

THOUGHTS

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ON THE

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION

IN

CIVIL GOVERNMENT,

AND ITS TENDENCY TO PROMOTE AND PRESERVE THE

SOCIAL LIBERTY,

AND RIGHTS OF MAN.

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BY THE REV. DAVID SCURLOCK, M. A.
ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S JUSTICES OF THE PEACE FOR
THE COUNTY OF BUCKINGHAM.

Licentia, nisi coerceatur, parit audaciam, quæ ad omne
flagitium et facinus evadet.

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TO THE MOST NOBLE THE
MARQUIS OF BUCKINGHAM,
KNIGHT OF THE
MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER,
AND
LORD LIEUTENANT
OF THE COUNTY OF BUCKINGHAM, &c.

MY LORD,

SENSIBLE as I am of the invaluable blessings which I derive from the happy constitution of my country, in church and state, I feel it a duty incumbent on me, to offer my contribution to its support; against the attacks of needy, discontented, seditious, and prophane men. The loyalty of Englishmen, as you, my Lord, well

know, is the loyalty of reason; it consists in the observance of laws which at once give, and protect liberty, and in yielding that obedience to the Sovereign which the laws require. It maintains the right of constitutional opposition to arbitrary power on the one hand; while it is zealous in supporting legal government against the spirit of anarchy and disorder on the other.

If it is creditable to a work, that it should be inscribed to one who is a perfect judge of the subject of it, the following pages will receive a very peculiar advantage from being addressed to your Lordship. Impressed with these sentiments, I submit this Treatise to the Public, under the sanction of your Lordship's name, as the best means of procuring it credit and success. Your public conduct, my Lord, receives, as it well deserves, the

honourable tribute of public approbation; and your private virtues are above my praise:—I feel, however, a very superior satisfaction in bearing my testimony to the great and good qualities which distinguish your character; and in thus expressing an ardent wish, that you may long continue to be, what you have ever been, an ornament and honour to your country—

I have the honour to be,

With the greatest respect,

Your Lordship's

Most obedient humble servant,

D. SCURLOCK.

THOUGHTS, &c.

THERE is no truth more evident from experience, nor more affecting in the contemplation, than that the greatest blessings are liable to be perverted to the worst purposes; nor, in any of the various circumstances of life and society, does this observation appear to be more fully justified, than in the use which men are apt to make of liberty.

The simple idea of liberty is charming to the human mind, and, when considered in its proper definition, as giving rational beings the power of doing all which they ought to do, consistent with their own individual happiness, and the general good of that society to which they belong, it expresses one of the greatest

blessings which our nature has received from the bounty of heaven.

But in all periods of the world, this great and leading principle of human happiness, has been sometimes misunderstood, or perverted; and men have frequently formed such fanciful speculations and enlarged views of their civil and religious rights, as Christians and free subjects, that they have been seduced by their own extravagant misconceptions, or the arts of others, into a conduct altogether inconsistent with the rational freedom of social men. Nay, how often has liberty been considered as a privilege to gratify the passions, instead of a principle to correct them; and how often has it been employed as a cloak to carry on the designs of ambition and tyranny, of anarchy and sedition?

Of these effects, proceeding from misconceived notions of liberty, or an insidious perversion of it, whether we consider

it as operating to individual gratification, or to public disorder, there are but too many examples in the records of times that are past, and of our own day: Kingdoms and states, and public societies have, in all ages, experienced the inconvenience which must necessarily arise from a mistaken or profligate use of liberty; and where is the country, and when has there been a period, when weak, wicked, or desperate men have not risen up to undermine public happiness, to propagate false, impracticable notions of Free-agency, and to incite men to consider the reasonable and wholesome restraints of government as infringements on the Natural Liberty of Man?

Indeed, there cannot be a better cause assigned for the very extravagant doctrines concerning the Rights of Man, which have been, of late, propagated with so much zeal and diligence by many mistaken and wicked men among us, as well as their

audacious attacks upon our civil and religious establishments, than the loose, indefinite notions of liberty, the spawn of the French Revolution, which have been with so much art and activity disseminated through a great part of Europe; as if the right which men have to publish their sentiments in matters of government and religion, were without limit from any political jurisdiction; as if it were the distinguishing privilege of every free man to be the sole judge of his own opinions and actions; as if society could be carried on without power in the rulers, and submission in the people; in short, as if calumny, and sedition, and blasphemy, and treason, were not to be numbered among the crimes of man.

If any nation was represented to be in such a relaxed state of government, that its rulers were the objects of a bold, malicious, and daily detraction, while their authority was reprobated and their power

despised, that its established religion was made an object of mockery and ridicule, and where any attempt to restrain such disorders would be considered as an encroachment on the privileges of a free people, would not every wise reflecting man pronounce the speedy downfall of a nation in such a miserable state of anarchy? while some, I fear, might be found, who would call this a free government, because it appears to be the mad opinion of too many, in the present day, that to banish all religion, and reason, and order, out of the world, would be to establish the true social liberty of the human race.

