

THE
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Religious Communications.

LECTURES ON THE SHORTER CATECHISM OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES—ADDRESSED TO YOUTH.

LECTURE XLVIII.

3. *Of Masters and Servants.*—

In discussing this part of our subject, I must notice the existence of slavery in our country—a calamity of no ordinary kind. That it had its origin from the impositions of the mother country, in our colonial state, is unquestionable; but, alas! it was continued for some time after our national independence, in all the enormity of that guilt which the *African slave trade* involves; and in some large portions of the United States, the *domestick traffick in slaves* is still practised and cherished, in violation of every principle of religion, morals, and humanity. Any nation in which this should be permitted, might well fear the severe inflictions of the righteous Sovereign of the Universe; but there is no nation on earth in which the guilt, and consequent danger, of perpetual and hereditary slavery, are so great as in our own; because the very basis* on which we ground

a claim to freedom for ourselves, would emancipate every slave in our Union, as speedily as it could be done without inflicting an additional injury on the slave himself. I feel bound, therefore, to deliver it as my decided opinion, that every slaveholder who would maintain a conscience void of offence, and do his part to avert from his country the judgments of a just God, should regard it as his first duty to every slave he possesses, to liberate him, as soon as it can be done with safety to the slave and to the society in which he lives; that he should beware of forming pleas for continuing slavery, which, on carefully examining and looking into his own heart, he may find to have no better origin and support than a regard to his own interest or inclination; but honestly and earnestly aim to rid himself of the misfortune, or the sin, of depriving a fellow creature of rights with which the God of nature has endowed him. The nation, too, that has authorized and countenanced this evil, and every individual of that nation, should be cordially willing that provision should be made by a tax, to afford an equitable indemnity to those whose property, especially if it came by inheritance, is found to consist, in whole or in

* After a single prefatory sentence, the position on which the declaration of American independence is founded, as on an axiom in morals and human rights, is the following—"We hold these truths to be self evident; that *all men are created equal*, and that they are endowed by their

Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness."

Is Heaven's high decree made known,
 "The man that dareth to strive with me,
 In his wild career overthrown,
 A fearful proof of my wrath shall be."

Yet still that wretch *hath* dared
 To mock his Maker's power,
 Whose mercy long hath spared
 And warned from hour to hour;—

Lo! the once haughty form
 That thought to tremble never,
 To its silent home is borne,—
 The spirit—hath fled forever!

April 15, 1830.

Reviews.

JEFFERSON'S PAPERS.

(Continued from p. 199.)

Of Jesus Christ, of the Apostles, and of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.—On these important points, we find that we can better exhibit the opinions of Mr. J., by taking them in connexion, than in a separate form. In this way, too, we shall in some measure abridge our own labour, of which we are already heartily tired; and the sooner, also, relieve the patience of our readers, which we seriously fear may be exhausted, before we shall have done with the abominations of the papers under review—although we lay before others but a very small part of what has sickened ourselves.

In Vol. II. we find a paper entitled "Syllabus of an estimate of the merit of the doctrines of Jesus, compared with those of others." From this our first quotation has been taken. He refers to it in several of his letters; having first formed it, he says, to acquit himself of a promise which he once made to Dr. Rush. He appears to have regarded it with great fondness; as a very happy specimen of his ability to reduce Biblical knowledge to its essence. We have taken from it what he says of the Jews, to show his estimate of their religion; and of course, his opinion of the Old Testament, from which they derived it. This will be seen more at large, in the latter part of the third quotation, in which he vituperates Moses, and all his institutions, with great bitterness. He speaks, in a letter to Mr. Adams, of another re-

sult of his Biblical studies and researches, with the publication of which we believe the world has not yet been favoured. This, with a few sentences from the same letter, in which he awards the lyric palm to the Psalmist, forms the second quotation. The third, is from two letters to William Short, in which he explains the design of his syllabus, corrects what he thinks the errors of our Saviour, and reviles the holy apostles.

"II. Jews. 1. Their system was Deism; that is, the belief in one only God. But their ideas of him and of his attributes were degrading and injurious. 2. Their Ethics were not only imperfect, but often irreconcilable with the sound dictates of reason and morality, as they respect intercourse with those around us; and repulsive and anti-social, as respecting other nations. They needed reformation, therefore, in an eminent degree.

"III. Jesus. In this state of things among the Jews, Jesus appeared. His parentage was obscure; his condition poor; his education null; his natural endowments great; his life correct and innocent; he was meek, benevolent, patient, firm, disinterested, and of the sublimest eloquence.

