

SOPHISTRY DETECTED,

OR, A

REFUTATION

OF

T. PAINE'S

AGE OF REASON.

BY THE REV. THO. MEEK.

The natural Man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, 1 Cor. ii. 14.

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M.DCC.XCV.

*To all DEISTS, and Sons of Infidelity, who may
have an Opportunity of seeing, and who may
condescend to read the subsequent Performance.*

GENTLEMEN,

MY Expectations have never been so sanguine as to induce me to believe, that you will derive any signal advantage from what is here presented to the world. Were you as much disposed as the humble enquirer after truth, to yield to the power of conviction, I might perhaps flatter myself that I have not written in vain; but such candour and honesty you have rarely exhibited. Were not the determined resolution of defending a system of opinions once adopted, however ridiculous, God-dishonouring and absurd, a more predominant principle with you than a sincere wish to retract what has been so often proved erroneous; the numberless defeats which your most redoubted champions have experienced in the field of controversy, would have made you resign the contest as altogether desperate.

BUT the scattered remnants of a routed army have been rallied again to attack the conquerors,—not from any rational hope of retrieving their honour, or of being indemnified for their loss, but from the united energy of ignorance, pride, and despair. Thus it has lately happened with respect to you: Another champion, with less knowledge and more confidence than his predecessors, and with more daring blasphemy than

Goliath

Goliath of the Philistines, has attempted to lead you once more to the field. Gentlemen, be not too much elated with the hope of success under this new commander; for, believe me, if your efforts proved abortive under the vastly superior knowledge of a TINDAL and a WHISTON, it will be impossible to cover your retreat with THOMAS PAINE at your head. Himself being judge, he was never qualified for such an undertaking. He possesses no acquaintance with the very weapons by which victory can alone be insured. You may, no doubt, admire his ribaldry for a little, but, when you perceive, as soon you must, that truth, at this enlightened period, is not to be vanquished by his controversial skill, you will blush to have confessed that you viewed him as a leader. I have ventured to meet him on his own ground, recollecting that the son of Jesse, though a youth, and his antagonist a man of war from his youth, was enabled by that God whom Goliath defied, to lay him prostrate on the earth. If so, my hope of conquest is much more flattering, as I have studied for several years, that which his thirst for the life of a mariner prevented him from knowing. I have nothing more to add but a requisition to peruse the following pages, if worthy of your notice, with the same impartiality that their author discovers in examining Mr PAINE, and I will humbly venture to predict, that you will have no great reason to admire the production of your chieftain.

I have the honour to be,

GENTLEMEN,

Your sincere friend,

THOMAS MEEK.

SOPHISTRY DETECTED, &c.

IT has been often asserted, and perhaps in many cases with considerable propriety, that truth has derived no great advantage from controversial disputes. But this ought certainly to be understood with particular limitations. A good cause may be injured by the mode of its defence, and artful insinuations may give importance to a bad one: Dogmatism and obstinacy can sully the lustre of the most interesting facts, while opposite dispositions give plausibility to error.

In glancing over the last performance of Mr PAINE, I was astonished to find that he has outdone every champion of infidelity who ever went before him. The writings of a HOBBS, a MORGAN, or a TINDAL, contain not a thousandth part of the blasphemy found in the *Age of Reason*. It has been supposed by some, that he who was
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the author of the *Rights of Man*, was incapable of composing such an infernal pamphlet. What my sentiments of his political works are, no man has a right to know; but I must frankly acknowledge that I believe him qualified to write as he has done. In the first part of his *Rights of Man*, wherever he has the smallest occasion to hint at religion, he seems to ridicule a particular doctrine, which thousands deem sacred and important. His political Adam, intended as a burlesque on hereditary government, convinced me, that he laughed at the fundamental doctrines of Christianity; and therefore that the transition to Deism was easy and natural. If he has acquired fame by his political compositions, his *Age of Reason* has obscured the whole, had it been ten thousand times more than republicans will have it.