It may be said, indeed, that such folly is too gross to be adopted by the most ignorant of mankind; that such doctrines are, in themselves, so repugnant to the common sense, and so destructive of the happiness of man, that they must be lost in their incapacity to be realized:—all this

is undoubtedly true; but while there are weak, wicked, and desperate men in the world, liberty will continue to be made, more or less, a cloak for licentiousness; and it becomes, therefore, the duty of every wise man and good citizen, as far as in him lies, to check, by his influence, his example, and his admonitions, all attempts at innovation, and all inroads upon the general order of the society to which he belongs; and to look alone for that reformation which the lapse of time, or a change of circumstances may appear to suggest, from the powers of the constitution, who must be the best judges when and how to proceed in an arrangement, which requires all their deliberative wisdom to adjust and settle.

The history of the world, indeed, furnishes us with many examples of tyranny and oppression in the rulers, as well as sedition and anarchy in the people, when the real nature and object of authority

has been too greatly mistaken, and such false notions of it have been adopted, as, from a base submission, or a cruel necessity, to clothe one man with arbitrary power, and to make the will of the governor the sole standard of the liberty of the people: but wherever authority has been unjustly obtained, and tyrannically exercised, the zeal, resolution, and bravery, which resisted the tyranny in defence of law and liberty, must be considered and applauded as great and patriot virtues.

On considering the annals of those nations who have enjoyed the greatest share of freedom, and reviewing the dissensions which have taken place, at different times, in all of them, one might almost be led to conclude that there were some natural, inherent, irreconcilable qualities in liberty and authority, which produce such frequent discord between them. But the fact is far otherwise; for true liberty, and rightful authority, when wisely defined, and

limited with proper qualifications, are so far from possessing properties hostile to each other, that they are in a state of inseparable connection : authority being the offspring of liberty, and the laws which are made to secure the one, have constituted the other for its protection, as well as for laying such a restraint on the wrong, as may uphold men in the right exercise of it. In short, a dissolution of the natural alliance between liberty and authority has never been occasioned but by wicked and ambitious men, who have made liberty the plea, when rule and dominion was their aim, in order to get the civil and religious rights of their country under their direction and controul. But whatever views the advocates of unlimited power may have had in former times, and the supporters of unlimited liberty may have, in our own day, by forwarding the advancement of their respective systems, they certainly add blasphemy to their

presumption, when they pretend that their designs are supported by the dictates of reason, or the doctrines of religion; for neither reason nor religion can ever be made, without the most abominable perversion, to countenance liberty in the subject without restraint, or to dispense a power to the governor without limitation: for public laws must be considered as bound to form an equal protection for the authority of the one, and the liberty of the other; in as much as all acts of power in the governor, without law, are only so many acts of oppression and tyranny; and in like manner, every exercise of liberty in the subject, against law, is an act of licentiousness and anarchy. Such is the language of pure human reason; and religion, which may be considered, if I may so express myself, as divine reason, is always found to advance and encourage the same principles of political conduct.

In a country where the religion of the Gospel is established in its true spirit and energy, where the formulary and rituals of its predominant mode of worship, are so contrived as to aid devotion, without the danger of superstition, and where every dissenting sect of Christians experiences the benign effects of an indulgent toleration, in such a country,—and every Englishman, thank God, may boast that it is his own;—the constitution may be truly represented as being supported by the sanctions of evangelical doctrine, as well as by the most perfect principles of political wisdom.

Public virtue must be considered by all who are acquainted with the objects and end of good government, as a quality essentially necessary in the character of a great statesman; and private virtue, I shall not hesitate to add, is the only source of, as it is the best security for, public excellence: that is, a man who possesses

those qualities and dispositions which have made him useful and honourable in the private walk of life, has given the best possible pledge, that, when he is called to political power in his country, he will discharge its duties with zeal and integrity. Nor will it, I trust, be denied, that the best foundation of human virtue, whether public or private, is an attachment to the precepts of religion, on the sober principles of rational piety. Ambition, interest, and what is called honour, have sometimes induced statesmen to fulfil the duties of their elevated stations in government, with benefit to their country, and reputation to themselves; but these are mere human influences, which temptations may seduce, which success may pervert, and calamity render desperate, and for whose rectitude there is no better security, than the reward of popular applause, the gratifications of predominant passions, or the dread of popular disgrace.

Hope and fear are the springs of all human actions; and as religion exalts the former, and quickens the latter, it would be obstinacy, or folly, or something worse, to deny its salutary influence in every circumstance and position of life, from the cottage to the throne. The history of every country, both ancient and modern, informs us, that the wisest ministers have sometimes been the object of popular abhorrence, and that wicked ministers have been as often followed by popular approbation. Mere human influence cannot possess that restraining and correcting power over the minds and passions of men, which will preserve the one in undeviating integrity, and command the other into a calm subordination to it. A thousand soliciting temptations continually surround the seat of power; and it is most happy, indeed, for the people, when he who sits thereon sincerely feels that his conduct is not to receive its shape

and direction from the mere operating changes and chances of the world, but that he will be finally answerable for a right discharge of his duty to the creator of kings and kingdoms, and be made accountable for all his actions, in a state of existence, where human distinctions will cease, and where change and chance will be no more.

