusive, yet so plausible, as to be well entitled to a particular reply. I shall, therefore, give it as much consideration as I flatter myself, after what I have already advanced on the same subject, you will think sufficient.

In the character of an Epicurean philosopher, addressing an Athenian audience, he says, p. 216, "Allowing the gods to be the authors of the existence, or order, of the universe, it follows, that they possess that precise degree of power, intelligence, and benevolence, which appear in their workmanship. But nothing farther can be proved, except we call in the assistance of exaggeration and flattery, to supply the place of argument and reason." He farther says, p. 223, "You have no reason to give distributive justice any particular extent, but only so far as you see it at present extend itself."

This is the sum of his argument, which he has only repeated in his posthumous Dialogues, and the reasoning of which you will find

find obviated in the preceding Letters. He himself makes a friend, whom he introduces as discussing the question with him, reply to it, that intelligence once proved, from our own experience and observation, we are necessarily carried beyond what we have observed, to such unseen consequences, as we naturally expect from such intelligence, in similar cases.

“ If you saw,” says he, p. 225, “ a half
 “ finished building, surrounded with heaps
 “ of bricks, and stones, and mortar, and all
 “ the instruments of masonry, could you
 “ not infer from the effect, that it was a
 “ work of design and contrivance, and could
 “ you not return again from this inferred
 “ cause, to infer new additions to the effect,
 “ and conclude that the building would
 “ soon be finished, and receive all the far-
 “ ther improvements that art could bestow
 “ upon it? Why then do you refuse to
 “ admit the same mode of reasoning with
 “ regard to the order of nature? &c.”

This reply appears to me to be satisfactory. But Mr. Hume refuses to acquiesce
 in

in it, on account of a supposed total *dissimilarity* between the Divine Being and other intelligent agents, and of our more perfect knowledge of man than of God. The substance of his answer is, that we know man from various of his productions, and, therefore, from this experience of his conduct, can foretel what will be the result of those of his works of which we see only a part. "Whereas the deity," he says, p. 227, "is known to us only by his productions, and is a single Being in the universe, not comprehended under any species or genus, from whose experienced attributes or qualities we can, by analogy, infer any attribute or quality in him. As the universe shews wisdom and goodness, we infer wisdom and goodness. As it shews a particular degree of these perfections, we infer a particular degree of them, precisely adapted to the effects we examine. But farther attributes, and farther degrees of the same attributes, we can never be authorized to infer, or suppose, by any rules of just reasoning." He therefore says,

p. 230,

p. 230, " No new fact can be inferred from
 " the religious hypothesis, no event foreseen
 " or foretold, no reward or punishment ex-
 " pected or dreaded, beyond what is already
 " known by practice and observation."

But if the deity be an intelligent and de-
 signing cause (of which the universe fur-
 nishes abundant evidence) he is not, in Mr.
 Hume's sense, an *unique*, of a genus or spe-
 cies by himself ; but is to be placed in the
 general *class* of *intelligent and designing agents*,
 though infinitely superior to all others of
 that kind ; so that, by Mr. Hume's own
 concession, we are not without some *clue* to
 guide us in our inquiries concerning the
 probable tendencies and issues of what we
 see.

Besides, admitting the deity to be an *uni-
 que* with respect to intelligence, it is not
 with *one* of his productions only that we are
 acquainted. We see innumerable of them ;
 and as far as our experience goes, we see
 that all of them advance to some state of
 perfection. Properly speaking, nothing is
 left *unfinished*. It is true that particular
 plants,

plants and animals perish before they arrive at this state, but this is not the case with the *species*; and all individuals perish in consequence of some *general laws*, calculated for the good of the whole species, that is, of the greater part of the individuals of which it consists. Consequently, without regard to the productions of other intelligent agents, we are not destitute of *analogies*, from which to infer a future better state of things, in which there may be a fuller display of the divine attributes, both of justice and benevolence.

On the whole, therefore, if we see things to be in a progress to a better state, we may reasonably conclude that the melioration will continue to proceed, and, either equably or accelerated, as we have hitherto observed it. Whatever be the *final object* of a work of design, yet, from what we know of such works, we can generally form a tolerable guess whether they be *finished* or *unfinished*, and whether any scheme be near its beginning, its middle, or its termination. We are, therefore, by no means precluded from
all

all reasoning concerning a future state of things by the consideration of the infinite superiority of the author of the system of the universe to all other intelligent beings. Notwithstanding his superiority to any of them, he may be said to be *one of them*, and, without any information from the scriptures, we might have discovered that in this sense, at least, *in the image of God has he made man*. Or, though God should not be considered as of the same class with any of his creatures, his productions, having the same author, supply abundance of analogies among themselves.

In the same manner, the benevolence of the deity (which, in this place, Mr. Hume does not deny, but suppose) being simply admitted, we are at liberty to reason concerning it, as well as concerning the benevolence of any other Being whatever. And therefore if, in any nearly parallel case, we can see no reason why benevolence should be limited, or why a *less* and not a *greater* degree of good should be intended, it must appear probable to us, that the greatest is intended ;

intended; though, for sufficient, but unknown reasons, it cannot take place at present. Just as, if we are once satisfied that any particular *parent* has a just affection for his child, we conclude that, though he does not put him into immediate possession of every thing that he has in his power to bestow upon him, it is because he is persuaded that, for the present, it would not be for his advantage; but that, in due time (of which we also naturally presume the parent himself to be the best judge) he will do much more for him, even all that his knowledge and ability can enable him to do. And though we may presume envy and jealousy to prevent this in natural parents, we cannot possibly suppose any thing of this kind to affect the *universal parent*, because we cannot imagine any interference of interest between this parent and his offspring.

We always argue in the same manner concerning the conduct of a *governor*. If we are once fully satisfied with respect to his *love of justice*, and have also no doubt of his *wisdom* and *power*, we immediately conclude,

clude, that every incorrigible criminal in his dominions will be properly punished; and though, for the present, many criminals walk at large, we conclude that their conduct is duly attended to, and that their future treatment will be made to correspond to it.

In like manner, if the present state of things bear the aspect of a scene of *distributive justice*, it may reasonably be considered as only the beginning of a scheme of more exact and impartial administration; so that, in due time, virtue will be more adequately rewarded, and vice more exemplarily punished, than we now see it to be. Every thing, therefore, that I have advanced on this subject in the preceding *Letters* may be perfectly well founded, notwithstanding this particular objection of Mr. Hume, and notwithstanding the great stress he lays upon it, both in this work, and in his *posthumous Dialogues*.

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R XI.

Of the SYSTEME DE LA NATURE.

DEAR SIR,

IT would be tiresome to you, as well as irksome to myself, to go over *all* the atheistical writers that have been admired in their time, but there is one work much more celebrated abroad than that of Mr. Hume will probably ever be with us, that you wish me not to pass unnoticed. This is the *Systeme de la Nature*.

After what I have already observed in my six first letters, and my animadversions on Mr. Hume's Dialogues, &c. it will hardly be in my power to select any thing from this work that I have not noticed already. However, as this performance is considered by many persons as a kind of *bible of atheism*, and the manner in which it is written, though far from being closely argumentative, is often excellent in the mode of *declamation*,

mation, and the writer is much more bold and unreserved than Mr. Hume, I shall make such extracts as I am confident you will acknowledge contain the essence of his argument, and will be, at the same time, a pretty just specimen of the composition of the whole, with short remarks.

This writer admits of nothing but what is the object of our senses, and, in the common sense of the word, *material*; and concerning the origin of matter, and all the present laws of it, he expresses himself as follows :

“ If we ask whence came matter,” p. 29,
 “ we say it has existed always. If we be
 “ asked whence came motion in matter; we
 “ answer that, for the same reason, it must
 “ have been in motion from all eternity;
 “ since motion is a necessary consequence
 “ of its existence, of its essence, and its pri-
 “ mitive properties, such as extension, gra-
 “ vity, impenetrability, figure, &c.—These
 “ elements,” p. 32, “ which we never find
 “ perfectly pure, being continually in action
 “ on one another, always acting and re-
 “ acting, always combining and separating,
 M “ attracting

“ attracting and repelling, are sufficient to
 “ explain the formation of all the Beings
 “ that we see. They are alternately causes
 “ and effects; and thus form a vast circle
 “ of generations and destructions, combina-
 “ tions and decompositions, which never
 “ could have had any beginning, and can
 “ never have an end. To go higher,” p.
 32, 33, “ for the principle of action in
 “ matter, and the origin of things, is only
 “ removing the difficulty, and wholly with-
 “ drawing it from the examination of our
 “ senses.”

I will acknowledge with this writer, that
 matter cannot exist without *powers*, as those
 of attraction, repulsion, &c. more or less
 modified, as in the form of gravity, elas-
 ticity, electricity, &c. for take away all the
 powers, that is, all the *properties* of matter,
 and the *substance* itself vanishes from our
 idea. Consequently, if matter has been
 from eternity, these powers, and the mo-
 tions which are the effects of them, must
 also have been from eternity. But then, in
 the *adjustment* of these various powers, and,
 consequently,

consequently, in *imparting* them, there must evidently have been a knowledge, comprehension, and foresight, of which the bodies possessing, and subject to, those laws are altogether incapable. I therefore conclude with certainty, that a Being superior to every thing that is the object of our senses, must have imparted those powers and have adjusted them to their proper uses; that is, that he must have *created matter itself*, which could have no existence without its powers. I am unable to account for what is *visible* without having recourse to a power that is *invisible*; and this invisible power I distinguish by the name of God.

“What does the word God,” says he, vol. 2. p. 191, “mean, but the impene-
 “trable cause of the effects which astonish
 “us, and which we cannot explain. In
 “this God,” vol. 2. p. 109, “nothing is
 “found but a vain phantom, substituted for
 “*the energy of nature*, which men are always
 “determined to mistake. Men have filled
 “nature with spirits,” p. 110, “because
 “they have been almost always ignorant of

“ true causes. For want of knowing the
 “ force of nature, they have thought it to
 “ be animated by a great spirit. For want
 “ of knowing the energy of the human
 “ machine, they have supposed *that*, in like
 “ manner, to be animated by a spirit; so
 “ that we see the word *spirit* means nothing
 “ but the unknown cause of the pheno-
 “ mena that we cannot explain in a na-
 “ tural manner.”

To this I can only say that, if nothing
 that is visible *can* account for what I see, I
 must necessarily have recourse to something
 that is invisible. Just as if I hear a voice
 which, I am convinced, does not proceed
 from any thing in the room in which I am,
 I cannot help ascribing it to some cause
 without the room, unless I could believe
 that such a thing as *sound* could originate
 without any cause at all. Now men, ani-
 mals, plants, and even metals and stones,
 are things that we can no more suppose to
 have existed without a cause, than a mere
sound.

I am

I am not solicitous about the term *spirit*, but I must have some name by which to distinguish that to which I ascribe such *powers* as cannot belong to any thing that I am able to see. A human body may be, and probably is, the seat of all the powers that are exerted by man; but there is in the constitution of man (of whatever materials he may consist) marks of a design and intelligence infinitely superior to any thing that is found in man. He, therefore, *must* have some superior cause, and so must every thing else that, like man, is finite. Proceeding in this manner, we must come at last to a being whose intelligence is properly *infinite*, and then (besides that we are under a *necessity* of resting there) it ceases to be in the predicament of a man, or a plant, which must necessarily be dependent upon something superior to themselves; though, for that very reason, it ceases to be the object of our conceptions.

It is not properly our ignorance of the energy and secret powers of nature, that is, of what is visible in nature, that makes us

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ascribe

ascribe them to something that we call a spirit, but rather a perfect comprehension and knowledge, that such beings as we see could not have existed without some superior cause distinct from themselves. This writer might just as well say, that it is because I am ignorant of the secret energy of nature, that I enquire for the cause of a sound that I hear, or of a watch that I meet with.

It is true that, because men cannot account for the power of thinking in themselves; they have had recourse to an invisible spirit, and likewise because they cannot account for the order of the universe, they have recourse to another, but greater, invisible spirit. So far the two cases resemble each other; but, in fact, they are very different. I discover the fallacy of the popular opinion concerning the supposed invisible spirit called the *soul*, or the seat of perception and thought in man, when I consider that all the phenomena of perception and thought, depend upon the organization of the brain, and that therefore, whatever those

those powers are, they *must*, according to the received rules of philosophizing, be ascribed to that organization. We are not to multiply causes without necessity. And when I reflect farther, I see that no difficulty is, in fact, removed by ascribing the powers of perception and thought to an invisible or immaterial spirit, because there is no more perceivable connexion between what is *invisible* than what is *visible* and those *powers*. It is true, that I have no distinct idea of *any* proper seat of those mental powers, with what they can connect, or on what they may depend. But, for any thing that appears to the contrary, they may just as well connect with, and depend upon, the *brain*, as upon any invisible substance within the brain.

But when I pass from the immediate cause of thought in man to the cause of that cause, or the cause of this organization of the brain, I must necessarily look for it in something that is at least capable of understanding that organization; and this I know must be a Being of intelligence in-

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finitely

initely superior to that of any *man*, and therefore, certainly very different from any thing human. For the same reason it is in vain that I look for this intelligence in the earth, the sun, the moon, or the stars, or in all those bodies combined.

There is, indeed, in the universe, that kind of *unity* which bespeaks it to be *one work*, and, therefore, probably the work of one Being; but we by no means see that *continuity of substance*, which we find in the brain, so as to conclude from that analogy, that the parts of the visible universe do themselves constitute a thinking substance. What is visible belonging to man *may*, for any thing we know to the contrary, be the seat of all his powers, and, therefore, according to the rules of philosophizing, which teach us not to multiply causes or substances without necessity, *must be concluded* to be so. But what is visible in the universe *cannot* be the seat of the intelligence that belongs to it, according to any analogy that we are acquainted with. Besides, allowing, impossible as it must be, that so disjointed

disjoined a system as the material universe is, to have a *principle of thought* belonging to it, it has, however, so much the appearance of other works of design, that we must still look out for *its* author, as much as for that of a man.

Concerning the origin of the human race, this writer says, p. 88, "The contemplator
 " of nature will see no contradiction in sup-
 " posing that the human race, such as it is
 " at present, has either been produced in
 " time, or from all eternity.—But some re-
 " flections seem to give a greater probability
 " to the hypothesis, that man is a produc-
 " tion in time, peculiar to the globe that
 " we inhabit; who consequently, has no
 " higher origin than the globe itself, and
 " is a result from the particular laws that
 " govern it."

"To those who, to cut the difficulty,"
 p. 25, "pretend that the human race is de-
 " scended from a first man and first woman,
 " created by the divinity, we will say that
 " we have some idea of *nature*, but that we
 " have none of the *deity*, or of *creation*; and
 " that

“ that to make use of these terms, is to
“ say, in other words, that we are ignorant
“ of *the energy of nature*, and that we do
“ not know *how* it has produced the men
“ that we see.”

It is, I acknowledge, equally reasonable to suppose the race of men to have existed from eternity without any superior cause, as to have begun to exist in time without one; but yet the latter supposition, which this writer thinks the more probable of the two, by removing the origin of man out of the obscurity of eternity, appears more glaringly absurd, being more directly opposite to every thing that we observe or experience. Had we ever seen any thing come into being in this manner, we might conclude that man *might* have done so; but having no experience of any such thing, and, on the contrary, seeing every man, animal, and plant, to be descended from pre-existent parents; we necessarily conclude that every individual of the species must have come into being in this manner, till we come to the first of the species; and this first we see no

difficulty in supposing to have been formed by a Being of sufficient power and skill. In the same manner, we trace back a number of *echoes*, or reverberations of sound, to some thing that, without being itself a sound, has a power of exciting it. But the primary cause of *man* can no more be a man, than the primary cause of a *sound* can be a sound.

As this writer ascribes every thing that exists to the energy of *nature*, he seems sometimes to annex the same ideas to that word, that others do to the word *God*; so that, from some passages in his work, one would imagine that he was an atheist in name only, and not in reality.

“We cannot doubt,” says he, vol. 2. p. 165, “of the power of Nature to produce all the animals that we see, by the help of combinations of matter, which are in continual action. Nature,” vol. 2. p. 167, “is not a work. It has always subsisted of itself. It is in its bosom that every thing is made. We cannot deny,” *ib.* p. 170, “but that nature is very powerful, and very industrious. Nature,” *ib.* p. 173,

p. 173, " is not a blind cause. It does not
 " act at random. Nothing that it does
 " would appear *accidental* to him who
 " should know its manner of acting ; its re-
 " sources, and ways. It is Nature," ib. p.
 174, " that combines according to certain
 " and necessary laws, a head so organized as
 " to make a poem. It is Nature that gives a
 " brain proper to produce such a work.
 " Nature," ib. p. 177, " does nothing but
 " what is necessary. It is not by acci-
 " dental combinations, and random throws,
 " that it produces the beings that we see.
 " Chance," ib. p. 178, " is nothing but a
 " word of imagination, like the word *God*,
 " to cover the ignorance we are under of
 " the acting causes in nature, whose ways
 " are often inexplicable."

If what this writer here calls *nature* be
 really capable of all that he ascribes to it ;
 if it be thus powerful and industrious, if it
 does nothing at random, and produces be-
 ings of such intelligence as men, &c. it is
 indeed no bad substitute for a deity, but
 then it would be, in fact, only another
 name

name for the same thing. It is the *power*, not the *substance*, that we reverence; and a power like this, capable of producing men and animals, without pre-existent parents, is a power not to be overlooked. I should even think it capable of occasioning as much superstitious dread as this writer imputes to the belief of a God. Also, if the powers of this nature favour virtue, as this writer strongly contends, it might be even apprehended that, being capable of producing men at first, it might be capable of *re-producing* them after they had been dead and buried; so that an atheist who had been very wicked could not be quite sure of escaping the punishment of his crimes even in the grave.

But, notwithstanding all that this writer ascribes to nature, and though it does not act at random, he imagines it has no intelligence or object; which I think is not a little paradoxical. "Nature," says he, vol. 2. p. 189, "has no intelligence or object. It acts necessarily, because it exists necessarily. It is we that have a necessary ob-
ject,

* ject, which is our own preservation," p. 190. This writer, however, supposes man to act necessarily; so that merely acting *necessarily* is not incompatible with having an *object*. Consequently, nature, though acting necessarily, *may*, according to his own mode of reasoning, have an *object*; and that nature, or the author of nature, *has* had various objects, is just as evident as it is that man has objects. The power that formed an *eye* had as certainly something in view, as he that constructed a *telescope*.

I am unable to pursue the inconsistencies of this celebrated writer any farther; and yet, taking the whole work together, it is the most plausible and seducing of any thing that I have yet met with in support of atheism; and the author is to be commended for writing in a frank and open manner, without the least cover or reserve, which is not the case with Mr. Hume.

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R XII.

An Examination of some fallacious Methods of demonstrating the Being and Attributes of GOD.

DEAR SIR,

IT is, in some respects, to be regretted, that all the friends of religion do not agree in the principles on which they defend it; because it gives their common adversaries the advantage of various important concessions from some or other of them. This has, in fact, proceeded so far, that in the opinion of some theists, the principles of professed atheists are not more dangerous than those of their particular adversaries, though equally declared theists with themselves. Also, *human passions* interfering, the enemies of atheism are apt to dispute with too much anger and rancour about their several modes of attack and defence,
and

and to represent those who have the same ultimate object with themselves, *as favourers of atheism*, though they may hesitate to call their principles directly *atheistical*.

But, on the other hand, this very circumstance, though unfavourable in these respects, is not without some advantage; as different persons may be impressed by different modes of reasoning. And provided the *great moral purpose* be attained, which undoubtedly is an inward reverence for an invisible Being, whom we consider as the maker of us and of all things, who is our moral governor here; and will take cognizance of our conduct hereafter, the real friends of religion, and especially those of the most truly enlarged minds, will rejoice.

Nor do we need to be alarmed at any future discovery of the weakness of any principles of religion by those who have built the most upon them. For if the superstructure itself be valued, a man will always look out for some better supports rather than let it fall altogether. There are few persons of a speculative

culative turn of mind but must have observed this in themselves, with respect to various other valuable objects.

On how very different and opposite principles has the general doctrine of *morals* been founded, and how often have speculative persons changed their views of this seemingly momentous business; and yet it is not at all probable, that the *practice of morals* has ever suffered from this cause. On what different principles, also, have the civil and religious rights of men been founded, by persons who have been equally ready to lay down their lives in defence of them, and who change their speculative opinions without becoming advocates for slavery.

Why then should any friend of religion be alarmed because one person thinks that the being of God, and the great truths of natural religion, are to be proved in one way, and another person in a different way. If, as we must all acknowledge, it would be most injurious to call any person an atheist, merely because he could not prove the being of a God at all, much more, certainly, must it

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be injurious to call a person an atheist who does it satisfactorily to himself, though not so to us.

It is very rarely that thinking and speculative persons are convinced of any mistake of consequence, but let the confutation be ever so clear and undeniable, if the disputant be a man of virtue, I should not be apprehensive that even principles the most indisputably (yet, in fact, only *consequentially*) atheistical, would ever make him an atheist.

What would become of the advocates of the doctrine of the *trinity*, if those only should be allowed to be trinitarians, who explained and defended it in the same manner. To say nothing of the general difference between ancient and modern times in that respect, few societies, I apprehend, of that denomination of christians at this day, would, on this principle, hold communion with each other.

In general, the truth of any particular proposition may be so firmly assented to, and may be so intimately connected with numberless other tenets, that a man's *whole system*
of

of opinions must give way before that one doctrine can be rooted out of his mind ; and so total a revolution in the principles of men, who really think at all for themselves, so seldom happens, that it is no reasonable object of apprehension. It is happy for us that we are so constituted. Without this, we should be in a state of endless fluctuation ; and it is almost better to have any principles, and any character, than no fixed principles, no proper character at all.

With respect to the subject of these Letters, I shall hope to derive this advantage from the discussion, that those persons who are atheistically inclined, and who have been confirmed in their disbelief of the principles of religion by the injudicious manner in which some of its friends have defended it ; may find their triumph premature ; and that the system of theism is not overturned, though they should have succeeded in their refutation of some principles which have been *imagined* to be essential to it, and necessary supports of it.

With this calm, and I hope just view of the subject, I shall, in this Letter, endeavour to explain the fallacy of some of the speculative principles on which real friends of religion have, at different times, endeavoured to support the doctrines of a God and of a Providence. And, in doing this, I shall have no fear of increasing, but, on the contrary, some hope of lessening, the number of atheists.

I. I shall not detain you long with the opinion of those who maintain that the belief of a God is an *instinctive principle*; because I presume it will, at this day, be generally acknowledged, that there is no evidence of *any* idea, or principle, being properly instinctive, or *innate*. We come into the world furnished with proper senses to receive the various impressions to which we are exposed; and the traces in the mind, left by those impressions, appear to be the elements of all the ideas, and all the knowledge we ever acquire. Being then possessed of a natural capacity of acquiring to a certain degree every kind of valuable knowledge,

ledge, and the knowledge of God and of religion, as well as of other things, it is not agreeable to the analogy of nature to have the same things impressed upon us in another, and quite different manner.

Besides, had the idea of God been originally impressed upon the minds of all men, the character would, no doubt, have been the same, and would not have been liable to so great variation, and perversion, as we find it to have been. Nor could we imagine it could have been so nearly, if not intirely, effaced, as it appears to have been in some whole nations; if, indeed, it can be supposed possible, on that hypothesis, for *any* person to have been an atheist.

This very unphilosophical opinion, *viz.* that the belief of a God is an instinctive principle, not to be deduced by reasoning from any appearances in nature, has, however, been asserted very lately, and every other mode of defending the primary truths of religion has been most arrogantly exploded, and ridiculed, by Dr. Beattie and Dr. Oswald, on principles before advanced

by Dr. Reid ; and yet of the good *intentions* of these writers, in this singular conduct, I never entertained a doubt, though such absurd principles, so haughtily advanced, and so weakly supported, in this enlightened age, deserve, in my opinion, every other censure. See my *Examination of these writers*.

2. Descartes thought that the very *idea* of a God was a sufficient proof of his existence. This opinion, if defensible at all, implies the former. For unless the idea of God be of such a nature as that it could not have been acquired by any impressions to which we are exposed, it must be impossible to say but that it may have been so formed. What is there in our idea of God but human perfections magnified ; and what is our idea of *infinity* itself, but the mere negation of bounds ?

3. There is another mode of reasoning concerning the being of God, which, I believe, originated with Dr. Clark, and is, I imagine, peculiar to this country, but it does not appear ever to have given general satisfaction ; though some very eminent
meta-

metaphysicians are still strongly attached to it. To me, however, the fallacy of it seems very obvious.

According to this author, there must be a God, or an original designing cause of all things, because it would be as much a contradiction to suppose the contrary, as to suppose that *two and two* are not equal to *four*. He also says, that the idea of God cannot be excluded from the mind, any more than the ideas of *space* or *duration*, though we use every effort we can for that purpose.

Now a *contradiction* is saying and unsaying, affirming and denying a thing at the same time, or in the same sentence; so that there is a manifest *contrariety*, or *incompatibility*, between those ideas that are asserted to coincide; and this must appear without any reasoning on the subject; just as if we should say *white is black*, and yet retain the ideas usually annexed to those terms. We immediately perceive, without any reasoning, that *black* cannot be *white*, or *white; black*. If we say that *two and two* are *five*, it is a contradiction, though in form one

step short of a *direct* one. To make it a direct contradiction, we should first say that *two and two are four*, and then that *four is five*, which only is a direct, or proper contradiction.

Now where is the proper contradiction, direct or indirect, in saying *There is no God?* If we reduce it to a formal proposition, it is, *The universe exists without a cause*. Now, false as the proposition is, it is no more a contradiction (i. e. *in terms*, and there is no other proper contradiction) than to say that *God exists without a cause*, which is a truth. Because neither is the idea annexed to the term *universe*, the direct reverse of the idea annexed to the term *uncaused*, nor does the idea annexed to the term *God* coincide with it.

As to the impossibility of excluding from our minds the idea of a deity, it is altogether an affair of *consciousness*; and with respect to myself, I have no scruple to say, that I find no difficulty at all in excluding the ideas of every thing in nature, except those of *space* and *duration*, and I cannot help being surprized

prized that the contrary should ever have been asserted.

It is true that the belief of what actually exists compels us to the belief of a God, or an uncaused Being, different from mere space. But exclusive of the consideration of *an existing universe*, from which I infer the belief of a God, as the necessary cause of it, there is nothing in the mere *idea* of a deity (as there evidently is in the idea of space) that prevents a possibility of its being excluded from the mind. But it is proper that so respectable a writer as Dr. Clark should be heard in his own words:

“ The only true idea of a self-existent or necessary existent Being,” *Demonstration*, &c. p. 17, “ is the idea of a Being, the supposition of whose non-existing is an express contradiction.— The relation of equality between *twice two* and *four* is an absolute necessity, only because it is an immediate contradiction in terms to suppose them unequal. To use the word in any other sense,” p. ib. “ seems to be using it without any signification at all.— If any
 “ one

“ one now ask what sort of idea, the idea of
 “ that Being is, the supposition of whose
 “ non-existence is thus an express contra-
 “ diction, I answer, it is the first and simplest
 “ idea that we can possibly frame, or rather
 “ which (unless we forbear thinking at all)
 “ we cannot possibly extirpate, or remove
 “ out of our minds, of a most simple Being,
 “ absolutely eternal, and infinite, original,
 “ and independent.”—Yet, as I have said
 before, I cannot imagine any difficulty in
 excluding this idea. But he argues the
 same thing in a different manner.

“ That he who supposes there may pos-
 “ sibly be no eternal infinite Being in the
 “ universe, supposes a contradiction, is evi-
 “ dent from hence,” p. 19, “ that when he
 “ has done his utmost in endeavouring to
 “ imagine that no such Being exists, he
 “ cannot avoid imagining *an eternal and in-*
 “ *finite nothing*; that is, he will imagine
 “ eternity and immensity removed out of
 “ the universe, yet that, at the same time,
 “ they still continue there.”

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Here

Here I think is a manifest fallacy. If, by an *eternal and infinite nothing*, he meant that nothing will be eternal and infinite but *space*, it is *false*, but surely no *contradiction*; and though an eternal and infinite deity be removed, an eternal and infinite space will not. If there be no reference to the idea of space (which indeed is not mentioned) the inconclusiveness of the argument is too obvious to have escaped the observation of any person.

I acknowledge, with Dr. Clark, that a finite being cannot be self-existent; but I do not feel the force of his reasoning on the subject, because it is the same with the preceding. "To suppose a finite Being," p. 47, "to be self-existent, is to say, that it is a contradiction for that Being not to exist, the absence of which may yet be conceived without a contradiction, which is the greatest absurdity in the world." Here he takes it for granted, that the idea of the self-existence of any Being implies its being a contradiction for that Being not to exist.

But

But though Dr. Clark advances thus far *a priori*, that is without any reference to an *existing universe*, in proof of the being of a God, he does not pretend to prove the *divine intelligence* in this manner, nor yet his *power*. "That the self-existent being," p. 55, "is an *understanding*, and really *active* being, cannot be demonstrated strictly and properly *a priori*, because we know not wherein *intelligence* consists, nor can we see an immediate and necessary connexion of it with *self-existence*. The self-existent Being, the supreme cause of all things," p. 80, "must of necessity have infinite power, because all things in the universe were made by him, and all the powers of all things are derived from him, and entirely dependent upon him."

But, what is more extraordinary, this writer thinks he can prove the *moral attributes of God* from his intelligence only. This, however, considering that he does not pretend to prove intelligence itself *a priori*, is not, strictly speaking, an argument *a priori*.

That

That the supreme cause of all things must of necessity be a Being of infinite goodness, justice, and truth, and all moral perfections, he proves from this consideration, that a being of infinite intelligence must perceive those *necessary fitnesses of things*, on which, according to him, morality depends; and, "having no want of any thing, "his will cannot be influenced," p. 125, "by any wrong affection, and, therefore, "he must of necessity do always what he "knows to be fittest to be done, i. e. he "must always act according to the strictest "rules of infinite goodness, justice, and "truth, and all other moral perfections."

As the idea concerning the *foundation of morals*, on which this argument proceeds, is another subject of discussion, I shall not enter into it here, except just observing, that I perceive no necessary connexion between *intelligence*, as such, and any particular *intention*, or *object*, whatever; and, therefore, nothing can prove actual *benevolence*, in preference to *malevolence*, but the actual production of *happiness*, in preference

ference to *mifery*, or, at least, a manifest tendency to it, in what is actually produced.

Dr. Clark's mode of reasoning is not very different from that of Descartes, and others, who maintain that we can prove the existence of a self-existent Being from the very *idea* we have of it. That the reader may see how he distinguishes in this case, I shall just recite what he says on the subject.

“ I must have an idea of something actually existing without me,” p. 22, “ and I must see wherein consists the absolute impossibility of removing that idea, in consequence of supposing the non-existence of the thing, before I can be satisfied, from that idea, that the thing actually exists. The bare having an idea of the proposition, *There is a self-existent Being*, proves, indeed, the thing not to be impossible (for of an impossible proposition there is properly no idea) but that it actually *is* cannot be proved from the idea, unless the certainty of the *actual existence* of a necessarily existent being follows

“ follows from the *possibility* of the exist-
 “ ence of such a being ; which that it does ;
 “ in this particular case, many learned men
 “ have indeed thought, and their subtle
 “ arguings on this head are not, perhaps,
 “ very easily to be disapproved. But it is
 “ a much clearer and convincing way of
 “ arguing, to demonstrate, that there does
 “ actually exist without us a Being whose
 “ existence is necessary of itself, by show-
 “ ing the manifest contradiction of the con-
 “ trary supposition, and, at the same time,
 “ the absolute impossibility of destroying
 “ or removing some ideas, as of eternity and
 “ immensity, which, therefore, must needs
 “ be the attributes of a necessary being ac-
 “ tually existing.”—

Since, however, *mere space*, as I have ob-
 served before, may easily be conceived to
 have existed *infinite* and *eternal*, without
 any thing to occupy it, it certainly cannot
 be necessary to suppose it the attribute of
 any other being. This is manifestly very
 unlike the case of *black, white, long, broad,*
 or other *mere properties*, which cannot be
 conceived

conceived without some *subject* to which they belong. The dispute whether space be a *substance*, or a *property*, is, in fact, merely, or little more than, verbal; because we know nothing of any thing but its properties. But if a *capacity of subsisting, in idea, by itself*, be a characteristic of *substance*, as opposed to *property*, space, undoubtedly, ought to be denominated a substance, and not a mere property; though, when occupied by any other substance, it may assume the appearance of a property belonging to that substance. For, take away the substance, and the space it occupied will not, in idea, go with it. Nay, in that sense, it is more of the nature of substance than any thing else, because it is impossible, even in idea, to suppose it not to be permanent.

If the whole of what Dr. Clark has advanced, on the proof of the being of a God, be attentively considered, it will not be very easy to say what his idea of God, as proved *a priori*, is. It is that of a Being self-existent, eternal, and co-extended with infinite

finite space, but not space. It is the cause of all things, but without *power, intelligence, or moral attributes*; for these he makes to depend upon the perceived relation of things. Consequently, they pre-suppose intelligence, which he acknowledges cannot be proved *a priori*.

In fact, therefore, he proves nothing *a priori* but *mere being*, without any proper *powers* whatever. But the terms, *being* or *substance*, give no ideas at all, when divested of powers or properties. So that, in reality, notwithstanding his assertion of the contrary, it is nothing but *empty space* that he is capable of proving *a priori*. And, with respect to this, I perfectly agree with him; because, do what we will, we cannot so much as *suppose* infinite and eternal space not to have existed.

Far, however, am I from saying that a deity, an *efficient deity*, with all his attributes, is not, properly speaking, *necessarily existent*; or that his existence is not, in reality, as necessary as that of space itself. But then we come to the knowledge of this

O necessity,

necessity, with respect to him, in a different manner. It is by beginning *a posteriori*, finding that, in consequence of the *actual existence* of Beings that must have had a cause, there must have been some Being that could not have had a cause, though we are altogether at a loss to conceive, *a priori*, *how*, or *why*, he should exist without a cause, and can in idea easily imagine him not to have existed, which is not the case with respect to space. Then, the necessary existence of a supreme cause once supposed, there are various attributes, as those of *eternity*, *immensity*, and *unity*, that may either with certainty, or with the greatest probability, be deduced from the consideration of *necessary existence*.

But though to us, and our conceptions, there be this difference between the idea of the existence of space, and of that of the deity, there may not be any in reality. Indeed, the deity could not have been *necessarily existent*, if there had not been, in the nature of things, if we may use the phrase (which, however, can only be improperly applied

applied

applied in this case) as much reason for his existence, as for that of space. But neither the term *reason*, nor any thing equivalent to it, ought, in strictness, to be used in this case, lest it should imply, contrary to the supposition, that there is some proper *cause* of the divine existence, whereas he cannot have had any cause.

On this account, I dislike the phraseology of Dr. Clark, when he sometimes speaks of *necessity being the cause of the divine existence*. Indeed the whole of our language is so appropriated to *finite* and *caused* beings, that it is hardly possible to use any part of it in speaking with strict propriety of a being *infinite* and *uncaused*. We should, therefore, forgive one another any oversights of this nature that we inadvertently fall into.

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

L E T T E R · XIII.

Of the Ideas of CAUSE and EFFECT, and the Influence of Mr. Hume's Opinion on this Subject in the Argument for the Being of a GOD.

DEAR SIR,

AS some persons have imagined that the cause of atheism has derived considerable advantage from Mr. Hume's ideas concerning the nature of *cause and effect*, I shall, in this letter, endeavour to shew that the apprehension is without foundation.

Mr. Hume says, that all we can pretend to know concerning the connexion of cause and effect, is their constant *conjunction*; by the observance of which the mind is necessarily led from the one to the other. From this the friends of religion have supposed that, if this representation be just, the connexion is merely *arbitrary*, and, therefore, that

that such things as we have usually called *effects* may take place without any thing that we have usually observed to correspond to them, as their *causes*. Consequently, that, for any thing that we know to the contrary, the universe itself may have existed from eternity without any superior cause.

To guard against this, some of the friends of religion deny that our idea of *power* or *causation* is derived from any thing that we properly observe. But, imperfect as Mr. Hume's ideas on the subject are (notwithstanding his laborious and tiresome discussion of it, and its being evidently a favourite topic with him) I think I have sufficiently shewn, in the third of the *Essays* prefixed to my Edition of *Hartley's Theory of the Mind*, that there is nothing in the idea of *power*, or *causation* (which is only the same idea differently modified) that is not derived from the impressions to which we have been subject, this being to be ranked in the class of *abstract ideas*, where it does not appear that Mr. Hume ever thought

of looking for it. In the Essay I here refer to, p. 36, I have shewn that the idea of *power*, is far from being, what some take it to be; a simple idea, but that, on the contrary, it is one of the most complex ideas that we have, consisting of what is common to numberless impressions of very different kinds.

Besides, if the idea of power be any thing that cannot be acquired by *experience*, it comes under the description of other *innate principles*, or *ideas*, which have been so long, and, I think, so justly exploded, that I think myself at liberty to take it for granted that there is no such thing.

But I shall proceed to observe that, in whatever manner we come by the idea of power or causation, it is an idea that all men have, and corresponds to something *real* in the relation of the things that suggest it. It is true, that all we properly *see* of a *magnet*, and a *piece of iron*, is that, at certain distances they approach to one another, and of a *stone*, that, in certain circumstances, it invariably tends towards the earth ;

earth; and we cannot give any proper, or satisfactory *reason* why either of these effects should take place in these circumstances. Yet we have always found that, in a similar constant conjunction of appearances, we have never failed to discover, whenever we have been able to make any discovery at all, that the event could not have been otherwise. And though, in these cases, we have only discovered a *nearer*, and never *the ultimate* cause of any appearance, yet there is an invariable experience in favour of *some* real and sufficient cause in all such conjunctions.

In consequence of this experience, it is indelibly impressed upon the minds of all men, that all events whatever, and all productions whatever, must have a necessary and adequate cause; so that "nothing can begin to be without a cause foreign to itself."

And let any person pretend what he will, he must himself (in consequence of the impressions to which he, together with the rest of mankind, has uniformly been

exposed) have come under the influence of it, and of course have the same persuasion.