I have explained in what manner a good cause may be hurt, and how a bad one may gain credit with myriads: Of the last of these, Mr PAINE is an instance. In the pamphlet which I now intend to examine, he has hit upon the secret of conveying poison under the semblance of medicine. He compliments his readers with the information that they have an undoubted right to judge for themselves, and then endeavours to lead them to a belief of his pernicious opinions, by a chain of the most
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sophistical reasoning any where to be met with.

I have been informed that Mr PAINÉ has been answered by a Mr WAKEFIELD, a performance I have not yet seen: It has been considered, however, as no solid, conclusive answer, as in some places he joins with his antagonist in a laugh against the word of GOD. It shall be my business to treat the interesting subject with as much solemnity as possible, and I shall be aware of being dogmatical in any thing I advance, without producing such arguments as cannot be controverted.

Mr PAINÉ informs us, that it has been his intention for many years past, to publish his thoughts upon religion*. It is, however, to be lamented, that he understood so little about the subject before he began. It must make infidelity blush to find such a poor assistant, and religion triumph that his attempts will prove abortive. Sorry should I be, were any thing advanced in the following examination to increase the circulation of Mr PAINÉ's pamphlet, without fortifying the mind against its intoxicating influence.

After some preliminary observations, he
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* Page 1.

thus introduces his subject. “ As it is necessary to affix right ideas to words, I will, before I proceed further, offer some observations on the word *Revelation*.*” Here I beg leave to quote an assertion from another part of the work, that the reader may perceive what an egregious blunder he has committed at the very commencement. “ The continually progressive change to which the meaning of words is subject; the want of an universal language which renders translations necessary; the errors to which translations are again subject; the mistakes of copyists and printers, together with the possibility of wilful alterations, are of themselves evidences, that human language, whether in speech or in print, cannot be the vehicle of the word of God†.” What a motley medley of inconsistency and nonsense is here exhibited! It is first asserted, that the annexation of right ideas to words is absolutely necessary, and then, that no such annexation is, or can be possible, because the meaning of words is perpetually changing. Why then did he presume to affix any meaning to any word whatever, when, upon his own principles the word *astronomy* may signify *navigation* in less than a hundred years? If language is continually changing in such a manner, that
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* Page 3.

† Page 16.

what was once called sweet is now denominated bitter; and that which is now stiled darkness will in future be termed light: Farewell the possibility of understanding one another! Before the present generation of men shall have paid the debt of nature, Mr PAINÉ'S *Age of Reason* may be reckoned a *Treatise on Algebra*, and his *Common Sense* an *Essay on Agriculture*. But perhaps I may be told, that no such complete transformation was intended by him. Be it so, still my point is gained, if he designed to prove that the real meaning of words can be so altered as unavoidably to mislead. Nothing short of this can infidelity itself annex to his language, and therefore words are as useless for the common business of life, as he would have them for the purposes of religion. But he wished, reader, to affix a new meaning to the word *revelation*, for his powerful voice can arrest the import of language, and make that immutable which is always changing. All this folly and stupidity has been given to the world, because he could not otherwise get rid of this glorious truth, That the will of God may be conveyed by language. If God ever said, let there be light, these words can have no other meaning through the ages of eternity. I challenge the whole world to produce a single word in any language under

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heaven,

heaven, the meaning of which has been so changed since the foundation of the earth, as to make that language no vehicle of intelligence, whether GOD or man chooses to make use of it. Even where words seem to have two opposite significations, such for example as the word *prevent*; not the smallest ambiguity can arise from the use of it; it is borrowed from a Latin word which signifies to come before, and this may either be in a hostile or friendly manner. In the one case, it must mean to hinder; and in the other, to assist. The former is the most common; but in the service of the Church of England, it is used in the latter sense.

