

THE
Theological Magazine,

OR

S Y N O P S I S

OF

MODERN RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT.

ON A NEW PLAN.

PROVE ALL THINGS, HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD.

Paul.

“ I observe that old men seldom have any advantage of new discoveries; because they are beside a way of thinking they have been long used to. Resolved, if ever I live to years, that I will be impartial to hear the reasons of all pretended discoveries, and receive them, if rational, how long soever I have been used to another way of thinking.”

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—1797.—

R E V I E W.

[From the UNITED STATES CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE.]

An Apology for the Bible, in a series of letters, addressed to THOMAS PAINE, author of a book entitled, The Age of Reason, Part the Second, being an investigation of True and of Fabulous Theology. By R. WATSON, D.D. F. R. S. Lord Bishop of Landaff, and Regius Professor of Divinity of the University of Combridge. New-York, printed by John Bull, No. 115, Cherry-street, 1796. Price 81 cents in blue, one dollar bound and lettered.

THIS work, several large editions of which, it is said, have been printed in England, and the first American edition of which has appeared in New-York, must afford the friends of divine revelation a peculiar pleasure. The publisher has been rather injudicious in his preface, and his edition is sold at too high a rate; but the editions which have been made since, and are intended to be made in this and other places, will, no doubt, reduce the price, and give the antidote as free and extensive a circulation as the poison.

Though the objections of Mr. Paine have been more forcibly urged by infidels before him, and his book is not improperly called, in a London review, *a new hash of old objections*, which have been repeatedly and satisfactorily answered; yet the novelty of his manner, and the popularity which, from certain circumstances, his writings possess, required some exertion to counteract their influence. Happily, what was to be wished has been performed by Bishop Watson, the author of "An Apology for Christianity," in letters addressed to Mr. Gibbon. By answering the second and main part of the Age of Reason, he has rendered the first entirely futile.

The Bishop has chosen to form his answer to Mr. Paine also in the way of letters; a way which admits of greater simplicity of language, and fatigues the attention less, than the way of formal dissertation. He has, as he informs us, designedly written in a popular manner, avoided learned disquisitions, and omitted little objections; but the reader may expect to find every plausible objection sufficiently answered, the many false assertions of Mr. Paine detected, his ignorance exposed, and his liberal abuse met with a becoming spirit. We cannot but regret that the Bishop has been too free in his concessions, and wish that he had enlarged on some points, and on others had been more explicit, or less liable to misconstruction. Serious readers will be disappointed when they look for an unequivocal testimony in favour of those doctrines of grace which are the great means used by the Holy Spirit in destroying infidelity, in changing the hearts, and reforming the lives of men. Every intelligent and impartial judge, however, must allow, that whatever may be his opinion on those things, the

answer

answer is such as necessarily and effectually to overthrow Deism, and to establish Christianity on a sure and stable foundation.

Mr. Paine is treated with great politeness and moderation; abundantly more than those who know him best think he can justly claim. Whenever any degree of severity is indulged, the occasion evidently justifies it. Thus, to the abominable misrepresentation of Mr. Paine, "that thirty-two thousand women-children were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses," the Bishop replies, "Prove this, and I will allow that Moses was the horrid monster you make him"—prove this, and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it—"a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy"—prove this, or excuse my warmth if I say to you, as Paul said to Elymas, the forcerer, who sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, 'O full of all subtilty and of all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?'—I did not, when I began these letters, think that I should have been moved to this severity of rebuke, by any thing you could have written; but when so gross a misrepresentation is made of God's proceedings, coolness would be a crime. The women-children were not reserved for the purposes of debauchery, but of slavery;—a custom abhorrent from our manners, but every where practised in former times, and still practised in countries where the benignity of the Christian religion has not softened the ferocity of human nature."—To what Mr. Paine says on the prophecy of Jonah, the Bishop makes the only reply which it deserves, "I shall put it," says he, "covered with *helebore* for the service of its author, on the same shelf with your hypothesis concerning the conspiracy of Daniel and Ezekiel, and shall not say another word about it."

Happy will it be if infidels give this work an attentive and candid perusal: The serious inquirer cannot fail of conviction; and even Thomas Paine, if he has a spark of sensibility and ingenuousness, will acknowledge the justice of the wounds which a generous opponent was obliged to inflict; and while he smarts, will openly renounce his madness and folly.

Did the studied brevity of this review admit of further quotations, pages might be quoted, particularly in the last letter, in which is a continued strain of fine writing. The Bishop has pled the best of causes, with true genius, taste, and eloquence; he has pled it with that temper which Christianity alone can inspire, and compared with which all natural endowments are vain: and had he left no room for suspicion as to his sentiments on some subjects, by concealment and ambiguity, which may prove dangerous, he had obtained our hearty and entire approbation.