Were I required to define what Man is,—I should not hesitate to describe him under the character of a religious animal, and, thereby, possessing that pre-eminence over all created beings by which it is his nature, and his boast, to be distinguished;—as those faculties which render him susceptible of religious impressions, and qualify him for the performance of religious duties, are the most irrefragable proofs of his proceeding from that gracious and divine power, by whom he lives and moves, and has his being. For, however his passions may turn him

aside from the real purpose of his creation, tho' deluded by their power, he may not only neglect but even scoff at the precepts of Religion,—he must, I believe, sink into that brutal insensibility, which is the last stage of human depravity, before he can wholly shake off the natural awe which arises from reflecting on an overlooking Providence, and the alarming dread of a future retribution.

If Man, therefore, as an individual member of society, derives his highest honour from the right sense which he entertains of religion, and happiness,—if a due regard to the duties of his private or political station proceeds from the same principle, the society, at large, must receive a proportionable aggregate of advantage from the cultivation and encouragement of the same principles. Society has its duties, on a right performance of which depends its happiness, and it has also a coercive power of its own construc-

tion to compel, as far as may be, the discharge of those duties; for the frail nature of man necessarily requires something more than the advantage of human rewards and the fear of human punishment, to keep him within the bounds of that order and submission, which is necessary to the prosperity of all public communities. Authority, without any other restraint than social law, or any other support than its own penal terrors, would be liable to be overthrown by its own excesses, as well as those of the people who are to be governed by it. The dependence which civil institutions of Government have upon religion, is evident not only from the exercise of our reason on the subject, but from the experience afforded us by the history of every nation that has existed in the world. It is evidently the interest of social policy, to support and advance religion, as all its objects depend upon the maintenance of

it, and, of course, it becomes necessary to protect that establishment it has determined to be the best, for extending its sanctions, and propagating its doctrines, which form so strong a basis of, give such an active energy to, and, as it were, consecrate, the institutes and regulations of civil government. The greatest prince and wisest man, who ever swayed a sceptre, has said, in the language of truth, that righteousness exalteth a nation: it is indeed the vital principle of all public virtue, the source of all true national glory, and they will both live and expire with it.

If we were to fix on any period in the history of any country, during which it appears that the people were remarkable for their attentions to its religious institutions, we should instantly discover a time of public tranquillity and legal obedience. Take another period, in which these people were become dissolute in their man-

ners, and, careless of all religious duties, and you have as immediately brought before you a period, of general disquietude, and subject to internal commotions. In short, wherever the laws are so defective, as to impose but few restraints on the passions of men, and those restraints are, from weakness, from negligence, or from fear, but seldom called into execution, or at least, properly executed, religion must not only have lost its influence, but be treated with contempt and derision. Some of the greatest nations of the world may be cited in support of these opinions,—they only preserved their glory, while they maintained the religion of their country. I shall just mention one, and the most splendid of them.—

The Romans founded their system of policy, in the very origin of their state, upon the best and wisest principle,—the fear of the Gods, a firm belief of a divine super-

intending Providence, and a future state of rewards and punishments. We neither exceeded, says Cicero, the Spaniards in number, nor did we excel the Gauls in strength of body, nor the Carthaginians in craft, nor the Greeks in arts or sciences: but we have far surpassed all the nations of the universe in piety and religion, and in the only point which can be called true wisdom, a thorough conviction, that all things here below are directed and governed by a divine Providence. To this principle alone, Cicero wisely attributes the grandeur and good fortune of his country: for what man is there, says he, who is convinced of the existence of the Gods, but must be convinced, at the same time, that our mighty empire owes its origin, its increase, and its preservation to their protecting care and favour. From whence it is evident, that these continued to be the real sentiments of the wiser Romans, even in the corrupt times

of Cicero. From this principle proceeded that respect for, and submission to, the laws, and that temperance, moderation, and contempt for wealth, which are the best defence against the encroachments of injustice and oppression. Hence also arose that inextinguishable love for their country, which, next to their Gods, the Roman people considered as the chief object of their veneration. This they carried to such an height of enthusiasm, as to make even social love, natural affection, and self-preservation, subservient to their unbounded attachment to their country: because they revered it as a place dear to their Gods, who, they believed, had destined it to give laws to the rest of the universe, and consequently favoured it with their peculiar care and protection. Hence we may trace that undaunted courage, that insuperable contempt of danger and of death in defence of their country, which complete the idea of the Roman charac-

ter, as it is drawn by historians, in the virtuous ages of the Roman republic. As long, therefore, as the manners of this great people were regulated by the principles of religion, they were free and invincible. But no sooner were these principles destroyed, by the introduction of an infidel philosophy, among them, than corruption appeared with resistless power, and the passions were let loose to run their full career, without check or controul, and produced that depravity of manners, and disregard of religion, which hastened, and may, in fact be said, to have produced the downfall of that mighty empire.