If language be no vehicle for transmitting religion, or the word of GOD to posterity, let us consider where it will land Mr PAINE, before we proceed to examine his bewildered ideas of revelation. All religion at this rate must consist in musing and reflecting; for if the arguments by which the being of a GOD and the duties of morality are supported, should be committed to writing, they might be taken in a few years for something totally different, if our author's doctrine be admitted as true. Nay, should mankind even venture to speak on deistical subjects, the danger would be equally great
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that they would misunderstand one another, and thus demonstrate the superfluity of both tongues and languages. If THOMAS was ever a *Quaker*, it is a pity he did not continue one, in which case he would have laboured under few temptations to speak, and still fewer to write; for where is the propriety of reading what may never be comprehended?

He grants the possibility of a revelation, but he is not aware that his ideas of language, make it absolutely impossible, which is a contradiction in terms. But perhaps I will be told, that his reasoning does not point blank deny the possibility of revelation, for he thus speaks; "Admitting for the sake of a case, that something has been revealed to a certain person, and not revealed to any other person, it is revelation to that person only*." I will never give up the point, that revelation is impossible upon his principles, having already adduced proof sufficient. To which I may add, if GOD can make a revelation of himself, it must be done in language that the beings understand to whom it is made, even admitting, as Mr PAINE would have it, that it were confined to the first communication. If a revelation be made to
man,

* Page 3.

man, it must be intended to give some interesting information which he could not otherwise have acquired. It must be designed for his substantial benefit either here, or hereafter, or both; for to make God the author of superfluity and nonsense, would be blasphemy unspeakable. And what a contemptible idea would it give us of the Supreme Governor of the universe to say, that such revelations would be made for the sake of an individual? This transcends in wickedness the power of utterance, and is not equalled in point of extravagance by Don QUIXOTE himself. But revelation is necessarily limited to the first communication! So says Mr PAINÉ, and that it is a contradiction in terms to imagine it otherwise. He is a mortal enemy to the study of the dead languages, and he seems to be as ignorant as a mule of the art of logic*. It is a pitiful, but a common practice, for men to condemn what they do not understand. It is wretched reasoning to say, that the transmission or communication of any thing whatever can alter its nature. It is a conclusion at which a school-boy would blush. If any thing be once revealed, it is absolutely impossible
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* I wish not to extend this assertion to his *Rights of Man*; but an author may be a very great politician and a most wretched divine: He may reason accurately on the one, and be a downright sophist on the other. The world by wisdom never knew God.

that eternity itself can make it no revelation; and here it is necessary to make a distinction, which our Author has either wickedly or stupidly omitted. A revelation made to one person, and not made to another, is revelation to the one, and made to the other, except it could be and not be at the same time. It is made to the one directly, and conveyed to the other by human testimony. In both cases it is revelation, independent of the person to whom it is made, or of him to whom it is related. Neither the one nor the other can alter the nature of the thing; and in order to be credited ten thousand ages after, we have only to consider, What possible motive the person pretending to a revelation could have to impose upon the world? If the supposition of his uttering a falsehood, would be more absurd and inadmissible than that he spoke the truth; the mind behoved of necessity to yield its assent. To this very strong proof we may add others yet more powerful: Whether the thing said to be revealed be worthy of God; calculated to promote the dignity and felicity of man; and accompanied by evidence bearing the signature of heaven? Should these things be examined at the bar of impartial reason, and there found conclusive, I am certain that THOMAS would be deemed a madman should he reject the evidence.

evidence. Political revolutions may take place in governments as they please, but a revelation must take place in the brains of mankind; and they must have an entire new set of faculties, before his ideas of revelation can possibly be adopted.