"The disadvantages under which his doctrines appear are remarkable. 1. Like Socrates and Epictetus, he wrote nothing himself. 2. But he had not, like them, a Xenophon or an Arrian to write for him. I name not Plato, who only used the name of Socrates to cover the whimsies of his own brain. On the contrary, all the learned of his country, entrenched in its power and riches, were opposed to him, lest his labours should undermine their advantages; and the committing to writing his life and doctrines fell on unlettered and ignorant men; who wrote, too, from memory, and not till long after the transactions had passed. 3. According to the ordinary fate of those who attempt to enlighten and reform mankind, he fell an

early victim to the jealousy and combination of the altar and the throne, at about thirty-three years of age, his reason having not yet attained the *maximum* of its energy, nor the course of his preaching, which was but of three years at most, presented occasions for developing a complete system of morals. 4. Hence the doctrines which he really delivered were defective as a whole, and fragments only of what he did deliver have come to us, mutilated, misstated, and often unintelligible. 5. They have been still more disfigured by the corruptions of schismatising followers, who have found an interest in sophisticating and perverting the simple doctrines he taught, by engrafting on them the mysticisms of a Grecian sophist, frittering them into subtleties, and obscuring them with jargon, until they have caused good men to reject the whole in disgust, and to view Jesus himself as an impostor.

“Notwithstanding these disadvantages, a system of morals is presented to us, which, if filled up in the style and spirit of the rich fragments he left us, would be the most perfect and sublime that has ever been taught by man.

“The question of his being a member of the God-head, or in direct communication with it, claimed for him by some of his followers, and denied by others, is foreign to the present view; which is merely an estimate of the intrinsic merit of his doctrines. 1. He corrected the Deism of the Jews, confirming them in their belief of one only God, and giving the just notions of his attributes and government. 2. His moral doctrines, relating to kindred and friends, were more pure and perfect than those of the most correct of the philosophers, and greatly more so than those of the Jews; and they went far beyond both, in inculcating universal philanthropy, not only to kindred and friends, to neighbours and countrymen, but to all mankind, gathering all into one family, under the bonds of love, charity, peace, common wants and common aids. A development of this head will evince the peculiar superiority of the system of Jesus over all others. 3. The precepts of philosophy, and of the Hebrew code, laid hold of actions only. He pushed his scrutinies into the heart of man; erected his tribunal in the region of his thoughts, and purified the waters at the fountain head. 4. He taught, emphatically, the doctrines of a future state, which was either doubted, or disbelieved by the Jews: and wielded it with efficacy, as an important incentive, supplementary to the other motives to moral conduct.”—Vol. iii. pp. 508, 509.

“We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists, select, even from

them, the very words only of Jesus, paring off the amphibologisms into which they have been led, by forgetting often, or not understanding, what had fallen from him, by giving their own misconceptions as his dicta, and expressing unintelligibly for others what they had not understood themselves. There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals, which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging the matter which is evidently his, and which is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill. The result is, an octavo of forty-six pages, of pure and unsophisticated doctrines, such as were professed and acted on by the *unlettered* Apostles, the Apostolick Fathers, and the Christians of the first century. Their Platonising successors, indeed, in after times, in order to legitimate the corruptions which they had incorporated into the doctrines of Jesus, found it necessary to disavow the primitive Christians, who had taken their principles from the mouth of Jesus himself, of his Apostles, and the Fathers cotemporary with them. They excommunicated their followers as heretics, branding them with the opprobrious name of Ebionites or Beggars.” *

* * “I acknowledge all the merit of the hymn of Cleanthes to Jupiter, which you ascribe to it. It is as highly sublime as a chaste and correct imagination can permit itself to go. Yet in the contemplation of a being so superlative, the hyperbolick flights of the Psalmist may often be followed with approbation, even with rapture; and I have no hesitation in giving him the palm over all the hymnists of every language, and of every time.”—Vol. iv. pp. 223, 224.