We may certainly boast of a constitution superior to that of Rome, even in the purest times of the republic, and, of a religion, which it would be almost impiety to compare with the superstitions of the Pagan world. It may, indeed, be said, with the greatest truth, that Chris-

tianity, even if it did not possess the sanctions of an immediate revelation, preserves, in the exquisite moral beauty, and sublime tendency of its doctrines, an internal evidence of its divine origin. For so wonderfully are its precepts applied to the nature of Man, to his hopes and his fears, to his strength and his weakness, that it is almost impossible to consider the subject with the seriousness and attention it deserves, without receiving the fullest conviction, that the creation of man, and the gospel rules for his conduct in life, proceed from the same wise and beneficent power.

It is the professed object of the Evangelical system, to correct, improve, and perfect human nature, under all the circumstances in which it may be involved. —It lays down, however, no rule for social compact, or the political arrangement of society, but aims solely at inspiring men with that spirit of benevolence,

charity, and good order, which will make wise rulers and good subjects, in any and every form of government which the accidental circumstances and events of the world may produce. The Christian law-giver refused to interfere in the civil regulations of the country where he was placed to promulgate his doctrines. He checked sedition in the soldiery, he encouraged the citizen in his duty, and himself submitted to the sentence of the laws: his apostles also, after the example of their master, recommended submission to the civil powers, and propagated, among the early Christians, those rules for the direction of human conduct, which, when reduced to practise, in any state, or under any government, will diffuse such a spirit of virtue, as to produce the greatest degree of public happiness which any state or society is capable of receiving.

It has, indeed, been too common among

mankind, to mistake the abuse of religion, for religion itself; and, of course, to level their attacks at the thing perverted, instead of the perversion. Governments, and laws, and institutions, have shared the same fate, and been treated with equal injustice: but while there are weak and wicked men in the world, the first blessings of our existence will be misunderstood, and misrepresented,—laws, divine and human, will be disobeyed,—the order of social life be more, or less disturbed,—and the designs of licentious spirits be oftentimes attempted, and will sometimes succeed.

I have dwelt the longer upon this subject, because, the enemies of our happy constitution and government, have, many of them, under the pretext of reforming abuses, endeavoured to ridicule all establishments and rituals of religion, with a view to seduce men into the wilds of enthusiasm on the one hand, or pervert

them to a total disregard of all religion, on the other; and, thereby, qualify them for promoting their own seditions and detestable purposes. For of those who are inflamed with wild fantastic notions of religion, or who have cast from them all submission to religious influence, it may be said, with equal truth, in the language of the poet, that, *they are fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.* Nor can I but repeat, that when whole nations become so corrupt and depraved, as to have driven the spirit of religion from among them, they will sink rapidly to that state of licentiousness and disorder, which, is a terrible scourge while it lasts, and must shortly terminate in the destruction of their liberty and constitution.

The historical part of the sacred writings, records very striking examples of this affecting truth: and not only the Roman empire, as I have already mentioned, but many other distinguished

nations of antiquity, have shared the same fate, from the same causes. But without looking back to ages so long past, the present deplorable state of a neighbouring people, has manifestly arisen from that extreme depravity and corruption, which has so long, and so generally prevailed in their manners and government. Hence it is, that in the vain endeavour to correct the errors of their former constitution, they have run headlong into a state of licentiousness and anarchy, the enormities of which, have few or no examples, in the worst period in the annals of time: nor shall I hesitate to hazard an opinion, which experience, I doubt not, will confirm, that the total destruction of the ecclesiastical establishment of France, which I am bold enough to call impious, because it has involved all religion in the ruin, will be a principal difficulty in the way of restoring any proper form of government to that distracted country. Nor am I, in the least

apprehensive, that my prediction will fail, when I foretell, that from the abolition of their religion, the future government of the French nation, whenever a regular constitution shall be settled for them, must be supported by the most rigorous laws, and the strongest exertions of the executive power, perhaps yet known, in a free country. For as they have lost the influence of religion, which is such a powerful auxiliary to civil polity, the latter must depend upon itself alone, for the good order and preservation of the state, till, by a national preparation of the national youth, if such a measure should be attempted, and could be practised, another age and race of people may be formed, with that renewed reverence for religion, which the corrupt and licentious spirit of their fathers, and the political distractions which it had brought upon their country, had almost annihilated.

The French have vauntingly called

themselves, a nation of philosophers, though Mr. Burke, with greater truth, has considered them rather as a nation of atheists: for when once the religion of a country is divorced from the civil government, and left to itself, it is soon rent in pieces, by what I shall call, the factions of fanatics and enthusiasts, or sinks at once, as it has done in France, into a lawless and brutal infidelity. It appears to be the present policy of the French nation to encourage an open disdain of the sacred truths of religion; and as a testimony of their veneration for the new illuminating philosophy, they dug up the remains of its principal professor from the unconsecrated grave, to which their late religion had consigned him; and in honour of a man, whose prolonged life and brilliant talents, were employed in a mockery of the Gospel, they brought his mouldering skeleton, in a profane triumph to their metropolis, and re-interred it beneath a

dome, sacred to Christian adoration. Nay, in the last proud display of their federation, no symbols, no ceremonies of religion accompanied the solemnity: the altar of God was removed, to give place to the altar of liberty,—the Gospel was thrown aside for the volume of the constitution, and the demon of licentiousness, received the devotion due alone, to the Creator of the world. But since that period they have proceeded to the extreme of iniquity.—The oath, taken at the boasted altar of liberty, has been violated, amid blood and massacre, by actions that would disgrace the most savage people, and for which, language, in its vocabulary of execration, has not a name. They have, indeed, completely fulfilled the national character, which their canonized philosopher had long since given of them, that to the grimace of the ape, they added the ferocity of the tiger.