Having said enough to evince the ignorance of our author concerning the subject of revelation, I go on to the examination of what follows. He says, "It is not difficult to account for the credit that was given to the story of Jesus Christ being the Son of God*." Had this come from the mouth of a clown, whose knowledge is circumscribed by a few acres of pasture ground, it would have been entitled to our pardon; but from the pen of him who composed *Common Sense*, it merits the ridicule and contempt of every rational being. It is an indisputable fact that the cross of Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. The latter laughed the idea of his divinity, and vicarious substitution to scorn; and the former charged him with blasphemy for asserting his heavenly origin. Proud philosophy and self-conceit were exactly in the mind of an antient Greek, what they are in a modern deist or infidel; the determined enemies of
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* Page 4.

of every doctrine delivered by JESUS of Nazareth. Let Mr. PAINE at his leisure tell how the Gospel of Christ made its way through so much of the world, with every thing against it, which malice, pride, and an attachment to established customs could suggest. Mahomet has gained his point among the Turks, by flattering their vanity and indulging their lusts; JESUS CHRIST has gained his point by waging war against the beloved vices of mankind, by wounding the very vitals of their pride, and denouncing everlasting misery against the finally impenitent. GIBBON'S five secondary causes, with as many more as hell and PAINE can invent, will never be able to account for such a stupendous effect.

The hodge podge, the low, pitiful puns, and the childish quibbles he advances in speaking of the fall of Adam, of Satan, and the atonement, are very far beneath the dignity of a reply. I lament, however, that a man, who has acquired such reputation in the world, should advance in ignorance, as he advances in years. I cannot pass over what he urges as a perfect substitute for revelation: "If objects for gratitude and admiration are our desire, do they not present themselves every hour to our eyes? Do we not see a fair creation
 " pre-

“ prepared to receive us the instant we are
 “ born,—a world furnished to our hands
 “ that cost us nothing? Is it we that light
 “ up the sun; that pour down the rain;
 “ and fill the earth with abundance*?”

These queries are intended to prove that we are capable of discovering every thing necessary to be known, independent of any thing but the works of creation. I beg leave to tell my readers what Mr PAINÉ and his unbelieving brethren wish to keep a secret. All the knowledge which he boasts of; all the acquaintance he professes to have with the being and attributes of GOD; and the duties of morality resulting therefrom; is meanly pilfered from the sacred volume, and then converted into arguments against revelation itself: It is, according to the well-known proverb, Robbing Peter to pay Paul. It is like picking a man's pocket to carry on a law-suit against him. If this can possibly be disputed, let the whole mass of ancient knowledge upon this subject be produced, and let the world see what jargon and nonsense unassisted reason must always exhibit. Nothing can be discerned prior to the promulgation of Christianity respecting the ALMIGHTY and his ways, but the most woful stupidity. Their supreme deity was the son of Saturn, and a monster of iniquity.

* Page 10.

quity. CICERO himself, who wrote professedly upon the subject before us, proclaims his ignorance to the world by the very title of his work; *de Natura Deorum*, concerning the nature of the gods. There is knowledge for you, reader, which THOMAS durst not venture to impose upon you for the sublime discoveries of reason, till he had manufactured it by the aid of revelation. That man, in point of moral rectitude, is precisely what he ever was, (a favourite tenet of our author's,) may do very well with such a den of rogues, whoremongers and pick-pockets, as the gods of the antients were; but no christian can digest the idea that GOD made us profligates. It is poor consolation to think that we are the workmanship of a manichean deity. If JEHOVAH made man at first as we now behold him; that is, corrupted and depraved, it is impossible that he can be displeased with his departure from virtue, and of consequence, that there can be no distinction between good and evil.

“The word of God,” says our author, “is the creation we behold*.” And a precious word the antients made of it, as we have already hinted, and as any one may have the gloomy satisfaction of seeing, by a perusal of the Pantheon. Were not infidelity determined to reject christianity

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at all hazards, in defiance of eternal damnation, it would surely be disposed to ask, how comes *reason* to know so much since JESUS of Nazareth appeared in the world, when it could discover so little for four thousand years before? This is a galling consideration to the deist, for which I defy him to account upon his own principles, but it reflects eternal honour upon the gospel of Christ. The Salvo commonly used upon other occasions will not do here, That man is progressive, and that we cannot set limits to the human understanding; for this cuts the throat of deism at one stroke. What was he doing with his progressive nature for so many ages before the christian æra? It was a progression backward, something like what THOMAS has been making since he wrote his *Rights of Man*.

