

D20. 25. 228 (3)

The Nature of Religious Zeal,

IN TWO

DISCOURSES,

The Substance of which was delivered

AT THE

VISITATION

OF THE

Worshipful PULTER FORESTER, D.D.

ARCH-DEACON OF BUCKS,

AT

NEWPORT PAGNELL,

April 27, 1774.

By J. BRIGGS, A. M.

RECTOR of CALVERTON, BUCKS.

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M.DCC.LXXV.



TO THE

WORSHIPFUL

PULTER FORESTER, D.D.

CHANCELLOR OF LINCOLN,

AND

ARCH-DEACON OF BUCKS,

AND THE REST OF THE

CLERGY OF THE TWO DEANERIES
OF BUCKINGHAM AND NEWPORT PAGNELL;

THESE DISCOURSES ARE,

WITH GREAT RESPECT,

INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR

MOST OBEDIENT,

AND MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR,

25...137

THE
N A T U R E
O F
R E L I G I O U S Z E A L .

General Epistle of St. JUDE, Verse 3.

*That ye should earnestly contend for the Faith
which was once delivered to the Saints.*

WHEN we see a Zeal for Religion
enforced by the Precepts, and by
the Example of our Saviour,
and his Apostles, we cannot but acknow-
ledge it to be a Duty incumbent on
Christians.

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When we consider its Nature, and the Manner of its Operation, how general and powerful an Engine it is in the Hands of Men; and how convenient, and reputable a Cover it supplies for their Errors, their Passions, and their Vices; we are alarmed at the Uses to which it may be applied.

And when we look into the History of those numerous Evils, which it has actually produced in all Ages of the Church, we shrink back with Horror from the Prospect; and, in our first Emotions, are almost tempted to doubt either the Genuine-ness of the Precept, or the Graciousness of its Design.

That a Religion, so conformable to the Dictates of the purest and sublimest Morality, and so friendly to all the tender and benevolent Affections, should have
occasioned
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occasioned many of the worst Evils of human Life: that the Gospel of Truth, Mercy, and Peace, should have led to the most odious Falsehood, and have armed Men with more than savage Fury and Cruelty to their mutual Destruction: that the Cause of Heaven should thus, I say, have been fought with the Weapons, and enlarged the Dominion, of the Kingdom of Darkness, may almost stagger our Faith; may excite Reflections injurious to the *Goodness* of God, if such be the Design, or the natural and genuine Effects of the Christian Dispensation; to His *Wisdom*, if Zeal (the authorized and hallowed Weapon of its Warfare) be, contrary to His Intention, generally and uniformly seen to produce them.

The Prejudices and Mischiefs to Christianity, that these disgraceful Contentions for it have occasioned, are infinite. They
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have depreciated its Value, raised Objections to its Truth, retarded its Progress, and diminished its Influence. They have been a Stumbling-block to the weak, and an Offence to the profane; the Shame and Confusion of its Friends, and the Triumph of its Enemies.

It will, however, upon a nearer Inspection of the Subject, appear, that they are perfectly consistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of God; that the Zeal which occasions them, is essential to the Propagation, the Purity, the Influence of the Gospel; natural, necessary, and unavoidable, in its serious Disciples; that the Consequences which spring from it, and which are so justly to be lamented, flow from the Imperfection, Ignorance, and Wickedness of Man, in the same Way that almost every other Evil in Society is produced; on which Account we can

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can scarcely hope they will ever be entirely remedied.

But it is our Duty, *Ours* more particularly, to guard against these malignant Effects of Zeal, both in Ourselves and Others, as much as possible: And let it be an additional Motive to *Us*, that the Sacredotal Character hath been frequently, and Truth obliges us to confess not altogether unjustly, reproached with an opposite Conduct.

It will not, therefore, it is hoped, be thought unsuitable to this Occasion and Audience, if I endeavour, with this View, to bring to your Recollection the Grounds and Measures of the Duty of Religious Zeal: On what Reasons it is founded; by what Causes it is liable to be corrupted; in what Spirit, and with what Temper, it is to be exercised; to what Objects directed,

directed ; and within what Limits restrained.