It is nevertheless, the opinion of some,

that the natural volatility of the French nation will operate as powerfully in bringing them back to their loyalty and their religion, and with as swift a flight, as marked their apostacy from both. That some regard for the sovereign whom they once idolized, may be renovated in the public mind of France, I am not wholly indisposed to believe. The splendid form of Royalty, the re-enjoyment of tranquillity, the return of commerce, the security of possession, which must accompany any re-establishment of a regular government among them, may produce a submission to that government, and a respect for the power that presides in it; but the sudden renewal of an expansive religious influence, is not within the scope of my expectations.

If, however, among those novelties of the present period, which at once astonish and baffle the experience of times that are past, the people of France, on beholding

the priesthood restored to its functions, the altars reconsecrated, as it were, by the renewal of their former celebrations; and their churches re-echoing with the Gospel promises of peace and pardon,—should be struck with a sense of their past enormities, and be suddenly inspired with a renovated spirit of religion, the enthusiasm might be rekindled with a violence that would fill the deserted cloisters with crowds of penitents.

I would not, however, be considered as anxious for the restoration of the late religion of France, but as the established religion of the country, and, of course, it had some, though, as it appears, but too little influence, on the conduct of its people. If the restoration of government in a better form, could be accompanied by a purer example of religious establishment in that kingdom, than it before possessed,—it would be an event of real exultation to the French themselves, and of the sin-

cerest satisfaction to every benevolent mind throughout the civilized world.— But, from the general depravity of the French people, my conjectures, I fear, are too well founded, that it will be long, indeed, before a due sense of religious duty can be restored among them; and, as there is every reason to expect, that any future effective system of government in France must be established by the sword,—I greatly fear, from the want of those aids which all civil establishments have hitherto derived from religion, that by the sword, it must be maintained.

The Roman Catholic religion is by no means favourable to the rational liberties of mankind; it is suited to an unlimited monarchy, and in the Christian world, has always accompanied it; but it is, surely, far preferable for any people to be the subjects of an arbitrary prince, and members of the papal church, than to live

as if there was no government in their country, and no God in the world.

We, of this happy island, are blessed with a civil and religious establishment, with a constitution in church and state, which is contrived, in a pre-eminent manner, to give the subjects of it, that true rational liberty, which is consistent with the dignity of man, and the best interests of social nature. Nevertheless, there are men, who, from the diabolic state of their minds, or the desperate state of their fortunes, from a violent ambition, or a thirst for rapine, would wish to gratify the one, and to replenish the other, by the downfall of this country. Not a few of these men have displayed uncommon skill in the attack they have made upon the British constitution and government. Their system is, I must own, too well calculated to seduce the weak, and to charm the wicked, as it goes directly to the dissolu-

tion of legal power, and religious influence; for, by propagating the opinion, that our civil government is a bad government, and that our religious establishment is a faulty establishment, they do all they can, to bring the laws of the one and the doctrines of the other, into contempt, and thereby to conjure up a spirit of opposition to both.

That it is among the rights of men to change their form of government, and their modes of religion, as they change their garments, can be asserted by none but ignorant politicians, by disaffected citizens, and men of depraved hearts; and that man, above all others, who, with an audacity beyond example, has told the people of this country, that they have neither liberty, nor a constitution; that an established religion is an infringement of their natural rights; and that they must overturn all order, government, and religion, as they have done in France, in

order to obtain them: that man, I say, is not formed to be a good subject in any state, nor to be considered but with detestation and abhorrence, by every sincere friend to virtue and his country. With men who are so little of Englishmen as to declare, that we have no constitution, and such enemies to our ecclesiastical establishment, as to number it among the corruptions of Christianity, and that we do not enjoy those rights which God and nature has given to all mankind; with such men, I should hold no communication, and, therefore, shall not mispend my time, or insult the understanding of my readers, by a particular refutation of their opinions; but content myself with doing all the good which can be done, by considering what true liberty is, and how it is promoted and secured by the principles of our constitution in church and state.

Men are, by nature, free and intellectual beings, and consequently liberty must

form a very principal ingredient in human happiness. But this liberty must not be considered as a boundless power, or an unlimited privilege, to act every one according to his will; because free agents may, in the vicious use of their agency, produce misery, instead of happiness. The true notion of liberty must, therefore, comprehend in it a limitation and direction by some laws, as absolutely necessary to its support and preservation.

The law of reason, implanted, as it were, in the mind of man, may be considered as the original will of God, by which every free and intelligent being was left to regulate his own conduct in the use of his liberty: for if men had never swerved from this law, there never would have been any occasion for the institutions of society; nor of any other discovery of the will of God, as a rule of action; but every man would be a sufficient law unto himself, and, conse-

quently, there could be no occasion to lay down any rules of duty, or to form any measures of liberty, for the general order and well-being of social happiness. For, if it were possible, that mankind could be brought to an unerring perception and observance of the pure dictates of reason, then all laws of government, as well as those of revealed religion, would become useless ; because the great objects of religion and polity would then be most fully and effectually answered, without their aid and direction.