Having now examined his ideas of revelation, and the total insufficiency of his proposed substitute, to answer the purposes of virtue and religion; I go on to consider what he has advanced upon *mystery*, *miracle*, and *prophecy*. On the first of these he speaks thus; "Every thing we behold
 " is a mystery to us; our own existence is
 " a mystery; the whole vegetable world is
 " a mystery*." But we see the facts, al-
 though

* Page 47.

though we cannot account for them; and therefore he will by no means allow that there is any analogy between the arcana of creation, and the incomprehensible tenets of the word of GOD. I confess I have studied this subject over and over, and I cannot perceive any thing in divine revelation, which is more mysterious than the simplest question, which may be put concerning any thing in nature. I observe also, that it is reasonable to conclude, *a priori**, that a system of religion from GOD will contain more mysterious points than the works of creation, because man was never able to conjecture what would be the contents of a revelation before it was given. If Mr PAINÉ had been acquainted with the absurdities of MANICHEUS, or even the profoundest researches of the wisest philosophers on matters of religion, he would have been ashamed to ascribe to reason what revelation alone has imparted. If our author and I are agreed that every thing in nature is a mystery to us, it follows of consequence, that if revelation be only liable to a similar objection, it must be
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* As I am sensible that this little work will fall into the hands of many who are unacquainted with the abstruse parts of learning, I have made short notes on such places as I conceive might be difficult to that class of people. *A priori*, is a phrase denoting the reasoning from cause to effect, as *a posteriori* means from effect to cause.

entitled to a similar respect. But I humbly apprehend that I can combat the deistical ideas of mystery on a ground entirely new. It is always asserted with an air of triumph, that if every thing in scripture was clear and mathematically certain, it would be altogether impossible to withhold our assent. Now, I hope to prove, that there are greater absurdities in the mathematics themselves than the veriest infidel out of hell ever pretended to father on the gospel of Christ. The incarnation, the divinity of the son of God, the atonement, and such like, are declared either to be ridiculous, blasphemous, or obvious contradictions, none of which can ever be proved without an absolute knowledge of the Supreme Being. But are there not monstrous contradictions in the mathematics, which the meanest capacity can clearly comprehend? Yes, we all know that the universe must be limited in its extent, because to be absolutely without bounds is essential to God. Yet matter, we are told, is infinitely divisible, a more shocking contradiction than any christian ever made use of. That which is divisible cannot be infinite, and that which is infinite cannot be divisible. Yet this is not all the shocking nonsense contained in the problem to which I now allude. Matter is finite or limited, but still this finite contains an infinite number

number of infinites; for there is no particle of matter so small, which may not be divided into others infinitely smaller. To say that a sixpence contains an infinite number of shillings is not more dreadfully absurd, and therefore it is altogether impossible to conceive how a mathematician can dispute the truth of any thing. These men who boast of demonstration also tell us, that two parallel lines, though protracted ad infinitum, will never meet. This is true if they were strictly parallel, and what every child must perceive; but the curiosity is, that they will never meet though continually approximating. Now, by actual experiment we find that they must meet, and intersect one another, and that their distance from each other, after the intersection must be to their distance from the point before the intersection, in the ratio of one to one. Another absurdity, reader, and I have done with this part of the subject. If ACHILLES and a tortoise run a race; if the former goes an hundred times faster than the latter, and the tortoise be only a yard before ACHILLES, the mathematician will demonstrate that it will never be overtaken. The very opposite is the truth, as can be shewn by a trial. ACHILLES must come up with it by the time it has gone one yard; and when it has travelled the short
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space of six feet, ACHILLES is an hundred yards before it*. Such ridiculous nonsense, gave me an early disgust at the mathematics. I was fond of divinity from a child, and to that in a peculiar manner, I turned my attention. I only applied myself to the study of mathematics, for the purpose of ascertaining, whether they were intitled to the very high encomiums passed upon them by the sons of infidelity, and in that light my labours have not been in vain. I find that the deist exults, he knows not why, and must believe as a mathematician, he knows not what. In the whole compass of revelation there is nothing like the precious mathematical morsels I have now exhibited†. All that is incomprehensible in
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* I know that mathematicians blush and are ashamed at this delicious problem, and have therefore called it the *Sophism* of Zeno. I allow it is a dreadful sophism indeed, and I heartily join in a laugh against it: but I forbid the mathematician at his peril to smile; for it is, and must be true, if the infinite divisibility of matter be admitted as a fact.