Though, therefore, by means of some secret bias, and sophistical argumentation, a man may come to be persuaded that the universe has had no superior cause, he cannot deny but that all other things (which the theist must show to be in the same predicament with the universe) must have had such a cause; so that nothing is to be apprehended from his idea of *the nature of causation in general*. What ever that idea be (and, in fact, it will be the same with that of the rest of mankind, let any person give whatever account of it he pleases) he will necessarily expect a superior cause in those circumstances in which mankind in general will be satisfied that a cause is requisite.

Different persons *feel*, and are *persuaded*, differently enough in some cases; but where the influences to which their minds have been subject have necessarily been nearly the same, the impressions made on them
cannot

cannot be materially different. In this case, I should sooner imagine that the ideas annexed to the words *hunger* and *thirst* should be different in different persons, than the ideas annexed to the words *power* and *causation*, or that they should have different effects in their serious argumentations,

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

L E T T E R X I V .

An Examination of Mr. Hume's Metaphysical Writings,

DEAR SIR,

YOU are surprized, you tell me, that Mr. Hume, so great a master of reasoning, so cool and dispassionate a writer, and so subtle a metaphysician, should have written so loosely and unguardedly, as you
are

are now convinced he has done in this *posthumous work* of his; a work of which, it is evident, he made great account, by his taking such effectual measures for its publication after his death. But you cannot well suppose, having always entertained a different idea, that I can be sufficiently well-founded in the censure I have passed on his *metaphysical writings in general*, in my ninth Letter, and, therefore, you wish I would enter on the proof of what I have advanced, by a distinct exhibition of *all* that Mr. Hume has done in this way; that when all the observations he has advanced shall be seen without the imposition of his style and manner, its real merit, its solidity or futility, may plainly appear.

Now I am ready to give you the fullest satisfaction on this subject; and I should not have ventured to throw out that *general censure*, without being prepared to justify it in all the particulars, if you should call upon me to do it. Besides, I am not without hopes, that when you see on how narrow a foundation Mr. Hume's fame as a *meta-*
3 physician

physician stands, his authority as a *reasoner* will not weigh so much as it has hitherto done, with you and others who have only a general and indistinct notion of his being a *great philosopher*, and an acute and guarded writer. This I shall do in as succinct a manner as I can, in a regular analysis of all his *Essays* that are in the least to our present purpose.

In the first of his *Philosophical Essays*, on *the different species of philosophy*, which is only an introduction to the rest, it appears that he had no idea of the connexion of the different faculties of the mind, and their dependence upon one principle, as that of *association*. For he says, p. 11, “The mind
“ is endued with several powers and facul-
“ ties; and these powers are totally distinct
“ from each other; but” p. 15, “We may
“ hope that philosophy may carry its re-
“ searches farther, and discover at least, in
“ some degree, the secret springs and prin-
“ ciples by which the human mind is actu-
“ ated in its operations.” He says, how-
ever, “it is probable that one operation and
“ principle

“ principle of the mind depends on another,
 “ which again may be resolved into one
 “ more general and universal.” What that
 principle is, it is evident Mr. Hume had no
 idea.

In his second Essay, on *the origin of our ideas*, I find nothing that could have been *new*, but an ill-founded suspicion, “ that
 “ simple ideas are not, in every instance, de-
 “ rived from corresponding impressions,” merely because, having had ideas from actual impression of the extremes of any particular *colour*, we are able, without any farther assistance from actual impressions, to raise the idea of the intermediate shades of the same colour; not considering that this amounts to nothing more than a difference of *greater or less*, and, therefore, is not properly any new idea at all. It is no more than forming an idea of a middle sized hill, after having seen small hillocks, and large mountains.

Let a tender eye be strongly impressed with a luminous object, of white, or any other colour, and if the eye be immediately
 shut,

shut, the impression will, of itself, change into various other colours, as well as shades of the same colour; and there can be no doubt but that this would have been the case originally, though no such colours had been known before. Now the substance of the brain being the same with that of the retina, and of the other nerves, it must be capable of such changes of affection as these, from causes within itself; but still the necessary consequence of external impressions.

In the third Essay he reduces all the cases of the connexion, or association, of ideas to three, viz. *resemblance, contiguity* in place or time, and *cause and effect*, without attempting at a conjecture how ideas thus related to each other come to be associated, or what circumstances they have in common; though it was so easy to perceive that, in all of them, the immediate cause is nothing more or less than *joint impression*; the universal and simple law of association being this, that two sensations, or ideas, present to the mind at the same time, will afterwards recal each other; which was well understood by Mr.

Locke,

Locke, and all who had treated of association before Mr. Hume. Let us now see how easily this observation will explain Mr. Hume's three cases.

Things connected in *time* and *place* are generally considered together, or so near to each other, that the remains of one of the ideas is not gone out of the mind before the other has entered it. This is the reason why we so readily repeat numbers in their progressive order, and are not so well able to do it in a retrograde order. We have been most accustomed to repeat them in that order.

Resemblance is a *partial sameness*, and when that part of any idea which is the very same with part of another is excited, it is evidently in consequence of a former joint impression that the remainder of the same idea is revived also.

Mr. Hume says, p. 44, that *contrariety* may perhaps be considered as a species of *resemblance*, for a reason for which I must refer the reader to the Essay itself. But things opposed to one another are frequently
compared,

compared, and considered together. It is, therefore, from frequent joint impression that their easy association is most naturally to be accounted for.

Things that are *causes and effects* to each other are also often contemplated together, and by habit we do not consider our knowledge of any thing to be complete, without knowing the cause if it be an effect, or the effects if it be a cause. We think the idea to be as incomplete as that of the head of a man without his body, or of his body without his head. We feel them as different parts of the same thing.

Little, and imperfect, as what Mr. Hume has advanced on this subject manifestly is, he seems to have imagined that he had done something very great, when he concludes the Essay with saying, “the full explication of
 “this principle, and all its consequences,
 “would lead us into reasonings too pro-
 “found and too copious for these Essays.
 “It is sufficient at present to have esta-
 “blished this conclusion, that the three
 “connecting principles of all ideas are the
 “relations

“relations of resemblance, contiguity, and
“causation.”

The fourth Essay, entitled *Sceptical Doubts*, relates to our inferring an effect from a cause, asserting, that it is by a process that is not properly *reasoning*, because all that we observe is the two separate ideas, and we are altogether ignorant of their connexion; and in his fifth Essay, entitled, quaintly enough, *the Sceptical Solution of those Doubts*, he says, that we make the inference by the principle of *habit*, or custom; which comes to this, that the two ideas have always been associated together, so that, as he expresses it, the mind is naturally led from one of them to the other, or, as he should have said more properly, one of them will necessarily introduce the other.

Leaving the question in this state, he may, with superficial readers, have weakened the foundation of our reasoning from effects to causes, as if it was properly no *reasoning* at all (which is language that he frequently uses) but only an arbitrary, and perhaps ill-founded, association of ideas. Whereas he
would

would only have done justice to his subject, to have added, that, having found, in all such *constant* conjunctions of ideas, with respect to which we have been able to make any discovery at all, that the conjunction was really *necessary*, we conclude that the conjunction, if constant, is equally necessary, even when we are not able distinctly to perceive it. We, therefore, *presume* it, and securely *set* upon it. Indeed, without having made any discovery at all, we could not but be sensible, that if two events always follow one another, there must be some sufficient reason for it.

As almost every pretension to *discovery*, or *novelty*, is contained in this observation of Mr. Hume's, I shall consider it a little more strictly. When we say that two events, or appearances, are *necessarily connected*, all that we can mean is, that some more general law of nature must be violated before those events can be separated. For example, I find that the sounding of one musical string will make another string that is unison, &c. with it, to sound also; and finding this

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obser-

observation invariable, I call the founding of the first string the *cause*, and that of the second the *effect*, and have no apprehension of being disappointed in my expectation of the consequence. But I do not see what should make this conjunction necessary, till I discover that sound consists of a vibratory motion of the air, and that the air being put into this vibratory motion by the first string, communicates the same to the second by its pulses, in the same manner as the first string itself was made to vibrate.

In like manner, it was always known (and mankind have always acted on the persuasion) that respiration is necessary to animal life, and that air frequently breathed, &c. is fatal to it, though it is only of late that we have discovered the connexion of those effects with the cause. In due time we may discover the cause of this cause, &c.

The idea annexed to the term *cause*, or *necessary agency*, is not a simple idea, or what could originally have been formed in the mind by the perception of any two other ideas,

ideas, as Mr. Hume seems to have expected (and which notion alone could suggest any difficulty in the case) but it represents the impression left in the mind by observing what is common to numberless cases in which there is a constant conjunction of appearances or events, in some of which we are able to see the proximate cause of the conjunction, but with respect to the rest we only *presume* it, from the similarity of the cases. Notwithstanding, therefore, a definite idea, corresponding to the words *cause* or *power*, does not occur to the mind on the original comparison of any two particular ideas, the inference from effects to causes, whether Mr. Hume will call it *reasoning* or not, is, in many cases, as safe as any reasoning whatever, so that no sceptic can derive the least advantage from this consideration.

The latter part of this Essay (which I dare say Mr. Hume considered as the first in importance in the whole work) contains a very imperfect and manifestly false account of the difference between *belief* and *imagination*,

nation, "Belief," he says, p. 82, "is no-
 " thing but a more vivid, lively, forceable,
 " firm, steady conception of an object, than
 " what the imagination alone is ever able
 " to attain." And to account for this *man-*
ner of conception, he says, that whenever
 we are led from one *Idea* to another, by the
 connexion of *resemblance*, or *contiguity*, and
 therefore, probably, by that of *causation* too,
 we at the same time get a *stronger* concep-
 tion of it than we should otherwise attain.
 Unable to account for this, he ascribes the
 fact to an *instinct of nature*. But he might
 just as well have done what Drs. Reid,
 Beattie, and Oswald, did afterwards, viz.
 ascribe the sentiment of *belief itself*, as well
 as that which is the *cause of belief*, to an ar-
 bitrary instinct of nature.

In reality, nothing can be more evidently
 false than what he here supposes. For how
 often does it happen that we are more affect-
 ed by a representation of fictitious distress,
 in a novel, or on the theatre, than by in-
 stances of real distress in common life. It
 is true that, *ceteris paribus*, reality makes a
 stronger

stronger impression than *fiction*; and, therefore, when an impression is, by artificial means, made stronger than usual, it sometimes imposes upon us for truth. But the idea annexed to the word *truth* is of a very complex nature, and is the impression that is left in the mind by thousands of cases in which *real existence* has been discriminated from that which has none.

A child hears a tale of distress, and having always had the truth told him, he, of course, believes it, and according to his previously acquired sensibility, is affected with it; but he inquires farther, and finds that he has been imposed upon. Either no such person existed, or such and such things did not happen to him. He also reads tales of distress, &c. in books, but finds, by comparing them with other books, and other accounts, they had no existence. From much observation of this kind, a complex idea, formed by a number of circumstances, is left in the mind, and to this he gives the name of *truth*, an idea which he learns to respect more and more every day, and which

he acquires a habit of affixing, with all its *secondary ideas* of respect, with justness and effect, as he advances in life; so that, independently of the *strength of our feelings*, or imagination, we act very differently, according as we see reason to annex this idea of *truth* to a story, or not.

Mr. Hume says, p. 90, "When a sword is levelled at my breast, does not the idea of wounds and pains strike me more strongly than when a glass of wine is presented to me, even though, by accident, this idea should occur after the appearance of the latter object." But let an executioner, whom he believes to have a commission to run a sword through his body, be at the distance of a hundred miles from him, and though there be neither a sword, nor the figure of a sword near him, he would, I doubt not, by only *thinking* of a sword, in those circumstances, feel very differently, and more strongly, than if he should take a real sword in his own hand, and hold the point of it to his naked breast, when he had no apprehension of any design to hurt
himself

himself with it. But how does this tally with Mr. Hume's account of the difference between belief and fiction?

It is evident that Mr. Hume had no idea of the extent of the power of association in the human mind, by means of which a single idea may consist of thousands of parts, being a miniature of numberless *trains of ideas*, and of whole successive *states of mind*, and yet be perfectly distinct from other ideas, consisting of as many parts, every such complex idea retaining its separate character and powers. The very *names* of persons famous in history excite in our minds an epitome of all that we know concerning them, the particulars of which we may have forgotten. How complex also are the ideas belonging to words expressive of *national customs, ranks, and orders of men*, which, however, when pronounced ever so slightly, excite ideas perfectly distinct from each other, as much as those denoting the most simple ideas.

Now the ideas of *cause, effect, reason, instinct, probability, contingency, truth, falsehood,*

hood, &c. &c. &c. are of this nature, requiring definitions of some extent; and the ideas they in fact excite are miniatures of much more than enters into the shortest possible description of them; for they were not attained in that manner; and yet all the parts perfectly coalesce, and form distinct and permanent ideas. I have endeavoured to give some account of this business in the third of the *Essays prefixed to my edition of Hartley's theory of the mind.*

Mr. Hume, in his sixth Essay, p. 94, says that "the sentiment of belief is begotten in the mind by an inexplicable contrivance of nature. Let any one try," he says, p. 97, "to account for this operation of the mind upon any received system of philosophy, and he will be sensible of the difficulty." On the system of Hartley there is no difficulty in it at all.

In the seventh Essay, *on Power*, he only more particularly insists upon it, that we know of no connexion between the idea of any cause and that of any effect, though we suppose there is some connexion. Of this
I have

I have given, I presume, a sufficient account already.

In his eighth Essay, on *Liberty and Necessity*, he very clearly illustrates some of the arguments in favour of Necessity; but not having any comprehension of the *great system*, of which that doctrine is a part, he, without the least reason, and without the least concern, abandons it to the most shocking immoral consequences. Whereas, in reality, nothing is more favourable to the most sublime sentiments of virtue, in all its branches, as I have shewn at large in my *Illustrations of that doctrine*.

His ninth Essay, on *the Reason of Animals*, contains very little indeed. He only asserts, p. 169, that "it is custom alone that engages animals, from every object that strikes their senses, to infer its usual attendant, and carries their imaginations from the appearance of one to conceive the other, in that strong and lively manner which we denominate belief." This, unable to give any better account of, he calls

calls *instinct*, and says, that man avoids fire by instinct also. Whereas, if by instinct be meant any thing different from the association of ideas (which certainly were not born with us) nothing is more contrary to fact. A child knows nothing of a dread of fire, but acquires it in consequence of the sensation of pain from it. He can even hardly be prevented from putting his finger into the flame of a candle. How Mr. Hume could reconcile this well-known fact with a proper *instinctive dread of fire*, is not easy to say.

The tenth Essay, on *Miracles*, is intended to support a principle, according to which the relation of no appearance whatever, not evidently similar to former appearances, can be credible; a principle which we see refuted every day in experimental philosophy, and which nothing could have given the least countenance to, or have intitled to any consideration, but its affecting the credit of the miracles recorded in the Scriptures. On this account it has
been

been refuted by many persons, and I have considered it in my *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*.

The eleventh Essay, *on a particular Providence and a future State*, I have examined in my tenth Letter.

In his twelfth Essay, Mr. Hume maintains that “because all we know of any object is
“the idea of it in our minds, we can never
“prove,” p. 241, “that those ideas, or per-
“ceptions, may not arise from the energy of
“the mind itself, or from the suggestion of
“some invisible or unknown spirit, or some
“other cause still more unknown to us,” and that the supposition of a connexion between those perceptions of the mind and external objects is without any foundation in reasoning; not considering that we have just the same reason for believing the existence of external objects, that we have for the truth of the Copernican system. They are *the easiest hypotheses for acknowledged facts*, as I have shewn at large in the *Introduction to my Examination of the writings of Drs. Reid, Beattie, and Oswald*.

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His observation, p. 243, that *all sensible qualities*, and, therefore, that *extension* itself, is in the mind, and not without us, is trifling. He might as well have said, that because *sound* is a thing formed within a musical instrument, and not without it, there is nothing without it that produces the sound.

To his objection to the infinite divisibility of matter, p. 246, to some angles being infinitely less than others, and those again divisible *ad infinitum*, which he allows to be *demonstrable*, and yet says, is *big with contradiction and absurdity*, at the same time that he acknowledges that “nothing can be more sceptical, or more full of doubt and hesitation, than this scepticism itself,” I surely need say nothing. This does not amount to so much as a *sceptical solution of a sceptical doubt*. It may rather be called *the sceptical proposal of a sceptical doubt*.

In the conclusion of this last Essay, we find the outline of all the scepticism of his posthumous work, with the same paltry cover, viz. that “all reasoning from the relation of cause and effect is founded on a
 2 “ certain

“ certain instinct of our nature, and may be
 “ fallacious and deceitful,” p. 251, that
 “ we can never satisfy ourselves concerning
 “ any determination we may form with re-
 “ gard to the origin of worlds, and the situa-
 “ tion of nature from and to eternity ;” p.
 255, that “ divinity or theology,” p. 209,
 “ as it proves the existence of a deity, &c.
 “ has a foundation in reasoning, so far as it
 “ is supported by experience” (which sup-
 port in a former Essay he absolutely denies
 it to have) “ but that its best and most
 “ solid foundation is *faith* and divine reve-
 “ lation.”

In the first of these Essays, Mr. Hume had
 said, “ We have, in these Essays, attempted
 “ to throw some light upon subjects, from
 “ which uncertainty has hitherto deterred
 “ the wise, and obscurity the ignorant.”
 How very small is the light that he has
 thrown, and mixed with how much darkness,
 I need not repeat. “ Happy,” says he, p. 18,
 “ if we can unite the different species of
 “ philosophy, by reconciling profound in-
 “ quiry with clearness, and truth with no-
 “ velty ;

“velty; and still more happy, if reasoning
 “in this easy manner, we can undermine
 “the foundation of an abstruse philosophy,
 “which seems to have served hitherto only
 “as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to
 “absurdity and error.”

. Now I neither see the *profundity*, nor the *clearness* of his reasoning, except in things with respect to which he is far from being *original*, notwithstanding his advantage of a command of language, and a great power of perspicuity, where his argument would admit of it. As to the *abstruse philosophy* which he meant to undermine, it could be nothing but the doctrine of *certainty*, and a steady persuasion concerning *truth*, and especially the truths of natural and revealed religion; and what kind of a mind must that man have had, to whom *this* could give any satisfaction!

. All men by no means judge of the value of publications by the same rules with Mr. Hume, or perhaps his own *Essays* would be in more danger than he himself imagined.
 “When we run over libraries, persuaded of
 “those

“ those principles,” says he, p. 259, “ what
 “ havock must we make? If we take in
 “ hand any volume of Divinity, or School
 “ Metaphysics, for instance, let us ask, Does
 “ it contain any abstract reasonings concern-
 “ ing quantity or number? No. Does it
 “ contain any experimental reasonings concern-
 “ ing matter of fact, or existence? No.
 “ Commit it then to the flames. For it can
 “ contain nothing then but sophistry and il-
 “ lusion.” It is happy for us all, that we
 are not judges for one another in these cases,
 but that a wise providence over-rules all
 things. The *scriptures* were certainly not
 meant to come under either of Mr. Hume’s
 characters of *books to be saved from the flames*.

In the preceding observations, I think I
 have descanted upon every thing of Mr.
 Hume’s, in which it can be pretended, or in
 which he himself would have pretended, that
 he had made any advances in the knowledge
 of the human mind. I need not now say how
 inconsiderable those advances were. All
 that he has observed relates to the power of
 association, and his ideas on that subject
 were

were much confined, going very little, if indeed, on the whole, any thing at all, beyond those of Mr. Locke, and others who had preceded him.

Mr. Hume had not even a glimpse of what was at the same time executing by Dr. Hartley, who, in an immense work, of wonderful comprehension and accuracy, has demonstrated, that this single principle of *association* is the great law of the human mind, and that all those which Mr. Hume, as well as others, had considered as *independent faculties*, are merely different *cases*, or *modifications* of it; that *memory*, *imagination*, *judgment*, *the will*, and *the passions*, have the same, and no other origin; so that by means of this one property, and the circumstances in which we are placed, we all of us come to be every thing that we are.

In his *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Mr. Hume very well illustrates what I fancy he himself would not pretend to be *new*, though, I believe, it had not been sufficiently attended to by Metaphysicians, viz. that “utility is the foundation of virtue;”
and

and this being the most considerable and the most elaborate work of Mr. Hume's, I have referred to it as a specimen of analytical reasoning, in my *Lectures on Criticism*. But in this work Mr. Hume refers the pleasing *feelings*, annexed to the perception of virtue, to *an instinct of nature*, confessedly unable to trace them any farther. "It is
 "needless," he says, p. 85, "to push our
 "researches so far as to ask why we have
 "humanity, or a fellow-feeling with others.
 "It is sufficient that this is experienced to
 "be a principle in human nature. We must
 "stop somewhere in our examination of
 "causes, and there are in every science some
 "general principles beyond which we can-
 "not hope to find any principle more gene-
 "ral." Dr. Hartley, however, not resting
 where Mr. Hume did, has, with wonderful
 sagacity, discovered the origin of benevo-
 lence, of the moral sense, and of every other
 principle before thought to be *instinctive*,
 shewing how they are derived from associa-
 tion, affecting us in our infant state, and as

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we

we advance in life; and he has shewn the diversity that we find in human affections to arise from a diversity of influences, operating on us in the same general manner.

In this work, Mr. Hume classes *humility* among the *vices*, with no other view, that I can perceive, but to shew his contempt for the christian system, in which it makes a principal figure, as a virtue. And he has wholly overlooked all the virtues of the *devotional kind*, when, in fact, they may be shewn, by arguments independent of the peculiar doctrines of revelation, to be, in their own nature, the most truly *valuable*, as well as the most *sublime* of all others, and to form what may be called the *key-stone* of every truly great and heroic character. Without the virtues of this class (though Dr. Smith considers Mr. Hume as “approaching as nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit”) his character must have been as imperfect as his views
(looking

(looking to nothing beyond the grave) were narrow.

I have thus given you my reasons, as briefly as I well could, for placing Mr. Hume so low as I do in the class of *metaphysical writers*, or *moral philosophers*. As to *Natural Philosophy*, or *Mathematics*, I never heard that he had any pretensions to merit; and of that which constitutes an *historian*, you will not, I imagine, think that much remains to him, besides that of a *pleasing compiler*, after reading Dr. Towers's judicious Remarks on his *History of England*. His *Miscellaneous* and *Political Essays* always pleased me, but they by no means entitle him to the *first rank* among writers of either class. As to his *style*, notwithstanding its excellence in some respects, I have shewn in my *English Grammar* (and, as I have been informed, to Mr. Hume's own satisfaction) that he has departed farther from the true idiom of the English language, than perhaps any other writer of note in the present age.

Submitting all my observations to your own judgment, and sincerely wishing the

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happiest

happiest issue to your laudable pursuit of
truth, I remain,

Dear Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

CALNE, *Marsh*, 1780.

ADDITIONAL
LETTERS
TO A
PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.
IN ANSWER TO
MR. WILLIAM HAMMON.

P R E F A C E.

IT is certainly to be wished that every man was at full liberty, not only to publish his real opinions on any subject whatever, but also to urge them with the greatest force, and to recommend them by the strongest arguments that he can produce in support of them. No *lover of truth* will wish to stand on any other ground. For my own part, I rejoice that a *professed*

atheist has thought proper to stand forth in defence of his principles, though it is not with all the consistent boldness that may be expected from one who believes in a God, a providence, and a future state. I myself have no opinions that I wish to shelter behind any *authority* whatever; and should rejoice to see the time (and that time, I doubt not, as the world improves in wisdom, will come) when the civil powers will relieve themselves from the attention they have hitherto given to all matters of speculation, and religion amongst the rest; an attention which has proved so embarrassing to the governors, and so distressing to the governed; and when no more countenance will be given to any particular mode of *religion*, than is given to particular modes of *medicine*, or of *philosophy*.

Individuals are much better situated for providing for themselves, in this respect, than any *representatives* can do for them; and the religion that men would voluntarily adopt for themselves would make them the
best

best subjects to any government, and especially to one that should allow them all, without distinction, this perfect and equal liberty. This would be an attachment much stronger, and more valuable, than any that can be secured by *hire*, as is that of the members of an established church. However, till *nations* get wisdom, *individuals* must bear with their folly, and endeavour to instruct them; and this is most effectually done, by the explicit avowal, and the fearless defence, of whatever we apprehend to be true, and to be conducive to the good of society and of mankind.

That our readers may form a just idea of the subject of the present controversy, it may be proper to inform them, that Mr. Hammon, though a declared atheist, is far from asserting, with the Epicureans of old, and the generality of atheists before him, that there are no marks of *design* in the visible universe. Besides what I have quoted from him in the course of these Letters, he considers it as undeniably true (p. 4.) that “ atoms cannot be arranged in

Q4

a man-

“ a manner expressive of the most exquisite
 “ design, without competent intelligence
 “ having existed somewhere.”

He says farther (*Prefatory Address*, p. 28)
 The “ *vis natura*, the perpetual industry,
 “ intelligence, and provision of nature, must
 “ be apparent to all who see, feel, or think.
 “ I mean to distinguish this active, intelli-
 “ gent, and designing principle, inherent
 “ as much in matter, as the properties of
 “ gravity, or any elastic, attractive, or re-
 “ pulsive power, from any extraneous fo-
 “ reign force and design, in an invisible
 “ agent, supreme, though hidden lord, and
 “ master over all effects and appearances
 “ that present themselves to us in the course
 “ of nature. The last supposition makes
 “ the universe, and all other organized
 “ matter, a machine, made or contrived by
 “ the arbitrary will of another being, which
 “ other being is called *God*; and my theory
 “ makes a *God* of this universe, or admits
 “ no other *God*, or designing principle,
 “ than matter itself, and its various orga-
 “ nizations.”

Such

Such is the fair state of this controversy. It is my business, therefore, to shew, in the first place, that the visible universe is not, and cannot be, that *uncaused being*, which Mr. Hammon supposes; and secondly, that the seat of that intelligence, which is acknowledged to be in the universe, cannot be in the visible universe itself, but must reside in, and belong to, some being distinct from it. One of these hypotheses must be true; for a third cannot be imagined.

These, then, are the principal subjects of the following Letters. But I have also taken some notice of what Mr. Hammon has observed with respect to the moral attributes of the deity, the moral influence of religion, and other subjects of a miscellaneous nature.

Mr. Hammon is also so far from repro-
bating, as other atheists have done, the idea
of a *future life*, that he not only considers
it as desirable, but even as not impossible,
or incredible. For he places it among the
things *inadmissible* and *inconclusive* (p. 10)
that

that "an atheist believes himself to be at
"his death for ever excluded from return-
"ing life."

Atheism, so qualified, certainly loses much of the horror with which it has hitherto been regarded, and affords room to hope that it will soon give place to the system which gives us the fullest and most satisfactory assurance of that *future life*, to which Mr. Hammon looks with *desire*, and, seemingly, not without some degree of *hope*. This certainly ought to be a motive with the world to give him a patient hearing; they have so much reason to expect a favourable issue to the debate. What occasion can there be for *terror*, or *violence* of any kind, when there is so little reason to distrust the natural power of *truth*. If I fail, let abler champions be called in; but let atheism triumph rather than religion, by the help of force.

To conclude this preface with enforcing the sentiments with which it began: let those weak christians, who are for calling in the aid of the magistrate to suppress
heresy

heresy, learn to respect their religion more, and not act the part of the *moles* (in the excellent comparison made use of by a worthy baronet, in the late debate on the Dissenters bill) who thought that the mountain, at the foot of which they were at work, was in danger of falling, and consulted how to provide some better foundation for it. Let them be assured, that its own natural basis, is abundantly sufficient for its support.

If this comparison does not strike them, let them consider the instructive fable of *the horse and the stag*. What the horse lost by calling in the aid of the man, is but a faint emblem of what christianity has lost, by calling in the aid of the magistrate.—They have both of them, by this means, got *masters*, who, on all occasions, make use of them for their own purposes, without any regard to them.

This I now urge in favour of my adversary; but it is language that I may have learned from standing in the same predicament myself. For, as I have observed in the course of these Letters, if the laws of
this

this country were strictly executed, we should both be involved in the same fate. And, perhaps, while my antagonist and myself, like *the mouse and the frog*, are assaulting each other with our weapons of pointed straw, the great *eagle of civil power* may seize upon us both, and crush us, without distinction, and without mercy.

I make no apology for making no difference between the author of the *Prefatory Address*, and the body of the work to which I am replying, as Mr. Hammon, the writer of the former, approves of, and adopts the latter; and to have distinguished them from one another would have been rather embarrassing. All the Letters are addressed to Mr. Hammon.

ADDITIONAL

ADDITIONAL LETTERS

T O A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

L E T T E R I.

*Of Mr. HAMMON'S Professions and Con-
duct, &c.*

S I R,

WHEN I wrote my *Letters to a
philosophical Unbeliever*, I certainly
wished that some person of that character
would calmly and seriously discuss the ar-
guments which I there advanced, for the
belief of a God and a benevolent providence,
and give me an opportunity of perceiving
what it was that really determined his mind
to a conclusion so different from my own ;
though I did not, as you seem to have
imagined,

imagined, undertake to answer all the objections that might be made to what I had advanced on the subject. There is, however, something so peculiar in your Answer, that I have thought proper to take notice of it, and on that account to add a few more *Letters* to those that I published before.

There is a great appearance of *ingenuoufness*, and also of *courage*, in your conduct, which does you honour; and in this country, and in these times, I am confident it will not bring you into any inconvenience. You say (*Advertisement*, p. 8) that you will be looked on as “ a miracle of hardiness, “ for daring to put your name to what you “ have published.” And whereas, some have doubted, whether there ever was such a person as a proper atheist, you say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 17.) “ To put that out “ of all manner of doubt, I do declare “ that, upon my honour, I am one. Be it, “ therefore, for the future remembered, “ that in London, in the kingdom of Eng-

“sand seven hundred and eighty-one, a man hath publicly declared himself an “Atheist.” You even profess your readiness (ib. p. 21.) to suffer martyrdom in this cause, and to glory in it.

You must allow me, however, to observe, that I have not found in your conduct that perfect ingenuoufness and courage to which you pretend. You charge me with sending no answer to the *Letter* which you have published in your *postscript*, or “none that “ever came to your hand.” But whether this was *my* fault or *yours*, let our readers judge from the following facts. That letter I received (only dated September 23d, and not October the 23d, 1781) on the 25th of September; and on the 27th of the same month, I sent the following answer; addressed, according to your own subscription, to Mr. *William Hammon, jun. Liverpool*. The post-mark also of your letter, was LIVERPOOL.

S I R,

S I R,

I SHALL be very happy to do every thing in my power to make you perfectly easy, with respect to the part you wish to take. But this can only be by giving you my real opinion, that you have nothing at all to fear, especially if you write with decency, as a serious enquirer after truth. I am myself as obnoxious to the laws of this country as you can be; and at this day a *heretic* is, I should think, in more danger than an *unbeliever*.

If, contrary to my expectations, any prosecution should be undertaken against you, I can promise the most earnest interposition of myself and my friends in your favour; but farther than this, I do not think it right to engage myself.

I do not recollect that I have any where undertaken to answer all my opponents: but this is of no consequence. If what you write be deemed worthy of an answer, you need

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need not fear having one, and from an abler hand than mine.

Sincerely wishing you may proceed in your purpose, and meet with no obstruction in it, I am, S I R,

Your very humble servant,

BIRMINGHAM, 27th
September, 1781.

J. PRIESTLEY.

Four days after this I received the following.

REV. SIR,

I WROTE you a letter on a philosophical subject this day se'nnight, since which I have had no answer. I only want now to know whether that letter reached you, and whether you intend to send me any answer, or not. I am, REV. SIR,

Your most obedient and humble servant,

WILLIAM HAMMON, JUN.

LIVERPOOL, September 30, 1781.

R

The

The post-mark of this letter was also
LIVERPOOL.

I cannot say that the *tone* of this letter was pleasing to me; nor indeed is it of a piece with the *civility* of the former letter; besides that, the complaint contained in it must, upon the slightest reflection, have appeared unreasonable. For I received your letter on the 25th, and omitting only one single day, answered it on the 27th; and though it was possible that you might have received an answer, before the 30th, it was barely so; and allowing for common accidents, such as my being out of the way, or very particularly engaged at the time of its arrival at my house (which is not in Birmingham, but only near it) it was not to be expected.

No person, however, of your name could be found in Liverpool, though several persons, some of them my particular friends, and at my request, made diligent enquiry concerning you. My own letter was returned to me, and it is now at your service, with the proper post-marks upon it,

and shall be sent to you without delay, if you will inform me where it will really find you.

Your *Prefatory Address* is dated Oxford-street, N^o 418; but at that place no such person could be heard of. There is also no name of a *publisher* annexed to your work. How then can you say, as you do (ib. p. 21) that you have “ventured to subscribe your “publication with your name, as well as I “do my *Letters*, to which your publica- “tion is an answer.” If you enquire for me at Birmingham, as I did for you at Liverpool, I have no doubt but you will readily find me, and I assure you I shall be very glad to see you there.

As to your readiness to suffer *martyrdom* in the cause of atheism, I hope you will never be put to the trial. But you must allow me to observe, that this ostentatious profession of your courage before hand, together with your deficiency in point of *ingenuoufness of mind*, in the instance above-mentioned, gives me no expectation that you would really stand it.

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You

You seem to be apprehensive of the *laws of this country*; but I know of no law that can affect you, except *one*, which equally affects myself. I mean the act of king William, which makes it *blasphemy*, punishable by confiscation of goods, and, if persisted in, imprisonment for life, either to deny that “any of the Three Persons, the “Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, is God; or “to maintain that there are more Gods “than one.” Of these three, I have not scrupled, on many occasions, to deny the divinity of one, and the separate existence of another; so that if the law were executed, I should suffer just the same as you, who deny the divinity of one of them, and the existence of the other two.

I would not be understood to boast of my courage, though I have lived in the open violation of this law, even citing it, and censuring it about twenty years; because I should not have ventured to walk at large, as I have done, and now do, by the mere connivance of my countrymen, unprotected by any law, if I had not thought that I had
sufficient

sufficient reasons to confide in their goodwill, and to presume on the improving *spirit of the times*. Without this secret persuasion, if I had published at all (in opposition to an article of faith, so guarded by laws and penalties) it would probably have been without my name; but I think I should not have used any *false pretences*, or have made a parade of courage, which I really had not. I hope you will find that the people of this country, at least, have made so much progress in that *melioration* of which you profess yourself to be a believer, as that an avowed *Atheist* has nothing more to fear than an avowed *Socinian*.

The religion that I profess hath never been more than barely *tolerated* by the civil power of any country, and very seldom so much as that. But in this circumstance it more resembles the kingdom of my master, which he declared to be *not of this world*.

I own I am so much impressed by this consideration, that I do not wish that my religion may ever be in any other circumstances, so as to receive any thing that can

be called *aid* or *countenance*, from worldly power. We have seen enough of a pretended *alliance between Church and State*. It has only contributed to debase the one, and enslave the other.

It is also not perfectly of a piece with the *courage* to which you pretend, to endeavour to divert the resentment of *Christians*, by intimating, that *they* are not concerned in the question. You say (*Advertisement*, p. 5) “ Revealed knowledge is not descanted upon, and therefore Christians need take no offence. Doubts upon natural religion have not hitherto been looked upon as attacks upon revelation, but rather as corroborations of it.” And again (p. 7) “ The religion established in this country is not the religion of nature, but the religion of Moses and of Jesus, with whom the writer has nothing to do. He trusts, therefore, he shall not be received as a malevolent disturber of such common opinions as are esteemed to keep in order a set of low wretches, so inclinable to be lawless.”

All

All this is manifestly disingenuous. Do you really believe that christianity is not affected by the belief or disbelief of a God? What becomes of the divine mission of Moses, or of Christ, if there be no such being as that *God*, from whom they pretended to be sent. You must know very well, that they are not such doubts as these, that were ever thought to be any corroboration of revealed religion.

What could it be but *timidity*, and to avoid giving umbrage to the ruling powers, that led you to declare (ibid. p. 6) that you have no desire to make converts, and to say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 15) “ I declare I am
 “ rather pleased there are so few Atheists,
 “ than at all anxious to make more. I
 “ triumph in my superior light. I and my
 “ friend are so proud, in our singularity of
 “ being atheists, that we will hardly open
 “ our lips in company, when the question
 “ is started, for fear of making converts,
 “ and so lessening our own enjoyments, by a
 “ numerous division of our privilege with
 “ others !”

Now I am at a loss how to reconcile this either with your publishing any thing on the subject, or with the *benevolence* to which you likewise pretend in this publication, as “an attempt (*Advertisement*, p. 7) to substitute better foundations for morality,” and with the idea of that *debasement of mind*, which you frequently ascribe to the belief of religion. If atheism be a good thing, with respect to yourself and your friends, why should it not be equally good with respect to others, and from what good principle can you wish to confine the benefit to yourselves only; and why should you not both *speak*, as well as *write*, and *suffer martyrdom* in the cause. If, on the other hand, religion be a thing valuable to society at large, though it should happen not to be so with respect to yourself, why do you not forbear to write, as well as to speak against it. You say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 15) that you are resolved to make no reply to any answer I shall make to you; and that if I should have the advantage in the argument, you will “bear my triumph without repining!” Yet
in

in the same page, you promise an answer to my intended letters in behalf of *revelation*. I really see no sort of consistency either with respect to *sense*, or to *courage*, in this conduct of yours.

In general, I have no reason to complain of uncivil treatment from you; but it is not very handsome in you to put the interpretation that you do upon my saying, that I shall proceed with my *Letters to a philosophical Unbeliever*, provided that those which I have published be *well received*, when you say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 14) "It is, in the sum total, just as much as if you had said, *provided this book sells well, I will write another.*"

It is true, as you say, that I have written many books, and if life and health be continued to me, I shall probably write more; but I can truly say (and the nature and complexion of my publications will not contradict it) that I have never yet written any thing solely, or principally, with a view to any advantage that might accrue from it; and several things, with a certainty of being
a loser

a loser. Not one of them was written to please a patron, to court the populace, or to recommend myself to any sect of christians. Certainly not those of the established church, and if possible, still less those of the same denomination with myself. It was even contrary to my own expectation, that, after some of my publications, I should have met with any countenance from them. But they have had much more liberality, than I had presumed upon. And my theological writings are certainly ill calculated to gain the applause of those who are usually stiled philosophers. My object, I trust, is the simple pursuit of truth, from the full persuasion, that the consequence of this will be ultimately friendly to society.