But such a state of perfection cannot be expected to take place among the inhabitants of this lower world, as they have all actually swerved from the rule of reason, and become subject to the undue influence of their passions. Indeed, the very structure of all society and government evidently implies, that men, from their frailties and imperfections, are under the absolute necessity of having

some more coercive power to limit and direct them, in the use of liberty, than the private dictates of their own reason and judgment. All religion, and all law is addressed to the imperfections of our nature. God has been pleased to establish the one, and society is under the necessity of framing the other ;—nay, such is the imperfect state of man, and so little is he to be trusted to his own guidance and discretion, that even Revelation itself does not suppose that men may attain to such perfection, even with its divine directions in their hands, as that they may be released from the prescriptions of human laws. In every part of the Evangelical and Apostolic writings, it is plainly implied, that the frailties of men are such, as to render it absolutely necessary that they should be placed under the direction and discipline of political regulations, as the standard of that share of liberty with which they are to be entrusted. The

doctrines of the New Testament have no tendency whatever to excuse men from their obligations to the laws of society, nor allow of any private discretionary use of liberty to neglect or oppose them : on the contrary, they constantly enjoin all Christians to submit to the constitution of their country, as a duty consonant to the will of God, they consider the laws of it as the proper measure of liberty, and pronounce any violation of them, to be an offence against God himself. It is evident, therefore, that, in requiring men to measure their liberty by the scale of public law, the Apostles did not propose to take them from the direction of reason, but to support the power of it, by taking them from the dominion of their passions.—If, however, it should be asked, what this reason is? it may be answered, it is that distinguishing, universal principle of the human mind, when aggregately exercised, on which the laws of

society are generally founded ; or, at least, to which they are more invariably conformable, than the opinions of individual men, who are liable to be agitated by passions, and swayed by interests, which continually give a wrong and precarious bias to private judgment ; so that, as public laws may be reasonably supposed to proceed from cool reflection and dispassionate investigation, they must be calculated to prescribe better rules of conduct to any man, than he could propose to himself.

It may, however, be said, that public laws being the contrivances of fallible men, may not always be conformable to the dictates of reason, and may, consequently, deprive particular persons of such liberty as might be reasonably allowed them. But as no human institution ever was or ever will be perfect and free from defects,—to allow individuals the privilege of disobeying and calumniating the

public laws, on the idea that they are, in some points, deficient, would be the same as if there were no laws at all. For the law of society is the law of all its members, who have concurred in establishing it, as containing certain rules of action, by which they consent to be limited and directed in the use of their liberty; and such law must possess a predominant power over the actual exertions of private opinion, or the society which is to be maintained by it must be dissolved. All the right which any dissatisfied member of society can have, is to quit that society, when he believes the laws to be so defective as to be no longer a satisfactory guide and protection to him; but he has no right whatever to attempt the subversion of them, or even to offer an opposition to them, as such a conduct would involve him in the guilt of invading the rights of the majority, who are content to be governed by them.

The first preachers of Christianity required of their followers, to exercise a dutiful submission to the powers of that government under which they lived; and this principle of political obedience appears to have been sanctioned by the precepts of natural, as well as the doctrines of revealed religion, as might be proved by examples taken from the conduct and opinions of the Heathen philosophers. As a memorable instance, *Socrates*, who was among the wisest and most virtuous of them, could not be persuaded, by the most earnest and affectionate entreaties of his friends, to escape even from an unjust sentence of his country; because he believed it to be among the first duties, to submit, even unto death, to the public administration of the society under which he had consented to live; and that it would be inconsistent with those principles of good order, which are the essence of all good govern-

ment, to assume the liberty of counter-acting those social ordinances, which he had bound himself to obey.

If, however, it should be objected, that such a general, unreserved submission to laws or government, would tend to perpetuate the errors and defects of it; I shall beg leave to observe, that every society is supposed to be provided with some means of reforming the abuses, correcting the errors, and supplying the deficiencies in its public economy. The wisdom of our constitution, in particular, admits the power of offering complaints to the legislative part of it; in which every subject possesses the liberty of making his objection to any subsisting law, or to propose the framing of any new law, by his representative in parliament, who, in conjunction with the representatives of the kingdom at large, will consider of the propriety and tendency of his proposition, and determine

accordingly. This, surely, is as much liberty as any reasonable man will require, and as any wise government should allow; for an unlimited freedom in every private subject to disseminate his objections, and to raise seditious disputes and altercations among the people at large, against the reasonableness of subsisting laws, is to destroy all authority, to disturb the regular mode of legislation, and to cut off all recourse to that power of public decision, which it is the interest of every society to establish by their concurrence, and support by their obedience.