† I grant that all the instances now adduced, are demonstrably certain upon mathematical principles; but this I apprehend is so much the worse, as they are absolutely folly and nonsense to both reason and experiment. I have no aversion to the science, but I trust I may be permitted to make as free with it, as thousands have done with the word of God. As to the infinite divisibility of matter, I have heard mathematicians honestly declare that it is involved in many difficulties, but they would not yield the point though conquered. They affirmed it to be conceivable at least, while their language ought to have been, that it can be conceived impossible. If they do not mean that it is
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scripture, only tends to prove that it could not be a human invention. It would be something worse than lunacy to say, that man can discover any thing which he cannot comprehend, when it is discovered. This I humbly apprehend is a formidable observation; and that I may not avail myself of its force, without putting its truth beyond dispute, let infidelity point me out a single discovery in any art or science whatever, the invention of man, which any one either does not, or may not understand. Since the greatest deist under heaven will find it impossible to make the gospel a human invention, let him call it, if he will, the work of the Devil, supposing him to exist; and surely we must conclude, that a kinder devil could not have been created, to cheat men out of misery and woe, and cheat them into happiness, both here and hereafter. I think I have said enough on mystery, and proved to the satisfaction of every enquirer, that nothing can be found in scripture,—that nothing has been fathered upon it, in any age, by a thousand degrees, so absurd as has

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infinitely divisible in the rational and metaphysical sense of the word, which they will blush to contend for: why not use expressions capable of defining their meaning precisely, and not lay themselves open to the just ridicule of good sense? Its particles may be divisible as far as man can trace them, even in idea; but to say that the division is absolutely endless, would be blasphemy against the nature of God himself.

now been fixed upon the favourite science of its determined opponents: I proceed therefore, to our author's account of *prophecy*.

Reader, whether you understand greek or not, you will certainly be surpris'd to hear, that a poet and a prophet are synonymous expressions. For this piece of information, if it be good for any thing, you are indebted to the wonderful genius of Mr PAINÉ; and he will prove that they are so by this whale of an argument, *because they are so*. This is all the reason I can perceive for so bold an assertion, through the whole book. What we call a prophet, the greeks called *prophetes*, made up of two words which signify to speak beforehand, or to tell what is to come. This was never pretended by a poet, properly so called, and never before was it deemed a characteristick of a maker of verses. The prophesying with the harp, psaltery and tabret, is what our author cannot comprehend; as if there was any thing mysterious or absurd in setting to music the predictions of future events. The Church of England sings prose as well as verse, and if THOMAS PAINÉ sees any more difficulty in singing a prediction than a piece of history, I frankly declare that I do not.

“ If

“ If by a prophet,” says our author, “ we
 “ are to suppose a man, to whom the AL-
 “ MIGHTY communicated some event that
 “ would take place in future ; either there
 “ were such men, or there were not. If
 “ there were, it is consistent to believe
 “ that the event so communicated, would
 “ be told in terms that could be under-
 “ stood*.” I beg leave to know, where the
 prophecy is to be found, from the begin-
 ning to the end of the *Old Testament*,
 which is altogether unintelligible to a care-
 ful investigator, or so plain in all its cir-
 cumstances as to encourage a forgery ? But
 here I have granted too much, for no vil-
 lain was ever so daring as to hazard a pre-
 diction properly so called. The sybilline
 prophecies were manufactured long after
 the commencement of the christian epoch,
 by some who had been well acquainted with
 the predictions of scripture. The responses
 of the antient oracles were a bundle of
 trash, which no candid mind will compare
 with the writings of a sacred seer. Let the
 event be what it would, the oracles were
 sure to be right, as is evident from the an-
 swer of one of them to the king of Epirus,
 “ *Aio te Æacida, Romanos vincere posse.*” Ac-
 cording to every rule of construction, this
 has two opposite meanings, ‘ I say, son of
 Æacus, that you can conquer the Romans :’