“But while this syllabus is meant to place the character of Jesus in its true and high light, as no impostor himself, but a great reformer of the Hebrew code of religion, it is not to be understood that I am with him in all his doctrines. I am a Materialist; he takes the side of Spiritualism: he preaches the efficacy of repentance towards forgiveness of sin; I require a counterpoise of good works to redeem it, &c. &c. It is the innocence of his character, the purity and sublimity of his moral precepts, the eloquence of his inculcations, the beauty of the apologues in which he conveys them, that I so much admire; sometimes, indeed, needing indulgence to eastern hyperbolism. My eulogies, too, may be founded on a postulate which all may not be ready to grant. Among the sayings and discourses imputed to him by his biographers, I find many passages of fine imagination, correct

morality, and of the most lovely benevolence; and others, again, of so much ignorance, so much absurdity, so much untruth, charlatanism and imposture, as to pronounce it impossible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same being. I separate, therefore, the gold from the dross; restore to him the former, and leave the latter to the stupidity of some, and roguery of others of his disciples. Of this band of dupes and impostors, Paul was the great Coryphæus, and first corruptor of the doctrines of Jesus. These palpable interpolations and falsifications of his doctrines, led me to try to sift them apart. I found the work obvious and easy, and that his part composed the most beautiful morsel of morality which has been given to us by man. The syllabus is therefore of *his* doctrines, not *all of mine*: I read them as I do those of other ancient and modern moralists, with a mixture of approbation and dissent." * * * * *

"There are, I acknowledge, passages not free from objection, which we may, with probability, ascribe to Jesus himself; but claiming indulgence from the circumstances under which he acted. His object was the reformation of some articles in the religion of the Jews, as taught by Moses. That sect had presented for the object of their worship, a being of terrific character, cruel, vindictive, capricious and unjust. Jesus, taking for his type the best qualities of the human head and heart, wisdom, justice, goodness, and adding to them power, ascribed all of these, but in infinite perfection, to the Supreme Being, and formed him really worthy of their adoration. Moses had either not believed in a future state of existence, or had not thought it essential to be explicitly taught to his people. Jesus inculcated that doctrine with emphasis and precision. Moses had bound the Jews to many idle ceremonies, mummeries, and observances, of no effect towards producing the social utilities which constitute the essence of virtue; Jesus exposed their futility and insignificance. The one instilled into his people the most anti-social spirit towards other nations; the other preached philanthropy and universal charity and benevolence. The office of reformer of the superstitions of a nation, is ever dangerous. Jesus had to walk on the perilous confines of reason and religion: and a step to right or left might place him within the gripe of the priests of the superstition, a blood thirsty race, as cruel and remorseless as the being whom they represented as the family God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, and the local God of Israel. They were constantly laying snares, too, to entangle him in the

web of the law. He was justifiable, therefore, in avoiding these by evasions, by sophisms, by misconstructions and misapplications of scraps of the prophets, and in defending himself with these their own weapons, as sufficient, *ad homines*, at least. That Jesus did not mean to impose himself on mankind as the son of God, physically speaking, I have been convinced by the writings of men more learned than myself in that lore. But that he might conscientiously believe himself inspired from above, is very possible. The whole religion of the Jews, inculcated on him from his infancy, was founded in the belief of divine inspiration. The fumes of the most disordered imaginations, were recorded in their religious code, as special communications of the Deity; and as it could not but happen that, in the course of ages, events would now and then turn up, to which some of these vague rhapsodies might be accommodated by the aid of allegories, figures, types, and other tricks upon words, they have not only preserved their credit with the Jews of all subsequent times, but are the foundation of much of the religions of those who have schismatised from them. Elevated by the enthusiasm of a warm and pure heart, conscious of the high strains of an eloquence which had not been taught him, he might readily mistake the coruscations of his own fine genius for inspirations of an higher order. This belief carried, therefore, no more personal imputation, than the belief of Socrates, that himself was under the care and admonitions of a guardian Dæmon. And how many of our wisest men still believe in the reality of these inspirations, while perfectly sane on all other subjects. Excusing, therefore, on these considerations, those passages in the gospels which seem to bear marks of weakness in Jesus, ascribing to him what alone is consistent with the great and pure character of which the same writings furnish proofs, and to their proper authors their own trivialities and imbecilities, I think myself authorized to conclude the purity and distinction of his character, in opposition to the impostures which those authors would fix upon him; and that the postulate of my former letter is no more than is granted in all other historical works."—Vol. iv. pp. 321—326—328.

Thus it appears, that Mr. J. rejected with disdain the idea that there is any thing of *Divine inspiration* in the Bible. Moses and the ancient prophets are denounced with unsparing and contemptuous censure. The apostles and evan

gelists, who wrote the New Testament, he considers as rogues and fools. The Saviour of the world he represents as a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary; of no education, but of natural talents of the very highest order; of distinguished virtue; a zealous reformer; pre-eminently eloquent, and peculiarly amiable and benignant; yet, withal, needing correction in some of his notions; using evasions and sophisms to screen himself from his enemies; and so much of an enthusiast as to think he was inspired, when it was only an excitement of the imagination that he felt. Was such a concentration of absurdity ever given to the world before? Yes, Mr. J. is not altogether an original here. Rousseau's character of the Saviour appears to have been in his view; and on the whole, we do not think he has equalled his master. Yet among those Jewish barbarians, (as the Greeks and Romans and probably Mr. J. too, accounted them) he has found a *hymnist*, with whose sublime and devout strains, nothing among the most distinguished poets of the most polished nations of antiquity can pretend to compare; and also a moralist, incomparably superior to all their philosophers and ethical writers, of whatever age, or character, or sect—And this all took place without any supernatural aid. Is this credible? Do Christians believe in any such effects, without an adequate cause? No:

“But Infidels, of fools the chief,
Hold faith in creeds of unbelief.”