The sale of a book is certainly one means of judging of its success; but of this I can assure you, Sir, I have no reason to boast; for, instead of the *number of editions* you speak of, not one, and that a very moderate one, hath yet been sold. In other respects also, the event has been as little flattering. I do not know that my book
has

has converted a single unbeliever; and if, as I hope, it has confirmed the faith of some, you say it hath contributed to the unhinging and overturning of yours. On no account, therefore, have I, as yet, any encouragement to proceed with this work, as I once intended. You have, however, no need to wait for the *continuation* of those *Letters*, to which you promise an answer. I have really nothing material to add to what I have already advanced on the subject, in my *Institutes of natural and revealed religion*. I could only expect to state some parts of the evidences of revelation in a clearer and more unexceptionable light, and to reply with advantage to some particular objections. I beg, therefore, that you would reply to that work in the first place; and if you advance any thing that I shall think to be material, whether I write with more or less difficulty, you may depend upon an answer from me. I shall be happy to contribute any thing in my power to excite a more general attention to a subject of
fo

so much importance ; being perfectly satisfied, that *truth*, which is all my object, will be a gainer by the discussion.

I am, Sir,

Your's, &c.

J. PRIESTLEY.

L E T T E R II.

*Of the proper Proof of the Existence of a
God, as an uncaused Being.*

SIR,

AS you do not discuss any of my arguments at large, but only deliver your own opinion, in a desultory, but striking manner, I do not know that I can reply to you in any better way, than by first bringing into a short compass, and exhibiting in one connected view, the principal steps in my former arguments, to which you do not
appear

appear to me to have given sufficient attention, notwithstanding I am satisfied, from your quotations, that you have read my book. The *principles and modes of argumentation* are equally known to us both. I have endeavoured to explain them in my former *Letters*, and our *data* are contained in the same *face of nature*, which is equally open to our inspection. Let us then consider the different conclusions that we draw from the same premises.

To instance in some one part of the system of nature, as a specimen of the whole, I have observed, that from whatever reason we are led to conclude that a *telescope* required a maker, an *eye* must have required a maker also; since they are both of them equally mere *instruments*, adapted to answer a particular purpose. They, therefore, prove the existence of what we call a *mind*, capable of perceiving that end or purpose, with a power of providing that means, and of adapting it to its end.

This mind must be a thing entirely foreign to the telescope, and consequently
to

to the eye; it being as contrary to appearances that the eye should make any part of this mind, as that the telescope should.

In the same manner we are necessarily led to conclude, that the *animal* whose eye it is, is the production of some mind, or intelligent being (for every *power* is referred to some *substance*) foreign to itself, and also the *system* of which that animal is a part, comprehending the whole *visible universe*; each part of which bears a relation to the rest, and therefore must derive its origin from a Being whose intelligence is capable of comprehending the whole.

The supposed *eternal generation* of one plant, or one animal from another, does not in the least remove the difficulty of conceiving how any plant, or animal, should have no foreign cause; because there is nothing in any plant or animal, that is even capable of comprehending its own structure; and much less have they the additional power of properly *producing* any thing like themselves, and of enabling one of the
species

species to produce another. This has been the effect of an intelligence much superior to theirs. How any thing that they do contributes to this end, is altogether unknown to them.

We are, therefore, in this train of speculation, necessarily led to *one great intelligent Being*, capable both of *comprehending*, and of *producing* all the visible universe. This Being must have existed from all eternity, without any foreign cause; for if it had had a beginning, it must have had a prior cause. We cannot, indeed, conceive *in what manner*, or *on what principles*, as we may say, such a Being exists, or why it might not be, that he should not have existed. But this does not affect the certainty, that such a Being *does* exist, drawn from the certain existence of what necessarily requires and proves it.

Nor is there any thing peculiar in this particular argument. In many other cases we admit general *facts*, without pretending to have any idea of the *mode* or *manner* of their existence. We have no idea at all
how

how the principles of sensation and thought should depend upon, or result from, the contexture of the brain; but as we know, from undeniable facts, that these properties, or powers, do result from that organization, we necessarily believe it, without having any farther distinct idea on the subject. In like manner we firmly believe, that there must have been an eternally existent and intelligent Being, capable of producing the visible universe, without having any farther idea how this should be. This is not, strictly speaking, believing what is *incomprehensible*, but what we *do* perfectly comprehend, though we perceive it is connected with something that we are not able to comprehend. But as you lay particular stress on this subject, I shall enter a little farther into the discussion of it.

You say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 32) “ It
 “ is impossible for an intellectual Being to
 “ believe firmly in that of which he can
 “ form no conception. I hold the deity,
 “ the fancied deity, at least, of whom,
 “ with all his attributes, such pompous
 “ descriptions

“ descriptions are set forth, to the great
 “ terror of old women, and amusement of
 “ young children, to be an object of which
 “ we form (as appears when we scrutinize
 “ into our ideas) no conception, and there-
 “ fore can give no account.” You also say,
 (p. 48) “ All that Epicurus and Lucretius
 “ have so greatly and convincingly said, is
 “ swept away in a moment by these better
 “ reasoners, who yet scruple not to declare,
 “ with Dr. Priestley, that what they reason
 “ about, is not the subject of human un-
 “ derstanding. But let it be asked, is it
 “ not absurd to reason with a man about
 “ that, of which that same man asserts we
 “ have no idea at all? Yet, will Dr.
 “ Priestley argue, and say, it is of no im-
 “ portance whether the person with whom
 “ he argues, has a conception or not of the
 “ subject. *Having no ideas includes no im-*
 “ *possibility*; therefore, he goes on with his
 “ career of words to argue about an unseen
 “ Being, with another whom he will allow
 “ to have no idea of the subject; and yet it
 “ shall be of no avail in the dispute, who-

S

“ ther

“ther he has or no, or whether he is cap-
 “able or incapable of having any. Rea-
 “son failing, the passions are called upon,”
 &c.

Let us now see whether the *career of words, without ideas*, be more justly laid to my charge or yours. In order to this, I wish, Sir, you would consider what conception you have, or what account you can give of an uncaused and eternally existent universe, every separate part of which bears undeniable marks of a design and intelligence, of which itself is not capable. If you only attend to the case, I think you will soon find that your ideas are far from being clear or satisfactory; notwithstanding you say (p. 37) in general, that to suppose an “infinite succession of finite causes, “is so far from being difficult, that a mind “not afraid to think, will find it the “most easy contemplation in the world to “dwell upon. It is probable,” you say (p. 38) “that if one horse had a cause, all “horses had. But will not the argument “be more consonant to itself, in supposing
 “ all

“ all horses had the same cause; and as one
 “ is seen to be generated from a horse and a
 “ mare, so all were, from all eternity.”

How this conclusion can appear *clear* and *satisfactory* to your mind, is to me not a little extraordinary, as it gives me no satisfaction at all. To me it is the very same thing as if, knowing nothing historically about the matter, a man should find such a city as *London*, and conclude that it had existed from eternity, just as it is, and had no foreign cause; or as if, without knowing any thing concerning the production of *horses*, or of *men*, he should conclude, that any *particular horse*, or *man*, had existed from eternity, without any foreign cause. I do not see how these cases differ; because the whole *race of animals* shews the same marks of design, in the relation they bear to other parts of the system, that the several parts of any individual Being bear to the rest of its particular system; and of a design of which they are themselves incapable. Yet, should any person affirm, concerning *London*, or concerning any par-

ticular horse, or man, what you do not hesitate to affirm concerning the *whole species*, and concerning the *universe*, you would not scruple to say, that he talked without having any distinct conception or ideas, or without reasoning consequentially from them. For there is no objection against the independent existence of the *individuals*, that does not equally lie against that of the *whole species*.

I am ready enough to acknowledge, that there is something relating to an *independent first cause*, of which I can form no proper idea, that is, of which I have no knowledge. But this certainly implies no *contradiction*, any more than my ignorance concerning many other things, of the *existence* of which I have no doubt. Every thing that I see, I suppose to have a cause foreign to itself, because it is not capable of comprehending itself; and the whole *visible universe*, in this respect, comes under the same description with any plant or animal that is a part of it. But there is not this objection against the supposition of a
Being

Being that is capable of comprehending itself, and all things else, having existed without cause from all eternity, whatever other difficulties may attend the speculation. If, than, you adopt that opinion which is pressed with the least difficulty, and is farthest removed from a manifest absurdity, you must abandon that of the independent existence of the *visible universe*, and have recourse to an *invisible first cause*; which is the only alternative left you, in order to avoid the most palpable absurdity.

As you may, perhaps, still object (though you do not urge it very particularly) that the visible universe itself, though bearing marks of design, may as well be conceived to have had no foreign cause, as that the cause of the universe should have had none; I shall endeavour to state more distinctly why I conceive that there is a very great difference in the two cases.

The obvious reason why an *eye*, which is properly an instrument, or a means to gain a particular end, and also why the *animal* that is possessed of it, which is a *system of*

means adapted to various ends, cannot have been uncaused, is that they are not capable of comprehending themselves. They are properly *contrivances*, and therefore, necessarily suppose a *contriver*, just as much as a *telescope* does, which comes under the same description with the *eye*; being an instrument adapted to answer a particular purpose. -

Consequently, the mind can never rest till it comes to a being possessed of that wonderful property, but of which we can have no distinct ideas, because we are not possessed of it ourselves, viz. *self-comprehension*. And this Being must be so essentially different from all others, that, whereas they *must* be derived, this *may* be underived; and if it *may*, it will follow from other considerations, it absolutely *must*. For the mind will always revolt at the idea of going back *ad infinitum*, through an infinite succession of mere fine causes, whatever you may pretend to the contrary.

It is not pretended, as I have said, that we can conceive, *a priori*, that a Being possessed

fessed of self-comprehension, must have been uncaused: but as the mind cannot rest till it arrives at such a Being, and this is a circumstance essentially different from that in which we find every other intelligent Being, it *may* be capable of self-existence, of which the others are not. Any real difference in the condition of these beings may be sufficient to interrupt the analogy between them, so that we cannot be authorised to conclude concerning the one, what we do concerning the other. But these Beings differ in that very circumstance on which the inference, that a *superior cause is wanting*, depends. There must be some external cause of whatever is *limited*, or *finite*. We cannot conceive the possibility of its independent existence. But whatever other difficulty attends the speculation, we cannot say the same concerning a Being *unlimited* and *infinite*.

If any Being whatever bear marks of *design*, there must exist somewhere a *mind* capable of that design; and if it be not

§ 4

capable

capable of it itself, we must look for it in some other Being. But if that Being has within itself that perfect comprehension of itself, as well as of all things else that depend upon it, we have no longer the same motive to make any farther inquiries.— Such a Being as this may, for any thing we can prove to the contrary, have existed without cause, and from eternity. At the same time it must be acknowledged, as before, that, supposing no visible universe to have existed, it is absolutely inconceivable by us, on what principles, as we may say, such a Being as the author of this visible universe should exist. But being sensible of the one, we are necessarily led to infer the other.

I am, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R III.

Concerning the Seat of that Intelligence, which is conspicuous in the visible Universe.

S I R,

I N former times, those who denied the being of a God, denied also that there was any proof of *intelligence*, or *design*, in the visible universe. This, however, you readily admit; but you insist upon it, that the *seat* of this intelligence and design, is in the visible universe itself, and not in any Being foreign to it. On this subject you are sufficiently explicit. “The *vis naturæ*,” you say (*Prefatory Address*. p. 28) “the
 “perpetual industry, intelligence, and pro-
 “vision of nature, must be apparent to all
 “who see, feel, or think. I mean to dis-
 “tinguish this active, intelligent, and de-
 “signing principle, inherent as much in
 “matter, as the properties of gravity, or
 “any elastic, attractive, or repulsive power,
 “from

“ from any extraneous foreign force and de-
 “ sign, in an invisible agent, supreme,
 “ though hidden lord, and master over all
 “ effects and appearances that present them-
 “ selves to us in the course of nature. The
 “ last supposition makes the universe, and
 “ all other organized matter, a machine,
 “ made or contrived by the arbitrary will of
 “ another Being, which other Being is cal-
 “ led *God*; and my theory makes a God of
 “ this universe, or admits no other God,
 “ or designing principle, than matter it-
 “ self, and its various organizations.”

I cannot help thinking, that when you attend to this hypothesis, you must be satisfied, that, on your own principles, it is absolutely untenable. If it be the *marks of design* in the visible universe, that compel you to admit there is a *principle of intelligence* belonging to it, this principle must be the *cause* of those marks of design. But can you think this to be even *possible*, when you maintain, that every *cause* must necessarily be prior to its *effect*. Here an orderly system pre-supposes intelligence, and yet
 this

this intelligence arises from the order. If this be not what is called *arguing in a circle*, I do not know what is.

You may say, that the *universe*, and the *order* belonging to it (from which its principle of intelligence arises) were equally from eternity, and therefore, that the one is not prior to the other. But still, independent of any *priority*, you make the same thing to be, at the same time, *cause* and *effect* with respect to itself. The cause of *intelligence* is still that very *order*, or that *system* which is produced by it.

To say that the whole visible system always existed as it now does, the *cause of its own order*, i. e. of itself, is a very different thing from saying that an invisible author of nature had an eternal and necessary existence. This is merely a thing, of which we have no *idea*, or *comprehension*, but what implies no more *contradiction*, than that *space* or *duration* should have been from eternity, and have been uncaused; though in this case we cannot exclude the idea of them, or suppose them not to exist, and in the other we can.

Besides

Besides this capital defect in your hypothesis, and which obliges us to have recourse to that of an intelligent uncaused Being, as the author of the visible universe, I have no objection to examining the two hypotheses by your own favourite test.

You say, as I have quoted before, “ that
 “ it is impossible for an intellectual Being
 “ firmly to believe in that of which he can
 “ give no account, or of which he can form
 “ no conception.” You believe, however,
 that this visible universe, and the present
 course of nature, had no beginning; and as
 an atheist (believing nothing foreign to the
 system of nature) you *must* believe it. But
 look a little into your own mind, and say,
 whether you have any clearer idea of *nature*;
 than you have of the *author of nature*; hav-
 ing had no beginning. If you be ingenuous,
 you must acknowledge, that you have no
 more conception of your own hypothesis;
 than you have of mine; and therefore, that,
 in the very first instance, you gain nothing at
 all by it; being as much embarrassed as
 ever with the necessary belief of something;
 which

which, in some respects, is absolutely incomprehensible to you.

Again, though you believe that there is a principle of intelligence and design in the visible universe, can you say that you have any proper idea *how* this exquisite design, that we see in the formation of plants and animals, &c. can possibly result from the conjoined action of such things as the sun, moon, and stars, earth, air, and water, &c. of which the visible universe consists, any more than of its belonging to a Being that is not the object of our senses? In what respect, then, do you believe in things less incomprehensible than I do? We must both equally acknowledge, that we are led by the most undeniable facts to believe what we clearly comprehend to be necessary to the existence of those facts, though we are both of us unavoidably led to speculate farther on the subject, till we get into regions far beyond our clear conception.

Exclusive of all *matter*, and of *deity* also, can you even say that you have a distinct idea of *duration* itself having had no beginning;

ginning; or of a whole eternity being actually expired at the present moment? This you say (p. 30) is *an odd notion* of my own. But certainly that must be a proper *eternity*, or an *infinite duration*, which *exceeds all finite bounds*. Is it not thus that mathematicians always define *infinity*? Now, can you name, or write down, any number of *years*, or *periods of time*, that is not even infinitely exceeded by that *great period*, which is actually terminated by the present moment.

That the intelligence and design, which is apparent in the visible universe, should result from the several parts of this visible universe in conjunction, is so contrary to any analogy in nature, that whatever else we have recourse to, in order to account for it, this must be wholly inadmissible. And if a regular confutation of such a notion be at all difficult, the difficulty is of that kind which always attends the proving or disproving of such things as are almost self-evidently true or false.

The brain of a man, or of any other animal, is a homogeneous connected mass, and
may

may as well be endued with the properties of *sensation and thought*, as a stone with that of *gravity*, or a load-stone with that of *magnetism*; there being only an equal difficulty in conceiving *how* such powers can belong to, or depend upon, their respective substances. But in the visible universe there is no such homogeneity, or connexion of parts.

The *universe* at large, consisting of the different stars, and their respective systems of planets, have less apparent connexion than the *solar system*; and the parts of this have a less intimate connexion than those of any one of the planets, for instance, the *earth*, to which we belong, and which we have the best opportunity of examining. And yet, that the *earth*, consisting of land, water, and air, fossils, plants, and animals, should compose *one thinking substance*, is more incredible, than that a collection of buildings, called a *town*, should have a principle of intelligence, with *ideas and thoughts*, such as, by your own confession, must have been in that which comprehended and produced

duced this system. For whatever is capable of *design*, is universally termed *mind*, and must have *ideas* and *thoughts*, whether it be material or immaterial. There is an end of all our reasoning concerning effects and causes, concerning marks of design and a principle of intelligence, if this conclusion may not be depended upon.

That principle of thought and intelligence, therefore, the marks of which cannot be denied to abound in the visible universe, must belong to something else than that universe. For, difficult as it may be to conceive, that there should be an *invisible Being* pervading the whole system, and attentive to all things in it, and that this Being should have existed without any foreign cause, the supposition, though ever so confounding to the imagination, is less difficult than the contrary; and one or other of them *must* be admitted.

You allow (p. 42) that there is in nature a principle of *production*, as well as of *destruction*; so that, "whenever the globe shall come to that temperament, which
" is

“ is fit for the life of any lost species of
 “ animals, whatever energy in nature pro-
 “ duced it originally, if ever it had a be-
 “ ginning, will most probably be sufficient
 “ to produce it again. Is not,” you say,
 “ the reparation of vegetable life in the
 “ spring, equally wonderful now as its first
 “ production? yet this is a plain effect of
 “ the influence of the sun, whose absence
 “ would occasion death, by a perpetual win-
 “ ter? So far is this question from con-
 “ taining, in my opinion, a formidable dif-
 “ ficulty to the Epicurean system, that I
 “ cannot help judging the continual muta-
 “ bility of things, as an irrefragable proof
 “ of this eternal energy of nature.”

To me the conclusion which you think so
 very probable, appears to be drawn directly
 contrary to all the known rules of philoso-
 phizing. Supposing, as you do, the cause
 of destruction to any species of animals,
 to be a change of temperature in the cli-
 mate, still the re-production of those ani-
 mals, when the country should have reco-
 vered its former temperature, would be as

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proper

proper a *miracle* as any thing to which a believer in revelation gives that name (and would, therefore, prove the existence of a power distinct from any thing in the visible universe, and superior to it) because we see nothing similar to this in any similar circumstances of things at present. Take a vessel of water, with ~~fishes~~ and insects in it. You may freeze that water, and consequently destroy all the animals that it contains. But though you may thaw that water again, you might wait long enough before you would find any more such fishes or insects in it, provided you excluded the spawn, or eggs, of others.

If there be any such thing as the reproduction of any lost animal, as of that large one, the bones of which you speak of (p. 41) and there be no such thing as a being distinct from the visible universe, it must be produced by what now exists, and is visible to us; but how this should be done by any *law* or *power of nature*, with which we are acquainted (and beyond this we are not authorized to form any judgment

ment at all) though, within your creed, is beyond my conception. As the animal you speak of was an inhabitant of the *earth*, I should imagine that you would think some power residing in, and belonging to, the earth itself might be sufficient for this purpose, without calling in the aid of the sun, moon, or stars. But how the earth, with all the animals and men upon it, are to go to work, in order to re-produce this animal, I have no knowledge. I know that I should be able to contribute very little towards it. *The energy of nature, before which, you say (p. 41) all difficulty vanishes,* is a fine expression; but when we come to realize our ideas, and to conceive in what manner this energy of nature is to be exerted, we are just as much at a loss how to connect it with the things to be produced by it, as if no such energy existed.

You say that “the reparation of vegetable life in the spring, is equally as wonderful now as at its first production,” and that this, “is the plain effect of the influ-

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“ence

“ence of the sun.” I am really surprized that you can, even for a moment, suppose these two cases to be at all similar. We can only judge of *powers* by *observation* and *experience*. Now, whenever did you see any plant produced when the seed was properly destroyed? In this case, what can the *sun* do to produce it. If the sun has this power, why is it not sometimes exerted, so that we should see plants spring up by means of *heat* only, without their proper seeds? That there is a Being distinct from the visible universe, possessed of the power of controuling its laws, is not a random supposition, like this of yours, but is sufficiently proved by *fact*, as the history of revelation shews.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

L E T T E R

L E T T E R I V.

*Of the Proof of the Being and Attributes of
GOD, from Revelation.*

S I R,

I SHALL now venture to urge another argument, hinted at in the conclusion of the last letter, for the belief of a deity, as a Being distinct from the visible universe, which you will not deny to be adapted to affect the minds of the *vulgar*; and if it be attended to, it cannot, I think, fail to give satisfaction, even to philosophical persons, and must contribute to remove any doubts that may have been occasioned by metaphysical speculations on the subject. The evidence I mean, is that of *miracles*, which, if they be undeniable, clearly prove the existence of a Being distinct from what is visible in nature, and a Being who can controul the laws of it; and this can be no other than the *author of Nature*.

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The evidences of revealed religion are generally considered as *subsequent* to those of natural religion, and both of them are generally treated of as altogether independent of each other. But as revelation supposes the being of a God, whose will is revealed to us, so the historical proof of actual interruptions in the usual course of nature, in the visible universe, is a distinct proof of the existence of a power foreign to the visible universe itself, and capable of controuling it. And if there be marks of *design* in such interpositions, if they be intended to answer some purpose, and some benevolent purpose, they are distinct proofs of the *intelligence* and *benevolence* of that foreign power. And that there have been such interruptions in the course of nature, we have, in my opinion, abundantly sufficient evidence. It is clear to me, that, all things considered, the man who disbelieves this evidence, must believe things much more extraordinary, and even more contrary to present appearances (as I think I have shewn
in

in my *Institutes of natural and revealed religion*) than those which he rejects.

Such interpositions, in which the author of nature is exhibited as communicating his will to men, by the use of *language*, &c. is better adapted to give us an idea of a *character*, of a *disposition of mind*, and even of *design*, than the settled and regular course of nature; though, to a reflecting mind, this does not fail to suggest the same thing. Let any man, the most sceptical in the world, be supposed to have been present when Moses heard the voice distinctly pronouncing the words, *I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, &c. promising to bring his people out of Egypt, &c. and then to have passed through the red sea along with them, and also to have heard an audible voice pronouncing every word of the ten commandments from mount Sinai: or let a person be supposed to have heard the words which, in the course of the evangelical history, were three times audibly pronounced, but proceeding from no visible Being, *This is my beloved Son, hear ye him* :

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let

let him have heard Jesus invoke that invisible Being, and immediately afterwards raise Lazarus from the dead; and especially let him have conversed with Jesus after he had been publicly crucified and buried: I say, let us suppose any person whatever to have been present at any of these extraordinary scenes, so as not to be able to deny that astonishing changes in the laws of nature had really taken place; and then let us suppose it possible for him to deny the existence of a Being distinct from what we call *nature*, or the *visible universe*, and capable of controuling its laws, if we can.

Moreover, if this great invisible Being, who at his pleasure controuled the laws of nature, and thereby proved himself to be equal to the establishment of them, announced himself to be the *author of nature*, and always assumed that character; can we suppose it possible that any person who really believed such miraculous interpositions, should entertain a doubt that there was an invisible author of nature, distinct from any thing that he could see in it? It

is evident, therefore, that the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testaments are naturally adapted to give the fullest satisfaction concerning the being of a God, as well as of the truth of revelation; and, therefore, that in order to disprove the being of a God, a person must likewise disprove the evidence of the Jewish and of the christian revelations, which I think he will find it difficult to do, consistently with his retaining faith in any history whatever. But this is not my present business, farther than to point out the connexion between the evidences of natural and revealed religion, and to shew what you have to do before you can effectually refute either of them.

I shall conclude this letter with shewing, that, admitting what you profess to do concerning the visible universe, the *intelligence* and the *energy of nature*, you may admit the whole system of revelation; so that, in fact, you have conceded rather more than you intended.

If you admit an *intention*, or *design*, in nature, you cannot exclude the idea of what
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we call *character*, and proper *personality*, whether it belong to a Being distinct from the visible universe, or to the visible universe itself; and admitting this, the whole system of revelation may follow. And this, in fact, is all that I am solicitous about, because it is all that I am affected by, as it implies every thing on which my hopes or fears are founded.

The power, or principle, that formed the eye, with a view to enable us to see distant objects, and which for excellent purposes established all the laws of nature, may also for the best of purposes, have occasionally controuled them. That power which formed the organs of speech, may itself have spoken from mount Sinai, and have given mankind an assurance of a resurrection from the dead by Jesus Christ.

It is this *power*, or *principle*, in whatever it resides, that commands my homage and obedience. It is *properties* and *powers*, and not *substance*, that I pretend to have any concern with. But I think it contrary to analogy, and the rules of just reasoning, to
suppose

suppose these powers to reside in the visible universe; and therefore I prefer the hypothesis which ascribes them to an invisible Being, distinct from it.

If you admit a principle of intelligence, and a power of *production* and *reproduction* in nature, you are prepared to admit all the facts on which the system of revelation is founded; and whether they be true or false, is a thing to be determined by *historical evidence*. If, as you say, "a future life be certainly desirable;" if you "firmly wish for it, and are determined to live as if there was one:" If immorality, as you also say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 10) has not preceded your unbelief, and will not follow it, I have no doubt but that, by giving due attention to this evidence, you will again become a believer, and a christian. But then, I think you will not long retain your present hypothesis, of a principle of intelligence and design residing in, and properly belonging to, the visible universe; as there will then be no conceivable reason why you should

should not believe, and rejoice in the belief of a supreme Being, or of a maker and a moral governor of the universe, as well as myself.

I am, Sir,

Your's, &c.

L E T T E R V.

Of the moral attributes of the Deity.

S I R,

AS to the *moral attributes* of the deity, viz. his *benevolence* and his *justice*, I shall not enter very far into the argument at present, not thinking that what I advanced before is at all invalidated by your merely asserting the contrary.

You say (p. 22) "Take a view of human existence, and who can even allow that there is more happiness than misery in the world." I should think that you yourself allow it, when you speak (p. 27)

of a future life (expecting it, I suppose, to resemble this) as *desirable*. However, the bulk of mankind, I doubt not, enjoy, and value their present existence. I do for one. You allow (p. 4) that the condition of man is in a state of *melioration*, and if this be the case, though happiness should not preponderate over misery at present, it is sure to do so in due time; so that, looking forward to the whole of things, the argument for the goodness of God, with respect to mankind at least, is quite satisfactory. "Who," you say (p. 22) "will ever resolve the question, "if evil and pain be good and necessary "now, why they will not always be so?" I answer, this may be the case in some degree, and yet be consistent enough with the proper meaning of the figurative descriptions of a future life in the scriptures. If you admit the doctrine of *melioration*, you must admit that, if we continue to exist, all evil will gradually vanish; and I think that, on the principles of Dr. Hartley's Theory of the Mind, I could shew, in some measure, *why* it will be so; but the discussion would be too long for this place,

Your

Your argument against the belief of a God, at least of a just and righteous Being, on account of his not interposing to punish vice, and especially those who deny his existence, seems to me very unworthy of any person pretending to reason. “ If that
 “ wished-for interposition of the deity is
 “ put off to a future existence, you say
 “ (*Prefatory Address*, p. 30) I cannot help
 “ observing, that future day has been al-
 “ ready a long while waited for in vain,
 “ and any delay destroys some one attribute
 “ or other of the deity. He wants justice,
 “ or he wants the power, or the will, to do
 “ good and be just. Shall such a tremen-
 “ dous Being,” you say (p. 49) “ with such
 “ a care for the creatures he has made, suf-
 “ fer his own existence to be a perpetual
 “ doubt? If the course of nature does not
 “ give sufficient proof, why does not the
 “ hand divine shew itself, by an extraordi-
 “ nary interposition of power? It is al-
 “ lowed miracles ought not to be cheap, or
 “ plenty. One or two, at least, every
 “ thousand years, might be admitted. But
 “ this is a perpetual standing miracle, that
 “ such

“ such a Being as the depicted God, the
 “ author of nature, and all its works, should
 “ exist, and yet his existence be perpetually
 “ in doubt, or require a Jesus, a Mahomet,
 “ or a Priestley, to reveal it. Is not the
 “ writing of this very answer to the last of
 “ those three great luminaries of religion, a
 “ proof that no God, or no such God, at
 “ least, exists? Hear the admirable words
 “ of the author of the *Système de la Nature*,
 “ HOW CAN HE SUFFER A MORTAL LIKE
 “ ME TO QUESTION HIS RIGHTS, HIS TI-
 “ TLES, AND EVEN HIS EXISTENCE?”

This, Sir, I think to be as weak as (if I
 may be allowed one harsh expression) it is
 arrogant. You, and the author of the work
 you quote, must have a very high opinion,
 indeed, of your own importance, and of the
 force of your writings, to imagine that a
miracle is requisite to confute them. I trust
 that something far short of this will be
 abundantly sufficient for the purpose, with
 respect to mankind at large; and, as to your
 own particular conviction, it may be no
 very great object with the author of the
 universe.

universe. His wise general laws, and the excellent maxims of his government, may admit a much greater partial evil than that, and make it subservient to good. The wisdom of God will, I doubt not, appear most conspicuous when it shall be seen, that sufficient provision was made two thousand years ago, for remedying all the evils, which, from foreign causes, have been introduced into the system of religion since that time. Christianity, I am confident, will be able, without the aid of any more miracles, to free itself from all its impurities, and command the assent of all the world; even the learned and most sceptical not excluded.

As to your calling upon the divine Being to vindicate himself from your impiety, any wise and merciful sovereign, who should allow his subjects a proper time for forming their characters and conduct, before he thought proper to interpose, in order to reward or punish them, might be insulted in the same manner by weak and impatient minds. If there be any such thing as a
state

state of trial and discipline, some delay in administering justice must be admitted ; and of what continuance that ought to be, there may be better judges than you, or the author of the Systeme de la Nature.

If you meant to pay me any compliment by classing me with *Jesus* and *Mahomet*, I must observe, that, to say nothing farther, it is a very awkward one. They (the one justly, and the other unjustly) pretended to divine communications, which you must know I never did.

I am, SIR, yours, &c.

L E T T E R VI.

Of the moral Influence of Religion.

SIR,

YOU greatly misconceive, or mis-state the influence of religion, when you say (p. 43) “ all that the belief of a God
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“ and of a providence can in reality pro-
“ duce, scarce goes beyond some exterior
“ exercises, which are vainly thought to
“ reconcile man to God. It may make
“ men build temples, sacrifice victims, of-
“ fer up prayers, or perform something of
“ the like nature; but never break a cri-
“ minal intrigue, restore ill-gotten wealth,
“ or mortify the lust of man—If no other
“ remedy were applied to vice than the re-
“ monstrances of divines, a great city, such
“ as London, would in a fortnight’s time
“ fall into the most horrid disorder.—
“ Religion may make men follow ceremo-
“ nies: little is the inconvenience found in
“ them. A great triumph truly for reli-
“ gion to make men baptize, or fast. When
“ did it make men do virtuous actions for
“ virtue’s sake, or practice fewer inventions
“ to get rich, where riches would not be
“ acquired without poverty to others? The
“ true principle most commonly seen in hu-
“ man actions, and which philosophy will
“ cure sooner than religion, is the natural
“ inclination of man for pleasure, or a taste
“ contracted

“ contracted for certain objects by prejudice
 “ and habit. These prevail in whatsoever
 “ faith a man is educated, or with whatever
 “ knowledge he may store his mind.”

Confident as you seem to be of your advantage on this head. I have no doubt but that, if I may oppose one assertion to another, religion has gained the end that you propose, viz. to *do virtuous actions for virtue's sake*, far more generally, and much more effectually, than philosophy has ever done; and that it hath carried men much higher in the path of virtue than you have even an idea of, if by the man who does virtuous actions *for virtue's sake*, you mean that *great and good man*, described in your Prefatory Address (p. 33) who *loves virtue because he finds a pleasure in it*. For this is far from being any heroic or noble principle. It is only a more refined selfishness. Whereas religion teaches men to love others as themselves, and implicitly to obey God and their consciences, as such, without any sinister view whatever. However, notwithstanding

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standing this, it is with the greatest wisdom that the hope of reward, and the fear of punishment, are proposed to us. If you have made any observations on the human mind, you must know that, with or without the belief of a God, men always begin to act from the simplest and lowest motives; and that it is only by degrees, and the force of habit, that these motives lose their influence, and that men become capable of acting from more generous and disinterested principles. If you be ignorant of this, you have much to learn, but you will find it admirably explained by Dr. Hartley, to whom I refer you on the subject.

It is by slow degrees that a child comes to love even his nurse, or his parents. At first, he loves his food and his play much more; but in time he becomes capable of sacrificing both, and even his life, and not only to serve them, but also his country and mankind. Though, therefore, religion begins with the *fear of God*, and the *hope of heaven*, at length *perfect love casteth out fear*,
and

and the true christian *loves the Lord his God with all his heart* (being wholly devoted to his will) *and his neighbour as himself.*

Religion, if I have any idea of its nature and practical tendency, is a very different thing from what you suppose it to be. By extending our views to the certain prospect of a future and better life, it must, in proportion as its principles are attended to, give a man a higher idea of his *personal importance*, and of the *consequence of his actions*; and, in fact, will make him a superior kind of Being to the man who believes that his existence will close in a few years, and may terminate to-morrow. You say (p. 46) that “an atheist, feeling himself to be a link in the grand chain of nature, feels his relative importance, and dreads no imaginary Being;” but a theist, and a believer in revelation, conceives himself to be a much more important link in the same grand chain of nature, and therefore will feel himself more concerned to act a part worthy of his rank and station. If he *fears*, it is only that great Being, who is the proper object

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of

of fear, and then only when his righteous will is not obeyed; and his *hope*, which is certainly a delightful and valuable principle, must be allowed to be infinitely superior to any thing that an atheist can pretend to.

Besides, upon your own principles, you cannot deny that religion *must* have great practical influence, if it be really believed, so long as mankind are governed by hopes and fears. Why is it that the *laws* and the *gallows*, as you say, keep in order such a city as London, but that men fear detection, and dread pain and death. But a real believer in revelation well knows that, if he act wickedly, he can never escape detection, and that he has much more to fear than man can inflict upon him. How is it possible, then, that men should not be influenced by it? I make no doubt but that its practical influence is very great, and even that it weighs something with those who profess to disclaim it. Indeed, human nature must be a thing very different from what we know it to be, if the principles of religion, firmly
believed

believed (as, no doubt, they are by many) have no real influence. No man, acquainted with history, or with common life, can deny the influence either of *enthusiasm*, or of *superstition*, which are only perversions of religion.

You do not hesitate to say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 21) that “whatever advantage religion hath had in the enumeration of its martyrs, the cause of atheism may boast the same,” and you mention Vanini as a martyr for atheism. I will not dispute the point with you, but I think I have read an account of Vanini, which represents him as not having been properly an atheist, as not having had the power of recantation at the stake, and as suffering with more reluctance than has been sometimes given out; all which circumstances make his case much less to your purpose. But admitting all that you can wish with respect to it, very little, we know, is to be inferred from the conduct of any *single person*, because he may be influenced by motives which will have little weight with the generality of mankind.

On the contrary, it must be something adapted to influence *human nature in general*, and cannot but have real moment in the conduct of men, that can produce such lists of ready and chearful martyrs as christianity can boast; men of all countries, of all ages, and of every rank and condition in life, and differing from one another in as many circumstances (and especially in the belief of particular doctrines) as you can name; while they have agreed in nothing besides the simple *profession of christianity*, and the belief of *a future life of retribution*. There can be no doubt, therefore, but that, since the same causes will always produce the same effects, a time of persecution would now call forth as many martyrs as ever. Surely then, if we may judge from observation, as philosophers ought to do, we must be convinced, that there is something in *this belief* that is adapted to affect the hearts and lives of men, and that in the greatest and happiest manner.

Should you yourself suffer martyrdom in the cause of atheism, as you express your readiness to do, p. 21. (but in which few will

will believe you to be in earnest, because, with your prospects, they will think you a fool for (so doing) it will contribute very little to impress mankind in general in favour of your principles, and though you may possibly have some admirers, I will venture to say, you will have few followers. Unbelievers, of my acquaintance, make no scruple of conforming to any thing that the state requires; and, I am confident, would be the first to laugh at you, if they were to see you going to the stake.

I am, SIR,

Yours, &c.

L E T T E R VII.

Miscellaneous Observations.

SIR,

I DO not care to animadvert upon all those passages in your answer, in which you seem to have mistaken my meaning; but

but I must take notice of one or two of them.

It is not fair in you to say, as you seem to do (p. 25) that because I have endeavoured to prove that an atheist cannot be quite sure that there will be no future state, I therefore allow that “the course of nature might be as it is without a God, and therefore that there is no natural proof of a deity.” What then, Sir, was my object in those Letters, to which you have made a reply? Was it not to unfold and exhibit the natural proof of a deity? Do you infer whatever you please from my writings, but do not insinuate that I myself, infer, or allow it.

You charge me very unjustly (*Prefatory Address*, p. 29) with giving up a *particular providence*, and you say you give it up too; whereas I only deny those *frequent miraculous interpositions*, which some have supposed. But, notwithstanding this, I believe that every thing, and every event, in the whole compass of nature, was originally appointed to fit its proper place; and this
you

you yourself must also admit, if you acknowledge a principle of *intelligence* and *design* in the universe. For this cannot be limited to some things only, but must extend to all. Besides, the greatest things have the strictest connexion with, and dependence upon, the smallest.

If, which you allow, there was a real *design* in the original production of things, and in the establishment of the laws of nature, there must likewise have been a *fore-sight* of whatever would happen in consequence of those laws, and therefore a proper adjustment of all events to one another; so that you cannot admit a proper intelligence in nature, without admitting the doctrine of a particular providence. Indeed, Sir, you should not have abandoned the old atheistical principle of *chance*, and have admitted *design* in nature, without attending to all the consequences of this principle. Only pursue that principle consistently, and you will soon come to believe all that I do.