Zeal, considered in general, springs from the Affection of the Mind for the Objects of seeming Good. To the Love of Happiness we are incited by a natural Impulse ; to the Attainment and Preservation of those Things that we suppose will in any Degree contribute to it, by a natural Desire. In the Warmth and Energy of this Desire, consists the general Nature of Zeal ; a Principle of Action, as universal as the Love of Happiness in Men ; and as various as their Pursuits thereof, in its Objects and Operation.

From hence it is easy to perceive the Reason and Necessity of that Zeal, which has Religion for its Object ; for, if Religion appear as a Good, it must, like every other

other apparent Good, engage the Affections of Men, and stimulate them to such Exertions, as are deemed the proper Means of promoting it.

But, how liable that Zeal must be to Corruption, and how mischievous in its Effects when corrupted, will be obvious if we attend to the Powers it assumes, and to the Nature of Mankind by whom they are exercised. The Bias which Education, Habit, and Authority fix upon the Mind ; and the Weakness of Reason and Conscience, when opposed to Interest and Inclination, are perceived in numberless Instances ; but in none more than those where Men can disguise their Enormities, under honourable Names and Pretences ; and of these the Duty of Religious Zeal furnishes so ample a Fund, that there is hardly any Wickedness that has not been committed with the professed

fessed Design of promoting God's Glory, and the Salvation of Mankind.

Does holy Scripture, in any detached Passages, seem to give a Countenance, and Colour to their Proceedings? It is of little Consequence that those Passages are obscure, are doubtful, are contradicted by others more numerous and more clear, by Reason, and by the whole evident Design of Christianity. These are Considerations they can easily overlook; they have God's express Command for what they do.

Are they even unable to press one single Text into the Service of their Passions, or Designs? They have nevertheless, God's general Authority; their Purposes are holy, and the End is to sanctify the Means.

And

And by this kind of Sophistry, not indeed unusual on other Occasions, do Men get rid of their Scruples; hiding both from themselves, and others, the Deformity of vicious Actions, under the Semblance and Pretext of Duty; and sheltering every odious Passion, and corrupt Interest behind the venerable Name of Zeal for Religion!

From such Considerations as these some have been led to assert, it would have been for the Benefit of Mankind, had Zeal never been numbered among Christian Virtues.

But, for the same Reason, our Zeal for Civil Liberty and Civil Government; for Arts and Literature, and indeed for every thing that is most useful and beneficial to Mankind, ought likewise to be proscribed. We should remember, that the best Things

Things are liable, and perhaps are *not* liable, to be perverted to the *worst* Purposes ; and that it is not allowed in just Reasoning, to conclude against the general Use of a Thing, from its accidental *Abuse*. The Necessity of Zeal towards the Propagation of the Gospel, is obvious ; the gracious Purposes of that Dispensation, we know ; and we must be blind, or to the last Degree prejudiced, not to see, or not to acknowledge, the general, great, and beneficial Influence it has had upon Society, notwithstanding those Corruptions.

It is common with Men deploring the Evils of Zeal, to think and speak of them as appropriated to *Religious* Zeal alone. But these exclusive Censures are not just. They flow alike from every kind of Zeal whatever be its Object. And they must necessarily do so in every Contention ;
where

where the Affections, Interests, and Passions of *Men* are concerned, and their Wrath inflamed by Opposition.

And, it is further to be observed, that very many of those particular *Mitchiefs*, that have usually been ascribed to *Religious* Zeal, have, in Truth, owed their Origin to other Causes ; which the discerning Readers of History will see, and the candid will acknowledge.

Religion indeed is so powerful an Engine in a State, that seldom are any great Changes attempted to be introduced therein, where that is allowed to remain entirely inactive and unconcerned. But to ascribe to Religious Zeal, the Evils produced by every Effort of Policy, every Struggle for Power in which it may have happened to be employed as an Auxiliary, is to confound Effects with their Causes ;
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and betrays a want of Attention, of Judgment, or of Candour.