In short, all notions of liberty which is not under the controul of an established authority, are wholly inconsistent with a regular system of government; as they must proceed from an opinion, that laws more properly result from the clamorous disputes of a disorderly populace, than the calm councils of chosen legislators; from

the agitated passions, rather than the deliberative wisdom, of mankind. But wherever such notions have been adopted by the body of a nation, the elements of government were rapidly dissolved, confusion, riot, and anarchy ensued, till harassed and worn out by the complicated evils of political commotions, the people have been glad to find a miserable refuge in an unreserved submission to one man, who might be, as he generally was, a tyrant and an oppressor.

The same principles which have been laid down for the protection of civil freedom, may also be applied to the maintenance of religious liberty; as every society possesses an inherent right to adopt a religion for itself, and to clothe it in those forms of worship, which appear to be best suited to promote the object of rational devotion. And no member of that society does or can possess a right to disturb such a national regulation.

The Author of the Christian religion instructed mankind in the spirit and precepts of it, but left the forms, by which the one should be diffused, and the other taught, to the circumstances of those states where it should be established. In this country, the powers of the constitution have instituted a mode of public worship for the subjects of it; and while that mode of worship has the sanction of the law, it must be an offence against the law to offer it injury or do it violence. Nay, being so established, it is in direct contradiction to the precepts of Christ and his Apostles, to make any attempts to disturb it.

It is the nature of our religion to inspire men with those virtues and that sense of duty and order, which make them good citizens; and, having the aid of a divine authority to enforce its precepts, can reach far beyond the power of any human institutions: nor can I doubt

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ON THE

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IN

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but that it oftentimes corrects and restores the mind of man, when human institutions have lost their influence. Since religion, therefore, affords such a powerful energy to political law, it becomes the duty as well as the interest of the latter, to give efficacy and extent to its doctrines, by clothing it with such an establishment, and guarding it by such regulations, as may best obtain those salutary objects. Hence arises that natural association which has subsisted, among the wisest nations, between their religious and civil establishments, to the maintenance of both, and the consequent advancement of public and private virtue.

If it should be said, that religion, being a mere spiritual principle of action, requires not the aid of that authority which is necessary in civil society; I shall only observe, that the propriety of such an opinion must be determined by the experience of mankind; and an ex-

ample of a religious society where the co-operation of legal authority was considered as unnecessary, does not suggest itself to my memory or comprehension: in fact, authority is the life of liberty, which neither in a civil or religious state, can exist without its protecting and restraining influence. The whole tenor of the Apostolic conduct and writings, tend to establish a government and order in religious society, in such forms, as the nature of things may require in the progressive course of Christianity: indeed, the Apostles themselves have left certain general directions for the conduct of men in the different ranks and orders of religious community. The question then would come to be considered,—if it really were a question, in which the disquisitions of reason would not be considered as a waste of them,—whether the religion of a country should be independent of, or connected with, the civil government of

it? For, surely, such an alliance between two powers, framed by different means and under different sanctions, to promote the virtue and happiness of mankind, is so evident, that it will not be controverted but by those who are in opposition to all religious administrations whatever. It must be a principal object of our religion, in return for the protection of the civil government, to give spirit and energy to legislative operations, to inspire rulers to make good laws, and their subjects to obey them. It need not, therefore, be suggested what would be the fate of that society, where the authority of religion is independent of the civil government, if these different institutions, instead of acting and re-acting upon, should become hostile to, each other.

If, in civil affairs, a man enjoys the right to do every thing which is not particularly injurious to his neighbours, or ge-

nerally detrimental to society, he possesses as much liberty as he will know how to use ; and if, in religious affairs, he may enjoy what opinions he pleases, and worship God in what manner he thinks proper, provided he does not disturb the established religion of his country, he is blessed with as much religious liberty, as any man of sound piety and judgment, can possibly desire ; and such is the liberty, both civil and religious, which every subject of Great Britain possesses.

Yet, such is the lamentable perversion of human nature, there are men, as we daily perceive and hear, who are endeavouring to persuade the people at large, that they do not possess the rights to which all men have an undeniable claim, both as men and Christians.—Of what rights we are deprived to which we have a real claim, is unknown to me ;—I shall only insist, that we actually possess the right of

doing every thing which is not in opposition to the laws, established for our civil and religious government; and if these men, who are so loud in their clamours against a society which professes to be supported by both these establishments, are not satisfied with it, they have a right to remove themselves from it; but they have no right while they remain members of it, to disturb its economy, or refuse submission to its orders and regulations. Where they will go to get a wiser civil government, and a purer religious establishment, I do not know, nor do they know themselves: though they appear to aim at the dissolution of all establishments, whether civil or religious, and to level their artillery against every government in Europe, but that of France,—which they have erected columns, such as they are, to support.—It cannot, however, be passed by without observation that the objects of their attack remain

unshaken, and the only power they attempt to maintain, is sinking rapidly into destruction. They may, indeed, be well described, as the foes of prosperity and the friends of ruin. Such men are libertines in politics, and libertines in religion; and it is almost needless to add, that it is a spirit of libertinism to subvert order, to confound all distinctions, and to banish a sense of moral and religious duty out of the world. The *former* are those who, under a pretence of lawful rights, determine all obligation of duty to their superiors, to be tyrannical influence: on this principle they attack the characters and arraign the legal measures of government, while they artfully endeavour to foment a spirit of sedition and tumult among the people, so that, in the moment of disorder and confusion, they may satisfy some base or daring passion, at the expence of the society to which they belong. The *latter* employ

the liberty they possess, to promote the same object, by different means. They speak loudly against the general faith, and ridicule openly the established ordinances, with a view to break down those barriers, which form the pale of civil and religious duty;—because, while men are pious Christians and good citizens, they cannot be made engines in the hands of these emissaries of sedition, to aid and advance their diabolic intentions.