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You consider it as a false assertion (p. 5) that "a cause need not be prior to its effect." Now many *secondary causes* cannot be conceived to exist a moment without producing their proper effects, as the sun without giving light, a magnet without attracting iron, &c. This, therefore, *may* be the case with the *original cause* of all things; so that his works, as well as himself, may have been from all eternity. This, however, I have only mentioned, as what may perhaps be a more probable supposition, than that the divine Being should have existed a whole eternity, without creating any other Being. But this opinion is not necessarily connected with the simple proof of the Being of a God.

It may not be amiss to take some notice of what you say with respect to *authority*, in the question we are discussing. I am as far as you can be from laying much stress on mere authority in matters of *speculation* and *reasoning*, though it is impossible for any man not to be more or less influenced by it. But I can by no means think
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with you (*Prefatory Address*, p. 24) that “modern philosophers are nearly all atheists.” Indeed, if this be the case, there must, by your account, be very few in this country, at least you are not acquainted with many of them; and therefore, from your personal knowledge, can have no authority for the assertion. For you say (*ib.* p. 16) you know of none besides *yourself* and *your friend*, the joint authors of this answer to my Letters. I am ready, however, to allow that what you say may be nearly true with respect to France and Italy, though I believe it is by no means the case, as yet, in England; and if you confine yourself to those who have really advanced the bounds of natural knowledge, and who have distinguished themselves the most in the character of *philosophers*, you will not, I think, find so many atheists among them, in any country, as you may have supposed.

You mention Hume, Helvetius, Diderot, and D’Alembert; but I do not remember to have heard of any discoveries in natural or moral science made by any of them.

them. This I do not say to insult them, or to insinuate that they are not entitled to the reputation they have gained, though I scruple not to avow this with respect to Mr. Hume. They have their excellencies, but they are of a different kind. Some of them are mathematicians, but, properly speaking, I do not know that any of them are to be allowed a rank, at least any high rank, among philosophers. In a general way of speaking, indeed, it may be proper enough to call any person a philosopher, who only gives his attention to the subject of philosophy, and is acquainted with the discoveries of others; but when you mentioned particular names, as those of persons known to the world in the character of philosophers, and especially so few as *four*, you should have selected those who had made important discoveries of their own. You can hardly think it sufficient to entitle a man to the rank of a *philosopher*, that he is merely *an unbeliever in natural or revealed religion**.

* As what I have said concerning Mr. Hume in this place, may be misunderstood, and be thought to be invidious, I shall add, what

As to what you are pleased to say (ib. p. 24) I myself might have been, if I had not “ from my first initiation into science, “ being dedicated to what is called the “ immediate service of God,” it is a thing that cannot be known, except to my maker. It is evident, that you have little knowledge of my history, nor is it of any importance to the world that it should be known. I have, however, been more than once, and for a considerable length of time, near fourteen years in all, out of what you, in ridicule, call the *immediate service of God*, after I had been several years engaged in it ; and now, without having any reason to complain of age or infirmity, and in preference perhaps to more lucrative pursuits, I have, from pure choice, resumed it ; and I hope

what I have taken several opportunities of saying before, viz. that I am far from thinking, that it requires great mental powers to make discoveries in natural philosophy. They have generally been made by accident. But as Mr. Hammon seemed willing to avail himself of the authority of *philosophers*, I have only observed, that, be their merit what it may, that kind of authority, strictly speaking, and when the term is properly defined, makes very little for him ; not many of those who have distinguished themselves in that way, having been atheists.

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to continue in it as long as I shall be capable of doing the duties of it.

Sincerely wishing that you may come to see the subject of our discussion in the same light with myself, and thereby attain to the same perfect satisfaction in your pursuits and prospects that I have in mine,

I am, Sir,

Your very humble servant,

BIRMINGHAM,
May, 1782.

J. PRIESTLEY.

L E T T E R S

T O A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

P A R T II.

CONTAINING

A State of the Evidence of revealed Religion, with Animadversions on the two last Chapters of the first Volume of *Mr. Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*

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

AC. IMP. PETROP. R. PARIS. HOLM. TAURIN. AUREL. MED.
PARIS. HARLEM. CANTAB. AMERIC. ET PHILAD. SOCIUS.

———— Ne te auferat ebrius ardor,
Neu clausos radiis oculos opponat apertis.
Utere mente tua. Procul anticipata repelle
Judicia; et recto librans examine lances,
Hanc demum, audita causa, complectere partem,
Quam mens, et ratio veri studiosa, probabit.

ANTI LUCRETIUS.

B I R M I N G H A M,

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MDCCLXXXVII.

T H E

P R E F A C E.

IT is with much satisfaction that I have now completed this series of *Letters*, in which I have advanced what appears to me to be the best calculated to remove the objections of philosophical persons to the evidences of natural and revealed religion.

In this discussion, I flatter myself, that I have some advantage over those who have hitherto treated the same subject, both with respect to what I have undertaken to defend, and the mode in which the defence is conducted. The articles that I undertake to defend are more consonant to reason, and my proof of them rests on the same principles on which all philosophical investigations proceed; so that, if I do not deceive myself, I have brought the questions concerning

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the being of a God, the truth of his moral government here, and the certainty of a life of retribution to come (which are the great principles of all religion) into a state in which it will be more easy to come to a fair issue with unbelievers, and to decide whether there be sufficient ground for our faith in them, or not.

With respect to both natural and revealed religion, all that we have to do, is to consider whether *actual appearances*, and known *facts*, can be accounted for on any other hypothesis. In natural religion the appearances to be accounted for are *the constitution and laws of nature*. In revealed religion, they are certain *historical facts*, as indisputable as any natural appearances. They are the belief of the miracles of Moses and of Christ, and that of his resurrection, in given circumstances. As appearances in nature cannot, I apprehend, be accounted for without admitting an intelligent author of nature, distinct from nature itself, and also that this author of nature is a benevolent and righteous Being ;

P R E F A C E.

Being ; so the simple fact, of the belief of the great events on which depends the truth of the divine missions of Moses and of Christ, cannot, I apprehend, be accounted for, without admitting the reality of those events.

To this particular state of the question, I have endeavoured to confine myself in this second series of Letters, referring the reader for the discussion of many things relating to the evidence of revelation to more systematical works, and to that short view of the whole compass of it, which will be found in my *Institutes of natural and revealed Religion.*

In this second part of my work I have considered the divine missions of Moses and of Christ as proved by exactly similar arguments, but with little regard to their connexion ; and to this *similarity of arguments* I earnestly wish to draw the attention of learned and candid *Jews* ; being confident that, when once they shall truly understand the ground on which they ought to receive, and

must defend, the divine mission of Moses, they will be convinced that they must also admit the truth of the divine mission of Christ; and this being admitted, they will soon acknowledge that every other objection to christianity, on which they have laid any stress, must fall to the ground.

Those Jews with whom I have conversed, or corresponded, though they firmly believe what they have been taught concerning the truth of their religion, do not appear to me to have a sufficiently distinct apprehension of the true ground of their own faith, or what arguments they must allege in order to convince an unbeliever, that Moses had a divine mission, and that he worked real miracles in proof of it. A previous controversy with unbelievers would show them the ground on which they must stand; and then, I think, they must clearly perceive, that the truth of the divine mission of Christ, stands more firmly and unexceptionably on the same ground, in consequence of the origin of christianity being nearer to

our

our own times, and more within the compass of acknowledged history.

I therefore wish that the Jews, to whom I have addressed a series of *Letters*, would consider this work as an appendage to them, having the same object with respect to *them*, viz. as unbelievers in christianity. They will, I flatter myself, receive some satisfaction from seeing in them a clear state of the evidences of their own religion; and I am not acquainted with any writings of their own, in which this is given, or attempted. Being well grounded in this, they will soon be satisfied, that it is impossible for them to defend their own faith, without, at the same time, admitting what will be sufficient to vindicate ours also. Both the systems are, in effect, but one, and must stand or fall together.

It is also earnestly to be wished that the attention of *christians*, as well as that of Jews, might be drawn to this subject; that having a clearer idea of the *certainty*, as

well as of the *value* of their faith, they might both be able to defend it, whenever they hear it attacked, and also prize it the more, and be more careful to govern their lives by it. Without this, men are but *nominal christians*, which is in reality much worse than being no christians at all. Better would it be for any man never to have heard the name of Christ, than be his disciple *in name only*.

To be christians to any purpose, we should always keep in view the great practical principles of our religion. It ought not to be in the power of business, or of pleasure, to make us lose sight of them. Christianity will be no obstruction to any thing that is truly rational, and becoming a man, with respect to either; and whatever is not rational, ought to be abandoned on principles that are even not christian.

It is because I consider the principles of christianity as properly *practical* ones, that I am less solicitous about the conversion of any unbelievers

unbelievers who are much advanced in life, at least for their own sakes; since their dispositions and habits are already formed, so that it can hardly be supposed to be in the power of new and better principles to change them. But I wish it for the sake of *younger persons*, on whom their opinions have influence, and on whom good principles might have the greatest effect.

To unbelievers of a certain age, a conviction of the truth of christianity would only be the acquisition of a new speculative truth, the magnitude and value of which would never be fully felt, or make much impression on them. Having heard it from their infancy, having in general believed it for some time, and not coming to disbelieve it, till they had long disregarded it, it will not have the effect of *absolute novelty*, as it had with the heathen world at the time of the promulgation of christianity, when it produced a wonderful change in the lives and manners of persons of all ages. With respect

respect to those unbelievers of the present times, who are hackneyed in the ways of the world, their minds are already so occupied, that they would give but little attention to the principles of christianity, if they should come to believe in it.

But be the advantage more or less to such unbelievers themselves, from their conversion to christianity, there are others to whom it might be the greatest benefit. We see every day, how men of reputed sense, and general knowledge, are looked up to by those who are young, and entering upon the busy scenes of life, and whose minds are not yet so much occupied, but that they might feel the full force of new truth. If they only perceive a person of acknowledged ability, and general good character, to smile when the subject of religion, or christianity, is mentioned, they will suspect, perhaps conclude at once, that there is nothing in it that deserves their attention ; and having this persuasion, however hastily formed, they may go
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without restraint into that career of vicious indulgence, to which their age prompts, and which they know christianity forbids.

Whereas, were all persons of respectable characters, on other accounts, believers in christianity, though they might not have much zeal for it, they would at least behave and speak in such a manner, when the subject was mentioned, as would lead young persons to consider it as a serious business, and not to be trifled with; and this might lead to the most desirable consequences, What young persons embrace, they embrace with ardour; and their minds are not so much engrossed with the things of this world, but that they might attend to those of another; and notwithstanding the impetuosity of passion, there is in uncontaminated youth an ingenuous modesty, a sense of honour, and a dread of vice, almost peculiar to that early period of life; which aided by good principles, may be more than equal to the restraint of their passions, and render them

them capable, as we frequently see them to be, of the most heroic acts of virtue.

But the greatest advantage that I look to is that, when the parents are christians, their children will be in the way of receiving a religious and christian education ; in consequence of which, they will be brought acquainted with the scriptures, from their earliest years ; and without this, it is hardly possible that they should ever acquire a true relish for them. The phraseology of the the scriptures, notwithstanding the noble simplicity, and true sublimity, of many parts of them, is (at least according to our present translation) so uncouth to an European ear, and both the customs, and the popular opinions of the oriental nations, which were adopted by the pious Jews, as well as others, appear so strange, that persons whose taste has been formed by the modes of modern education, will often be more struck with such circumstances as will tend to make them smile, than with those that ought to make them serious. This will
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more especially be the case with those whose minds have got a tinge from reading the prophane jests of such writers as Voltaire. There are many persons whose minds are in such a state, that it is not even in their own power to make the allowance that they ought to do, and which they are even sensible they ought to do; for the circumstances above mentioned, so as to read the scriptures with the same satisfaction and advantage, that one who has been educated a christian, and been brought up with a reverence for those sacred books habitually does. Our feelings are far from so readily following our opinions.

Not that I consider the books of scripture as *inspired*, and on that account entitled to this high degree of respect, but as authentic records of the dispensations of God to mankind, with every particular of which we cannot be too well acquainted. The sacred writers, as we justly call them, were moreover, in general, persons of such exalted piety, and disinterested benevolence
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(the most genuine and affecting marks of which abound in their writings) and the histories themselves are so valuable and improving, that no other reading can supply the place of this. It is in vain that we look in profane history, for a narrative so instructive, for characters so excellent, or forms of devotions so pure. What is there in all the remains of heathen antiquity, comparable to the book of Psalms? There never existed among the Greeks or Romans that knowledge of one God, the maker and preserver of all things, and that persuasion concerning his universal and righteous government, which alone can inspire such sentiments, and dictate such compositions.

My principal object in this work will easily be perceived to have been, to give a just view of the circumstances in which christianity was promulgated; since, from the consideration of these alone, can it be demonstrated that the origin of it was divine; and in describing those I have been much assisted by *Dr. Lardner's Jewish and*
I *Heathen*

Heathen Testimonies, a work of singular value, and which, in my opinion, no unbeliever, who has heard of it, can hold himself excusable in rejecting christianity, till he has read and considered. From this work only have I given the view of ancient objections to christianity, in the 14th and 15th Letters. I have lately had occasion to peruse the authors from which he has collected them; but I know of nothing of much importance that can be added to what he has produced; and I thought it of some use and consequence to bring into one view, what is dispersed through four quarto volumes. I have chosen his translations, in preference to any that I might have given of my own, as no person will question his fidelity, his diligence, or his universal impartiality.

Great benefit would accrue to christianity, if it be founded in truth (and on no other supposition would I wish to have any respect for it at all) from a calm and free discussion of its evidences with an intelligent

gent unbeliever. This I endeavoured to procure, when I animadverted upon *Mr. Gibbon's two chapters* in the conclusion to my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*. But with the invitation I then gave Mr. Gibbon, he has hitherto refused to comply. What may be inferred from his declining this discussion, it is for the public to judge; and it concerns himself, and not me. A copy of these *Letters* will also be sent to him, and if he (or any other unbeliever of ability and character) chuse to answer them, he may depend upon hearing from me in reply. And, in my opinion, and that of many others, no public controversy could be more useful, or more reasonable.

In this case it will be necessary for Mr. Gibbon, if *he* should undertake the discussion, to lay aside the mask he has affected to wear, by pretending to believe in christianity, when he evidently does not; but it is a mask by which he conceals nothing. If I treat any thing in the religion of my country

try as absurd, I do it openly, and gravely ; and at the same time I hold myself ready to defend whatever I advance, or to retract what I may be unable to defend.

If Mr. Gibbon believes christianity to be *mischievous*, as well as *false*, let him, as becomes an honest man, and a good citizen, openly disclaim, and openly oppugn it. If he thinks it to be false, but *useful*, let him neither write nor speak on the subject. Nothing can justify this, but a persuasion of its being better for the world that the scheme should be exploded and abandoned.

If any man, embarked in a voyage with others, perceives that the vessel in which they sail will certainly be lost, and that it is not in his power, or in theirs, to prevent it, he ought to keep his knowledge to himself, and not give others needless alarm and distress. If he think that, by proper exertion, there is a possibility of saving the ship, he ought to give the greatest and quickest alarm that he can. But in

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no case can he be justified in giving his opinion in such a manner, as that some of the passengers might understand him to mean one thing, and others another; and in amusing himself with laughing at the mistakes that were made about his real sentiments. Such, however, has been the conduct of Mr. Gibbon, with respect to a subject of infinitely more moment than the danger of a shipwreck.

If Mr. Gibbon be, as he pretends, a believer in christianity, and a future life, let him write on the subject in such a manner, as that no person shall entertain a doubt of it; and so that their faith may be strengthened, and not weakened by his writings. If he be an unbeliever, let him no longer trifle with the world, and use the language of deceit, without deceiving.

By replying to Mr. Gibbon, in these *Letters*, I am far from meaning to insinuate, that I think lightly of what others have done in the same controversy. On the
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 contrary,

contrary, every answer to him that I have yet seen, contains a sufficient refutation of every thing of any consequence that he has advanced against christianity *, and the defence that he has made of *himself* against Mr. Davis, is far from amounting to a defence of the *cause* that he has espoused, which is all that the public is concerned with. The reply of the learned Bishop of Llandaff is particularly valuable; but I am sorry to see him affect to believe Mr. Gibbon to be sincere in the regard that he professes for christianity. This I think to be unworthy of a christian bishop; as I think Mr. Gibbon's pretences are unworthy of a man. I treat Mr. Gibbon as unquestion-

* I shall take this opportunity of acquainting my reader with the satisfaction I have just received from an Essay in *Mr. Cumberland's Observer*, Vol. I. No. 113, in answer to what Mr. Gibbon has said concerning the darkness at our Saviour's crucifixion. His remarks appear to me to be very judicious, and well expressed. I have some doubts, however, whether that darkness was preternatural, as well as whether it was very considerable.

ably an unbeliever, and in that character I wish him to make his defence.

Since this Preface was sent to the press, I have seen *Dr. Toulmin's Essay on the Eternity of the World*. But after what I have said in reply to Mr. Hammon, I see no reason to take particular notice of it.

He is far from denying *design*, or a principle of *intelligence*, in the universe, and sincerely wishes, p. 130, “to confirm mankind in the belief of the existence of what is *great, powerful, and good*.”

“So far,” says he, p. 133, “are the arguments which I have made use of from having the smallest tendency to damp the expectations of future being and felicity, that they open the most brilliant prospects to the imagination; they enforce the
“excel-

“ excellence of moral rectitude, and the
“ existence of infinite wisdom and intelli-
“ gence, inseparable from, and pervading,
“ an eternal universe.”

He asserts the eternity of the human race. But, in my opinion, only proves a state of the earth anterior to the period of the Mosaic account of the creation, which I believe is the general opinion of philosophical christians. He descants on the pretensions to high antiquity by the Hindoos, as those which he thinks to be the best founded, but he says nothing of the writings of Moses, who was so near to the origin of the present race of man, as (independent of other considerations, not noticed by Dr. Toulmin) makes it highly probable that his account is very near the truth. But the belief of revelation does not absolutely require a belief of any events prior to the age of Moses, or such as himself and his cotemporaries could not but have had the means of being well informed of.

E R R A T A.

N. B. (*b*) signifies from the bottom of the page.

Page 9. l. 4. (*b*) for *would*, read *could*.

— 16. l. 1. Note, for *contracted*, read *contradicted*.

— 72. l. 1. (*b*) for *they*, read *it*.

— 100. l. 5. (*b*) for *transformation*, read *transformations*.

— 172. l. 1. for *has been referred to before*, read *will be mentioned hereafter*.

— 184. l. 9. for *proceeding*, read *preceding*.

— 227. l. 6. for *doctrins*, read *doctrines*.

C O R R I G E N D A.

N. B. (*b*) signifies from the bottom of the page.

Page 10, l. 1 (*b*) dele, and the history of them.

— 174, l. 8, for *this kind*, read *any other kind*.

L E T T E R S
T O A
PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

P A R T II.

L E T T E R I.

Of the Nature of Testimony.

DEAR SIR,

I Am happy to find that, in my former Letters, I have been able to suggest to you such considerations as, by the help of your own just reflections, have removed the difficulties that lay in your way with respect to the belief of the being of a God, and of his moral government of

PART II.

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the world. But you think that the arguments from the light of nature, in favour of a *future life*, amount to little more than to shew that the thing is *not impossible*, not being, upon the whole, repugnant to the observed course of nature; and that the striking *fact* of our seeing men die just like brutes, or plants, without any symptom of revival, wears so different an aspect, that you cannot think we are sufficiently authorized to indulge so much as what may be called the *hope* of a resurrection. For as to the opinion of an *immaterial soul*, distinct from the body, which makes its escape at death, we are both agreed, that no appearance in nature favours the supposition. Whatever the powers of *perception* and *thought* be in themselves, they evidently depend upon the organization of the brain; and therefore, according to all the received rules of philosophizing, must be ascribed to it, so that they cannot subsist without it.

Acknowledging, however, as you do, that a future life, and an endless continuance of being (in which we shall make continual
advances.

advances in knowledge and virtue, enlarging our comprehension of mind without limits) affords a flattering prospect; and as this is strongly, and with the greatest confidence, held out to us in the christian, if not in the Jewish, revelation, in which you know I am a believer, you wish that I would explain to you, as distinctly as I can, and from the first principles of *assent*, the proper ground of this faith in revealed religion, in the same manner, as, in my former correspondence, I explained the principles of natural religion. In other words, you wish me to inform you, on what foundation it is, that I believe that the Maker of the world, and of man, has at any time revealed his will to any part of the human race, so as to promise eternal life and happiness to those who obey it.

Encouraged by the success of my former attempt, I am very ready, on this, as on that occasion, to give you all the satisfaction in my power; and I earnestly wish that it may be with the same effect; as I am confident that, disposed as you are to the practice

tice of virtue, a belief in revelation will make you a still better and much happier man, even in this life. You will look with unspeakably more pleasure on every thing around you, and quit this scene of things, not only without regret, but with a satisfaction far exceeding that which you have ever had in it.

I shall begin with observing, that the evidence of revelation is necessarily of the *historical* kind, and rests upon *testimony*; and though I hardly need to explain the foundation of our faith in testimony, I shall, by way of introduction to the disquisition I am undertaking, observe, that, philosophically considered, it arises from our *experience* that it may be depended upon; it having been found that there is generally a correspondence between what is asserted by men, and the things, or events, which their assertions respect. Thus, if one person tells me that another said, or did, so or so, and I find by any other evidence (for instance that of my own senses) that he actually *did* say, or do, what I was informed of, I am satisfied

fied that the assertion I heard was true. If I find by repeated experience, that the same person never does deceive me, I conclude that there must be a sufficient *cause* for this *constant appearance*, and that, in the same circumstances, the same effect may be depended upon. In common language, I say that my informer is a *man of veracity*, and that he will not deceive me. In the same manner, if, notwithstanding a number of impositions, I find that among mankind at large, a regard to truth greatly prevails over falsehood, I conclude that there is in general sufficient ground for *faith in testimony*.

Examining this interesting appearance more closely, I find in what cases testimony is most apt to be fallacious, as those in which men either have not sufficient opportunity of being well informed themselves, or those in which they have an interest in deceiving others; and separating these from other cases of human testimony, I find a still stronger ground of assent in the remaining cases.

It is true, that *single persons* may be so circumstanced, as that though to appearance, they may have had sufficient opportunity of being well informed themselves, and we can discover in them no design to impose upon others, yet, through some unknown cause, their testimony may be defective on one or both of these accounts. But when we have the concurrent testimony of *different persons*, unconnected with each other, equally competent judges of what they relate, and to appearance equally impartial, that defect in the evidence is removed; it being to the last degree improbable that the same, or different unknown influences should affect many different persons, no way connected with each other. Accordingly, in many cases, we do not entertain the least sensible doubt of the truth of testimony, as that there exists such a city as Rome, or that Alexander conquered Darius. Our faith in a mathematical truth cannot be perceived to be stronger than our faith in such historical propositions as these.

I am, Dear Sir, yours, &c.

J. PRIESTLEY.

L E T T E R II.

Of the Evidence of Revelation.

D E A R S I R,

AS human testimony is a sufficient ground of faith, it is applicable to every thing of which men can be said to be *witnesses*, that is, of whatever comes under the cognizance of their senses, as seeing, hearing, &c. and there is no fact so extraordinary, or unexpected, but may safely be admitted on this ground; there being no limit in this case, but that of absolute *impossibility*.

Now, it cannot be denied but that it is in the power of God, the maker of the world, to signify his will to men, in the manner described in the history of the Jewish and christian revelations, to perform all that is there advanced as a proof of his interposition in the case, and likewise to fulfil every thing that is there promised; the most important article of which, is the raising of all

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mankind

mankind from the dead, and enduing them with a power of immortal life. Because there is nothing in all this that implies a greater degree of power than must have been exerted in the creation of such a system as this of which we are a part. Whatever power it was that *established*, the same, no doubt, can *change*, the laws of nature, or suspend the operation of them ; and I must now take it for granted, that there is a *cause*, or *author* of nature, and that this is a *designing* cause.

Whether this Being established the present order of nature from eternity, so that it be coeval with himself, or this part of the system had a beginning, from an exertion of power independent of any thing that preceded it, it must be in itself *possible*, that the same Being may exert a similar power whenever he pleases. There is no conceivable difference between this case and that of a man capable of erecting any particular engine, and retaining the power of stopping the motion of the engine, or altering the construction of it. All that can
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be said is, that no *motive* could exist, which should induce the author of nature to interpose in this manner. But who can be authorized to say that the Divine Being, the author of nature, must necessarily leave the present system to the operation of the present laws of it, and that there could never be any *propriety*, or *use*, in suspending them? It must be extreme arrogance in any man to pronounce in this manner concerning his maker.

Some interruption of the course of nature is the only proper evidence of the interposition of the author of nature, and every other kind of evidence must necessarily be equivocal. Now there is an account of a great variety of such interpositions in the historical books of scripture, facts, of which great numbers of persons, in some cases, whole nations (by no means in circumstances in which it can be supposed that they would be deceived themselves, or be willing to deceive others) were witnesses. These interpositions were not confined to one age of the world, but distinguished several

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veral ages, to the time of Christ and the apostles.

The reality, however, of these events, is that which must be called in question by those who do not believe in the Jewish or christian revelations. They must suppose, that the evidence alleged for the miraculous interpositions on the truth of which these revelations rest is, in some respect or other, *insufficient*; and what a philosophical believer replies to them is, that there is a *law* respecting the validity of human testimony, as well as other things; and that this particular testimony is so circumstanced, as that it will be more extraordinary, if it be not true, than if the things related should have happened. For such *testimony* is itself to be considered as a *fact*, or *appearance*, which requires to be accounted for, as much as any other fact whatever. The most idle report cannot be raised without a *cause*. The unbeliever, therefore, should consider how he can account for the *existence* of the Jewish and christian religions, and the *history* of them,

as themselves *indisputable facts*. The cause of these facts, the believer says, is clearly found in the histories of those religions; and he challenges the unbeliever to account for the facts on any other principle. Such I apprehend to be the true and philosophical state of the question which you wish me to discuss.

The generality even of christians have been too apt to consider *christian faith* as something of a different nature from that which relates to other things, and unbelievers have, as might have been expected, taken their advantage of this circumstance. But the philosophical christian forms his judgment concerning all similar propositions on similar principles, and makes no exception with respect to matters of religion. Thus, in all abstract propositions, that may be reduced to *number*, or *quantity*, the evidence of truth is the coincidence of ideas belonging to the subject and predicate of any proposition. If, for example, three things, as three plants, three animals, or three men, cannot be one thing, one plant, one

one animal, or one man ; neither can three Divine Beings, or persons (for in this case they must be the same thing) be only one God.

With respect to *hypotheses*, to explain appearances of any kind, the philosophical christian considers himself as bound to admit that which, according to the received rules of philosophizing, or reasoning, is the most probable ; so that the question between him and other philosophers is, whether his hypothesis or theirs will best explain the *known facts*, such as are the present belief of Judaism and christianity, and also the belief of them in the earliest ages to which they can be traced.

The unbeliever must say that these facts, and all that we certainly know to have been fact, may be admitted, without supposing that Moses, or Christ, had any divine mission, or were authorized by God to teach any doctrine at all ; and, consequently, that no miracles were ever wrought in proof of their mission. Whereas, the philosophical christian says, that such facts as all persons

in the least acquainted with history *must* admit, necessarily lead us to conclude, that Moses and the subsequent prophets, and also that Christ and the apostles, had a divine mission, and that miracles must have been wrought in attestation of them.

The philosophical christian farther says, that the state of things could never have been what it is universally acknowledged to *be*, and *to have been*, without miracles; and that the miracles which the unbeliever must have recourse to, besides answering no conceivable good purpose, must have been infinitely more numerous, and of a more extraordinary nature, than any that *he* has occasion to admit. For he maintains that, if the men who lived in the time of Moses, and also those who lived in the time of Christ and the apostles, were constituted as men *now* are (which must be taken for granted) they could not have believed the miracles recorded in the books of Moses, and in the New Testament, without either such sufficient evidence of their reality, as the writers of these books relate that they had

had (which he thinks most probable) of without a supernatural influence on their minds, disposing them to receive as true what was at the same time totally destitute of such evidence, and likewise manifestly contrary to their interest, and wishes to receive; so that great numbers of men must have been what we commonly call *infatuated*, or *partially deprived of their senses*; a thing which no person, who considers the circumstances of the case, can possibly admit.

They must also have been thus miraculously infatuated for the sake of building upon their belief of a series of events which had never happened, a system of religion, which of course could not be true, and therefore with a view to lead a great part of mankind to this time, and probably to the end of all time, into a great mistake; and a mistake which they had no means of ever rectifying.

Now it can never be imagined that any miracles, and particularly so many, and of extraordinary a kind, as this scheme requires

quires, should have been wrought for such a purpose as this. And yet, the philosophical christian maintains, that there is, in reality, no alternative between admitting such miracles as these, and for such a purpose as this, and the truth of those recorded in the books of Moses, the gospels, and the book of Acts, the credibility of which, he submits to the most rigorous examination.

All that is necessary, therefore, to the proper discussion of the evidence of the divine mission of Moses, or of Christ, among philosophers, is to attend carefully to the circumstances which accompanied the promulgation of their respective religions, to consider the persons by whom they were received, and the influences to which they were exposed. And it appears to me, that this due attention has never yet been given to these circumstances by any unbelievers.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

L E T T E R

L E T T E R III.

Of the Antecedent Probability of divine Revelation.

DEAR SIR,

TO the state of the question in the preceding letter, an unbeliever will perhaps say, that the idea of divine interposition is so very extraordinary, from nothing of the kind having been known in our own times, that no evidence can authorize us to admit it; it being more easy to suppose that any testimony, however circumstanced, may be false, than that such accounts should be true.

But, besides observing that no experience of one age can be any contradiction to that of another * (and all history shews that there are a variety of events peculiar to certain

* The objection to miracles as contradicted by present experience, is particularly considered in my *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*, vol. i. p. 262.

periods ;

periods, so that it by no means follows, that because we see no miracles in the present age, there never were any formerly) I shall, in this letter, endeavour to shew that, when the proper use of miracles, and the great object of revelation, are considered, it will not be at all incredible, or improbable, that there may have been divine interpositions in former ages, though now they are not necessary, and therefore not to be expected.

Admitting the author of nature to have had the kindest, and greatest design respecting man, the rational part of his creation here (which, considering that God has been proved to be a benevolent Being, is certainly far from being improbable) viz. to lead him to the true knowledge of himself, of his duty here, and of his expectations hereafter, to lead him to cultivate proper affections respecting his Maker, and his fellow-creatures; thereby to exalt his nature, and train him for a higher sphere of existence hereafter; and admitting the nature of man always to have been what we now observe it to be, let us consider what method is best

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adapted to gain the end above-mentioned. With these views, would it be the wisest method to leave mankind to collect the knowledge requisite for this high moral improvement from their own observations on the course of nature, or to assist them by extraordinary communications, or interpositions? That the latter, and not the former method, would be more *effectual*, and therefore preferable, may, I think, be concluded from the following considerations.

1. The knowledge necessary for this great object, viz. that of the being and unity of God, the extent of his providence and moral government, even that of several moral duties, the beneficial tendency of which is not apparent, and especially that of a future life (the demonstration of which seems, indeed, to be impossible from any appearances in nature) could never have been discovered by man.

It is true that, some part of the human race have been destitute of this knowledge, and will probably remain so for many ages. But they were once in possession of it, though
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they have now lost it, and by subsequent revelations, things are put into such a train, as that, in due time, without any farther interposition, they must again come to the knowledge of all the useful truths above recited. It is also agreeable to the course of nature, that great things have small beginnings, and great excellence is always the produce of long time.

2. If it had been possible for men to have discovered the above-mentioned salutary truths by the light of nature, yet their attention might never have been drawn to any thing of the kind, without some direction. The bulk of mankind, at least, are not apt to attend to the causes of any uniform constant appearances, such as the rising and setting of the sun, the annual returns of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, &c. They are only the more thoughtful and inquisitive, that endeavour to trace the causes of such phenomena as these. Whereas, if the sun should not rise, or should rise an hour later than usual, the attention of all mankind would be immediately excited;

and from inquiring into the cause of a thing so *unusual*, they might be led to reflect upon the cause of what was *usual* and *regular*.

If it was of importance, therefore, that the attention of mankind should be drawn to the *author of nature*, and that they should pay him any *homage*, there is not (as far as we can judge from our observation of human nature) any method so well calculated to produce the effect, as the exhibition of what we call *miracles*, or an interruption of the usual course of nature. So far, therefore, are miracles, which have so great an object, from being in themselves incredible, that we might even have expected them, on the idea of the author of nature giving constant attention to the works of his hands, and being willing to engage the attention of his rational offspring to himself, as the means of exalting their natures, and fitting them for their proper happiness.

How many are there, even of philosophers, who spend their lives in the investigation of the laws of nature, without ever
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raising their thoughts to the author of nature, and even maintaining that there is no proper, that is, no intelligent author of nature at all? If this be the case in the present highly enlightened age, what could we expect from an age destitute of all instruction? In these circumstances, it appears highly probable to me, that the idea of an intelligent author of nature, at least of there being only *one*, infinitely great, wise, and good author, would never have occurred to them at all.

Here then is a *nodus deo vindice dignus*, a great end to be obtained, and no sufficient *natural means* to attain it. Consequently, *miracles*, having so important an use, are neither impossible, nor improbable; and therefore, the evidence of them is by no means to be rejected without serious examination. Very circumstantial evidence is, no doubt, requisite to establish their credibility, as that of any *unusual facts*, not analogous to any that we have observed. But human testimony, that of persons who have

the perfect use of their senses, and under no prejudice, is abundantly competent to it.

The king of Siam, according to the story, had never seen water in any other form than that of a *fluid*, and therefore, could have no idea, from his own experience, of the possibility of such a thing as *ice*; but, notwithstanding this, he might think it more probable that it should even become so hard as to bear men and carriages, than that the Dutchmen, who told him that it was actually sometimes so, in their country, should deceive him. In like manner, though no person now living has seen a river divide, and men walking across its channel, or any person come to life again, after he had been unquestionably dead, yet, the testimony of past ages, to events of this kind, may be so circumstanced, as that it shall be naturally more probable that these things should have *then* taken place, than that the men of those ages should have combined to deceive both their cotemporaries, and all posterity,

posterity, by their relation of them; and in this case only, do I say that we ought to admit them,

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

L E T T E R IV.

*Of the Nature of Prejudice for, or against,
Revelation.*

DEAR SIR,

BEFORE I proceed any farther in this correspondence, you wish me to account for what appears to you to be a remarkable fact, viz. the great prevalence of infidelity among persons of a philosophical turn of mind. There must, as you justly observe, be a *cause* of this, as well as of every other *fact*, and though the history of revelation be true, there must be some adequate cause of

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its not always having been seen, or acknowledged to be so.

As I, who am myself, a believer in revelation, cannot think that the cause of infidelity in any person, is a want of sufficient evidence of its truth, I must account for it, by supposing that there is in all unbelievers, a state of mind which pre-disposes them either to give too little attention to the evidence of it, or to see that evidence, or the doctrines of revelation, in some unfavourable point of light; and in most, I think, it is owing to a want of attention to the subject, and this appears to arise very often from a secret wish that christianity may not be true,

To be absolutely indifferent to the subject of religion, and the doctrine of a future life, is hardly possible. A bad man cannot wish christianity to be true, as a good man, especially one who has made considerable sacrifices to his integrity, cannot help wishing that it may be so. The suspicion only of its being well-founded must fill the mind of the former with painful apprehensions, and that of the latter with the most pleasing of all

all prospects. It might seem, therefore, that a good man is as likely to be biased in favour of the evidences of revelation, as the bad man is to be against them; did there not appear to be a considerable difference in some circumstances of the two cases.

A man has no motive to enquire into the foundation of his fears, unless he be previously determined to do every thing in his power to avoid the impending evil. Because if he be previously determined to pursue a certain course *at all events*, he will think himself a gainer by troubling himself as little as possible about the risque that he runs in pursuing it; and this I apprehend to be the case with very many unbelievers. They are men of pleasure, or of ambition, to a considerable degree, though they may distinguish themselves by various liberal pursuits. Their habits and plans of life are fixed, and not being disposed to change them, they are disinclined to any *inquiry*, the issue of which might be a conviction of the importance of changing them. They are conscious to themselves that they have

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no reason to wish christianity to be true, and therefore, they think as little about it as possible.

On the other hand, the influence of the world around us is such, as that no man can have perfect confidence in his virtue and integrity. He may *hope* that a future life will be to his advantage, but this will not be such as to indispose him to enquire into the evidences of it.

Besides, every truly good man makes many sacrifices to his integrity, and therefore, cannot but wish to know on what grounds he does this. A christian refrains from many gratifications, for indulging in which, the world in general would not greatly blame, but rather applaud him. He has, therefore, sufficient motives to enquire whether he does not submit to these inconveniences without reason, and whether he has sufficient ground to expect an equivalent for his present sufferings, which, in time of persecution, may be very great.

It is said of the apostles, after the resurrection of our Saviour, that when they first
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heard of it, *they did not believe through joy*. The event was so far beyond their expectations, that they hesitated a long time before they could really believe it, and did not do it at last without the most satisfactory evidence. In the same manner will many virtuous and pious persons be affected with respect to the truth of that religion which promises them the glorious reward of a resurrection to immortal life and happiness, a thing of which they could not have any assurance from the light of nature.

Whether I have satisfactorily accounted for it or not, it is, I apprehend, indisputably true, that the generality of unbelievers are averse to enquire into the evidence of revelation. Few have taken the trouble even to read the scriptures, which contain the history of it, though they would have read, with the greatest eagerness, any other writings of equal antiquity, and as remarkable for the peculiarities of their style and composition, &c. This can only arise from such a dislike of christianity, as (whether they be distinctly aware of it or not) will necessarily

necessarily lay an undue bias upon their minds against it.

On the other hand, believers in christianity not only take a singular pleasure in reading the scriptures, and every thing in favour of the evidence of it, but those of them who have a turn for reading and speculation, peruse with the greatest care whatever is written against christianity; a proof that their wish to find christianity true does not operate so unfavourably to freedom of enquiry with them, as a wish that it may *not* be true does with unbelievers.