To give an instance of this kind of Partiality. The *Rise* of the Civil Wars in this Kingdom in the last Century, are by a celebrated Historian ascribed to the Operation of *Religious Zeal*; and, to represent it in its lowest State of Degradation, of Zeal for trifling Ceremonies; the Use of the Surplice, the Ring in Marriage, the Sign of the Cross in Baptism. And this he asserts upon the Authority, as he would have us believe, of “all the Historians who lived near that Age; and even of all Authors who have casually mentioned those Transactions; who have agreed in ascribing them to so mean and contemptible an Origin *.”

* Hume's Hist. Vol. vi. p. 389, 390. Edit. Quart. 1773.

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There is hardly however any Truth of this Kind better established in History, than that those Wars *did not* take their rise from a Zeal for those, or for any other Ceremonies; but from a Zeal for the Interests of *Civil Liberty*, almost, if not altogether, unconnected with the Cause of Religion; which did not, till some Time after, come to be blended with them. And so far is it from Truth that all Historians, and even all Authors who have casually mentioned those Transactions, have agreed in ascribing them to the Causes this Writer mentions; that I believe he is the only one, I am sure he is the only one of any Eminence, who has given Way to a Conceit, of which even *his own* Account, prejudiced and partial as it is, furnishes a sufficient Refutation *.

* For a full Verification of these Points, the Reader is referred to “Letters on Mr. Hume's History” (p. 228 et sequentibus).

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There are likewise some Mistakes in the general Nature of Religious Zeal ; which, by ascribing to it Qualities that do not belong to it, would load it with the Ignominy of Crimes, of which it is entirely innocent.

And of this too the same History furnishes a remarkable Instance * : “ It being, according to this Author, almost a general Rule ; that in all Religions, except the true, the Zeal that induces any Man to *suffer* Martyrdom, would also make him willing to *inflict* it on all those who differ from him.” In which Observation it is difficult to discover, either Truth, or Common Sense ; or indeed any thing, but the Malice of its Author. But he knew to what Inferences it would give Rise ; and that it had no very rigor-

* Hume's Hist. Vol. iv. p. 413.

ous

ous Examination to fear, from those for whose Use it was designed *.

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* The Passage not having, that I know of, been taken Notice of before, may be worth preserving, as a Specimen of the “ Candour, the Impartiality, and Ingenuofacts which Mr. Hume's Admirers tell us (vid. Preface to his Dispute with Rousseau) distinguish his Character and Writings.”

“ There was one Philpot, possessed of such Zeal for Orthodoxy, that having been engaged in Dispute with an Arian, he spit in his Adversary's Face, to shew the great Detestation which he had entertained for that Heresy. He afterwards wrote a Treatise to justify this unmanly Expression of Zeal ; and, he said, he was led to it to relieve the Sorrow conceived from such horrid Blaphemy ; and to signify how unworthy such a Mischance was, of being admitted into the Society of any Christian. Philpot was a Protestant ; and now falling into the Hands of People as zealous, and more powerful than himself, he was condemned to the Flames, and suffered at Smithfield.” And then follows this Reflection, of which the Author entertained so good an Opinion, that he added it to the later Editions of his History. “ It seems to be almost a general Rule, that in all Religions, except the true, no Man will suffer Martyrdom, that would not also inflict it willingly on all those who differ from him. The same Zeal for speculative Opinions is the Cause of both.”

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With what view all this is done, it is easy enough to perceive; but whilst we seek not to disguise any of the Corruptions and Mischiefs that have arisen, or that do indeed proceed from a misgoverned Zeal

Here then we see a general Rule, inferred from a single Instance; from an Instance too, wherein it is taken for granted, that one who suffers, when he *cannot avoid suffering*, (that is by falling into the Hands of People more powerful than himself) suffers by his *own Choice*; that a Breach of *good Manners* (for he represents it as no more) implies the worst of *Crimes*; and that *spitting in an Admirer's Face, is little less than roasting him alive*.