Mr. Paine tells the people of this country, that their form of government, which was the grand desideratum of one of the most renowned politicians of antiquity, which, after twenty years indefatigable study of political systems, excited the warmest eulogium of the immortal Montesquieu, is a bad form of government; in short, that they are without a constitution. The legislative bodies of the kingdom, however, declare that we have a constitution, founded on the wisdom of

ages, and under which the people are happy; and the people, from one end of the island to the other, exult in confirming the declaration.

When Mr. Paine asserts that the inhabitants of Great Britain have no true liberty, he asserts that which is false; but if he had said that our liberty may be abused and perverted by bad citizens, he said that which is too true, and he might offer himself as a very flagrant and audacious example. But the good sense of this country, which was, for a short time, perplexed by the novelty and impudence of his writings has, at length, recovered itself; and he and his doctrines are melting away into that contempt and neglect they deserve; nor will he enjoy even the consolation of accompanying Jack Cade or Wat Tyler, or the Norfolk Tanner, in the future consideration of mankind.

Dr. Priestley is a man, indeed, of a very different character. He is profound

as a philosopher, and amiable as a man: his science has been eminently useful to his country, and his moral life is without reproach. His religious opinions are to himself, and he must answer for them at a tribunal that can judge perfectly, as it will judge finally, of them: and it ought to make him contented and keep him quiet, that he is permitted not only to enjoy, but to preach them. His political notions, however, are very adverse, in many points, to the constitution of his country. It is a favourite article of his political creed, that civil government has nothing to do with religion; that every man has a right to adopt or establish any religion he pleases, and to demand, under any of them, a share in the executive branches of government: that all religious establishments are deviations from the spirit of Christianity, and, of course, that the religious establishment of this country is one of them: nay, he avows

the opinion, that all governments which confine a share in their administration to the members of their religious establishment, are hostile to liberty, and that, consequently, the government of Great Britain is not free. But the legislature, which consists of men who are, probably, as good judges of the matter as Dr. Priestley, entertain very different sentiments. It is their belief, as it was the belief of their predecessors, that its religious establishment is consonant to the true spirit of Christianity, and that the connection between it and the civil polity of the state, is not founded in tyranny or an intolerant spirit; of which the privilege Dr. Priestley possesses of publishing his writings and preaching his opinions, is an irrefragable proof. For my own part, I am in no degree astonished, that the man, who boasts of the French constitution, should vilify that of Britain; and that he who holds up the philosophy, of France,

as an example of Christianity, should represent the church of England as an antechristian institution.—What secret principle governs Dr. Priestley's public opinions,—what love of change, or wish for power, animate his political zeal,—to what particular object his ambition is directed, can be known only to himself, and to that power to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid.—Dr. Priestley, however, has secured to himself a name, independent of his political and religious doctrines; and I should hope, that his science will be remembered, when his theology and his politics have long been forgotten.

That all human institutions possess, in a greater or less degree, the imperfections of human nature, is a truth attached to every part of the globe. To quarrel, therefore, with any political or religious institutions, because they are not perfect, is a proof of a petulant and

discontented mind, as well as of a weak understanding. Men must consult their piety as little as their reason, when they complain that human blessings are not pure and unmixed with human errors; and such I should refer to the impiety of one of the kings of Spain, who was used to declare, that had he been consulted when the world was made, he could have suggested certain improvements which did not occur to the Creator of it.

It is, however, a matter of very great consolation to every good subject of the British empire, that, in spite of the very powerful artifices which have been employed to seduce them into discontent and commotion, a very predominant and most respectable majority of the people appear to be fully sensible that they have a constitution founded on the purest principles of liberty,—that their religion is established on the purest principles of

Christianity,—that they have able and zealous ministers in the administration of both,—and that they have a good king over all, who loves his people, and gives the best example in the highest place. In short, that they possess the first of all rights, the rights of the wisest laws, the purest religion, and the best constitution in the world.

I have, therefore, no fear from the daring imbecillities of Mr. Paine, nor the ineffectual subtleties of Dr. Priestley; my only dread proceeds from that luxury, the offspring of our national wealth and prosperity, which is more pregnant with danger to our public happiness, than all the malicious designs of our foreign or domestic enemies. If, however, the good sense, the patriotism, the religion of the country, does but unite to check a spirit so fatal to national virtue, and, which must be the certain consequence, to na-

tional happiness ; the British constitution, as it so greatly excels every other that does exist, or has existed in the world, in prosperity, glory, and virtue, will equally exceed them in the extent of its duration. I conclude with the patriot wish of excellent Father Paul,—ESTO PERPETUA.

THE END.