These facts, I presume, will not be controverted. My own acquaintance with unbelievers is pretty extensive, and I know very few of them, though men of letters (for others are out of the question on both sides) who have read any thing in favour of christianity, and most of them know little or nothing of the scriptures.

If there be any truth in these observations, the rejection, or rather the non-reception of christianity, by ever so many men of sense, who have not taken the trouble

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ble to enquire into the evidence of it, cannot be allowed to have much weight. It may be founded in truth, though they who made no search into it have not found it out.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R V.

*Of the Causes of Infidelity in Persons of a
speculative Turn of Mind.*

DEAR SIR,

THERE is no class or description of men but what is subject to peculiar prejudices; and every *prejudice* must operate as an obstacle to the reception of some truth. It is in vain for unbelievers to pretend to be free from prejudice. They may, indeed, be free from those of the vulgar, but they have others peculiar to themselves; and the very affectation of being free from vulgar prejudice, and of being wiser than
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the rest of mankind, must indispose them to the admission even of truth, if it should happen to be with the common people.

The suspicion that the faith of the vulgar is superstitious and false is, no doubt, often well founded; because they, of course, maintain the *oldest opinions*, while the speculative part of mankind are making new discoveries in science. Yet we often find that they who pride themselves on their being the farthest removed from superstition in some things, are the greatest dupes to it in others, and it is not universally true, that all old opinions are false, and all new ones well founded. An aversion to the creed of the vulgar may therefore mislead a man, and from a fondness for singularity, he may be singularly in the wrong.

Besides, the creed of the vulgar of the present day is to be considered not so much as *their* creed, for they were not the inventors of it, as that of the thinking and inquisitive in some former period. For those whom we distinguish by the appellation of *the vulgar*, are not those who introduce

duce any new opinions, but who receive them from others, of whose judgment they have been led to think highly. And where *science* is not concerned, but merely *historical events*, an old opinion is certainly not improbable on account of its being old; and all that christianity rests upon is the reality of certain historical events.

They who are now christians without enquiry, received their faith from those who did enquire, who distinguished themselves from the vulgar of their day by the novelty and singularity of their opinions, and who had the courage to defy danger and death in the cause of what they apprehended to be new and important truths. Unbelievers of the present age, therefore, ought not to consider christianity as the belief of the vulgar of this period, but enquire whether their faith, as held by those who first embraced and propagated it, be well founded.

But if we exclude all consideration of the illiterate, and confine our views to men of letters, it may be expected, from the very
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great numbers of unbelievers in the present age, that this source of prejudice against christianity must diminish. Among those who are called *philosophers*, the unbelievers are *the crowd*, and the believers are those who have the courage to dissent from them. If we take into our view men of rank and fortune, as well as men of letters, it must be acknowledged that there are among unbelievers great numbers from whose understanding and knowledge, in other respects, the cause of infidelity can derive but little honour. From these circumstances I begin to flatter myself, that the evidences of christianity will meet with a more impartial examination at this day than they have done in the course of the last fifty years.

Another great cause of infidelity with philosophical and speculative people is likewise happily ceasing; and in time it must be entirely removed; and for this we are, in a great measure, indebted to unbelievers themselves. I mean the many corruptions and abuses, which, in a course of time, have been introduced into christianity from foreign

foreign sources, and especially from the philosophy of the times in which it was promulgated. That philosophy has been exploded, but the remains of it, in the christian system, are still but too apparent; and being manifestly absurd, they expose it to many objections. The principal of these, besides the doctrines that are peculiar to the Roman catholics, are those of a trinity of persons in the godhead, original sin, arbitrary predestination, atonement for the sins of men by the death of Christ, and (which has perhaps been as great a cause of infidelity as any other) the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the scriptures.

The objections of unbelievers have been a principal means of leading learned christians to consider these supposed doctrines of christianity; and the consequence of this examination has been a clear discovery that those long received articles of faith (professed in all the established churches in christendom) are no part of the system of revelation, but utterly repugnant to the genuine principles of it. This I

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must take for granted at present, contenting myself with appealing to the writings of learned christians on the subject, and to my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*;

You will naturally ask me, what is there left of the system of revelation, when the above-mentioned spurious doctrines are cut off from it; and it may be proper, before I proceed any farther in this correspondence, to give you satisfaction on that head, that you may be fully apprized what it is that I call *christianity*, for the truth of which I think it of so much consequence to contend. I therefore answer your question by saying, that christian faith implies a belief of all the great historical facts recorded in the Old and New Testament, in which we are informed concerning the creation and government of the world, the history of the discourses, miracles, death, and resurrection of Christ, and his assurance of the resurrection of all the dead to a future life of retribution; and this is the doctrine that is of the most consequence, to enforce the good conduct of men.

Admitting

Admitting the truth of all the doctrines which have been abundantly proved to be spurious, their *value* (estimated by their influence on the morals of men) cannot be supposed, even by the admirers of them, to be of any moment compared to this; and in the opinion of those who reject them, they have a very unfavourable tendency, giving wrong impressions concerning the character and moral government of God, and such as must tend, if they have any effect at all, to relax the obligations of virtue. This doctrine, therefore, viz that of the resurrection of the human race to a future life of retribution, I consider as the great doctrine of revelation, to which every thing else belonging to the system is introductory, or in some other respect subservient.

If you wish to know what, in my opinion, a christian is bound to believe with respect to *the scriptures*, I answer, that the books which are universally received as *authentic*, are to be considered as faithful records of past transactions, and especially the

account of the intercourse that the Divine Being has kept up with mankind from the beginning of the world to the time of our Saviour and his apostles. No christian is answerable for more than this.

The writers of the books of scripture were *men*, and therefore *fallible*; but all that we have to do with them is in the character of *historians*, and *witnesses* of what they heard and saw. Of course, their credibility is to be estimated like that of other historians, viz. from the circumstances in which they wrote, as with respect to their opportunities of knowing the truth of what they relate, and the biases to which they might be subject. Like all other historians, they were liable to mistakes with respect to things of small moment, because they might not give sufficient attention to them; and with respect to their *reasoning*, we are fully at liberty to judge of it, as well as of that of any other men, by a due consideration of the propositions they advance, and the arguments they allege. For it by no means follows, that because a

man has had communications with the deity for certain purposes, and he may be depended upon with respect to his account of those communications, that he is, in other respects, more wise and knowing than other men. Such is the christianity that I profess to defend, and by no means what has too generally been considered as such.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R VI.

Of the History of the Jewish Religion.

DEAR SIR,

A S few of the *facts* which I shall have occasion to mention will be contested, I shall not dwell so much upon the proof of them, as upon the connexion they have with the divine mission of Moses and the prophets, and that of Christ and the apostles. For this is the circumstance that

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appears to me to have been chiefly overlooked by unbelievers. They sometimes readily acknowledge the facts, but they do not attend to the necessary consequences of that acknowledgment. This has arisen from their want of attention to the principles of human nature, and the well known feelings and affections of all men in similar situations.

As the Jewish religion has been more objected to than the christian, I shall begin with the facts on which the truth of the divine mission of Moses is founded, before I proceed to that of Christ; and I hope to satisfy you that, even in this case, unbelievers are far from having any advantage in the argument, and that they ought to have attended to the *facts*, and the circumstances of them more closely than they have yet done.

It has been much the custom with unbelievers, such as Voltaire, &c. to divert themselves and their readers with the history of the Jews, with some of the peculiarities of their religion, and especially with their stupidity,

pidity, obstinacy, and ignorance, compared with the more polished nations of antiquity. But it has been without considering that all these latter charges are highly unfavourable to their own object in advancing them, if it be admitted (which surely cannot be denied) that Jews, stupid and ignorant as they have been, were nevertheless *men*, and not a species of beings totally different from that of other men.

For it is obvious to remark, that so obstinate and intractable as unbelievers describe them to have been (as indeed their own history shews that they were) it must have been peculiarly difficult to impose upon them, with respect to any thing to which they were exceedingly averse.

Also, from a people so unpolished and ignorant, so far behind other nations in the arts of peace and war, we should not naturally expect *doctrines* and *sentiments* superior to any thing of the kind that we find in the most improved nations. And yet the bare inspection of their writings proves that, with respect to religion, and the

doctrines concerning God, and providence, the Jews were in a high degree *knowing*, and all other nations ignorant and barbarous. In these respects, therefore, the Jews must have been possessed of advantages superior to those of other nations; and if these advantages were not *natural*, they must have been of a supernatural kind.

It must be allowed as a striking fact, that the religion of the Jews was most essentially different from that of any other nation in the ancient world. They had, indeed, in common with them sacrifices, certain modes of purification, a temple, an altar, and priests, which seem to have been almost essential to all the modes of ancient religious worship. But the *object of their worship* was quite different, and infinitely superior to any thing that other nations looked up to. Also what we may call the *morality* of their worship, the character of the rites of it, and the temper and disposition of mind promoted by it, were still more different. In all these essential particulars, the religion of the Jews was so strikingly different from
that

that of any of their neighbouring nations, that it could never have been derived from any of them, and an attachment to the one must have created an aversion to the other.

The objects of worship with the Egyptians, Babylonians, Tyrians, Syrians, Assyrians, Philistines, and Arabians, under all their different denominations, as Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, &c. were the sun, moon, and stars, and other visible objects, which they supposed to be animated, and on the influence of which they supposed their good and bad fortune depended. But in the religion of the Jews, the maxims of which are clearly laid down in their sacred writings, we find that all their worship was confined to one invisible and omnipresent deity, the maker and governor of all things, from whom the sun, moon, and stars, with every thing else, visible and invisible, derived their existence, and at whose disposal they all constantly are.

Now as the Jews, though an ancient nation, were not so ancient as the Egyptians, or any of the other nations mentioned above,
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by whom they were completely surrounded, and as, with respect to natural science, it is acknowledged that they were much behind them, how came they possessed of such just and sublime conceptions with respect to the subject of *religion*, and of whom could they have learned such rational worship? This *effect*, as well as every other, must have had an adequate *cause*, and, the circumstances of the Jews considered, I see no adequate cause of so great an effect besides those divine communications, which are recorded in the books of Moses; which shew that the universal parent made choice of that nation, obstinate and stupid as it always was, to be the means of preserving in the world the true knowledge of himself, and the purity of his worship, amidst the universal degeneracy of the rest of mankind.

That this was an object worthy of the interposition of the parent of mankind, who had at heart the happiness of his offspring, we must be convinced, if we consider the moral character, as we may say, of the religious worship of the Jews, and that of
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their neighbouring nations. All these nations, without exception, connected with their worship (on principles which I have no occasion to examine at present, but they *did* universally connect with it, and incorporate into it) ceremonies, some of which were most horribly barbarous, and others of a most impure nature. Their priests cut and mangled themselves, and practised the most dreadful mortifications in the course of their worship. Human sacrifices were authorised in all those religions, and were very frequent in some of them. Parents did not spare their own children, but madly devoted them to death, and even the most dreadful of all deaths, that of burning alive, to appease the wrath, or secure the favour of their gods, and they gloried in thus sacrificing still greater numbers of their enemies, with every circumstance of insult and barbarity. For this we have not only the testimony of Jewish writers, but the most unexceptionable evidence of Greeks and Romans, who themselves, even in a pretty late period, were not entirely free from the same
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horrid rites. The Carthaginians sacrificed at one time three hundred youths of the best families in the city; and their religion was that of the Tyrians, one of the most distinguished nations in the neighbourhood of Judea.

All these neighbouring nations also, without exception, practised the most impure, as well as the most cruel rites, in honour of their gods, and their public festivals were, in general, scenes of riot and debauchery. Besides many shocking indecencies, which cannot be recited, women, in other respects chaste, thought prostitution (in which the choice of a partner was excluded) a necessary mode of recommending themselves to the favour of their deities, and in some cases even sodomy and bestiality, were thought to be proper.

If the severe and cruel rites above-mentioned, did not deter men from the practise of these religions, we may be well assured that the lasciviousness and debauchery which they encouraged would not do it. Accordingly we find, in all nations, a kind of
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rage for the ceremonies of these religions. The family of Abraham had been idolaters in Chaldæa, the Israelites had conformed to the religion of Egypt, and their whole history afterwards shews, that they had a proneness to the religious rites of their neighbours, which even astonishes us, when we consider the awful and repeated warnings of their prophets, and the dreadful calamities which, agreeably to their predictions, never failed to overtake them in consequence of their idolatry.

Now, how can we account for Abraham abandoning the religion of his country (to say nothing of his removing to so great a distance from it) and the Israelites, when they were become a nation, relinquishing the rites of the Egyptians, and adopting a religion and ceremonies of so very different a nature? This is what no nation ever did of a sudden voluntarily, or could ever be brought to do involuntarily, by ordinary means; and that this was involuntarily on the part of the Israelites, is most evident from their frequent relapses into their former

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mer superstitions, from which they were with great difficulty reclaimed.

The only possible explanation of this wonderful *fact*, I will venture to say, is to be found in the books of Moses, and other writings of the Old Testament, in which we have an authentic account of the frequent interpositions of the Divine Being to bring about so great an event by miracles, which the obstinacy and incredulity of that nation, great as they always were, were not able to withstand. What could have restrained this people when they so often relapsed into idolatry, but those frequent interpositions, an historical account of which is preserved in their writings, and which at length fully convinced them, that the eye of God was in a more particular manner upon their nation; and that though he thought proper to connive at the idolatry of other nations, which had not been distinguished by him as theirs had been, he would not bear with *them*; but that, at all events, by their prosperity or adversity, they were to be a lesson to the whole world;

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to teach all nations the great doctrine of the unity of God, the universality of his dominion, and the purity of his worship. This is a clear and satisfactory account of the fact, and without this supposition it is absolutely inexplicable.

If we consider the miracles of which we have an account in the books of Moses (which were unquestionably written at the time when they are said to have been performed) we see them to have been wonderfully calculated to produce this effect; and they were of such a nature, as that no nation whatever could have been deceived into the belief of them, even if they had been as well disposed, as we know they were ill disposed, towards the object of them.

When the great scene opens, the Israelites were in the most abject state of slavery in Egypt, without the least prospect of relief, their oppressors being a warlike nation, themselves unused to arms, and no foreign power to take their part. Yet, though these warlike Egyptians, who derived the
greatest

greatest advantages from their servitude, did every thing in their power to detain them, they actually marched out of the country, without leaving any part of their property behind; they passed forty years in a wilderness, from which so great a multitude could not have derived sufficient sustenance; and they took possession of a country occupied by several numerous and warlike nations. Such are the *facts*, and I see no probable method of accounting for them, but upon the supposition of the truth of those miracles, which are recorded in the writings of Moses, and which explain the whole in the most satisfactory manner.

According to this account, the Israelites entirely despirited, and, though oppressed, yet become Egyptians in their worship and inclinations, are brought with great difficulty to conceive some hope of their deliverance by the assurances of Moses, one of their brethren, who had fled from Egypt, and had been forty years settled in Arabia. He told them, that the God of their fathers had appeared to him, and notwithstanding

standing his reluctance to undertake the commission, had enjoined him to demand their release of Pharoah ; and as a proof of his divine mission, had empowered him to work several miracles, a specimen of which he was commissioned to exhibit before them.

Pharoah, as was natural, received the proposal with great indignation, and increased his oppression of the people ; but by the infliction of the most extraordinary judgments, and those of the most public nature (with respect to which his own magicians confessed that the finger of God was in them, and the last of which was the death of the first-born in every Egyptian family in one night) he was brought to comply with the demand. Repenting of this concession, he pursued the unarmed multitude, encumbered with all their cattle and baggage, with a large army, determined to force them to return. While the Israelites were in the utmost consternation, having Pharoah and his army behind them, and the Red Sea before them, the sea opened, and made a way for their

PART II. E escape,

escape, and Pharoah and his army, who pursued them into the sea, were all drowned.

Presently after this, many illustrious miracles having been wrought for their relief, particularly supplying them with food and water in a miraculous manner, to suffice so great a multitude, God, in an audible voice from Mount Sinai, in the hearing of all the people, which must have exceeded three millions, standing at some distance from the foot of the mountain, so as to be far out of the hearing of any human voice, or any instrument in aid of articulation, delivered all the words of the ten commandments, with the preamble to them. This was accompanied with thunder and lightning, and a cloud covering the mountain; and of this awful appearance the people had regular notice some time before. The rest of the law was delivered to Moses himself, whose commission was so abundantly attested, that though there were several formidable conspiracies against him (in one of which his own brother Aaron, who must have been in the secret of all his measures,

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tures, was concerned) and though his conduct often gave the greatest offence to all the people, and he was himself of a meek and placid nature, and so unqualified for command in war, that another was always employed whenever they had occasion to take the field, his authority was fully supported.

After the expiration of forty years, the Israelites crossed the river Jordan in the same manner as they had crossed the Red sea, marching through the channel on dry ground; the walls of the first city which they besieged, fell down of their own accord, and in a short time, notwithstanding the opposition of the numerous and warlike inhabitants of the country, the Israelites took possession of it.

Such is the account that the books of Moses and of Joshua give of these things, and to say nothing of the internal marks of credibility in the writings of Moses, which bear as evident traces of authenticity, as any narrative, or journal of events, that was ever written, the miracles introduced into

the history, supply the only possible hypothesis to account for the rest. A fact which cannot be denied, is the *belief* of all the Israelitish nation, from that time to the present, that such events did take place, that the history we now have of them was written by Moses himself, till near the time of his death, and that the narrative was continued by other persons who recorded the events of their own times.

If the antiquity of the books of Moses, &c. be denied, it still remains to be accounted for, how all the nation could, at any period of time, be made to believe that their ancestors had come from Egypt, through the Red Sea, and the river Jordan, and that such a *law* as theirs had been delivered in an audible voice from Mount Sinai, when none of those things had ever happened. This is not more probable, than that the English nation should at this time be brought to believe that their ancestors originally came from France, and that they crossed from Calais to Dover without ships.

An attempt to impose upon a whole nation such an account as this, and especially a history of the events said to have been written at the time, when nothing of the kind had been heard of before, would at any period be treated with ridicule and neglect. No people ever were, or ever can be, so imposed upon, especially when the things proposed to them are so disagreeable and burthenome as the laws of Moses certainly were to the Jewish nation.

The belief of the fabulous histories of the Greek and Roman divinities, and of their intercourse with mortals, such as we read of in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, &c. can bear no comparison with the belief of all the contents of the books of Moses by the nation of the Jews. It was never pretended that there was any history of the heathen gods and of their intercourse with mankind, written at the time of the events, of which copies were ordered to be taken, and which was to be recited annually in the presence of all the people, which was the case with respect to the laws of Moses. All the stories of the

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heathen mythology are related with irreconcilable varieties, and the belief of them had probably never much hold of intelligent persons, and kept decreasing till, in a course of time, the stories were supposed to be in a great measure allegorical, contrived to express some mystical or moral truth ; and at length, this whole system of heathenism was effectually discredited, and sunk into universal contempt.

On the contrary, the whole body of the Jewish nation, attached as they formerly were to the superstitions of their neighbours, never entertained a doubt with respect to any of the contents of the books of Moses. That there were such persons as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, &c. and that the things recorded of them were true, they always believed, as firmly as we do the history of Julius Cæsar, or William the Conqueror ; and though the nation has continued several thousand years, and has been near two thousand years dispersed among all other nations, their belief in the ancient history of their nation, and their respect for
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the books which contain it, are not in the least diminished.

There is no example of any other nation suffering as the Jews have done, without being utterly lost, and confounded with the common mass of mankind, and their religious customs disappearing with them. The small remains of fire worshippers in one corner of Indostan, where they are suffered to live unmolested, and who find little inconvenience from their religion, is not to be mentioned with the attachment of the Jews to theirs; without considering this as a fulfilment of a prophecy delivered so early as the time of Moses, and frequently repeated in later periods. This alone, I will venture to say, is a fact which no philosopher can account for, without admitting the authenticity of the books which contain the principles of the Jewish religion, and the truth of the miracles by which it was proved to be divine.

L E T T E R VII,

*Of the historical Evidence of the Truth of
Christianity,*

DEAR SIR,

THE proof of the truth of *christianity* from the reception it met with in the world, is similar to that of the Jewish religion, but something clearer, as falling within the compass of authentic history, so that the great facts are the more easily ascertained. Indeed, all that is requisite to establish the truth of it is universally acknowledged; the rise and progress of christianity being as well known as that of the Roman empire. Consequently it is only necessary to attend to the circumstances of known facts, which are themselves as easily ascertained, as any other facts in history, to obtain as complete satisfaction with respect to it, as it is in the power of historical evidence to give. If, therefore, any person continue an unbeliever,

unbeliever, it must, in my opinion, be owing either to his not having taken proper pains to inform himself concerning facts, or to his having such a state of mind, as incapacitates him for judging concerning the nature and force of the evidence.

That the gospels and the book of Acts, which contain the history of the rise and first progress of christianity, are genuine productions of the age to which they are usually ascribed, viz. some time before the destruction of Jerusalem, or within less than forty years after the death of Christ, and that some of the epistles of Paul were written several years before that time (the first of them about twenty years after the death of Christ) whilst the chief actors in the scene, and many of the witnesses of the great facts were living, I must take for granted, because this does not appear ever to have been disputed; and there is as much evidence of it as there is of the genuineness of any histories that were ever published. It could not, therefore but have been well known at the time of the publication, whether the trans-
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actions recorded in those books really happened; and so great was the attention that was given to the subject, and the credit that was given to the books, that innumerable copies were immediately taken, they were soon translated into various foreign languages, and they were quoted and appealed to in the earliest ages by the different sects into which christians were soon divided. It is fact, therefore, that these histories were esteemed as true by great numbers, who were more competent judges in the case than any persons now living in England can be of the revolution under King William.

To say nothing of the universal reception of the epistles of Paul, as really *his*, I will venture to say that, it is as impossible for any impartial person to peruse them without being as well satisfied with respect to their genuineness, as to those of Cicero; the mention of particular events, persons, and places, being so frequent in them, so consistent with each other, and with the history of the time.

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According to the tenor of these writings, there were thousands of Jews in Jerusalem itself, as well as great numbers in other places, who became christians, in consequence of entertaining no doubt concerning the truth of the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ, and also the miracles wrought by the apostles afterwards. The facts were such as no person then living expected, so as to be previously prepared to receive; and the converts were so far from gaining any thing by their belief, that they were thereby exposed to every possible inconvenience, loss of property, disgrace, every mode of torture, and death. Paul himself was at the first a zealous persecutor of the christians, and had the greatest prospect of preferment and advantage from persisting in his opposition to them. Yet even *he* was so fully convinced of the truth of christianity, and was so sensible of the importance of it, that he became one of its most zealous preachers, and for a period of about thirty years, he actually went through the greatest labours and hardships in the propagation

propagation of the gospel, uniformly declaring that he had no expectation of any thing better in this life ; and at length he, together with innumerable others, who had the same persuasion, cheerfully laid down his life, rather than abandon his profession.

Now what kind of beings must the writers of the gospels and of the book of Acts have been, and what kind of beings must have been the thousands of that generation who received their accounts as true, and especially at such a risk (which abundantly implies that they had every motive for making enquiry, and satisfying themselves concerning the facts) if, after all, there was no truth in the accounts ?

What should we think of a set of writers, who should uniformly relate, that in the war of 1755, the French completely conquered all North America, the whole of Ireland, and a great part of England, which at length was reduced to be a province of France ? Would it be possible for a thousand such writers to gain the least credit ? or, if they did, would not the tens of thousands,
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who well knew that the story was very far from being true, and that the present state of things proves it to be so, say, that they were under some strange infatuation; and if, in a course of time, such histories should gain any credit, would there not be many more writers to confute the account, and would not the truth soon prevail over all the arts of falshood?

We may therefore safely conclude, that since the history of the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of Christ, and also that of the miracles wrought by the apostles, was received as true by such numbers of persons in the age in which they were published, and the account was never confuted, but christianity kept gaining ground from that time to the present, the great *facts* on which its credit stands were unquestionably true. A falshood of this nature could never have been propagated as this was. They who first received those books must have been previously acquainted with the history which they contained. The histories were, in fact, an appeal to the evidence of those
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into whose hands they were put, and their reception of them is the most express sanction that could be given to them.

That the history of Christ and the apostles could not have established itself without the most rigid enquiry into its truth, is evident from the persecution of christians, which began immediately after its first promulgation, and in Jerusalem itself, the very scene of the transactions. In these circumstances men had every motive, and every opportunity, for enquiring whether they sacrificed their reputation, their properties, and their lives, for an idle tale, or for a truth of the greatest certainty and importance. All these things being considered, it appears to me that no facts, in the whole compass of history, are so well authenticated as those of the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of Christ, and also what is related of the apostles in the book of Acts.

As to the resurrection of Christ, on which so much depends, the evidence of it is so circumstanced, as to be most wonderfully adapted to establish itself in the remotest

most periods of time. That Christ really *died*, cannot be doubted, when it is considered that he was put to death by his enemies, and that in the most public manner. The same persons also, who were most nearly interested in his not appearing any more, had the care of his sepulchre; and being apprized of his having foretold that he should rise again, would, no doubt, take effectual care to guard against all imposition in the case. Had there been any tolerably well founded suspicion that the guards of the sepulchre had been overpowered, or frightened away, by the friends of Christ, and that the body had been secreted by them, they would certainly have been apprehended and examined; and whether the body had been found, or not, the very possibility of its having been conveyed away would have prevented any credit being given to their account of the resurrection.

No person can reasonably object to the *number*, or the *quality*, of those who were the witnesses of Christ's resurrection, as they were persons who, without any hope of see-
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ing him again, were the most perfectly acquainted with him, and had sufficient opportunity of satisfying themselves that it was the same person. He was seen at first, when he was not at all expected, and afterwards by particular appointment, and especially in Galilee, when more than five hundred persons were present, and in the sight of a great number of them he went up into heaven.

Paul, one of the greatest enemies of his cause, one whom the Jews in general would probably have chosen, if they had been required to name any person whose conversion they thought the least probable, was satisfied, by the evidence of his own senses, that Jesus was really risen, he having appeared to *him*, as he had done to others before his ascension. Besides, all the miracles wrought by the apostles, which are as well attested as those of our Saviour himself, are a proof of the fact of the resurrection. For had Christ died as a common malefactor, and there had been nothing extraordinary in his previous history, it cannot be supposed that
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any persons would have been empowered by God to work miracles in proof of their divine mission, which evidently depended upon his.

Had Christ, after his resurrection, appeared in public, discoursing in the temple, and confronting his judges and Pilate, many more, no doubt, would have been satisfied that he was really risen from the dead. But divine providence is abundantly vindicated in affording men only reasonable evidence of truth, sufficient to satisfy all that are truly impartial, who really wish to know the truth, and in withholding what is superfluous for that purpose. And had the demand of unbelievers in this respect been granted, and the effect which they suppose would have followed from it really taken place, it would have been a circumstance exceedingly unfavourable to the credit of the story in the present, and much more in any future age.

Had the Jews of that age in general been converted, and consequently there had been no persecution of christians in Judea, it

PART II.

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would

would certainly have been said, that christianity was a contrivance of the heads of the nation, and such as we have now no opportunity of detecting. Upon the whole, therefore, to those who consider the nature of evidence, the history of the resurrection of Christ is much better authenticated by such evidence as is now existing, than it would have been in any other circumstances that we can at present devise to strengthen it. For whatever we might add to it in some respects, we must take from it in others. So far does the wisdom of God exceed that of man.

Next to our having ourselves sufficient opportunity, and likewise sufficient motives to examine into the truth of this important fact, is the certainty that those who were then present had both the opportunity and the motive. As things are now circumstanced, it will never be in the power of the enemies of christianity to say (what they might have said, if their demands with respect to the resurrection of Christ had been granted) that his religion was
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aided by the powers of this world. On the contrary, from the very beginning, it encountered all the opposition which the power and policy of man could bring against it, and had nothing but its own proper evidence to support it. But this alone was such as to enable it to do what all the power and wisdom of man was altogether unequal to, viz. to establish itself through the whole extent of the Roman empire, and even beyond the bounds of it, and finally to triumph over all the various systems of idolatry and superstition, which for ages had prevailed in it.

I am,

Yours, &c.

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LETTER

L E T T E R VIII.

Of the Causes of Infidelity in early Times.

DEAR SIR,

YOU say, that if the facts on which the truth of christianity depends were true, if Christ really wrought miracles, and the apostles after him; if he really died, and rose again from the dead; and if the evidence of these facts was sufficient to satisfy such great numbers as the history of the book of Acts represents; it is extraordinary that it did not convince *all*, and that all mankind did not immediately become christians. All the world, you say, was soon convinced of the truth of such events as the death of Cæsar in the senate-house, and the defeat of Marc Antony by Augustus. But a consideration of the principles of human nature, and our daily observation of the history of opinions, and the progress of truth,

truth, will satisfy all who are truly philosophical and attentive, that what you suppose must have taken place was not to be expected.

Two things are requisite to any person's giving his assent to a proposition of any kind, independent of its evidence, viz. an attention to that evidence, and also an impartial mind, free from any bias that might indispose him to receive and acknowledge it; and one or other of these appears to have been wanting in the generality of mankind, with respect to the truth of the gospel at the time of its promulgation, and for a considerable period afterwards.

With respect to all common events, such as the deaths of particular persons, an account of battles and their consequences, &c. there is nothing so improbable in their nature, but that all mankind must be satisfied that any thing of this kind may well happen, and the immediate consequences of the deaths of great men, and of great victories, are very soon and universally felt; so that

it is absolutely impossible that any doubt should long remain with respect to them. But this could not be the case with respect to such events as that of the miracles and resurrection of Christ; these having no such connexion with the state of public affairs, as that they could not but have been immediately known to every body. There was nothing to excite attention to them but the interest which each person, individually considered, had in them, and the zeal of those who were converts themselves to make converts of others.

Admitting the zeal of the first believers to have been ever so great, those to whom they addressed themselves would not believe what they heard till they had an opportunity of enquiring into the truth of it. They would also compare the accounts of others, and in many cases this would be a process which would necessarily take a considerable *time*, even with respect to the town or village in which the transactions took place, and much more time
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would be requisite before the belief of such extraordinary things could become general, and well established, in distant places.

Besides, the belief of christianity is not merely the belief of certain extraordinary *facts*, but includes likewise *inferences* from those facts, and many persons might admit the former without proceeding to the latter. That Christ had a divine mission, and was authorized by God to teach the doctrine of a future state, we justly think to be the necessary consequence of his working real miracles, and of his resurrection from the dead; and there are few persons, I imagine, in the present age, who will admit these facts, and hesitate to draw this conclusion. But we find that the facts were admitted, and yet the conclusion not drawn, by many persons at the time of the promulgation of christianity.

The unbelieving Jews ascribed the most extraordinary of our Saviour's miracles to the agency of demons, and the heathen world in general had great faith in *magic*; really believing that the most extraordinary

effects might be produced by pronouncing certain words, and performing certain ceremonies; these having, in their opinion, some unknown, but necessary connexion with the interposition of invifible powers. For it was by no means the firm belief of mankind in that age (though it will now be considered as an incontrovertible truth) that real miracles, or a deviation from the established laws of nature, can be produced by no other power than the great author of nature himself, or, which comes to the same thing, by some superior Being authorized by him. They might therefore admit the miracles of Christ, and those of the apostles, without being immediately satisfied that what they taught was true; and still less that they were under obligation to make a public profession of christianity, at the risk of all that was dear to them in life, and even of life itself. There are many steps in this progress, and many persons would stop in all of them; so that the number of declared christians might bear but a small proportion to what they

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would have been, if their becoming so had depended upon nothing but the simple evidence of the truth of those facts, which, it will now be acknowledged, necessarily implies the truth of christianity. When the number of its declared converts is considered, and compared with the situation of things in the age of the apostles, it will be found to be fully equal to what might have been expected, upon the supposition of the truth of every thing which is recorded in the gospels, and the book of Acts.

Of those persons to whom the facts were previously known, so that it was not necessary to produce any *evidence* of them, three thousand were converted in one day, on the speech of Peter, on the day of pentecost, in which he could say to them, Acts ii. 22.

“ Ye Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus
 “ of Nazareth, a Man approved of God
 “ among you, by miracles, and wonders,
 “ and signs, which God did by him, in the
 “ midst of you, as ye yourselves also know,
 “ &c. this Jesus hath God raised up,
 “ whereof we are all witnesses.” And the
 persons

persons then present with him were an hundred and twenty. After the first miracle performed by Peter and John, viz. the sudden cure of a man who was well known to have been lame from his birth, the number of male converts was five thousand, so that, including women, they may be supposed to have been about ten thousand. This was in Jerusalem only, the scene of the great transactions.

In distant places, the preaching of the apostles, and of their disciples, as might be expected, had no such sudden effect. A few converts in any particular place, were made at first, and their numbers kept increasing gradually. But within the age of the apostles (who did not preach without the limits of Judea, or to any gentiles, till about ten years after the death of Christ) there were christian churches in all the great cities of the Roman empire, and many of them were very numerous; so as to be full of factions among themselves, as appears by the epistles of Paul to several of them. In the villages there were fewer christians

christians than in the towns, the inhabitants of them being more out of the way of receiving intelligence concerning what had passed at so great a distance. This, it must be acknowledged, was agreeable to the natural course of things.

Beside the assertion of a divine mission, Jesus laid claim to the character of the *messiah* foretold in the Jewish prophecies, and the persuasion of the whole body of the Jewish nation concerning the temporal reign of their messiah, was so deeply rooted in their minds, that whatever miracles Jesus had wrought, it could not be expected that many of them would receive such a person as he was in that character, especially after his ignominious death. They might think that there was something very extraordinary in the case, and what they could not satisfactorily account for, without receiving him as their messiah. Besides, the manner in which Christ had exposed the vices of the scribes, pharisees, and chief priests, who were the leading men among the Jews, must have provoked the ambitious and worldly-minded

mind among them to such a degree, as that no evidence, or reason whatever, could reconcile them to his pretensions, so as to make them ready to lay down their lives for their adherence to him whom they themselves had put to death.

Such a revolution in the state of men's minds, will not be expected by any who have a knowledge of mankind; and considering the great number of those who may be called the personal enemies of Christ, and their influence with others, together with their attachment to the notion of a temporal deliverer, and their opinion of the power of dæmons, the number of Jewish converts in the age of the apostles, was certainly as great as could reasonably be expected. We find a considerable body of them in all the cities of the Roman empire in which Jews were resident. To them we always find the apostle Paul preached in the first place, and he never failed to convince some of *them* before he particularly addressed himself to the gentiles; and it cannot be doubted, but that the number of Jewish

as well as of gentile christians, kept increasing; though it is but little that we know of the former, on account of the latter having little intercourse with them; and they are the writings of the gentile christians only that are come down to us.

After the second century, it is probable that there was no great addition made to the number of Jewish converts. But we shall the less wonder at this, when it is considered, that, besides the preceding causes, which must have indisposed all Jews to receive Jesus as their Messiah, the doctrines of the pre-existence and of the divinity of Christ, which (being directly contrary to what they had been taught in the prophets concerning the Messiah) were in the highest degree offensive to them, were advanced. These doctrines, so foreign to the genuine principles of both Judaism and christianity, were generally received by the learned christians, who were the preachers, and writers of the age; and some time after the council of Nice, they were the general belief of the whole christian world. Such doctrines as these,

these, which were represented as essential to christianity, a Jew might think himself not obliged even to consider, or examine. This has continued to be the state of things with the Jews to this very day, as I find by their writings and conversation.

The heathen world in general were strongly attached to their several superstitions. Their religion entered into all their civil transactions, so that the business of every day bore some traces of it, every festivity to which they had been accustomed, and every thing connected with pleasure and the enjoyment of life was connected with it, and a part of it*. To abandon all this, implies much more than the mere reception of

* "The religion of the nations," says Mr. Gibbon, p. 513, "was not merely a speculative doctrine, professed in the schools, or preached in the temples. The innumerable duties and rites of polytheism were closely interwoven with every circumstance of business or pleasure, of public or of private life; and it seemed impossible to escape the observance of them without at the same time renouncing the commerce of mankind, and all the offices and amusements of society," many particulars of which he proceeds to enumerate.

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new truth. It was almost equivalent to making men over again. In fact, there is no example in the history of the world before the time of Christ, of any nation or considerable body of men, changing their religion, except the primitive one for the idolatry and superstition which then universally prevailed. Conquests had frequently been made, and the greatest revolutions in the state of empires, and of arts and sciences, had taken place, but these were all easy things compared to a revolution in matters of religion. This, therefore, could not be expected to be accomplished in a short time. That it did take place so completely as it afterwards did, in all the ancient world, that it was in time effected by christianity, when philosophy had not been able to contribute any thing towards it, is the most wonderful event in the history of mankind, and what nothing could have produced, but the fullest evidence of the miracles and resurrection of Christ; and this being of the historical kind, necessarily required *time* to establish itself.

When the magnitude of this effect is considered, we see a reason for all the miracles of Christ, and also for those that were wrought by the apostles afterwards. For, we may easily imagine that in Greece, or at Rome, no evidence of miracles wrought in Judea, would have been much attended to, if the inhabitants of those distant places had not been witnesses of similar miracles wrought before their own eyes. But these were so numerous, and the knowledge of them extended so far, that, great as the effect was, they were sufficient at length to accomplish their purpose.

As to the more learned among the gentiles, whether they had been used to treat all religion with contempt, which in that age was the case with many, or to reverence the establishment under which they lived, which continued to be the case with others, we may easily imagine how they would be affected at the first hearing of miracles wrought in a distant country, and to support the claim of a divine mission by a crucified malefactor. By such persons it cannot but be supposed

supposed that the preaching of christianity would be treated with ridicule; and nothing but the knowledge and evidence of it being *obtruded* upon them (which could only happen in very peculiar circumstances) could induce them to make any enquiry about it. And what effect can evidence produce without *attention* and a due *examination* of it?

Some have expressed their surprize that such persons as Seneca, Pliny, and Tacitus, did not become christians. But can we be sure that either Seneca, or Tacitus took any pains to inform themselves about christianity? It is pretty evident that Pliny did not. But his case, and that of other speculative heathens, will be considered more largely in a subsequent letter. Seneca was cotemporary with the apostle Paul, but do we know that he ever conferred with Paul, or any other christian, upon the subject; and without this, what could he know, or believe, more than other men, who had never heard the name of Christ?