As to the Reserve in Favour of the *true* Religion, in which it seems it is possible for a Man to suffer Martyrdom, without wishing to inflict it on all who differ from him; it will not amount to much, with any Person at all acquainted with Mr. Hume's Sentiments of Religion, as they appear in his Writings. At all Events, it belongs to those alone to thank him for the Exception, that have the Benefit of it. A Catholic, a Mahometan, or a Heathen has at least a Chance, that *his* Religion may come under the Denomination of the *true*; from which Piece of good Fortune, Mr. Hume expressly excludes the established Religion of his Country. For it was the Martyrdom of a Protestant, and his supposed Willingness to have inflicted the same Punishment on all who differed from him, with which Mr. Hume introduces, on which he forms; and to which he applies his general Rule.

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for Religion, referring them to their true Cause, the Weakness and Wickedness of Mankind; let us justify it, where Truth and Reason will support us, from those which do not belong to it.

A truly Christian Zeal consists in a sincere and earnest Desire, founded upon a Principle of Duty, to promote the Honour of God, and the Good of Men; by spreading the Knowledge, inculcating the Belief, and enforcing the Practice of the genuine Doctrines of Christianity. What those are, and with what Weapons, and what Degree of Earnestness, our Contentions for them are to be carried on; we are to learn from Scripture and Reason.

The first Care of such a Zeal, will be to inform itself thoroughly of the Doctrines, whether they be of God: Knowing, that

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without this Care, it might teach for the pure Word of Truth, the Errors of fallible Men.

Its next Concern will be, that the Means it recurs to in promoting those Doctrines, be such as Reason, and Religion allow; just, charitable, and prudent. Without which, even its well-meant Endeavours will be criminal, and their Successes destructive of the very End, and Design of Christianity.

In Matters of mere Speculation, and Opinion; in Things either doubtful or indifferent; and about which, both good and wise Men may differ in their Sentiments, without Injury to Religion, unless it be by the Want of Candour in their Disputes about them; it takes but a very small Part.

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In promoting Doctrines however true, important, and indisputable, it remembers always "what Spirit it is of;" that "the Son of Man came not to destroy Men's Lives, but to save them;" not to break the Bonds of natural Affection, but to reconcile them both to God, and to each other.

It does not think itself justified in *Lying* for the *Truth*, nor in the Commission of any Evil, not even for the Sake of any Good. It is solicitous that Men should entertain true Notions of God, and of their Relation, and Dependence upon him; of their Duty, and the Means of conciliating his Favour; but it is, if possible, more solicitous that this Knowledge should produce its proper Effects upon their Lives, and Conversations. It can unite the greatest Detestation of Sin, with the most unfeigned Charity to the Sinner;

the most sovereign Contempt for dinge-
nuous Sophistry. in the Perverſion of
Truth, with undiſsembled Good-will
for the Perſons of thoſe who are guilty of
it. It does not confine God's Mercies to
a Sect, or Country; reprobating, at the
ſame Time, all thoſe who are not included
within its own narrow Circle; but look-
ing on Mankind at large, as common
Children of one common Parent, "who
made of one Blood all Nations of Men,"
it embraces them with the Affection of
Brethren; reverencing Virtue, and ſincere
Piety wherever found; making all proper
Allowances for natural, and unavoidable
Error; and ſevere only to wilful Blind-
neſs, or obſtinate and aſſuming Wicked-
neſs, and to the Doctrines that encourage,
and promote them. It accommodates it-
ſelf with Chriſtian Prudence to Times and
Seaſons; to the Errors, the Paſſions, the
Faults and Infirmities of Mankind; win-
ning

ning them to a Love for Truth by every
virtuous Art, and becoming, with the
Apoſtle "all Things to all Men, that it
may by all Means ſave ſome." It knows
how to combat the Errors of Ignorance,
with Tenderneſs; the Prejudices of Edu-
cation, without Rage; and the Contra-
diction of Infidels that "will not receive
our Saviour, without calling down Fire
from Heaven," or kindling it upon Earth,
to conſume them. It is a genial and vital
Heat, a mild and heavenly Flame, a Fire
that enlightens, warms, and burns not. It
is equally remote from that Fever of the
Mind, which breaks out in delirious Acts
of Violence, Cruelty, and Rage in the
Cause of Religion; and that Lethargy
which makes Men inſenſible, and dead to
its Interests.