Of a Future State.—Mr. J. frequently expresses much confidence in a state of future happiness, for himself and his friends. In a letter to Mr. Adams, (Vol. iv. p. 509,) after speaking of the revolution in South America, he says—

“But these are speculations, my friend, which we may as well deliver over to those who are to see their development. We shall only be lookers on, from the clouds above, as now we look down on the la-

hours, the hurry and bustle of the ants and bees. Perhaps in that super-mundane region, we may be amused with seeing the fallacy of our own guesses, and even the nothingness of those labours, which have filled and agitated our own time here.”

Again, on the death of Mrs. Adams—

“It is of some comfort to us both, that the term is not very distant, at which we are to deposite in the same cerement, our sorrows and suffering bodies, and to ascend in essence to an ecstatick meeting with the friends we have loved and lost, and whom we shall still love and never lose again.”

To Governor Page, who had addressed a letter to him on the death of his daughter, he writes, (Vol. iv. p. 19.)—

“Every step shortens the distance we have to go; the end of our journey is in sight, the bed wherein we are to rest, and to rise in the midst of the friends we have lost. ‘We sorrow not then as others who have no hope;’ but look forward to the day which ‘joins us to the great majority.’”

As Mr. J. rejected all revelation, we should be glad to know what system of infidel philosophy taught him the doctrine of the resurrection of the body; and how he came to quote, on so serious an occasion, and as the source of consolation too, a sentence from the apostle Paul, “the Coryphæus of dupes and impostors.” We find, in another letter, that he had great expectation of meeting his congressional friends in heaven, and seemed to think that they would hold a kind of congress there.

Of a future state of *punishment*, we doubt if he had any belief. We do not find that he ever speaks of it, otherwise than ludicrously or profanely. In writing to his friend John Page, (Vol. i. p. 162,) he says: “I know you too well to need an apology for any thing you do, and hope you will forever be assured of this; and as to the construction of the world, they would only have added one to the many sins for which they are to go to the devil.” And he concludes a letter to Ed-

ward Rutledge, (Vol. iii. p. 338,) in the following elegant style—" *Audiable les Bougres!* I am at the end of my curse and the bottom of my page, so God bless you and yours." We had heard that Mr. J. used profane language in his conversation, but we did not expect to find so much of it as we do in his letters. More than once, we meet with a profane oath, broadly expressed.

Of Religious Sects and Opinions.—Mr. J. seems to have been hostile to all religious denominations, except the Unitarians, whom he seems to lack language in attempting to extol as he wishes. He predicts the universal and speedy spread of their sentiments throughout our country. In a letter to Dr. Waterhouse, (Vol. iv. p. 350,) he says—"I trust there is not a *young man* now living in the United States who will not die an Unitarian." We are glad that this augury is not more portentous than "a heathen oracle."

In several instances Mr. J. speaks favourably of the Quakers; but in a letter (Vol. iv. p. 138,) which the editor states was endorsed "not sent," he says—

"The Friends are men, formed with the same passions, and swayed by the same principles and prejudices as others. In cases where the passions are neutral, men will display their respect for the religious *professions* of their sect. But where their passions are enlisted, these *professions* are no obstacle."

Thus he represents the Quakers as disregarding their profession, when it comes in conflict with their passions and their interest. And of this tenor is the most of the subsequent part of the letter. Episcopalians and Congregationalists are especially charged (Vol. iii. p. 441,) with indulging "a very favourite hope of obtaining an establishment of a particular form of Christianity through the United States." To the clergy in general, or "the priests," as he delights to style them, he applies almost every term of reprobation and abhorrence which the English language affords. Speak-

ing of "a comparison of the morality of the Old Testament with that of the New," (of which he declares "no two things were ever more unlike,") and regretting that this comparison had not been drawn out by Dr. Priestley, he says—"I ought not to have asked him to give it. He dared not. He would have been eaten alive by his intolerant brethren, the Cannibal priests." A little farther on in this letter, (Vol. iv. p. 295,) speaking of these same Cannibals, he writes—"You will be sensible how much interest I take, in keeping myself clear of religious disputes before the publick; and especially of seeing my syllabus disembowelled by the Aruspices of the modern Paganism"—But the choicest of his unmitigated wrath, Mr. J. always reserves for Calvin and the Presbyterians. In Vol. iv. p. 340, he states "the demoralising dogmas of Calvin" to be—