PART II.

G

Tacitus

Tacitus appears to have been shamefully ignorant of the history of the Jews, which he might have learned from the books of Scripture, or the works of Josephus, which were extant in Greek in his time. Had he taken the trouble to read them, he could never have given such a crude and absurd account of the Jews as he has done. He had evidently heard nothing but vague reports, derived originally from the scriptures, but at such a distance, as to retain very little resemblance to the truth. And can it be supposed that a man who took no pains to inform himself concerning the Jews (a remarkable ancient nation, many of them dispersed in all parts of the Roman empire) whose history he undertook to write, would take any more pains to inform himself concerning the christians, who in his time were generally confounded with the Jews, whose history he did *not* undertake to write?

As to a later period, notwithstanding christianity kept gaining ground in spite of all opposition, its progress must have been retarded

retarded by the many divisions among christians, and the absurd doctrines held by some of them, in consequence of which many persons, not ill-disposed with respect to christianity, might decline joining any particular denomination of christians. This we see to be the case with respect to the catholics abroad, and many members of the established church in this country. They are sensible enough of the errors of their respective systems, but they see those who dissent from them divided among themselves, and hating and despising one another; and not feeling themselves sufficiently interested to examine which of them is in the right, they continue where they are. This must have been the case with many of the gentiles in the early ages of christianity.

Besides, whilst christianity was exposed to persecution, great numbers of a timid disposition may have been well convinced of the goodness of the cause, without being able to relinquish their possessions, and especially to lose their lives for it, which, however, christianity absolutely requires. This

we find to have been the character of Nicodemus, and others, in our Saviour's time, and there were many such in all ages. Nay, many professed christians renounced their profession in the severity of persecution. And if this was the case with those who, no doubt, still continued to believe it, well it may be supposed that many might by the same means be prevented from making any profession of it at all.

That this was the actual state of things in the second and third century, that besides a great number of professed christians, there were at least as many who secretly thought better of it than they did of the established religion, was abundantly evident in the revolution made by Constantine; who could not with safety have declared himself a christian, have given such open encouragement to christians, and have discountenanced the idolatry which had prevailed before, if the minds of the great mass of the people had not been sufficiently prepared for so great a change. And this preparation could consist of nothing but a general

neral profession, or at least a general good opinion, of christianity. Had the popular opinion at that time, been very violently against christianity, many competitors for the empire would, no doubt, have availed themselves of it: and indeed some of Constantine's rivals did endeavour to avail themselves of the zeal that remained for the popular superstitions, but without effect. This change could not have been made by Marcus Aurelius, or any of the earlier emperors, if they had been christians. This remarkable fact therefore, viz. the easy establishment of christianity, and the extinction of heathenism by Constantine, and his successors, is of itself an abundant proof of the progress that christianity had made in the preceding period.

The emperor Julian bore as much good will to heathenism, as Constantine had done to christianity, but what was he able to effect? He did not choose to attack the new religion openly, but he discouraged the profession of it by every method in his power. In this, however, he met with nothing but disap-

pointment, and presently after his death, the establishment of christianity returned like a tide in the ocean; and had any other emperor, half a century after the time of Julian, attempted as much as he did, the general opinion would, no doubt, have been so much against him, that he must have abdicated the empire; so strong was the general attachment to christianity in that age, notwithstanding all the unfavourable circumstances attending the rise and progress of it. Had it been in the power of men of learning and enquiry, after the attention of mankind was sufficiently excited to the subject, to have exposed the pretensions of Christ, as we can those of Mahomet, it would certainly have been done before the age of Julian, or that of Constantine.

There is no writer from whom this might have been expected so much as from Josephus, who, on account of his being cotemporary with the apostles, and even with Christ himself, and passing a great part of his life in Judea, which was the great theatre of their miracles, must have had the

the best opportunity of examining into the foundation of christianity, and consequently of detecting any fraud or imposture that might have been employed about it. That he could not want any *inclination* to do this, is evident from his not being a christian. As he gives so particular an account of the Jewish sects, the pharisees, sadducees, and essenes, why did he give no account of the christians, whose origin was among the Jews, and who, he must have known, were very numerous in Judea, in all the provinces of the Roman empire, and in Rome itself, where he finally resided, so that some account of them might naturally be expected in such a history as his? The most probable account of his remarkable silence concerning the christians is, that for some reason or other, he disliked christianity, so as not to choose to make profession of it, and yet was not able to allege any thing of consequence against it, and therefore, chose to make no mention at all of the subject. There is no other motive for the silence of this writer concerning Christ, and the affairs of

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christians,

christians, that appears to me to be in the smallest degree probable. As to the testimony concerning Christ which is found in the present copies of his history, it has been sufficiently proved to be spurious, being inconsistent with the other parts of his writings. and with his own conduct and profession.

Upon the whole, it must certainly appear to any person who is sufficiently acquainted with the history of christianity, that it had no countenance from *power*, and that even the *learning* of the age was as hostile to it as the civil government. What then but *truth*, under every disadvantage, external and internal, could have procured it that establishment which, in about three centuries, it acquired through the whole extent of the Roman empire, and even among many of the barbarous nations beyond the bounds of of it, to the extermination of all the other modes of religion which had prevailed in them before ?

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

L E T T E R IX.

A more particular Account of the Nature of those Prejudices to which the Heathens were subject with Respect to Christianity.

DEAR SIR,

THEY who express any surprize that christianity did not make a more rapid progress in the world, besides not being acquainted with the real state of things in the age in which it was promulgated, do not appear to me to have given sufficient attention to the doctrine concerning *assent to truth* in general, whether natural, moral, or historical.

Nothing is more observable, than that when the mind is prepossessed in favour of any particular opinion, the contrary one will not always be admitted on the authority of its proper *evidence* only. We see every day that men are *silenced* without being *convinced*. They may see nothing to
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object to a new set of principles, but they may justly suspect that every consideration necessary to form a right judgment in the case, may not be present to their minds, and think that when they shall have time to recollect themselves, things may appear in a very different light, and therefore may suspend their assent. Or, perceiving an utter inconsistency between the new opinion proposed to them, and those which they have hitherto held, and being persuaded that they once saw sufficient reason for what they have been accustomed to maintain, they may think themselves excusable if, without taking the trouble to re-examine the subject, they content themselves with their former sentiments upon it. They may think that there must be some latent fallacy in the arguments for the new principle, though they are not able to detect it.

When we consider propositions with their proofs as mere logicians, we are apt to think that nothing more is requisite to secure a full assent to them, than a perception

ception of the agreement of ideas ; but in reality there are many other causes of assent besides this ; and some of the very strongest with respect to the great bulk of mankind, are of a very different nature. In their minds there is such an established connexion between the ideas of *truth* and *right*, and those of the opinions and practices of their parents, their countrymen, their party, their teachers, &c. (a connexion formed in the earliest years of infancy, and receiving additional strength in every period of life) that it is not in the power of any thing that we call *evidence*, to separate them. In this case, persons who are not of an inquisitive and speculative turn, that is, the great mass of mankind, will hardly ever listen to any attempt to separate them. What is more common than to hear the charge of heresy, impiety, and blasphemy, thundered out against particular opinions, by persons who are so far from pretending to have examined them, that they will even declare they think it wrong to examine, or deliberate in the case ; such examination

mination and deliberation implying at least a *doubt*, which they dread to entertain, even for a moment.

Besides, we all know that a regard to ease, reputation, and interest, imperceptibly biaſſes the judgments of men ; ſo that if it be for a man's ease, reputation, or interest, to maintain a particular opinion, how well diſpoſed ſoever he may be in other reſpects, he is not to be truſted with the diſcuſſion. He is no judge of his own impartiality ; as the ſame arguments will appear to him in a very different light from what they would have done, if his ease, interest, reputation, &c. had been on the other ſide. The degree of this influence would not be ſuſpected, except by perſons who know mankind well, and who have attended to the hiſtory of controverſy. Can any proteſtant imagine, that there would ever have been ſo many ingenious defences of the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, or that ſo many perſons would have really believed in it, if, beſides the influence of education and authority, it had not been part of a
ſystem

system which it was inconvenient, disreputable, or hazardous, to abandon? All unitarians must see the force of the same influences on the minds of those who defend the doctrine of the trinity.

We see the effect of the same causes of error in civil life. For we shall certainly deceive ourselves, and think too ill of mankind, if we should imagine that they always act contrary to their judgment, when they assert and maintain what we most clearly see to be false. Their connexions and interests, &c. impose upon their judgments. When nations go to war, both sides, I doubt not, in general, seriously think themselves in the right. They think they are only returning injuries received, or preventing the effects of the most hostile intentions; and they read with indignation the manifestos of their adversaries, which always breathe the spirit of peace.

Did every man, as an individual, really judge for himself, without the interference of any undue influence, we should not see the same opinions and maxims prevail, as they

they generally do, in particular families, schools, and communities of any kind. Whenever great bodies of men, connected as they must be by interest, or some other equally strong bond of union, profess the the same opinion, there can be no doubt but that their interest, or other principle of union, had a considerable influence in forming their judgments, and that had they not been under that influence, they would have thought as variously as any other equal number of men, who are not so connected.

On account of some of these undue influences, by means of which the proper effect of evidence is precluded, we are not to expect that any arguments will have much weight with the generality of persons who are far advanced in life. By one means or other they have, as we usually say, *made up their minds*, and notwithstanding all that can be proposed to them, if they should be prevailed upon to give any kind or degree of attention to a new opinion, they will frequently only remain the more confirmed in their former way of thinking. We may wonder

der that reasons which appear so clear and convincing to ourselves, should have no weight with others. But universal experience shews that, in many cases, they have even less than none. For considerations which we think to make for us, they often think to make against us; and where *conduct* is concerned, the mildest expostulations will often only exasperate; so that, instead of persuading men to act as we wish them to do, we often leave them more obstinate in their own way.

If any person doubt the truth of this observation, let him make the experiment himself, which it will not be difficult to do. If he be a christian, let him propose a conference with a Jew; if he be a catholic, let him have an interview with a protestant; or if a protestant, with an old catholic; if he be a trinitarian, let him propose his arguments to an unitarian; if an unitarian, let him argue with a trinitarian; if a whig in this country, with an old tory; or if a tory, with a staunch whig. I do not say that in such conferences as these no man will ever gain his point; but it appears

pears to me, from the course of my observation, that if the parties be turned forty or fifty years of age, and if by reading, thinking, or conversation, they have been long settled in their opinions, it is not one case in a hundred in which any change of opinion will be produced by this means. There are many Jews, many catholics, many trinitarians, many Arians, many deists, and many atheists, on whom I am sensible that no arguments, or mode of address, that I, as an *unitarian christian*, could make use of, would have any effect whatever.

Let a man go into Spain and Portugal, and, if it were possible, even work miracles, to shew them that the protestant religion is true; if they were not more in number than those which we have reason to think were wrought by the apostles; and if after a certain time they were discontinued, as those of the apostles were, a great proportion of the inhabitants would probably, for a long time at least, continue to think as they now do. How many persons are there who would have no patience to hear
such

such preachers, or any thing that could be said about them; and whatever reports they could not avoid hearing concerning their *miracles*, they would, without any examination, conclude them to be all tricks and impositions; and when these workers of miracles were gone off the stage, the conversion of this popish nation to the protestant religion, would probably proceed no faster than that of the heathen world to christianity.

How little disposed some persons of the best understanding may be to give any attention to those who are of a party or profession different from their own, we have a pretty remarkable example of in the late Dr. Johnson, who was so bigotted a churchman, that when he was in Scotland, and would gladly have heard Dr. Robertson preach, would not go into a church, though established by law, because it was a presbyterian one. Supposing the principles of this despised presbyterian church to have been ever so right and clear, can any person imagine it to have been possible for such a man as Dr. Johnson to have been

a convert to them? But the contempt with which the philosophers, and men of learning among the Heathens, considered christianity, probably far exceeded that which Dr. Johnson entertained for the tenets or practices of the presbyterians.

How little also is it that many of the learned clergy of the church of England know of the dissenters, or their writings? Great numbers of them have no more knowledge of what is transacted in a conventicle, than in a pagoda, and would sooner, I dare say, be persuaded to enter the latter, than the former. By this we may judge of the reluctance with which the proud and learned gentiles would receive any proposal to go into a christian church, in the first, or even the second century. Let the principles of any set of men, who are much despised, and little known, be ever so *true*, or *evident*, there can be no chance of their becoming generally prevalent, except in a long course of time. Let no person then wonder at the *time* which the great revolution effected by christianity took up, and at the
remains

remains of heathenism in many villages, and remote parts of the world, which had but little intercourse with strangers. The change was *rapid*, considering all the circumstances of the case, and what could never have been effected at all but by the force of truth.

Philosophical truth seems to be better calculated to make its way in the world than truth of a religious nature, because men are not so much interested in opposing it. But it must not be forgotten, that Galileo was put into the inquisition for maintaining one of the first principles of modern philosophy. The doctrine of Newton made but little progress abroad in the first half century after its publication in England, and at this very day it is not received (or has not been received till very lately) in *all* the foreign universities. Can any person attend to these facts (and many others of a similar nature might be mentioned) and wonder that the gentile world was not sooner converted to christianity?

I am, Sir, &c.

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LETTER

LETTER X.

Of the different Foundations on which the Belief of Judaism or Christianity, and that of other Religions stands.

DEAR SIR,

MANY persons content themselves with saying they have no occasion to inquire into the origin of the Jewish or christian religions. Mankind, they say, have always been credulous, and vulgar errors are innumerable. What could be more firmly believed than the fabulous histories of Apollo, Diana, and the rest of the Grecian and Roman divinities; by the Greeks and Romans, the story of Mahomet's journey to heaven by the Mahometans, the transformation of Vishnou by the Indians, or the legendary tales of the church of Rome by the generality of the catholics? All these things are, or were, most firmly believed by whole nations, so that it would
have

have been hazardous for any person to intimate the least doubt with respect to them; and yet what man of sense will say that they even deserve any examination? Why then may not this be the case with the the Jewish and christian religions?

But those who satisfy themselves with this light manner of treating the subject, have not sufficiently considered the essential difference between the circumstances of a mere *tradition*, and those of a *history written at the time*, not to mention other circumstances of the greatest importance in the case; and therefore, though I have mentioned this difference in my introductory letters, I shall enter into a fuller discussion of it here, with an application to the case in hand.

We know that when any thing is told from one person to another, it never fails to be altered; and if it be of an extraordinary nature (such as most persons take great pleasure in telling and hearing) it will be enlarged in almost every hand through which it passes, so that in a short time the origi-

nal relater shall not know the story that he himself first told; and it is often impossible to trace the rise and progress of reports, which in length of time gain the greatest credit. Of this we have frequent examples, especially in time of war, and public disturbances of any kind; so that wise men pay little regard to the belief of the multitude in things of this nature, especially if no persons have been interested to enquire into the origin of the reports, and to detect the errors that might be in them. In these very circumstances are the stories in the heathen mythology, the popish legends, &c. so that they might gain great credit, and in time get recorded in writing, without any foundation in truth. But in all these cases it will be easy to ascertain whether the history was committed to writing by an eye witness, and whether it was propagated and recorded by unprejudiced persons.

The case of a history written at the time of any transactions, or so near to it, that the memory of them was fresh in the minds of those

those into whose hands the accounts came, and especially the history of such things as no person was previously disposed to believe, and such as would not be admitted without enquiring into their truth, is essentially different from that of a mere tradition, which it was no body's interest to reject. And such was the history of the transactions on which the truth of the Jewish and christian religion depends: The former is contained in the books of Moses, recited by himself, in the hearing of all the people for whose use they were written, and the latter in the gospels and the book of Acts, probably all written by eye witnesses of the facts recorded in them, and received without objection by eye-witnesses; and it can never be said that either the religion of Moses, or that of Jesus, was such as the people to whom they were delivered, were at all predisposed to receive, or to relish.

Neither of these histories stole upon the world insensibly, so that it might be said that a small matter might grow to a great

magnitude before it was committed to writing, and that then it was too late to examine into its truth. On the contrary, the accounts were published while the events were fresh in the memory of those into whose hands the books came, and who would never have given their sanction to them, but have immediately rejected them, as fabulous, if they had not known them to be true; so that their credit must have been blasted at once, and they would never have been transmitted to posterity as authentic narratives of facts. This will be more evident if it be considered how deeply interested were both those who embraced, and those who rejected the doctrines of these books, to examine into their authenticity.

Where neither life, property, nor reputation are concerned, accounts of transactions may get into the world without much examination. But this was not the case with respect to the history of Moses, or that of Christ, especially the latter. Every man who embraced christianity, considered him-
self

self as bound to maintain the truth of it at the hazard of his life, and of every thing dear to him. And surely those who died a violent death for their adherence to christianity (which was the case with most of the apostles, and many other primitive christians, themselves witnesses of the miracles and resurrection of Christ) would not have done it but upon grounds that to them appeared sufficient. They must certainly have been fully persuaded that the cause in which they suffered so much, and so long, was a good one; and, living at the time, they had the best opportunity of knowing it.

This argument will apply to the martyrs of the next and following ages. And it is remarkable that the persecution continued as long as an enquiry into the truth of the facts was tolerably easy, viz. about three hundred years, after which time the value of martyrdom, considered as an evidence of the truth of the facts, would be much diminished; but during this period, the evidence they afforded was in some views acquiring additional strength. For, if the first set of martyrs, those who
were

were our Saviour's cotemporaries, could be supposed to have been under a kind of *infatuation*, and have sacrificed their lives without sufficient reason, those of the next generation had sufficient time to recollect themselves, and would hardly have followed them in the same course, without examination; and they still had sufficient opportunity for the purpose. The gospels were then recent publications, and it might easily have been enquired, in the very scene of the transactions, whether the things had been as they were related or not.

If even the second generation should have been blinded to their destruction, which is beyond measure improbable, the third was not wholly destitute of the means of enquiry, and they would certainly have availed themselves of it, rather than have suffered what we know they did in the cause of christianity. In this manner, successive generations of martyrs bore their testimony to the truth of those facts, for their faith in which they suffered, till no reasonable doubt could

but that, if the history of the gospels

and of the book of Acts, had not been in the main authentic, the falsehood would have been detected.

On the other hand, as the martyrs for christianity were deeply interested to enquire into the truth of that for which they suffered, their enemies, who were as much exasperated as men could be at the progress of christianity, had motives sufficient to detect and expose the imposture of it, if it had been in their power. The umbrage that was taken at christianity in Judea, the scene of the transactions, began with itself. Christ himself was never without the most bitter enemies. The same was the case with the apostles; and certainly they who imprisoned them, and *charged them to preach no more in that name*, Acts iv. 17. would have exposed their artifices, and pretended miracles, if it had been in their power; and they wanted no opportunity for the purpose, having every thing in the country at their command.

In these remarkable circumstances christianity was preached, and its professors were persecuted in Judea itself for the space of forty

forty years, without its being pretended that the most watchful eye had discovered any imposture in the case. The activity of Paul, while he was a persecutor, was only employed in *baling men and women, and committing them to prison, Acts viii. 3. and persecuting them into strange cities.* He himself was afterwards a prisoner for his profession of christianity, two years in Judea, where forty men entered into a bond *that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed him, Acts xxiii. 12.* but nothing is said of their attempt to find out his artifices to deceive the people; though this, as they could not but know, would have answered their purpose infinitely better than killing him.

Another theatre of christian miracles was in gentile countries, where the preachers of christianity had always adversaries, as well as friends. But here also we hear of no detection of their frauds; even though every other method was taken to prevent the spread of christianity. In the time of Julian, no writings, or records of any kind, had

had been destroyed; and if *he* could have discovered any thing respecting the origin or propagation of christianity, that would have been to its prejudice, would he have spared any pains to bring it to light? He had evidently no hopes of being able to do any thing of the kind, and therefore, he attacked christianity in other ways.

Similar observations may be applied to the history of the Jewish religion. All the articles of it were formed at once, and committed to writing by Moses himself; and the books were not kept secret, but express orders were given, and provision was made, for frequent copies to be taken of them. Nothing essential to this religion rests upon tradition. If any alteration or innovation had been attempted, it might easily have been detected, and no fraud in the establishment of it could possibly have been concealed. The body of the people, to whom this law was given, frequently rebelled against Moses, and would even have gone back to Egypt. Aaron, Moses's own brother, and Miriam, his sister, who could not have been out of the secret of any of the means

means of deceiving the multitude, that he might have employed, took umbrage at his preheminance, and therefore wanted no motive to detect any imposition they knew him to have been guilty of.

Though there were not, properly speaking, any martyrs to the Jewish religion in that early period, the institutions themselves were many of them so burdensome, especially that of circumcision, and others of them so hazardous, as those of the sabbath, the sabbatical year, &c. and all of them so contrary to the rites to which the people had been accustomed, and for which they had contracted a fondness, which they never wholly lost, that they must have been sufficiently disposed, in every period of their history, to detect any imposition they could have found in it. Their own idolatrous kings, and the priests of Baal, would, no doubt, have been glad to have justified their desertion of the religion of Moses, by the discovery of any thing that would have been to its prejudice. They were with respect to Judaism, what Julian was with respect to christianity.

When

When these things are considered, how can it be said that, the case of the Jewish and christian religions bear any resemblance to the fabulous mythology of the Greeks and Romans, the metamorphoses of the Indian Vishnou, the journey of Mahomet to heaven, or the legendary tales of the church of Rome ; all of which are founded on mere tradition, none of the pretended facts having been committed to writing at the time, and all of them received by those who suffered nothing for their faith in them, who were previously disposed to receive them, and add to them ; and when no unbelievers had any opportunity of examining into the truth of them ; and when there do not appear to have been any persons like the persecutors of christians interested to expose their falsehood. Nothing, therefore, can be less entitled to credit than these stories, and nothing more worthy of it, than those Jewish and christian histories, to which they have most injudiciously been compared.

I am,

Yours, &c.

L E T T E R XI.

The Evidence of Judaism and Christianity compared with that of Mahometanism, and of the Religion of Indostan.

DEAR SIR,

SOME have compared the rise and progress of christianity to that of Mahometanism, and that of Judaism to that of the religion of Indostan. But they certainly never attended to several very remarkable differences in both the cases.

1. There is no fact, of an historical nature, on which the truth of the Mahometan religion is said to be founded, that could be subjected to examination; because all the miracle that Mahomet himself pretended to was the revelation of the Koran, made to himself only. However, any person may judge at this day whether the composition of it be such, as that human ability
(that

(that of Mahomet himself, for instance, assisted by some confidential friend) could not have been equal to it. Let any man of sense now read the Koran, and give his opinion on the subject.

2. Mahometanism never did gain any converts in consequence of an examination into the grounds of it, among persons not interested in the reception of it. In what country was this religion ever generally received, in which the ruling powers opposed it, and persecuted it, or in which the ruling powers were not previously Mahometans?

The first Mahometans were all native Arabs, who were universally gainers by the propagation of their religion. But though they conquered many countries, their religion never became that of the generality of the ancient inhabitants, if they had been christians before. Notwithstanding all the hardships to which they subjected those of that religion, and especially the contempt with which they treat them, all the countries of the East are still full of christians, of various denominations. The far greater part of

Asia Minor, where the Turks were long settled before they invaded Europe, and also the greatest part of Turkey in Europe, of which they have been possessed three hundred years, is christian, Constantinople itself at least half so. The greatest part of Spain was once in the possession of Mahometans, and some parts of it near eight hundred years; but we read of few or no Mahometans in it beside native Moors from Africa.

In Indostan the governors only are Mahometans, though it is three hundred years since they conquered the country, so that whenever the government shall cease to be Mahometan, the profession of that religion in it will cease of course.

That many persons have, in a course of time, become firm believers in Mahometanism, cannot be doubted; and, therefore, many will probably continue so, especially in Turkey and Arabia, though the government of these countries should become christian. But we may safely prophecy that, whenever the government shall be changed,
a death

a death blow, a blow from which it will never recover, will be given to that religion, and all the remains of it will vanish in due time.

The Tartars, who at length conquered the Saracens, and put an end to the Caliphate, adopted their religion in preference to heathenism; but it by no means appears to have been done upon an enquiry into the historical evidence of it. Those Tartars who first conformed to the Mahometan religion, were those who had served under the Mahometan princes. They acquired power and influence by degrees, and many of them, no doubt, thought it necessary to make profession of that religion in order to establish themselves the better among a people who would not have any other. Thus Mahometanism, from being the religion of the *chiefs* among the Tartars, became in time that of the common people, and was afterwards adopted by other tribes of Tartars. If in any manner similar to this, or in any other in which the first converts were *princes*, the christian religion came to be professed by any of the northern nations

of Europe, I would lay no stress on such conversions as a proof of the truth of christianity, or as any recommendation of it.

3. There never has been any period in which the merits and evidence of the Mahometan and christian religions were freely debated by learned men. In all Mahometan countries it is death to make a profelyte, or to conceal one. Let this important circumstance be changed, and let a free intercourse be opened between Mahometans and rational, that is, unitarian christians, and I shall have no doubt with respect to the consequence.

4. Mahomet began with converting his own family, in which he met with difficulty, though they were interested in his success, and afterwards his nearest relations derived the greatest advantage from the scheme. On the contrary, Christ does not appear to have addressed himself particularly either to his own family, or to the ruling powers of the country, and no person connected with him ever derived any advantage from his undertaking. Two of his brothers were

were apostles, but they died martyrs, as well as most of the other apostles. The posterity of Moses derived no advantage from their relation to him, but continued in the rank of common Levites. None of Mahomet's first followers died voluntary martyrs to their faith in his divine mission. To risk one's life in battle with the hope of victory, is a very different thing from calmly submitting to a cruel death, without any hope but in a future life.

5. That the divine mission of Mahomet was firmly believed, and pretty early too, may be accounted for without supposing it to be true. His own family and acquaintance might be taken by his austerities and confident assertions, and the success of his enterprize would soon give them a notion that he had the countenance of heaven. His enthusiasm would pass for inspiration, and at length he might even himself imagine that a particular providence attended him. But had Mahomet died in

I 3

battle,

battle, and consequently all the effects of his *arms* had ceased, where would have been his religion ?

The religion of Christ was propagated in very different circumstances. No man having pretensions to a divine mission, could have died in circumstances more unfavourable to the credit of it than he did ; and yet his religion gained ground, and notwithstanding every mode of opposition, is firmly believed, in all revolutions of empires, by those who derive no worldly advantage from the profession of it to this day.

It should also be considered, that what is most reputable in the religion of Mahomet, is derived from the Jewish and christian religions, the corruptions of which he began with undertaking to reform ; and he had a particular advantage in addressing the Arabs, as the descendants of Abraham. His doctrine of the *divine unity*, gave him great advantage over the generality of christians of that age, who had most miserably bewildered themselves

themselves with their notions of a trinity in the godhead, of which it was impossible that they should give any rational account.

It has been said that *the religion of Indostan* is contained in written books, as well as that of Moses, and may be of as great, or greater, antiquity, and that the belief of the people in it is no less firm than that of Jews, or christians, in theirs. But I beg leave to make the following observations on the subject.

1. The books which contain this religion are not, as far as appears, of an historical nature, giving an account of miracles wrought in proof of the divine mission of those who wrote them, or who published the religion contained in them, but consists only of doctrines concerning God, the creation, the destination of the human race, &c. and in themselves utterly irrational, so that every thing the books contain might have been composed without any supernatural assistance. And there is nothing that we can now examine by the rules of history and testimony.

I 4

Consequently,

quently the Veda's cannot be brought into comparison with the books of Moses, the gospels, and the book of Acts.

2. The age of the books is very uncertain, as there has not yet been discovered any authentic history of the country, giving an account of the authors of those books, and continuing the history from that time to the present, which is the case with the books of Moses.

3. The religious books of the Hindoos are confined to one class of people in the country, who support their rank and privileges by keeping the common people in ignorance of them. It is even death by the laws of the country, for persons of a lower cast to read those books, or to hear them read by another person, which is certainly a very suspicious circumstance. And though, by this means, those of the inferior casts are kept in subjection to their superiors, they are all taught to believe that they are of a higher rank, and greater favourites of heaven, than the rest of mankind; that they will be rewarded for their adherence to
their

their religion, and punished for deserting it. It has never been said that the faith of the lower people is the result of *inquiry*, and conviction, nor do the Indians attempt to convert other people.

4. The professors of this religion never suffered any persecution for it; at least not in times in which the evidence of it was open to examination, as was the case with christianity. Their faith, therefore, is only like that of the Greeks and Romans, in their religions; a faith founded on mere tradition, and having the sanction of dark antiquity. Let the Hindoos, as well as the Mahometans, become acquainted with our literature, and have free intercourse with unitarian christians, and I have no doubt but that the result will be in favour of christianity.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

L E T T E R XII.

Of the Nature of Idolatry, and the Attachment of the Heathens to it, as a principal Cause of their hatred of Christians.

DEAR SIR,

YOU acknowledge that cases may be supposed, in which the most sufficient evidence would not produce its natural effect on the minds of men, that numbers might remain unconvinced, in circumstances in which we think that we ourselves could not hesitate to declare ourselves converts to an opinion. You are sensible that, in cases of this nature, we either do not sufficiently consider the difference between the previous state of our minds and that of theirs, or that we do not place ourselves precisely in the same circumstances; and that, on these accounts, it must be impossible to argue justly from the persuasion

OF

or feelings of any one man to those of any other. But you wish to know more particularly than I have hitherto explained it, what was the actual state of the gentile world in general with respect to christianity, especially in what manner it appears to have been treated by those who did not receive, but continued to oppose it; and what kind of objections were in those early ages made to it.

As this is a very reasonable request, I shall give you all the satisfaction in my power with respect to it; and I am confident that a just exhibition of those ancient times will convince you, that the opposition which christianity then met with, can supply no valid argument against it at this day. The objections which were then made to christianity were of such a nature, that they can have no weight with any modern unbelievers; so that if it had been possible for any person in those times to have enjoyed the superior light of the present age, he must have been ashamed of almost every thing which was alleged against the
the

the gospel by the ancient opposers of it. Indeed, so very absurd were the notions of the heathens, philosophers as well as others, that it is even difficult for us at this day to suppose they could ever have existed, at least so generally, as universal history shews that they did. On this account, though I might content myself with shewing the *fact*, I shall descant a little on the causes of it.

So little connexion do we see, or can imagine, between the religious ceremonies of the Greeks and Romans (such as sacrifices, processions, games, &c.) and the *welfare of a state*, that we can hardly bring ourselves to believe that any men of sense could ever have entertained the idea. Yet nothing was so deeply fixed in the minds of the gentile world in general.

The whole system of false religion, or idolatry, arose from the notion of a connexion between good or bad fortune, and certain acts, or *ceremonies*, which, for some reason or other, were supposed to gain the favour or incur the displeasure of those divinities

vinities which had the dispensation of good or evil in the world.

In the infant state of the world, when the *true* causes of things were not known, it is not to be wondered at that men should fix upon *wrong* ones; for they are never easy without imagining some hypothesis for every phenomenon. And since the best concerted plans were often unsuccessful, for reasons which the wisest men could not foresee or comprehend, they concluded that besides those causes of the events of life, which might be traced to the power and policy of men, there must be other and invisible ones, and such as were independent of the regular operation of the laws of nature. We may see the same propensity among ignorant people at this day. For *superstition* is always in proportion to *ignorance*. But whereas the ignorance and superstition of the present day have no resource but in a blind *fate*, or capricious *fortune*, residing in they know not what; mankind in the early ages fixed upon the
great

great visible objects in nature, such as the sun, moon, and stars.

Being sensible of their power in some respects, mankind easily imagined that it extended to other things; and this influence not being subject to any known regular laws, so that events might be predicted, or guarded against, they concluded that their power was not a *necessary influence*, but a *voluntary agency*. Then concluding, that there must be a sentient and intelligent principle in the heavenly bodies, they might easily go on to imagine, that there was a similar sentient principle in the earth, and even in the separate parts of it, as seas, rivers, mountains, &c. also in animals, and especially in man, whose passions and affections they could not explain by what was visible in his frame. This invisible principle they would easily suppose to be, like that in the heavenly bodies, incorruptible and immortal.

In this train of thinking mankind were soon provided with a prodigious number of
invisible

invisible beings, whose favour it behoved them to court, and whose displeasure they had to avoid. And prosperous or adverse events having actually followed certain actions, they would naturally imagine that the same actions, or others similar to them, had an influence with the beings who had the power over those events.

This mental process was not peculiar to ancient times. We see the same thing in the practice of many gamesters now, who will even imagine that good or bad fortune depends upon a particular place at the table, and that it may be changed by turning round their chair, &c. and when once any opinion, though of this most ridiculous kind, has got the sanction of *general belief*, on however insufficient grounds, it is not easily eradicated. For if the expected event do not follow the usual circumstances, the blame will be laid on a thousand unperceived causes, rather than it will be supposed that those circumstances had no real tendency to produce the desired effect. Consequently the same things will

will continue to be practised with the same expectations, and a single coincidence of the usual preliminary preparations with the expected event will be talked of, and magnified, while numberless failures will be forgotten, or accounted for. And the longer any superstitious rite had been practised, the more would its efficacy be depended upon, and the less regard would be paid to the cases in which it had failed.

From such causes as these, it cannot be denied that, in the age of Christ and the apostles, the religious customs of the heathen world had got the firmest hold on the minds of men. No person was able to trace the origin of any rite of importance, so that the veneration bestowed on every thing that was *ancient* was attached to them; and it was taken for granted, that the well being of all states absolutely depended upon the observance of the religious rites which had been from time immemorial practised in them.

Hence every person who suggested an idea of the insignificance of such things,
and

and much more one who protested against them, was considered as a dangerous member of society, and treated as an *arbest*; because he was an enemy to such gods as his fellow-citizens acknowledged, and promoted the discontinuance of those rites on which, in their opinion, the safety of the commonwealth depended.

On these principles, and without any farther enquiry, such a person was thought unworthy of protection, or of life. Consequently christians, as dissenters from the established worship, were hated, so that the very *name* was sufficient to condemn them, and the most patriotic magistrates thought it their duty to exterminate them. Such was the prejudice against christianity on this account only, that it was thought unnecessary to enquire into the ground of their faith; and persons of the most excellent characters in other respects, and of the most cultivated minds, such as Trajan, Pliny, and Marcus Aurelius, made no scruple to condemn to death, and even to torture, all who only acknowledged themselves to be christians.

It was, however, the belief of all the ancient heathens, that different kinds of worship were proper for different people. Indeed, they could not but see that different nations had been prosperous, notwithstanding their different religions; and therefore the greatest conquerors tolerated the nations that were subject to their empire in their peculiar rites. On this principle the Jews had obtained a toleration for themselves, wherever they were dispersed through the Roman empire; and, under the idea that christianity was a sect among the Jews, this was also for a long time tolerated by the Romans. But as soon as, by the increase of proselytes, the nature of christianity began to be perceived, and the national religion was apprehended to be in danger from it, the most violent measures were taken to exterminate it. The same, no doubt, would have been the case with judaism, if the progress of it had been equally alarming.

We perceive the extreme veneration for the ancient customs of nations; and the offence that was taken at christianity, as a
novel

novel religion, upon all occasions. Celsus upbraids the Jewish christians with deserting the law of their country *. “The
 “Jews;” he says, “have a law of their
 “own, and do right to observe it, because
 “different laws have been framed by dif-
 “ferent people; and it is fit that those
 “things should be observed which have
 “been established by public authority †.”
 Julian also thought more favourably of the
 Jews than of the christians, because the
 former had sacrifices, and priests, &c. in
 common with the gentiles ‡. This was a
 popular argument against christians, their
 customs being peculiar to themselves, and
 different from those of all other people.

The ancient religions being established
 by the laws of the countries in which they
 were observed, christianity was considered
 as an *illegal* thing, and the assemblies of
 christians not being *authorized by law*, all
 those who frequented them were confi-

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 321.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 325. ‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 87.

dered as liable to punishment on that account only; and *assembling in secret* was always thought dangerous in well regulated states. Celsus objects to christians their holding secret assemblies, contrary to law*.

On this account, christians, not denying, but avowing, these practices, were considered as obnoxious to the law. Among others Athenagoras complains that christians were persecuted for the name only †; and when a man was thought well of on other accounts, it was an objection to him that he was a christian. According to Tertullian, it was usual with them to say, such a one is a good man, but he is a christian ‡.

That the heathens really believed that the welfare of the state depended upon the observance of their ancient religious ceremonies, and that public calamities were occasioned by the omission of them, there is the most abundant evidence. I shall only mention a few of the proofs, such as will

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 322.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 185. ‡ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 389.

shew that not the vulgar only, but the most enlightened of the heathens, and persons in the highest authority, held the same opinion, and that they considered christians as the cause of all the calamities of the empire. Maximin, in one of his rescripts, speaking of the hurricanes and earthquakes of those times, says, “there is no man who does not know that all these, and worse calamities, have heretofore often happened, and that they have befallen us because of the pernicious error and empty vanity of these execrable men, which has so spread, as to cover almost the whole earth with shame and dishonour*”. Porphyry, a philosopher, who wrote against christianity, said, “since Jesus has been honoured, none has received any public benefit from the Gods†”.

When some of the senators petitioned the emperors Valentinian, Theodosius, and Arcadius, to replace the altar of victory which had been taken from the door of the senate-

* Ibid. vol. 3. p. 307.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 184.

house, they said, in the person of Rome,
 “ This way of worship has brought all the
 “ world into obedience to my laws. These
 “ rites drove Hanibal from my walls, and
 “ the Gauls from the capitol *.” It was
 more particularly imagined that the public
 welfare depended upon the vestal virgins †.

Zozimus, a heathen historian, says, that
 “ from the time of the public sacrifices
 “ ceasing, and all other things received
 “ from ancient tradition being neglected,
 “ the Roman empire has gradually declined
 “ till it has become the habitation of barba-
 “ rians ‡, &c.” Also, speaking of the prof-
 perity of the empire, during the observance
 of the secular games, he says, “ in the third
 “ consulship of Constantine and Licinius,
 “ the term of an hundred and ten years was
 “ compleated, when the festival ought to
 “ have been observed according to custom ;
 “ but not having been then observed, there
 “ was a necessity that affairs should sink into

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 381.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 383. ‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 263.