Theſe are the ſure Marks, the genuine
Qualities, and Offices of a well-informed,
and

and well-regulated Zeal. To apply, and compare them with some of its worst, or most usual Corruptions, will exhaust all that I have to offer upon the Subject.

That Massacres, Poisonings, and Assassinations; that Racks, Dungeons, and Fire should ever have been thought the proper Instruments of promoting the Religion of Christ; that the vilest Perfidies, and most savage Cruelties, that ever disgraced human Nature, should have been taught as Precepts of the Gospel, or practised for its Honour, and Advancement; is monstrous, and shocking to common Sense, no less than to every human Feeling. And yet, we know, this was once almost the only Method of converting Unbelievers, known, or practised in the Christian World.— But better were it to set Men loose at once from all Religion, and to leave them entirely to the Guidance of Reason and natural

tural Humanity; which would generally lead them to much more mild and merciful Conclusions; than to subject them to a Faith which authorities, which commands them to be false, treacherous, and cruel!

But let the Scandal of these melancholy Events rest where it ought to do; not on Christianity, which is altogether clear from every just Imputation of having authorized such Enormities; but on the Guilty in every Sect, and on every Doctrine that gives the least Encouragement to them.

Whatever is clearly revealed in holy Scripture, or may fairly be deduced from thence must be right; and therefore, should bear down any particular Scruples, which an Attention to Consequences, might produce. Whatever is collected from thence with a less Degree of Evidence, may be wrong;

wrong; and therefore it never can be our Duty to propagate it as undoubted Truth. If it has besides an evil Tendency; if it leads to Immorality, and to defeat the great and fundamental Doctrines and Designs of the Gospel; we may safely pronounce it to be false.

In the particular Case of Persecution for Conscience-Sake; should we even go so far as to allow it to be a disputable Point whether it be enjoined or not; when we consider the dreadful Evils of which it is productive; what is there to justify us in making it a Part of our Religion, or in venturing to act upon it?

In this Case, the Injury done to our Brethren is plain and obvious; our War-rant on the other Hand, from Scripture and Reason, of a dubious and uncertain Nature. Shall we then give up what is clear

clear and certain, for what is doubtful? shall we, upon the Authority of some few Texts, or Arguments of perhaps an ambiguous Appearance, act contrary to the whole Tenor of the Gospel, and that too where the very Lives of our Fellow-Creatures, and every thing that is most dear to them is concerned?

From this clear Principle of Reason which proportions our Assent to the Degree of Evidence before us, and which restrains us from asserting as divine, those Doctrines that are at the same Time both doubtfully revealed, and of a wicked and pernicious Tendency; we are enabled to pass Sentence on several other Corruptions of Religious Zeal.

For Instance, it appears from the whole Tenor of Scripture, from particular Passages, and from the evident Reason of the Thing,

tween them, is a Difference of Words only; and that as to the Terms of Justification, they entirely agree. They both require a holy Life, springing out of a true and lively Faith; only St. James specifies the *Effect*, which necessarily implies the *Cause*; St. Paul insists solely on the *Cause*, which of Course involves the *Effect*.

But we need not go so far; for, supposing it even impossible to reconcile this seeming Contradiction, what else would follow, but that the two opposite Passages balancing each other, and their Authority being equal, no satisfactory Conclusion could be drawn from either? When to this we add, that principal Consideration in all doubtful Points, the evil Tendency of the Doctrine in Question, the great Danger of teaching that good Works are not necessary to Salvation, the Zeal of propagating it must appear highly blameable.

P A R T

P A R T II.

General Epistle of St. JUDE, Verse 3.

That ye should earnestly contend for the Faith which was once delivered to the Saints.

THE same Kind of Reasoning will be found equally applicable to another Instance of depraved Zeal, in which Religion is greatly interested; though it cannot indeed, in Strictness, be denominated *Religious Zeal*, on Account of its Object; wick is the *Depravation* of Religion. I mean that earnest Contention, not for the Faith once delivered to the Saints, but for its Subversion; not for the Propagation of particular Errors, but for the

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the entire Ruin and Annihilation of Christianity; frequently with a View, as it is pretended, of substituting Natural Religion in its Place; and sometimes, for the Removal of both out of the World.