1. That there are three Gods.
2. That good works, or the love of our neighbour, are nothing.
3. That faith is every thing, and the more incomprehensible the proposition, the more merit in its faith.
4. That reason in religion is of unlawful use.
5. That God, from the beginning, elected certain individuals to be saved, and certain others to be damned; and that no crimes of the former can damn them; no virtues of the latter save."

Thus he unhesitatingly attributes to Calvin a string of impious absurdities, from which Calvin would have revolted as much as himself; and to which we challenge the revilers of Calvin to show from his works the least proof, or any fair resemblance. But Calvin was concerned in the death of Servetus, (we regret it as much as any one) and Servetus had furnished Mr. J. with that blasphemous description of the Holy Trinity, which we inserted in our last number—*Hinc illæ lachrymæ*. In addition to being Calvinists, a sufficient cause of hatred in itself, he attributed to the Presbyterians chiefly—with how much reason we know not—the opposition to his endeavours to obtain as much

legislative patronage as he wanted, for his favourite Mammoth University. Writing on this subject to his friend William Short, after denouncing the clergy generally, he says—

“The Presbyterian clergy are the loudest; the most intolerant of all sects, the most tyrannical and ambitious; ready at the word of the lawgiver, if such a word could be now obtained, to put the torch to the pile, and to rekindle in this virgin hemisphere the flames in which their oracle Calvin consumed the poor Servetus, because he could not find in his Euclid the proposition which has demonstrated that three are one, and one is three, nor subscribe to that of Calvin, that magistrates have a right to exterminate all hereticks to Calvinistick creed. They pant to re-establish, *by law*, that holy inquisition, which they can now only infuse into *publick opinion*. We have most unwisely committed to the Hierophants of our particular superstition, the direction of publick opinion, that lord of the universe. We have given them stated and privileged days to collect and catechise us, opportunities of delivering their oracles to the people in mass, and of moulding their minds as wax in the hollow of their hands.”—Vol. iv. p. 322.

The man who *raves* in this manner is no longer to be reasoned with; he is not the proper object even of resentment, but only of compassion and pity. But we do take it for no mean eulogy on the church to which we belong, and no inconsiderable evidence that she holds the Christian doctrines in their greatest purity, that all infidels hate her, more than they hate any other. They cordially hate all churches, but the Presbyterian worst of all—Things are known by their opposites, and by *the degree* of opposition in which they stand to each other.

Our readers can now tell as well as we, whether Mr. J. had any religion, and if he had, what it was. From his having spoken so favourably of the Unitarians, and wished them success so ardently, and the close approximation of his creed of unbelief to that of some who rank

themselves in that corps, it appears that a rumour had gone abroad, that he had changed from unqualified infidelity to Unitarianism—Not a great change to be sure, but yet one which he did not choose explicitly to admit, or at least to have publickly known. Let us not be misunderstood—If the Unitarians wish to claim him, we have not the slightest objection. We only desire to state facts as we find them. In a letter to Mr. Adams in the year 1817, he thus writes—

“One of our fan-colouring biographers, who paints small men as very great, inquired of me lately, with real affection too, whether he might consider as authentic, the change in my religion much spoken of in some circles. Now this supposed that they knew what had been my religion before, taking for it the word of their priests, whom I certainly never made the confidants of my creed. My answer was, ‘say nothing of my religion. It is known to my God and myself alone. Its evidence before the world is to be sought in my life; if that has been *honest and dutiful to society*, the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one.’”—Vol. iv. p. 300.

Most sincerely should we have rejoiced, had we found any evidence in the papers before us, of a change for the better in the religious opinions and feelings of Mr. J. But the most and the worst of the quotations given above, are from letters written in the last years of his life. The last letter of all is dated on the 24th of June, 1826, but ten days before his death. No change, to say the least, is indicated by this—We leave our readers to their own reflections.

We have yet to do what we can, to prevent the impression which a part of Mr. J.'s *Anas* is calculated and was intended to make, that General Washington had no belief in divine revelation. This, with a few general reflections, we hope to place in our next number, and then to close our unwelcome task of reviewing one of the worst books we have ever read.