“ the

“ the distress and misery in which they
 “ now are *.”

Libanius, a distinguished heathen philosopher of the fourth century, speaking of the sacrifices which were then permitted at Rome, but suppressed in other places, says, “ if in the sacrifices there performed consists “ the stability of the empire” (which he took for granted) “ it ought to be reckoned “ beneficial to sacrifice every where †.” Again, “ neither,” says he, “ is it at Rome “ only that the liberty of sacrificing remains, but also in the city of Serapis, “ that great and populous city” (meaning Alexandria) “ which has a multitude of “ temples, by which it renders the plenty “ of Egypt common to all men. This “ plenty is the work of the Nile. The city, “ therefore, celebrates the Nile, and persuades him to rise, and overflow the fields. “ If these rites were not performed, when “ and by whom they ought, he would not “ do so, which they themselves seem to be

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 241. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 148.

“ sensible of, who willingly abolish such things, but do not abolish these, but permit the river to enjoy his ancient rights, for the sake of the benefit he affords *.” The temple and statue of Serapis being at length demolished, it was given out by the heathens, that the Nile would no longer flow. Nevertheless, it rose the next year to its usual height †.

When Rhadagaisus, a Goth, invaded the Roman empire, the Pagans gave out that they could not withstand such an enemy, who had the assistance of the gods, to whom he sacrificed every day; whereas *they* had no help, since their gods and their rites were banished. The christian religion, they said, had quite ruined the state, and brought them into that miserable condition. This barbarian, however, was conquered, and in a most complete manner. Afterwards Rome did fall into the hands of an enemy, but he was a christian, and the Romans found him to be a merciful conqueror ‡. Not-

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 149.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 409. ‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 428.

withstanding all this, the Pagans still attributed all the misfortunes of the empire to the progress of christianity; and in answer to this, Austin wrote his famous book *De Civitate Dei*.

In consequence of the heathens ascribing all prosperous events to the favour of their gods, they considered temporal prosperity as a proof of their power, and therefore naturally concluded that religion to be a bad one, which exposed its votaries to temporal evils. Hence Celsus objects to christians their not being delivered by Christ when they were condemned to death*. Hence, also, arose part of the prejudice against Christ himself, viz. his being *put to death*, independent of the mode of his death, which marked him to be a low and mean character. Celsus, in particular, did not fail to object to christians the miserable death of Christ †.

Many of the heathens, instead of admiring the courage of the christian martyrs, as dying in the cause of truth, reproached them for their folly and obstinacy on that account,

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 323.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 317.

Porphry,

Porphyry, alluding to christians, speaks of them as “ mean people, who having embraced rules different from their former way of life, would endure to be torn limb from limb, rather than return to their old course*.” Tertullian shews how inconsistently the heathens reasoned on this subject, who could allow that to die for one’s country was honourable, but could think that to die for God and truth was reproachful and dishonourable †.

It is obvious to remark, with Lardner, on this occasion, that certainly men who were so much despised and hated, and who were exposed to so much misery in consequence of being christians, must have thought that they had good reasons for becoming such ; and since many of them were men of good understanding in other respects, they would, no doubt, take proper pains to enquire into the ground of that faith to which they sacrificed so much.

I am, Sir, &c.

* Lardner’s Testimonies, vol. 3. p. 192.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 176.

L E T T E R XIII.

The Attachment of the Heathens to their Religion more particularly proved.

DEAR SIR,

ABSURD as the heathen religion was, there is the most indisputable evidence of several of the wisest of the heathens, long after the time of our Saviour, being the most firmly attached to it, and especially of their practising the rites of *divination* prescribed by it, whenever they wished to pry into futurity. This was always a great article in the heathen religions; and the promises they held out of giving men information of this kind was, in all ages, one of the greatest inducements to follow them. Nor shall we wonder at this, when we consider how many persons, of whose good sense in other respects, better things might be expected,

ed, do even now secretly listen to the idle tales of the lowest fortune-tellers, and what numbers never fail to flock to any person who gives out the most absurd public advertisement for this purpose. In all these things the philosophers of antiquity, who might have been expected to know better, did little or nothing, as Lardner observes, to improve the sentiments of mankind; but, on the the contrary, they confirmed the prejudices of the common people, and made them still worse than they otherwise would have been*.

Philosophers gave credit to all the Pythagorean fables †, and in particular entertained the most ridiculous idea of *inspiration*, and of an intercourse between the gods and men. This superstition and credulity, Dr. Lardner apprehends to have been the common disposition of the heathen people, of all ranks, high and low, learned and unlearned ‡. It does not appear, he observes, that Pliny,

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 3. p. 276.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 275. ‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 235.

or Tacitus, entertained any doubt about the ancient worship, or ever enquired into the truth of christianity*.

Pliny was an augur, and greatly valued the office. Every Roman emperor was *Pontifex maximus*. Marcus Aurelius was introduced into the college of priests called *Salii*, at the age of eight years, and was complete master of all the rules of the order, so as to be able to discharge, himself, the functions of that priesthood. It is probable, therefore, that he gained in his childhood a deep tincture of superstition, which grew up with him, and was retained by him afterwards. He was indeed, extremely superstitious, and a rigid persecutor; and he disliked the christians because they outdid the Stoics in bearing pain and death †.

Julian, another philosophical emperor, was so superstitious, that it was commonly said, that if he returned victorious from the Persian expedition, the race of bulls would be extirpated by his sacrifices; and the

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 67.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 169.

multitude

multitude of them was so great, that his soldiers were often disordered by their excess in eating and drinking at them *. On a festival to the honour of Venus, he walked in the procession with lewd women, and others of the worst of characters, followed by his horse and guards †. Sacrificing on some occasion to Mars, and the omens not being favourable, he called Jupiter to witness, that he would never more offer a sacrifice to Mars ‡.

That the doctrine of *demons*, and of their intercourse with men, and also that of the gods in general, and the notion of *inspiration* by them, really obtained among the heathens, long after the promulgation of christianity, absurd as all modern philosophers will think them to be, there is the most abundant evidence. Damascius wrote that, “ the wife of Hieroeles became possessed, and as the demon would not be persuaded to depart by good words, his

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 26.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 32.

‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 27.

“ disciple

“disciple Theosebius compelled him by an
 “oath, though he did not understand ma-
 “gic, or théurgy; but he adjured him by
 “the rays of the sun, and the god of the
 “Hebrews; whereupon the demon de-
 “parted, crying out, that he revered
 “the gods, and him in particular*.” This,
 adds Dr. Lardner, is a story of a gentile
 philosopher, told by a gentile historian.

Marinus, speaking of Proclus, says, “how
 “dear he was to the goddess, the president
 “of philosophy” (meaning Minerva) “ap-
 “peared from the great progress that he
 “made in that study, to which he had
 “been directed by the goddess herself, †.”
 Among other superstitions of this Proclus,
 Marinus says, that once a month he puri-
 fied himself, according to the rites of the
 mother of the gods ‡. Of Ardesius, Eu-
 napius says, “that he became little inferior
 “to his master Jamblichus, setting aside

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 284.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 291.

‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 293.

“ the

“ the inspiration which belonged to Jam-
 “ blichus *.”

As it was imagined that the gods had the knowledge of future events, and often communicated it to men in their oracles, and by other modes of divination, it was pretended that, among other things, the progress of christianity (which was certainly a most interesting event to the heathen world in general) was foretold by them. Eunapius, speaking of the philosopher Antonine, says, “ At that time he
 “ was not accounted more than a man, and
 “ conversed among men; yet he foretold
 “ to all his disciples, that after his death
 “ there would be no temples, but that the
 “ magnificent and sacred temple of Serapis
 “ would be laid in ruinous heaps, and that
 “ fabulous confusion and unformed dark-
 “ nefs would tyrannize over the best parts
 “ of the earth, all which things time has
 “ brought to pass, and his prediction has

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 194.

“ obtained

“obtained the credit of an oracle*.” It was generally believed among the heathens, that there was an oracle which declared that the christian religion would continue three hundred and sixty-five years; and many were converted when they found that there was no truth in that oracle †.

The most remarkable thing in the history of paganism, after christianity came to be the established religion of the Roman empire, was a solemn consultation, and divination, of the heathen philosophers, in the year 374, to find out who should succeed the Emperor Valens ‡. They were extremely uneasy at the great progress of christianity, and were very desirous that the next emperor might be an heathen. This consultation being discovered, those who were concerned in it, and especially Maximus, who had been a great favourite of Julian, were put to death §.

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 195. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 421.

‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 353.

§ That the reader may have some idea of the nature of this solemn *divination*, at which the gravest of the hea-

The true spirit of the heathen religion, as held by the most eminent philosophers in this age, may be seen in a story concerning this Maximus, related by Eunapius,

then philosophers assisted, I shall copy the following account of it by Ammianus Marcellinus: "A tripod made
 " of laurel was artificially prepared, and consecrated, with
 " certain prescribed secret charms and invocations. It
 " was then placed in the middle of a room, perfumed
 " with Arabian spices. The charger upon which it was
 " set, had upon its utmost brim the four and twenty letters of the alphabet, neatly engraved, and set at due distances from each other. Then a person clad in linen
 " vestments, with linen socks upon his feet, and a suitable
 " covering upon his head, came in with laurel branches
 " in his hands, and, after some mystic charms performed,
 " he shook a ring, hanging at a curtain, about the edge of
 " the charger; which, jumping up and down, fell upon
 " such and such letters of the alphabet, where it seemed
 " to stay; the priest also then composing certain heroic
 " verses, in answer to the interrogatories that had been
 " proposed. The letters which the ring pointed out in
 " this case were four, ΘΕΟΔ, which being put together
 " composed these two syllables, ΤΗΕΟΔ; whereupon one
 " that stood by presently cried out, that the oracle plainly
 " intended *Theodorus*. Nor did we make any farther
 " enquiries, being all well satisfied that he was the person
 " intended." Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 354.

who

who says that, " Soon after Julian's arrival
 " at Constantinople, he sent a messenger
 " with letters to Maximus and Chrysan-
 " thius, inviting them to come to him.
 " They thought proper to ask council of
 " the gods, but the omens which they re-
 " ceived were discouraging; whereupon
 " Chrysanthius plainly told Maximus, there
 " could be no thoughts of going to seek pre-
 " ferment. We must stay where we are.
 " Perhaps it may be needful for us to hide
 " ourselves. On the contrary, Maximus
 " said, we are not to content ourselves
 " with a single refusal; we ought rather
 " to force the gods till they give us a fa-
 " vourable answer suited to our wishes.
 " Chrysanthius replied that, he dared not
 " disobey the first admonitions which had
 " been received, and went away. Maxi-
 " mus renewed his enquiries till he ob-
 " tained such an answer as he wanted*."

Innumerable other things might be re-
 lated of many of the heathen philosophers,

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 370.

equal to any thing in the Popish legends. Nothing could exceed their superstition and credulity. Far, therefore, is it from being true, as some moderns, and especially Mr. Gibbon, have pretended, that the belief in paganism was nearly worn out, and that it was an easy thing for christianity to step in, and take its place.

At this day good sense teaches men toleration with respect to religion, and apprehends no inconvenience from it to the state. But considering the notions and maxims which we have seen to have been adopted by the wisest of the heathens, we cannot wonder that they were no friends to toleration, but, from principle, the most rigid persecutors. This was the case with those who, in other respects, were the very best of the emperors. But they really thought that they were promoting the welfare of the empire, by the extermination of christians out of it.

Trajan, justly celebrated for his wisdom and justice in other respects, was a persecutor of the christians. His edict against them

them was never abrogated till the time of Constantine ; and according to this, every president of a province was obliged to pronounce sentence of death upon all who were brought before them, and acknowledged themselves to be christians*.

The elegant and philosophical Pliny thought that those who obstinately refused to sacrifice to the gods were justly deserving of death ; though he acknowledges, that when he had made enquiry by torture, of some who had abandoned the profession of christianity, he could not find that they were guilty of any thing else ; and that, in their private assemblies, they bound themselves by an oath to the practice of virtue.

Marcus Aurelius, the most philosophical of the emperors, and who is famed for his moderation, was a more bigotted heathen than Trajan, and a more violent persecutor of the christians.

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 3. p. 341.

Hierocles, who wrote against the christians, was himself a persecutor, and an adviser of persecution*. When he was prefect of Alexandria, he insulted, in the grossest manner, some christians who were brought before him, though they were persons of great gravity; and he delivered some nuns to the bayds for the purpose of prostitution †.

Julian wanted no good-will to extirpate christianity, but he had seen the little effect of the more violent kind of persecution in the former reigns, when christians were far less numerous than they were in his time. He did not chuse, therefore, to adopt the same measures, but he omitted no opportunity of shewing his malevolence to christianity, and the professors of it, in every method that he thought safe, and likely to be successful. Lardner truly observes, that he was intent upon extirpating christ-

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 3. p. 237.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 241.

ianity

tianity with the greatest dispatch; and that, with all his pretensions to right reason, and all his professions of humanity, moderation, tenderness, and equity, he has not escaped the just imputation of being a persecutor*.

In his letter to the prefect of Egypt, Julian says, "It concerns me extremely, that all the gods are despised †." Libanius, speaking of the severities of former reigns, says, that "Julian dissented from those who had practised such things, as not obtaining the end aimed at, and that he was sensible that no benefit was to be expected from such violence. Considering, therefore, these things, and that their affairs had been increased by slaughters, he declined what he could not approve of ‡." He connived, however, at a tumult, in which George, the Arian bishop of Alexandria, was murdered, and he banished Athanasius, Eleusis of Cyzicum, and Titus of Bostra, all bishops of great distinction, on very slight pretences §. He

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 110.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 134.

‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 100.

§ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 110.

not only deprived christians of magistracies, and all honourable distinctions, but likewise, it is said, of the rights of citizenship*. But what particularly distinguishes his reign is, his forbidding all christians the benefit of human literature. "This," says Ammianus, a heathen historian, "was an unmerciful law, and ought for ever to be buried in silence, which forbids christians to teach grammar or rhetoric †."

As a reason for this law, Julian, in an ironical manner, unworthy of a prince, alleged that it was absurd to teach the heathen writers, and at the same time not to espouse their religion. With the same cruel sneer he stripped the church of Edessa of its wealth, saying, that christianity promised the kingdom of heaven to the poor.

That Julian would have extirpated christianity, if it had been in his power, is evident from what he says of the books which had belonged to George, the Arian bishop,

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 39.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 178.

mentioned

mentioned before, which he ordered to be seized for his own use. Writing on the subject to the governor of Egypt, he says, " he had a large number of books, many philosophical and rhetorical, and also many concerning the doctrines of the impious Galileans, which I could wish to have utterly destroyed; but lest books of value should be destroyed with them, let those also be carefully sought for*." Damascius, Lardner observes, appears to have approved of any attempts against christians; and the christian religion †.

It is remarkable that, during all the persecution of christians, which from the decree of Nero was never wholly intermitted, no heathen philosopher ever pleaded the cause of humanity and toleration, which was grossly violated in their persons; though Libanius commended Jovian for his toleration of the Pagans. On the whole, it is most evident, that the heathens did every thing in their power to ex-

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 304.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 304.

tirpaté the christian religion, but were not able to do it.

We shall the less wonder at the unbelief of the most learned adversaries of christianity, and of the unrelenting violence with which they persecuted the christians, when we consider how ignorant they were of the principles of christianity. Lardner justly observes that, though we have so many letters of Pliny to Tacitus, and other learned men, his cotemporaries, and it appears from his own evidence, that christians were numerous in Bythinia, the province in which he resided, he never mentions to them the subject of christianity*; so that it is most probable, he had never had the curiosity even to look into their books. The same is probable also concerning Marcus Aurelius †. This emperor, says, “from Diognetus I learned not to busy myself about vain things, nor to give credit to wonder-workers, stories of incantations, expelling demons, and such like things ‡.” Of Li-

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2, p. 84.

† Ibid. vol. 2: p. 178. ‡ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 183.

banius

banius also, who wrote in a late period, Lardner observes, that he did not perceive that he had read either the New or the Old Testament*.

It is possible, however, that he and other learned heathens, might think it beneath them to mention christian writers, though they *had* read their books, hoping perhaps to extinguish the memory of them by their silence. Lardner observes that Epictetus, and others, may have suppressed their own thoughts, and have been reserved in their discourses, lest they should excite inquisitiveness in their hearers, and occasion doubts about the popular deities, and the worship paid to them †. A similar reason might also occasion the silence of Josephus. Celsus also, though he appears to have read the New Testament, never mentions the names of any of the writers ‡.

I am, &c.

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 133. † Ibid. vol. 2. p. 394.

‡ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 338.

L E T T E R X I V .

*Of the Objections to the historical Evidence of
Christianity in early Times.*

DEAR SIR,

HAVING shewn in what manner the heathens were affected towards christianity, I shall now proceed to shew what it was that they actually objected to it; and though none of their writings against christianity, are now extant, it is not difficult to collect this from those of the christians who have noticed them, from the many fragments which have been preserved of them, and from the history of the times in general. This has been done with great care by Dr. Lardner, in his *Jewish and Heathen Testimonies*, and for your use I shall abridge and digest, what he has collected.

Unbelievers of the present day may complain that the writings of heathens against christianity,

christianity are now lost; but christians lament this loss much more than they do; and in all ages have paid more attention to them than the heathens themselves did. Chrysoptom says, that “the books against christianity, were so contemptible, that they had been in a manner lost long ago; many of them perished almost as soon as they appeared, and if they were still to be found any where, it was among the christians*.” It is not denied, however, that there were edicts of christian princes for the suppression of these books of the heathens, as there had been similar edicts of heathen emperors for suppressing the books of the christians. But the different effect of these edicts is itself a proof of the different degree of attachment that was had to these books; and, consequently, of the different degree of *credit* that was due to them. Had the objections of these heathen writers to christianity been solid, it may well be presumed that, since they had all the powers

* Lardner’s Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 264.

of

of government in their favour, for near three hundred years, they would have effected their purpose, and of course have preserved themselves.

The most valuable, however, of all the writers against christianity, was undoubtedly Celsus, the earliest of them; and it can hardly be doubted but that every thing of consequence in him is preserved in Origen's answer to him, as the arguments of Porphyry and Hierocles are preserved in Eusebius, and those of Julian in Cyril; besides that we have several of Julian's own works, in which he reflects upon christianity. Upon the whole, therefore, every impartial person must be satisfied, that we are at this day able to see a very clear state of the objections to christianity in all the early ages; and I shall now fairly exhibit them, without omitting any that can be thought by any unbeliever to be worth mentioning, beginning with those that relate to *the credibility of the facts* in the gospel history, which indeed are all that are worthy of much consideration. For if the books be genuine, and the facts recorded

recorded in them be true, all other objections signify nothing. It will then be indisputable, that the scheme has the sanction of the Divine Being, and therefore, that we must reconcile to ourselves the particular difficulties we meet with in revelation, as we do those that we find in the works of nature, and the course of providence, that is, as well as we can.

It is remarkable that not one of the writers against christianity in the early ages disputed the genuineness of any of the historical books of the New Testament, or of the epistles of Paul. On the contrary, this important circumstance is tacitly allowed by Celsus, Hierocles, and Julian, who quotes the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as written before the death of John, and that of John as written by himself. In short, not one of these heathen writers expresses any opinion on this subject different from that which was held by all christians, in all times, viz. that the books were written by the persons whose names they bear; and that they were published before their deaths.

deaths. Celsus, indeed, says that the writers had altered some things, but of this he does not appear to have brought any proof*. And Hierocles endeavoured to disparage the writers, by calling them illiterate, liars, and impostors †. But these also are mere terms of reproach, without proof or probability. With more assurance, he said that, Jesus had been expelled from Judea, and after that committed robberies, accompanied by a band of nine hundred men ‡. But he might as well have said, that he took Jerusalem by storm, and made himself king of it. Such assertions as these, without any circumstances to make them probable, are deserving of nothing but contempt.

It does not appear whether Celsus admitted the miracles of Jesus or not. But as he did not expressly deny them, or endeavour to refute the account of them in the gospels, it is probable that he had no great objection to any of them, except to that of the

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 345.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 243. ‡ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 245.

resurrection.

resurrection. He says that, "even if we
 " admit that Christ healed the sick, raised
 " the dead, fed multitudes with a few
 " loaves, &c. it would not follow that
 " he was the son of God, but that he
 " might be such an impostor as the Egyp-
 " tian magicians*." He insinuates that
 the apostles and other christians might
 work miracles by the same means. For
 he says that, in his time, they had books
 of charms in barbarous languages †. Both
 this writer, and the unbelieving Jews said,
 farther, that Jesus learned magical arts in
 Egypt ‡.

But to say nothing of the time when
 Jesus was there, which, according to the
 common opinion, was only in his infancy,
 it is well observed by Dr. Lardner, that if
 diseases could have been cured by any art
 then known in Egypt, we should certainly
 have heard more of the effects of it; and

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 294.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 327.

‡ Ibid. vol. 1. p. 29. 194. vol. 2. p. 287.

the emperors, and others, would, no doubt, have learned it, as well as Jesus*.

Of the same nature with this, and equally undeserving of any serious answer, is the assertion of some Jews, that Jesus worked his miracles by means of the name of God, which he stole out of the temple. As to the power of magic, it was always supposed to be derived from the heathen deities, and therefore it would have been extraordinary indeed if they had permitted Jesus and his disciples, to employ it to the destruction of their own empire.

It was also said by the heathens, that, allowing Christ to have wrought miracles, things of as wonderful a nature had been done before. Celsus laid hold of the stories in the Greek mythology, to oppose to the miracles of Jesus, and those of the Jewish prophets †. Hierocles did not deny the miracles of Christ, but he said that even greater things had been done by Apollo-

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 297.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 267.

nius.

nus*. And Marcellinus, in his letter to Austin, said the heathens were then continually talking of their Apollonius, Apuleius, and other magicians, whose miracles, they said, were greater than those of our Saviour †.

As the miracles of Apollonius will not be contended for by any modern unbeliever, it is sufficient to say upon this subject with Dr. Lardner, "Some will ask how came it
 " to pass that many heathen people were
 " supposed to equal Apollonius to Jesus, or
 " even to prefer him before our Lord. I
 " answer, the reason was, that they were
 " willing to lay hold of any thing that
 " offered, to save the sinking cause of poly-
 " theism, and the rites belonging to it; as
 " shipwrecked men catch at every twig, or
 " straw that comes in their way to save
 " themselves from drowning ‡."

How ready the heathens were to cavil at the gospel history, and how much we may depend upon it, that they would have de-

* Ibid. vol. 3. p. 235. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 438.

‡ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 262.

tected any imposition with respect to it, if it had been possible for them to do it, we may clearly infer from the apparent insignificance of many of their objections. Thus Celsus says, the disciples did not believe in Jesus, because they forsook him in his last sufferings*. He also says, "Who saw the resurrection of Christ? A distracted woman, and one or two more of the same imposture, and some dreamers, who fancied they saw things as they desired to have them; the same that had happened to innumerable people †." This distracted woman was Mary Magdalen, a person of character and fortune, who had been insane, but was then in her sober senses; and neither she, nor any of the disciples, expected to see Jesus again. This writer does not even take notice of the great number who did see him repeatedly, or, of the opportunity they had of examining at leisure the person of Jesus, and of their being, in consequence of this, fully satisfied, that he was risen from the

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 304.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 306.

dead ;

dead; so far was he from chusing to enter into a critical examination of the evidence of this remarkable fact.

With respect to this resurrection, Celsus also says, that, "if Jesus would have manifested his divine power, he should have shewn himself to them that derided him, to him that condemned him, and indeed to all. For surely he had no reason to fear any mortal, now after he had died, and as you say, was a God*." I have already considered this objection, which derives no force from the time in which it was made, and I have shewn the futility of it.

The most important circumstance relating to the evidence of christianity, is the number of the converts to it near the time of the facts on which it was founded. Both the number, and the rank, as well as character of these converts, were much misrepresented by Julian. He says, "Jesus having persuaded a few among you, and those the worst of men, has now been

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 307.

“ celebrated three hundred years, having
 “ done nothing in his life-time worthy
 “ of remembrance; unless one think it a
 “ mighty matter to cure lame and blind
 “ people, and exorcize demoniacs in the
 “ villages of Bethsaida, and Bethany*.”

These few converts, on the day of pentecost only, which was the first day of the publication of the gospel, amounted to three thousand, and presently after they may be computed to have been about ten thousand, and in a few years they must have been many times that number, in Judea itself. And no sooner was the gospel preached in gentile countries, but the number of converts, as has been shewn, became very considerable. That these converts were the *worst of men*, was notoriously false, unless by this phrase, Julian meant what he appears to have done by similar phrases in other places, viz. men who set themselves to overturn the religion of the Roman empire. But this they might have done, and

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 79.

yet

yet have been men of the most exalted piety and virtue. Porphyry also, willing to stigmatize the apostles, charges them, but without any proof, with being deceivers, influenced by worldly views*.

In answer to such charges as these, Origen, who must have known who the christians were, and what kind of people they had been, and whose veracity was never called in question (except in modern times, by Mosheim, and Dr. Horsley, who, on being called upon to do it, has not been able to make good his charge against him) says, “there were more christian converts from no very bad life, than from those who had been abandoned †.”

Indeed, from the nature of the case, it may be supposed that the first christian converts were persons of an inquisitive turn of mind, which is seldom the character of those who are very profligate; and their readiness to abandon their vices, and to embrace a doctrine which required the strictest purity and

* Ibid. p. 390.

† Ibid. vol. 2, p. 280.

rectitude of conduct, and even to sacrifice their lives in the cause of truth (a temper of mind not acquired all at once) shews that they could not have been ill-disposed with respect to moral virtue, even before their conversion to christianity. Some of them, no doubt, had been men of immoral characters, and the excellency of christianity appeared by its reclaiming them,

As to the miracles of our Saviour, which Julian ridicules, but the truth of which he does not dispute, any one of the things which he mentions, such as curing the lame and the blind, and exorcizing demoniacs (though he passes over in silence all the more conspicuous and splendid miracles) was a sufficient proof of a divine mission; since it is manifestly above the power of man to do any of them. This objection, however, to our Lord's miracles, as inconsiderable things, we hear of in a later period. Thus, in Austin's time, it was said that the dispossessing of dæmons, healing sick people, and even raising men to life, (which it was said, but without truth, some others

others had done) were small matters to be performed by the deity*.

Julian farther says, “the first christians
 “were content to deceive maid servants, and
 “slaves, and besides them some men and
 “women, such as Cornelius and Sergius.
 “If there were any other men of eminence
 “brought over by you, I mean in the times
 “of Tiberius and Claudius, when these
 “things happened, let me pass for a liar in
 “every thing I say †.”

The conversion of Cornelius and Sergius Paulus Julian had from the book of Acts, the truth of which he did not dispute. But the same book, and also the epistles of Paul (the genuineness of which was never questioned) shew clearly that, besides Cornelius and Sergius, there were several other men of rank and eminence who became christians. If a great number of the gentile converts had not been opulent, they could not have made the liberal contributions which they did to the poor in Jerusalem; and though many of

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 412.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 83.

these

these were in low circumstances, their wants had been relieved by the sale of estates belonging to the richer among them.

Besides this, Julian takes advantage of the little that was then certainly known of the age of the apostles, and also confines his observations to the times of Tiberius and Claudius. For presently after this, it is notorious that there were many christians, in every distinguished rank in life. Christian writers very soon equalled in numbers and ability those among the heathens, and before the time of Constantine far exceeded them. With respect to *wealth*, the revenues of some of the churches, even during the time of persecution, were complained of as exorbitant. As to *rank*, it appears from the epistles of Paul, that there were christians even in the family of the emperor; and Tertullian seems to intimate that, when he wrote his Apology, which was at the close of the second century, there was a considerable number of christians in the Senate*.

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 394.

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With respect to the spread of christianity, it may be proved that it went on uniformly gaining ground, from the time of its promulgation to the establishment of it by Constantine; which fact alone is, as I have shewn, a sufficient proof of the progress which it had made before that time; and without appealing to the writings of christians, and the facts mentioned by any of them. This may be abundantly proved from the testimony of the heathens themselves.

The number of christians must have been very great in the time of Pliny, about eighty years after the death of Christ, and about seventy after the first preaching of the gospel to the gentiles, as appears from his own letters to Trajan on the subject. As a magistrate, Pliny was much embarrassed what to do with the number of christians who were brought before him, in whom he found no other crime than that they were christians. A part of one of his letters I shall copy.

Having related what he had heard of what was transacted in their private assemblies,

semblies, which has been referred to before, he says, “ After receiving this account, I judged it the more necessary to examine, and that by torture, two maid servants, who were called ministers; but I have discovered nothing besides a bad and excessive superstition. Suspending, therefore, all judicial proceedings, I have recourse to you for advice. For it has appeared to me a matter highly deserving consideration, especially on account of the great number of persons who are in danger of suffering. For many of all ages, and every rank, of both sexes likewise, are accused, and will be accused. Nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the lesser towns also, and the open country. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it may be restrained, and corrected. It is certain that the temples, which were almost forsaken, begin to be more frequented, and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived. Victims likewise are every where bought up, whereas for some
“ time

“time there were few purchasers. Whence
 “it is easy to imagine what numbers of
 “men might be reclaimed, if pardon was
 “granted to those who shall repent*.”

This letter alone is a sufficient proof of the astonishing progress that christianity had made, in a short space of time after the promulgation of it, and at a considerable distance from the place of its rise. What progress it had made in the time of Julian, in whose reign it was no man's interest to be a christian, appears from many passages in his own writings, and especially from what passed at Antioch, when he went to pay his homage to the famous temple of Apollo and Daphne, in the neighbourhood of that city, and found neither people nor sacrifice. The priest only, at his own expence, had provided a small victim. On this occasion the emperor heavily complained, that so large a city had not prepared some bulls for a sacrifice on that solemnity †.

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 13.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 105.

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These are proofs of such a spread of christianity as might have been expected from its being founded on truth, having had to struggle with deep rooted prejudices of various kinds, but still making its way by its own evidence, till idolatry was every where finally exterminated. It were to be wished, that it had had no aid of this kind. However, as the progress it had made by its own strength, in the face of all oppositions had been uniform, in the course of near three hundred years, there can be no doubt but that the same end would have been effected (and, I believe, sooner, at least more completely) without any aid from civil power at all.

These are all the objections that I can find to have been advanced, by any of the ancient writers against christianity, with respect to the proper, or historical evidence of it; and I dare say you will be surprized that they are so few, and so insignificant. They certainly amount to no proof of imposture in the founders of christianity.

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That it was not in the power of persecution to stop the progress of christianity, was sufficiently proved. It was even acknowledged, and lamented by its adversaries, that it had a contrary effect. Maximin, in one of his rescripts, says, “ It is, “ I am persuaded, well known to yourself, “ and to all men, how that our Lords, and “ Fathers, Dioclesian and Maximian, when “ they saw that almost all mankind were “ forsaking the worship of the gods, and “ going over to the sect of the christians, “ did rightly ordain, that all men who had “ forsaken the worship of the immortal “ gods, should be called back again to the “ worship of the gods by public pains and “ penalties. But when I first of all came “ into the east, and perceived that great “ numbers of men, who might be useful “ to the public, were by the before-men- “ tioned causes banished by the judges into “ several places, I gave orders that, for the “ future, none of them should be severe “ towards the people of their province, but “ rather endeavour to reduce them to the
 I “ worship

“ worship of the gods by fair words, and
 “ good usage *.”

In another rescript concerning the christians, he says, “ Forasmuch as it has been
 “ manifestly found, by the experience of a
 “ long course of time, that they cannot by
 “ any means whatever be induced to de-
 “ part from this obstinacy of disposition,
 “ you are therefore to write to the curators,
 “ and other magistrates, and to the go-
 “ vernors of the villages of every city, that
 “ they are no longer to concern themselves
 “ in this affair †.”

The firmness with which christians bore persecution and death, in all forms, was so far from being denied by their adversaries; that it was, as I have shewn, the subject of complaint, and even of reproach among them. On the other hand, the heathens shewed no such resolution when their religion was discountenanced by the state. Austin says, “ Who of the pagans has been
 “ found sacrificing since sacrifices have been

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 3. p. 310.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 302.

“ prohi-

“ prohibited by the laws, and did not deny
 “ it? Who of them has been found wor-
 “ shipping an idol, and did not cry out, I
 “ have done no such thing, dreading to be
 “ convicted? On the other hand, the dis-
 “ ciples of Christ, by his words, and by
 “ his example in dying and rising again,
 “ have been raised above the fear of
 “ death*.”

The heathens themselves made a merit of their compliance with the laws in this respect. Libanius says, “ I appeal to, the
 “ guardians of this law, who has known any
 “ of those whom you have plundered, to
 “ have sacrificed upon the altars, so as the
 “ law does not permit? What young or
 “ old person, what man, what woman,
 “ &c†.” Some weak christian emperors threatened with death several acts of the heathen superstition, but we do not find that the threatened punishment was ever inflicted. In general, indeed, as Dr. Lardner observes, those severe edicts were never

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 458.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 144.

carried into execution; and the heathens were permitted to write in defence of their religion, and against christianity, without any molestation.

Julian dissembled his strong attachment to heathenism ten years, conforming in the strictest manner to the rites of a religion, which he inwardly detested, and which he was determined, if ever it should be in his power, to suppress. This is the known conduct of most of the unbelievers of modern times. They are so far from making any difficulty of appearing as christians, and even solemnly subscribing to their belief of it, that they would laugh at the scruples of any man who should refuse to do it, if his interest required it. Most catholic countries abound with such christianized unbelievers. It is no secret, that many cardinals, and some popes, have had no real belief in christianity, and have even been atheists. The generality of writers against christianity are so far from risking any thing in the cause of what they deem to be truth, that wherever there has been the shadow of danger,

danger, they have always done it in a mean and covert manner, pretending to believe what they really wish to undermine. This has been the conduct of, I believe, every unbeliever who has put his name to his work, as that of Voltaire, and others abroad, and of Mr. Hume and Mr. Gibbon in this country.

I am, Yours, &c.

L E T T E R XV.

Of other Objections to Christianity in early Times.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING fairly stated to you all the objections that I can find to have been made to the proper, that is, the historical evidence of christianity, by any of its ancient adversaries, I now proceed to men-

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tion

tion their objections of other kinds. But I must observe, that none of these can amount to a refutation of the scheme, unless the things objected to either imply a contradiction, or inculcate gross immorality. But nothing of this kind has ever been proved. In things of small consequence, it may safely be allowed that christian historians, as well as others, may have been mistaken, and also that christian writers may, like other writers, have reasoned ill. But this is mere *humanity*, and cannot affect that revelation which they had from God, and which was proved by miracles. It is not, however, foreign to my purpose to shew what kind of objections were really advanced against christianity in early ages, that we may form some judgment concerning the state of mind, and turn of thinking, in the unbelievers of those times.

It is remarkable, that one of the strongest objections to christianity that we meet with was occasioned by the mistake of christians, who, with a view to magnify the person of their master, exalted him first into a
demi-god,

demi-god, and afterwards into a God, equal to his own God and Father. And it was just, that what had been done with a view to remove the objection that had been made to christianity, on account of the meanness and ignominious death of Christ (in which they, like the apostles, ought to have gloried) should be thus turned to their disadvantage.

In Celsus, the Jewish objector says to Christ, "What occasion had you, when an infant, to be carried into Egypt, lest you should be killed. A God has no reason to be afraid of death*." Celsus himself says, "the christians argue miserably when they say, that the Son of God is the word himself, and after all shew him to be a miserable man, condemned, scourged, and crucified †." Ridiculing the doctrine of the incarnation, he says, "Was the mother of Jesus handsome, that God was in love with her beauty? It is unworthy of God to suppose him to be taken with a corruptible

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 290.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 281.

“ body, or to be in love with a woman,
 “ whether she be of royal descent or other-
 “ wise*.” And again, “ If God would
 “ send forth a spirit from himself, what
 “ need had he to breathe him into the
 “ womb of a woman. For, since he knew
 “ how to make men, he might have formed
 “ a body for this spirit, and not have cast
 “ his own spirit into such filth †.”

It is with a view to the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, that Celsus says, “ No
 “ man would ever betray another at whose
 “ table he sat, and much less would he be-
 “ tray a God ‡.” “ Christ being a God,
 “ his sufferings and death, to which he
 “ had consented, could not be grievous to
 “ him §.” He also ridicules the idea of
 God eating the flesh of lambs, and drinking
 gall and vinegar ||.

Alluding to the same doctrine, Porphyry
 says, “ If the Son of God be logos, he must

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 288.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 288.

‡ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 302.

§ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 303.

|| Ibid. vol. 2. p. 304.

“ be

“ be the outward or inward logos ; but he
 “ was neither *.”

Julian, who was better acquainted with
 the true principles of christianity, charges
 the christians with introducing a second
 God, contrary to Moses and the prophets † ;
 and says, that “ neither Paul, nor Matthew,
 “ nor Luke, nor Mark, dared to call Jesus
 “ God, but honest John, after the death of
 “ Peter and Paul ‡.” Other philosophers,
 however, continued to repeat the same ob-
 jection. Libanius, speaking of Julian,
 says, “ By the guidance of philosophy he
 “ soon wiped off the reproach of impiety,
 “ and learned the truth, and acknowledged
 “ those for gods who were such indeed,
 “ instead of him who was only thought to
 “ be so §.”

Volusian, in his correspondence with
 Austin, says, “ I cannot conceive that the
 “ Lord and governor of the world should
 “ be lodged in the body of a virgin, and

* Ibid. vol. 3. p. 171.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 75.

‡ Ibid. vol. 4 p. 80.

§ Ibid, vol. 4. p. 133.

“ lie there ten months, and then be brought
 “ forth, without prejudice to the virginity
 “ of his mother*.” Also Marcellinus, a
 christian, tells Austin, that the doctrine of
 our Lord’s incarnation was a subject of
 common discourse, was much disliked, and
 censured by many, and that Austin would
 therefore do well to clear it up †.

In the proceeding articles the christians
 themselves gave but too much occasion to
 the objection that was made to their re-
 ligion, and the same was the case with
 respect to some others. Porphyry, for ex-
 ample, objected to the doctrine of *everlast-*
ing punishments, as contrary to our Saviour’s
 own maxim, “ with whatever measure
 “ you mete, it shall be measured to you
 “ again ‡.” The language in which the
 Fathers often express themselves leads us
 to think that many of them, at least, did
 hold the doctrine of the proper eternity of
 hell torments, though nothing can be more

* Lardner’s Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 436.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 438.