A Species of Zeal which whether we consider its Motives, or its Effects; is justly entitled to the Contempt, and Abhorrence of every Friend to Virtue, and Society.

That I am not supposing an uncommon Case, or that it is amongst the lowest Value only that such Influences are to be met with, witness the Labours of many distinguished Writers; many that would pass for Men of the deepest Researches, and most enlarged Understanding; of the most unprejudiced and liberal Sentiments; that are passionately enamoured of the Beauty of Virtue; are filled with the warmest

warmest Love of Truth; the highest Veneration for the Rights of human Nature; the Interests of Society; the Happiness of Men; but whose great Employment it is, at the same Time, to instill Doubts into the Minds of Believers, to diminish the Reverence of Religion, and the Restraints of Duty.

And their Endeavours, in whatever Way they are exerted, are but too successful; the Generality of Men finding no Obscurity in that Reasoning, no Sophistry in those Arguments, no Folly in that Wit, no Absurdity in those Doctrines which are to free them from uneasy Restraints, and tormenting Reflections; and to give them, at the same Time, the Pleasures of Vice, and the Reputation of Wisdom.

Without entering into any Vindication of the Gospel, from Objections which have

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have been repeatedly, and solidly refuted; it is sufficient to shew, that upon their own Principles and Professions, the Zeal exerted by the great Patrons of Infidelity, in disseminating the Seeds of Irreligion, is altogether absurd, unnatural, and criminal.

The Truths, or, if they please, the Prejudices of Christianity, are salutary to Morals; to the Interests of Virtue; to the Peace, and Happiness of Individuals, and of Society. To subvert their Authority, and Influence, is to sap the Foundation of all Truth, Probity, and Justice among Men; and as far as those Endeavours prove successful, to people the World with a Race of Monsters,

It will be in vain to tell us that Reason, and natural Religion lead Men to the same Conclusion as Revelation does—the Necessity

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ty of Virtue to Happiness. For why deprive Virtue of its best, and strongest Sanctions, when they see that Reason, even with the Aid of Religion, is much too weak to keep the Generality of Men to their Duty?

What Judgement then are we to form of that boasted Philosophy, which instead of contributing to the Good of Men, is solely occupied in making them more wicked, and miserable than they would otherwise be? What Opinion are we to entertain of those Philosophers, who, for the Sake of establishing perhaps some merely speculative Truths, care not if they demolish the whole Fabric of Human Virtue, and Happiness?—Let one of the most eminent amongst themselves answer for us.

“ They are to be deemed the Pests of Society; even if the Opinions they advance

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vance against Religion be true ; for their Endeavours are directed to loosen the Bands of it, and to take at least one Curb out of the Mouth of that wild Beast Man, when it were well if he were checked by Half a Score others *.”

That the very Author from whom the Force of Truth, in an unguarded Moment, extorted this Confession, should, in Contradiction to Sentiments so reasonable, and virtuous, have † directed the Publication of Writings which strike at the very Excellence of all Religion, both Natural and Revealed ; at a Time too when Death should have removed him for ever out of the Way of reaping any private Advantage from the Mischief he meditated ;

* Lord Bolingbroke, in Swift's Works published by Hawksworth, Vol. ii. p. 200, 201. Oct. Ed. 1767.

† Lord Bolingbroke in his Will ordered these Writings to be published after his Death.

was

was an Act of Wickedness for which we want a Name.

But, for the Happiness of Mankind, the Attack on Religion was as weak, as it was wicked ; and, exclusive of the general Detestation which it excites, remains a Monument of nothing so much, as of the Decrepitude, and Dotage of Understanding, to which Vice, and Vanity may bring a reputed Genius.

There is indeed a Distinction to be made, where any particular Mode of Religion is, in its own Nature, manifestly and unavoidably, subversive of Truth, of Morality, of the Virtue, and Happiness of Mankind. The same Motives which would lead a virtuous Infidel to a Reserve in the one Case, prompt him to Opposition in the other.

In