‡ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 188.

contrary

contrary to reason, or be less countenanced by the true sense of scripture, in which the duration of future punishment is expressed in terms of an indefinite signification; and which abounds with maxims utterly irreconcilable with that doctrine, representing the government of God as perfectly equitable, and approving itself to the reason of men.

The superstition of the primitive times gave but too much reason for Julian's saying, that "the christians worshipped the wood of the cross, and made signs of it upon their foreheads*." He also charged christians with killing some who persisted in the ancient religion (which, however, does not appear to have been the case) and some heretics; but he says, "it was their own invention, and not the doctrine of Jesus, or of Paul †." We may add, in this place, that the monks were a just object of ridicule to the heathens, as idle people, and burthensome to the community.

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 82.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 467.

In

In many other cases, however, neither christianity itself, nor the professors of it, gave any just occasion to the objections that were made to it, and least of all to that of Celsus, that "the doctrine of Christ contained nothing new or weighty*." The doctrine of a resurrection, and of a future life was certainly new to the heathen world; and if any thing be *weighty*, this is. Notwithstanding this, it was commonly ridiculed by the heathens in general, and by Celsus in particular †. They said the thing was impossible, and therefore incredible. They thought the body unworthy of being raised, and that the soul would do better without it. That the thing is *impossible* to that power which originally made man, will hardly be advanced at this day; and modern unbelievers will not readily join their predecessors in their doctrine concerning the peculiar happiness of a soul disengaged from the incumbrance of a body.

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 310.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 312.

It

It was an ancient, as well as a modern objection to christianity, that the knowledge of it is not universal. This was urged by Celsus*, by Porphyry†, and by Julian‡. To this it is sufficient to say, that the Divine Being may have good reasons for distributing all his favours very unequally. He has given to men more understanding than to brutes; he has given to some men a better understanding than to others; and he gives to some ages, and to some nations, advantages which he denies to others. But in this his equity cannot be impeached, so long as no improvement is required of what has not been bestowed; and as to his *wisdom* in these unequal distributions, it must certainly be great presumption in man to arraign that.

There is no end of the objections that have been made to christianity, in ancient or modern times, from the mistakes of the objectors, or their cavilling at things of no moment. Thus Celsus objects to christians

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 318.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 185.

‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 72.

the

the sentiments of the Gnostics*. Porphyry charged Peter with imprecating death on Ananias and Saphira †, when, in reality, he only foretold what the divine Being would do. Porphyry also said, it was improbable that Nebuchadnezzar should shew that respect to Daniel which is asserted in his book ‡. He ridiculed the queen, mentioned in the account of Belshazzar's feast, supposing her to have been his wife, as knowing more than her husband §; and he confounds Darius the Mede with Darius the son of Hyftaspes ||.

The Pagans in the time of Austin said, how could God reject the old sacrifices, and institute a new mode of worship ¶. But it does not appear that God has rejected the old sacrifices, though, the Jewish temple being destroyed, the service of it cannot now be performed, as it may be at the restoration of the Jews to their own country; when,

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 331.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 172.

‡ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 138.

§ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 140.

|| Ibid. vol. 3. p. 142.

¶ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 439.

according

according to the prophecies of Ezekiel, the temple will be rebuilt, and the service of it resumed. Besides, admitting the principles of those who object to the restoration of sacrifices, as only adapted to the infant state of the world, it is not contrary to the analogy of nature, that things should be in a progressive state, always approaching nearer to perfection.

In the time of Austin it was said, that christianity was inconsistent with the good order of society, in consequence of the passive conduct which it recommended*. But the only pretence for this are some proverbial expressions of our Saviour, which some have understood too literally.

Hierocles said, that the scriptures overthrew themselves by their contradictions †. But it does not appear what kind of contradictions he meant. They could not be any that affect the credibility of the principal facts, and it is on these alone that the truth of christianity depends.

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 439.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 234.

Porphyrus inferred the falsehood of christianity from the disputes between Paul and Barnabas, and other circumstances of a similar nature. But may not honest men see things in different lights, and sometimes give way to intemperate heat? As they differed, it is the more probable that, if there had been any thing sinister in the conduct of either of them, it would have come to light. Men that differ are not disposed to screen, or favour one another.

The eighteen arguments of Proclus against christianity, did not affect the christian religion in general, but only, or chiefly, the particular opinion of christians, that the world had a beginning*. This, however, may easily be proved to have been true, by arguments that have no dependence on revelation.

Julian objected to the Mosaical account of the creation of the world, the fall of man, and the confusion of tongues. He likewise found fault with the decalogue†. Intelligent

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 288.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 74.

christians

christians also object to some of these things, concerning which Moses himself could have had no information, except from tradition. But this does not affect the credibility of what he writes as having passed under his own eyes, and those of his cotemporaries, the account of which was published in his own life-time. Julian's objections to the decalogue, could only shew his ignorance, or his malice.

The subject of *prophecy* has always been acknowledged to be attended with much difficulty, and therefore we do not wonder that unbelievers, in all ages, have urged their objections to it. Celsus says, that "the prophecies may be applied to many others with more probability than to Jesus*." This is readily acknowledged to be the case with respect to many of the prophecies of the Old Testament, which have by some christians been applied to Christ. But there are also some of them, which can apply to no other person; and it

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 313.

cannot

cannot be denied that they were delivered some hundreds of years before he was born. The destruction of Jerusalem, and the desolation of Judea, were clearly foretold by our Saviour himself. The present dispersed state of the Jews is the subject of a whole series of prophecy, beginning with Moses. And if this remarkable people should be restored to their own country, and become a flourishing nation in it, which is likewise foretold, few persons, I think, will doubt of the reality of a prophetic spirit.

The prophecies of Daniel are so clear, that Porphyry says, "he did not foretel things to come, but only related what had happened*." He also said that the book of Daniel could not be genuine, because it was written in Greek, as he argued from the story of Susannah. It is very evident, however, that some of the prophecies of Daniel relate to the Roman empire, which is described under various images, and this certainly did not exist at the time that the book of Da-

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 3. p. 134.

niel

niel was first translated into Greek. The decay of the Roman empire is also mentioned in the book of Daniel, and this had not taken place in the time of Porphyry himself. As to the story of Susannah, it is no part of the book of Daniel, but a spurious work, probably written in Greek.

I have already observed that the great offence that was given by christians, was their drawing people from the worship of the heathen gods, on which it was imagined the prosperity of the state depended. On this account they were treated as atheistical, and profane persons, and dangerous in a community. And it is well known that when persons go under an ill name, and are on any account, generally odious, every thing bad is readily believed of them. Thus, because christians were often obliged to meet for religious worship in the night, they were charged with putting out the lights, and committing promiscuous lewdness; and probably their eating bread and drinking wine in the celebration of the Lord's supper, might give occasion to its being said, that

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they

they killed and eat children, as we find in Celsus*.

Besides that every thing of this nature is in the highest degree incredible, no proof was ever pretended to be brought of such practices; and when ever any enquiry was made into their conduct, nothing was ever discovered to their discredit. All that Pliny could find upon the strictest scrutiny, and from those who had deserted them, was (as we find from his epistle to Trajan) as follows:

“ The whole of their fault, or error, lay in
 “ this, that they were wont to meet toge-
 “ ther on a stated day, before it was light,
 “ and sing among themselves, alternately a
 “ hymn to Christ, as a god, and to bind
 “ themselves by an oath, not to the com-
 “ mission of any wickedness” (with which
 they had been often charged) “ but not
 “ to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or
 “ adultery, never to falsify their word, nor to
 “ deny a pledge committed to them, when
 “ called upon to return it. When these

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2: p. 335.

“ things

“ things were performed, it was their cus-
 “ tom to separate, and then to come toge-
 “ ther again to a meal, which they eat in
 “ common, without any disorder. But this
 “ they had forbore since the publication of
 “ my edict, by which, according to your
 “ commands, I prohibited assemblies. Af-
 “ ter receiving this account, I judged it the
 “ more necessary to examine, and that by
 “ torture, two maid servants, who were
 “ called *ministers*. But I discovered nothing
 “ besides a bad and excessive superstition *”.

On occasion of the vague and groundless ac-
 cusation of christians, and the odium they un-
 justly lay under, Justin Martyr gives a simple
 and natural account of what was transacted
 in their assemblies, and then challenges their
 heathen adversaries in a very proper man-
 ner on the subject. “ On the day called
 “ Sunday,” he says, “ we all meet together,
 “ &c. &c. &c. On this day Jesus Christ our
 “ Saviour rose from the dead, — and ap-
 “ peared to his apostles, and disciples, and

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 12.

“ taught them those things which we have
 “ set before you, and refer to your confide-
 “ ration. If these things appear agreeable
 “ to reason and truth, pay a regard to them.
 “ If they appear trifling, reject them as
 “ such. But do not treat as enemies, nor
 “ appoint capital punishment to those who
 “ have done no harm. For we foretel
 “ unto you, that you will not escape the
 “ future judgment of God, if you persist
 “ in unrighteousness; and we shall say,
 “ *the will of the Lord be done* *.”

Julian more than once reproaches the
 heathen priests with the better morals of
 the christians. In his letter to the high-
 priest of Galatia, he says, “ if heathenism
 “ does not prosper according to our wish, it
 “ is the fault of those who profess it—
 “ Why do not we look to that which has
 “ been the principal cause of the augmenta-
 “ tion of impiety, humanity to strangers,
 “ care in burying the dead, and that sanctity
 “ of life of which they make such a show ;

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 85.

“ all

“ all which things I will have to be really
 “ practised by our people.—It is a shame,
 “ when there are no beggars among the
 “ Jews, and impious Galileans relieve not
 “ only their own people, but ours also, that
 “ our poor should be neglected by us, and
 “ be left helpless and destitute *.”

Ammianus Marcellinus also, who cen-
 sures the bishops of Rome, says, “ they
 “ might be happy indeed, if, despising the
 “ grandeur of the city, which they allege
 “ as an excuse for their luxury, they would
 “ imitate the life of some country bishops,
 “ who by their temperance in eating and
 “ drinking, by the plainness of their habit,
 “ and the modesty of their whole behaviour,
 “ approve themselves to the eternal deity,
 “ and his true worshippers, as men of virtue
 “ and piety †.”

Such were the objections that were ad-
 vanced against christianity, in early ages,
 when there was the best opportunity of en-
 quiring into the grounds of it; and it is

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 101. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 183.

easy to see that they affect nothing on which its credibility at all depends. Admitting what the unbelievers of those ages urged against the facts on which the truth of christianity depends, it is evident that they had no pretence for rejecting it which a modern unbeliever would not be ashamed to avow. And whatever may be said of the good sense of the early writers against christianity, it is evident that it was no guard against the most despicable superstition, and the most unjust and cruel treatment of those who differed from them on the subject of religion. Whatever were the virtues of Marcus Aurelius, or Julian, they did not teach them toleration or humanity, where religion was concerned; and so far were they from being the *esprits forts* of the present age, that they gave into the most ridiculous credulity in divination, and all the other absurd pretences of the heathen philosophers and priests.

I am, yours, &c.

L E T T E R XVI,

*Of the two last Chapters of the First Book of
Mr. Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall
of the Roman Empire,*

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH it is not my intention, in this correspondence, to animadvert upon particular writers, yet, as you say that the *two last Chapters of Mr. Gibbon's History* have made more unbelievers than any thing that has been published of late years; and have greatly contributed to confirm many in their unbelief, I shall, at your request, take notice of such of his observations as more properly affect the *historical evidence* of christianity, and which I have not already noticed in the *Conclusion of my History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, in which I made some observations on what he has been pleased to call the secondary causes of its growth.

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There I shewed how inadequate all the *five causes* he mentions are to account for the fact, without the *primary cause*, “the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself,” which he contents himself with indistinctly mentioning, in part of a sentence, as wishing to keep it out of sight as much as possible. For in what that *convincing evidence* consisted he does not say, whether in the nature of the doctrines themselves, or in the truth of the great facts in the christian history. As to what he says of “the ruling providence of its great author,” it might be equally a proof of the truth of paganism, or Mahometanism, and no doubt he thought so.

Indeed, strange as it may seem, Mr. Gibbon himself appears to have entirely overlooked the necessary connexion between his *secondary* and the *primary* causes of the growth of christianity, though the former imply so firm a persuasion of the truth of it, in the minds of its professors, as could never, in the natural course of things, have been produced without the real existence of the great facts, which were the object of their faith.

faith. For, without mentioning any more of his causes, to suppose that the inflexible or intolerant zeal of the primitive christians, and their firm belief in a future life, could have been produced without there being any truth in the history of the miracles, death, and resurrection of Christ, is to suppose that a pile of building must be supported by pillars, but that those pillars may stand in the air, without touching the ground; or with the Indians, that the world is supported by an elephant, and the elephant by a tortoise, but the tortoise by nothing.

What is most remarkable in Mr. Gibbon's conduct of his *argument* (for such these two chapters of his history ought to be termed) is that, without pretending to consider the proper evidence of the miracles of Christ, and those of the apostles (the firm belief of which, by those who were in circumstances the most proper for the examination of them, must have produced all his secondary causes) he takes every opportunity of insinuating, in the course of his narrative, every thing that he can to take from the effect of that evidence, which he

he carefully keeps out of sight. And though it is by gross misrepresentation of facts, and giving them colours that by no means belong to them, they are such as the unwary reader will not suspect. Some of these only, I shall, in this letter, point out to you, that you may be upon your guard against others of a similar nature. In his account, in particular, of the conduct of the heathen magistrates in the persecution of christians, and of the behaviour of the christians under persecution, he never fails to mention, or suppress, every thing that could make the former appear to advantage, and the latter to disadvantage.

I have noticed the strange concession of Mr. Gibbon, that the Jews acted “in contradiction to every known principle of the human mind, in yielding a more ready assent to the traditions of their remote ancestors, than to the evidence of their own senses” (*Hist. of Corruptions*, vol. 2. p. 445) without being aware, that no such proposition, relating to the sentiments and conduct of *men*, can be true. I shall now quote another very
extraordinary

extraordinary assertion of his, relating to that *singular people*, as he calls them, and as they must indeed be, if they could *feel*, and *act*, as he supposes them to have done.

“The cotemporaries of Moses and Joshua,” he says, p. 539. “beheld with the most careless indifference the most amazing miracles;” by which he would insinuate that those miracles were never performed. But the only authority on which Mr. Gibbon could assert any thing concerning the miracles to which the Jews were witnesses, says, that they were far from being beheld with careless indifference. The Israelites were so much terrified with the appearances at Mount Sinai, that they requested that God would not speak to them any more in that manner, but by Moses. And so far were the miracles which they saw from making no impression on them, that notwithstanding their strong propensity to idolatry, their influence continued all that generation, and that which immediately succeeded it. We read Joshua xxiv. §1. *And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua,*

and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, and who had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel.

An insinuation that most nearly affects the credibility of the gospel history, in Mr. Gibbon's account, is contained in the following paragraph. "The Jews of Palestine," he says, p. 603, "who had fondly expected a temporal deliverer, gave so cold a reception to the miracles of the divine prophet, that it was found unnecessary to publish, or at least to preserve, any Hebrew gospel. The authentic history of the acts of Christ were composed in the Greek language, at a considerable distance from Jerusalem, and after the gentile converts were grown extremely numerous."

This must have been intended to insinuate, that the *authentic gospels*, were not published in the country where the facts were known, and that they were not much credited in Judea itself; whereas nothing is more certain than that the most zealous of all christians, notwithstanding the disappointment

ment of their fond hopes of a temporal Messiah, were the Jewish converts, and that by them only was the gospel propagated in distant countries. These Jewish christians also had a gospel of their own, which was published as early, and was as much regarded, as any other; and whether Mr. Gibbon will call it *authentic*, or not, there was no material difference between it and the other gospels, all containing an account of the miracles, death, and resurrection of Christ. This Hebrew gospel was preserved as long as the Jewish christians existed, and some of them remained till after the time of Austin.

The other gospels, though written in Greek, for the use of those who understood that language, and at a distance from Judea, were all written by Jews, and while the transactions were recent; and it was nothing but a well-grounded persuasion of their authenticity, that could have procured this remarkable history that firm credit which was given to it, in all parts of the world. Let Mr. Gibbon say how this effect could
have

have been produced, if the gospel history had not been attended with every circumstance requisite to establish its credibility in that age, and consequently in all future ages.

Mr. Gibbon insinuates an objection to the evidences of christianity from its not having recommended itself, to some wise and virtuous heathens, in the early ages. "We stand in need," says he, p. 616, in his ironical manner, "of such reflections, to
" comfort us for the loss of some illustrious
" characters, which in our eyes might have
" seemed the most worthy of the heavenly
" present. The names of Seneca, of the
" elder and the younger Pliny, of Tacitus,
" of Plutarch, of Galen, of the slave Epic-
" tetus, and of the emperor Marcus Anto-
" ninus, adorn the age in which they flou-
" rished, and exalt the dignity of human
" nature. They filled with glory their
" respective stations, either in active or
" contemplative life. Their excellent un-
" derstandings were improved by study.
" Philosophy had purified their minds from
" the

“ the prejudices of popular superstition, and
 “ their days were spent in the pursuit of
 “ truth and the practice of virtue. Yet
 “ all these sages (it is no less an object of
 “ surprize than of concern) overlooked, or
 “ rejected, the perfection of the christian
 “ system. Their language, or their silence,
 “ equally discover their contempt of the
 “ growing sect, which in their time had
 “ diffused itself over the Roman empire.
 “ Those among them who condescend to
 “ mention the christians, consider them
 “ only as obstinate and perverse enthusiasts,
 “ who exacted an implicit submission to
 “ their mysterious doctrines, without being
 “ able to produce a single argument that
 “ could engage the attention of men of sense
 “ and learning.”

In this there can be no doubt, but Mr.
 Gibbon gives his own opinion, in the form
 of that of the ancients, and afterwards, af-
 fecting to lament that the cause of christi-
 anity was not defended by abler advocates,
 he says, that “ when they would demonstrate
 “ the divine origin of christianity, they in-
 “ sisted

“ sifted much more strongly on the pre-
 “ dictions which announced, than on the
 “ miracles which accompanied, the appear-
 “ ance of the Messiah.”

If this had been the case, and if, with such miserable advocates, and such insufficient arguments, christianity had, as Mr. Gibbon says, “ diffused itself over the Roman empire,” so early as the time of Seneca, it will not be very easy for him to account for so extraordinary a fact. Here is a great *effect*, without any adequate *cause*. Yet this does not appear to have struck our philosopher, as any thing extraordinary. It satisfies him, that some thousands of people took it into their heads, without any reason at all, that Christ and the apostles wrought miracles, that they madly devoted their labours, their fortunes, and their lives, to the propagation of their groundless opinion; and that by their inflexible zeal, and obstinacy, they forced the belief of it on the rest of the world. Such is the philosophy of Mr. Gibbon, and of other unbelievers.

If

If Mr. Gibbon had read the New Testament with care, he would have seen that the first preachers of christianity had no *mysterious doctrines* to teach. Hear what Paul says in the Areopagus at Athens. *The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent. Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead; and of this he himself, and more than five hundred others, as he says, 1 Cor. xv. 6. were witnesses.*

What is there *mysterious* in all this? Is it less intelligible, or in itself less probable, than the elegant mythology of Greece and Rome? If in that age the *miracles* were less particularly insisted on, it was because they were not disputed. They were not *things done in a corner*, but such as whole countries were witnesses of. The arguments from prophecy, which Mr. Gibbon ridicules, had their weight chiefly with the Jews, but were not improperly urged

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upon

upon the gentiles; who, seeing a wonderful correspondence between the predictions and the events, would be sensible of the divinity of the whole system of revelation, begun in Judaism, and completed in christianity.

I am far from being disposed to detract from the merit of Seneca, and the other distinguished heathens here mentioned by Mr. Gibbon; though with respect to the younger Pliny, and Marcus Antoninus, he is far from being justified in saying, that "their minds were purified from the prejudices of the popular superstition." For it has been shewn that they, as well as Julian, were bigots to it. But let Mr. Gibbon produce what evidence he has of these men, of such excellent understandings, and freedom from prejudice, having made any proper *enquiry* into the nature and truth of christianity, and say what arguments they opposed to those of the christian teachers. Otherwise, their overlooking or rejecting christianity implies no reflections upon it, but upon themselves.

Notwith-

Notwithstanding what Mr. Gibbon here says, that the christian preachers could not produce "a single argument that could engage the attention of men of sense and learning," yet it is unquestionable, that whether it was by *argument*, or any other means, men of sense, and learning too, did embrace christianity; and that, in a very reasonable space of time, there was not a man of sense or learning that did not. It should also be considered, that none of the persons mentioned by Mr. Gibbon ran any risk by continuing heathens; whereas, in that age, a man hazarded every thing by becoming a christian. Which of them, then, was more likely to enquire into the truth of christianity, and by whose verdict shall we be best justified in abiding?

"How shall we excuse," says Mr. Gibbon, p. 618, "the supine inattention of the pagan and philosophic world, to those evidences which were presented by the hand of omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses. During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first
P 2 "disciples,

“ disciples, the doctrine which they preach-
 “ ed was confirmed by innumerable prodigi-
 “ gies. The lame walked, the blind saw,
 “ the sick were healed, the dead were raised,
 “ dæmons were expelled, and the laws of
 “ nature were frequently suspended, for the
 “ benefit of the church. But the sages of
 “ Greece and Rome turned aside from the
 “ awful spectacle; and pursuing the ordi-
 “ nary occupations of life or study, ap-
 “ peared unconscious of any alterations in
 “ the moral or physical government of the
 “ world. Under the reign of Tiberius,
 “ the whole world, or at least a celebrated
 “ province of the Roman empire, was in-
 “ volved in a præternatural darkness of
 “ three hours. Even this miraculous
 “ event, which ought to have excited the
 “ wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion
 “ of mankind, passed without notice, in an
 “ age of science and history.”

This was, no doubt, meant to insinuate,
 that the miracles Mr. Gibbon recites were
 never performed, since they did not engage
 the attention of the sages of Greece and

Rome. But their *inattention*, I presume, has been sufficiently accounted for; and if they did not give proper *attention*, and did not trouble themselves to make the necessary *enquiries*, their unbelief reflects no discredit on christianity.

As to the *darkness* about which Mr. Gibbon makes so great a parade, it was not very likely to attract the notice of historians, as it was not so great, but that the persons who attended the crucifixion could see to give Jesus vinegar on a spear, and he could distinguish his mother and his disciple John.

With a view, no doubt, to insinuate that much credit was not given to the account of the miracles, death, and resurrection of Christ, by the inhabitants of Judea, Mr. Gibbon says, p. 635, “ A more accurate
 “ enquiry will induce us to doubt, whether
 “ any of those persons who had been wit-
 “ nesses to the miracles of Christ were per-
 “ mitted, beyond the limits of Palestine, to
 “ seal with their blood the truth of their
 “ testimony.”

Admitting all this, it is not denied but there were martyrs to christianity, of those who were witnesses to the miracles of Christ, *within the bounds of Palestine*; and these were of more value than any others. And whether any of them suffered *without* the bounds of Palestine, or not, converts were made in other countries; and this must have been by the credit that was given to the accounts of the miracles of Christ, whether the testimony was sealed with blood, or not. But the epistles of Paul are a sufficient evidence of the great hardships to which himself, and many other christians, were exposed in *distant countries*. Mr. Gibbon cannot deny the reality of the persecution under Nero, in Rome at least; and in that persecution, according to the testimony of the ancients, to which there is no reason to object, both Peter and Paul were put to death. It is likewise the general opinion, that, except the two James's (both of whom suffered at Jerusalem) and John, who lived to a great age at Ephesus, all

all the other apostles died martyrs without the bounds of Palestine. And it must be acknowledged, that the testimony of the apostles, thus *sealed*, as Mr. Gibbon says, *with their blood*, was of more value than any other, as they had the most perfect knowledge of the history and character of Christ.

In order to suggest that it was a long time before the christians suffered any legal persecution from the Romans, Mr. Gibbon says, p. 647, " We may assure ourselves, " that when he" (Pliny) " accepted the " government of Bythinia, there were no " general laws, or decrees of the Senate, in " force against the christians; that neither " Trajan, nor any of his virtuous prede- " cessors, whose edicts were received into " the civil and criminal jurisprudence, had " publicly declared their intentions con- " cerning the new sect; and that whatever " proceedings had been carried on against " the christians, there were none of suffi- " cient weight and authority, to establish a " precedent for the conduct of a Roman " magistrate."

On this I would observe, that when Pliny arrived in his province, it was evidently the custom to condemn christians to death, merely *as such*, and whether this was done by a proper law, or otherwise, it was no less a trial of the faith of those who suffered death. But both the letters of Pliny, and the answer of Trajan, shew that the proceedings had been upon an existing law, whether enacted by Trajan himself, or any of his predecessors. His answer clearly implies that he did not send the governor any *new law*, but only informed him how he ought to act with respect to convictions on a former law, instructing him to condemn those who were proved to be guilty, but not to seek for proofs of guilt. A strange and inconsistent proceeding, as was justly remarked by Tertullian. If the profession of christianity was deserving of death, why might not the guilty be sought for, as well as other criminals? And if it was not, why condemn to death those who professed it?

The probability is, that the law by which the christians had been persecuted was one

one of Nero, or Domitian; and to say nothing of the inscription found in Spain (which, however, Lardner supposes may be genuine) Orosius says, that the edict of Nero extended to the provinces. It is certainly highly probable, that he who put so many christians to death, and in so shocking a manner, would think the whole sect deserving to be extirpated in all parts of the empire.

Mr. Gibbon appears to have been sufficiently sensible of the value of such a testimony to the truth of the gospel history, as is furnished by the *early martyrdoms*; and therefore, he takes great pains to diminish their number; and when the facts cannot be denied, he endeavours to exhibit them in the most unfavourable light, as either a criminal obstinacy, or a mad and ridiculous contempt of life. And yet, though this is evidently his object, he cannot avoid mentioning such circumstances, as show the shocking cruelty and injustice of the persecutors, and the noble constancy of the persecuted. "Punishment," he says, p. 650, "was not the inevitable

“ evitable consequence of conviction, and
“ the christians whose guilt was the most
“ clearly proved, by the testimony of wit-
“ nesses, or even by their voluntary confes-
“ sion, still retained in their own power the
“ alternative of life or death. It was not so
“ much the past offence, as the actual re-
“ sistance, which excited the indignation of
“ the magistrate. He was persuaded that
“ he offered them an easy pardon, since, if
“ they consented to cast a few grains of in-
“ cense upon the altar, they were dismissed
“ from the tribunal in safety, and with ap-
“ plause. It was esteemed the duty of an
“ humane judge to endeavour to reclaim,
“ rather than to punish, those deluded en-
“ thusiasts. Varying his tone, according
“ to the age, the sex, or the situation of the
“ prisoners, he frequently condescended to
“ set before their eyes every circumstance
“ which could render life more pleasing, or
“ death more terrible; and to solicit, nay,
“ to intreat them, that they would show
“ some compassion to themselves, to their
“ families, and to their friends. If threats
“ and

“and persuasions proved ineffectual, he had
 “often recourse to violence. The scourge,
 “and the rack, were called in to supply
 “the deficiency of argument; and every
 “act of cruelty was employed to subdue
 “such inflexible, and as it appeared to the
 “pagans, such criminal obstinacy.”

No doubt, the humanity of some of the Roman magistrates, led them to favour the christians, in the manner that Mr. Gibbon has described. But others took every advantage that the laws, and the temper of the times, gave them, and indulged themselves in acts of the most wanton barbarity.

With respect to the number of the martyrs, Mr. Gibbon seems to triumph, p. 653, in the confession of Origen, who says that it was *inconsiderable*. But this term is comparative, and the real value of it must be estimated by a regard to *the whole*, of which it was *a part*; and then it may be inferred, that many hundreds, or even thousands, might be said to be *inconsiderable*. Origen says, that “the providence of God restrained
 “the

“ the violence of the persecutors, left the
 “ whole race of christians should be extir-
 “ pated;” and then adds, “ that they who
 “ suffered death were few, and easily num-
 “ bered.” *Contra Celsum*, lib. 3. p. 116.
 From this it is evident, that, in the idea of
 Origen, the number of martyrs was few,
 when compared to the whole number of
 christians, which, no doubt, consisted of
 many hundreds of thousands in his time;
 and he could hardly have imagined there
 was any danger of the extirpation of the
 whole race of them, by the death of a much
 greater number than that to which Mr.
 Gibbon seems willing to reduce them.

Besides, it was not by *death* only, that
 the faith and constancy of the christians
 was shown. As Mr. Gibbon himself
 says, p. 652. “ the Roman magistrates were
 “ far from condemning all the christians
 “ who were accused before their tribunal,
 “ and very far from punishing with death
 “ all those who were convicted of an obsti-
 “ nate adherence to the new superstition;
 “ contenting

“contenting themselves, for the most part,
 “with the milder chastisements of im-
 “prisonment, exile, or slavery in the mines.”

These things Mr. Gibbon mentions as milder chastisements. But does not the suffering of such punishments as these (some of them, in my opinion, far more trying than the prospect of immediate death) sufficiently evidence the firmness of the faith of the christians, in the cause for which they suffered; and could so many thousands have suffered in this manner without having taken some care to inform themselves concerning the truth for which they suffered? Would Mr. Gibbon himself be content to be imprisoned, or to go to work in the mines for life, or “with the prospect of a general
 “pardon at some future, but uncertain time,”
 p. 653, without being well satisfied that he had good reason for submitting to it? And were there not among the christians, who *did* suffer these things, and all that the utmost malice of their enemies could suggest, men who valued life, and the enjoyments of
 it,

it, as much as Mr. Gibbon can do, and who had as much to lose as he can have?

“The general assertion of Origen,” Mr. Gibbon says, “may be explained, and confirmed, by the particular testimony of his friend Dionysius, who, in the immense city of Alexandria, and under the rigorous persecution of Decius, reckons only ten men and seven women, who suffered for the profession of the christian name.”

But if the account of Dionysius be examined, it will be found that, besides some horrid violences before this persecution, in which many lost their lives, the deaths of these seventeen persons are mentioned only on account of there being something remarkable in them. He is far from saying, with Mr. Gibbon, that these were *all* that suffered death; and he says that many professed their readiness to die, in so much that the judges shuddered, and the christians went out of the tribunal in triumph. He adds, that many were torn to pieces by the gentiles in other cities and villages.

Mr. Gibbon also says, p. 701, that “from the history of Eusebius it may be collected that only nine bishops were punished with death; and we are assured by his particular enumeration of the martyrs of Palestine, that no more than ninety-two christians were entitled to that honourable appellation;” and from this he draws what he calls “a very important and probable conclusion,” viz. that “the multitude of christians in the Roman empire, on whom a capital punishment was inflicted by a judicial sentence, will be reduced to somewhat less than two thousand persons; whereas more than a hundred thousand are said,” p. 703, “to have suffered, in the Netherlands only, by the hand of the executioner.”

Even this number would be abundantly sufficient for all the purposes for which martyrdoms are alleged by the advocates for christianity; considering *who* those martyrs were, how capable they were of satisfying themselves concerning the truth of christianity, and how interested they were in the enquiry.

enquiry. But by looking into Eusebius, it will appear that Mr. Gibbon was no more authorized to assert that the ninety-two were the *only* martyrs in Palestine, than that the seventeen were the only ones in Alexandria. The probability is, that it was very far short of the whole number.

Mr. Gibbon proceeds to relate the particulars of the martyrdom of Cyprian, and, as usual with him, in a manner as favourable to the persecutors, and as unfavourable to the martyr, as possible; as if he might have submitted to death, in those circumstances, even without any real belief in christianity, from the mere honour of suffering, and the infamy of shrinking from it. “ Could we
 “ suppose,” says he, p. 659, “ that the
 “ bishop of Carthage had employed the pro-
 “ fession of the christian faith only as the
 “ instrument of his avarice or ambition, it
 “ was still incumbent on him to support
 “ the character he had assumed; and if he
 “ possessed the smallest degree of manly for-
 “ titude, rather to expose himself to the
 “ most cruel tortures, than by a single act to
 “ exchange

“ exchange the reputation of a whole life
 “ for the abhorrence of his christian bre-
 “ thern, and the contempt of the gentile
 “ world. But if the zeal of Cyprian was
 “ supported by the sincere conviction of
 “ the truth of those doctrines which he
 “ preached, the crown of martyrdom must
 “ have appeared to him as an object of de-
 “ sire rather than of terror ?”

But what made it so infamous to decline
 martyrdom, and so honourable to suffer it,
 but a general persuasion of the truth, and
 the infinite importance of the truth, of chris-
 tianity, for which they suffered? Whence
 arose this general and strong persuasion of
 this truth, our historian does not investi-
 gate. He here says, that, had Cyprian not
 suffered, he would have incurred the con-
 tempt of the gentile world. In a passage
 quoted above, he said that, on throwing a
 few grains of incense into the fire, the chris-
 tians went from the tribunals of the magis-
 trates with safety, and with applause. Let it
 then be one, or the other, as Mr. Gibbon's
 changing purpose may require.

PART II.

Q

Whatever

Whatever was the *motive*, Mr. Gibbon does sufficient justice to the readiness of the primitive christians to suffer martyrdom, in its most frightful forms. "The sober discretion of the present age," he says, p. 661. "will more readily censure than admire, but can more easily admire, than imitate, the fervour of the first christians, who, according to the lively expression of Sulpicius Severus, desired martyrdom with more eagerness than his own contemporaries solicited a bishopric."

In this, I trust, Mr. Gibbon judges from his own feelings only. The present christian world in general holds the primitive martyrs in as high veneration, as did their cotemporaries (though neither they, nor the more judicious in the primitive times, approved of the zeal of any in courting martyrdom) and would be ready, I doubt not, if they were in the same manner called to it, to follow their example. In what age of the christian church have there not been those who may with propriety be called *martyrs* to what they held to be the truth of the gospel?

pél? Mr. Gibbon does not, he cannot deny, that there were thousands of such at the time of the reformation; and cannot he suppose that the same men would have been as ready to die for the profession of christianity, as for the doctrine of protestantism.

The only use that a defender of christianity makes of the martyrdoms of christians in early times, is as a proof of the firmness of their faith in the cause for which they suffered; such a faith requiring an adequate *cause*. But this firm faith is as evident in the readiness to suffer, as in the actual suffering, provided there be no doubt of the sincerity of that professed readiness. But this was then so far from being doubted, with respect to the generality of those who proposed themselves, that it was ridiculed, as madness and infatuation, by the heathens of those times. And Mr. Gibbon, in the following account, evidently joins the heathens in this ridicule.

“The christians,” p. 661, “sometimes
“supplied by their voluntary declaration,
“the want of an accuser, rudely disturbed

Q 2

“the

“ the public service of paganism ; and rushing
 “ in crowds round the tribunals of the magistrates,
 “ called upon them to pronounce, and to inflict,
 “ the sentence of the law. The behaviour of the christians
 “ was too remarkable to escape the notice of the ancient
 “ philosophers. But they seemed to have considered it
 “ with much less admiration than astonishment. Incapable
 “ of conceiving the motives which sometimes transported the
 “ fortitude of believers beyond the bounds of prudence,
 “ or reason, they treated such an eagerness to die as the
 “ strange result of obstinate despair, of stupid insensibility,
 “ or of superstitious phrensy. Unhappy men, exclaimed
 “ the pro-consul Antoninus, to the christians of Asia,
 “ unhappy men, if you are thus weary of your lives,
 “ is it so difficult for you to find ropes and precipices?
 “ He was extremely cautious, as is observed by a learned
 “ and pious historian, of punishing men who had found
 “ no accusers but themselves, the imperial laws not
 “ having made any provision for so unexpected a case.
 “ Condemning, therefore, a few, as a warning

“ warning for their brethren, he dismissed
 “ the multitude with indignation and con-
 “ tempt.”

To what purpose can it be to any man to endeavour, as Mr. Gibbon does, to reduce the number of christian martyrs, when their *readiness to suffer* martyrdom is not only acknowledged, but ridiculed; so that the *number* was a circumstance that did not depend upon themselves, but upon their adversaries. This willingness to suffer martyrdom I own to be censurable, since our Saviour exhorts his followers not to court persecution, but to avoid it, if it can be done with honour. But certainly this courting of suffering, is no argument of a less firm faith; and it is this firm faith that is alone of any use in proving the truth of those facts which were the objects of it. That the faith of christians in the truth of the gospel history in those early times (when it was not difficult for persons who were sufficiently in earnest to discover the truth) was real, and not to be shaken by torture or death, Mr. Gibbon sufficiently ac-
 Q₃ knowledges.

knowledges. Let him then account for this fact on the supposition of there being no truth in the gospel history, if he can.

The inefficacy of persecution to extirpate christianity, is abundantly confessed by Mr. Gibbon, in his account of the conduct of Galerius, who was the prompter to what was called the Diocletian persecution. “ But
“ when Galerius,” p. 694, “ had obtained
“ the supreme power, and the government of
“ the East, he indulged in the fullest extent
“ his zeal and cruelty, not only in the pro-
“ vinces of Thrace and Asia, which acknow-
“ ledged his immediate jurisdiction, but in
“ those of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt ; where
“ Maximin gratified his own inclination, by
“ yielding a rigorous obedience to the stern
“ commands of his benefactors. The fre-
“ quent disappointments of his ambitious
“ views, the experience of six years of perfe-
“ cution, and the salutary reflections which a
“ lingering and painful distemper suggested
“ to the mind of Galerius, at length con-
“ vinced him, that the most violent efforts
“ of

“ of despotism are insufficient to extirpate
 “ a whole people, or to subdue their religious
 “ prejudices.” Is it not extraordinary that
 Mr. Gibbon should be able to write this, if he
 reflected at all on what he wrote, without
 believing that the faith of christians stood
 on no very slight foundation ?

I have now, I think, explained myself as
 fully as I have been able, on every article
 relating to the evidence of revealed religion,
 to which you wished that I would give par-
 ticular attention ; and submitting all that I
 have advanced to your own calm and serious
 consideration, I subscribe myself,

Dear Sir,

Yours sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

▲

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