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or,

or, ' I say that the Romans can conquer you, the son of Æacus.' What jargon and nonsense is here! and how unlike the majestic, bold, and godlike dartings into futurity, recorded in the *Bible*!

It has been ascertained by abilities infinitely superior to those of Mr PAINÉ*, that ISAIAH flourished about seven hundred years before the birth of Christ; and yet he speaks of every thing relating to his manner of life, as if he had been his contemporary; and in such unequivocal language, as to be incapable of misconstruction. Impostors, aware of the danger of such experiments, have always kept clear of prophesying; because the knowledge of contingencies, or of things certainly future, belongs only to GOD: It is a proof in support of a Divine revelation, equal to the certainty of any problem of EUCLID. Some other evidences of a Divine mission may, perhaps, be capable of counterfeit; but it is absolutely impossible that this ever can. JESUS ventured to declare that one stone of Jerusalem should not be left upon another, and

* I mean the abilities of the immortal Sir Isaac Newton, whose indefatigable industry has done almost as much for religion as astronomy; an important circumstance of which I would remind THOMAS PAINÉ. If I have charged our author with ignorance, so did the great Sir Isaac charge Dr Halley, and told him without any kind of circumlocution not to speak of religion; "I have studied the subject," said that prodigy of learning, "and I know that you know nothing of the matter."

and this was literally accomplished in the space of forty years: Had he been a deceiver, one who was only shooting a bow at a venture, he would have left his disciples to be branded with perpetual infamy, if it had not happened, and betrayed a degree of unrelenting barbarity towards them, which cannot be fathered upon MAHOMET himself. Nay, he declared that he was to rise again in three days, which all the hellish artifice of his combined enemies could neither prevent, nor make the world disbelieve: The apostles continued to preach it where it could easily have been detected as a lie, if it had not been true; and an infernal Sanhedrim was too much interested in the success of its belief, to pass it over in silence, if they could have refuted it*. But I am not yet called upon by our author, to review this subject directly. Upon the whole, it is evident, that God only can predict future events; and therefore it is as certain that he who can predetermine with assurance what will happen for seven hundred or a thousand years after he is rotten in the dust, must have it from him, to whom all things are present, as it is that two and two are equal to four. What pitiable folly, or unpardonable impudence must it then be, for Mr PAINÉ to assert, that

* Trial of the witnesses.

that “ a prophet is a character uselefs and “ unnecessary*.” But he who can assert any thing, may affirm this into the bargain, as it can scarcely render him more ridiculous than he is already.

This pamphlet, which I have not only undertaken to examine, but to refute the sentiments it contains, is such a compound of heterogeneous substances, that I am more perplexed in reducing it to any thing like a system, than in refuting every sophistical argument it contains. He introduces Revelation first, and then we have to wade through a chaos of unconnected matter, before we come at the evidence. I have scraped together what he says upon mystery and prophecy, and shall next animadvert on his account of *miracles*.

Many vague definitions have been given of a miracle, but it is not the less possible, or capable of being defined on that account. It is an act contrary to, or a temporary suspension of, the established laws of nature. In opposition to this, Mr P A I N E confidently affirms, that, “ unless we know “ the full extent of those laws, and of “ what are commonly called the powers of “ nature, we are not able to judge whether
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* Page 54.

“ any thing that may appear to us wonderful, or miraculous, be within, or be beyond, or be contrary to, her natural power of acting*.” He makes no scruple of telling us what a wonderfully scientific genius he was, at a very early period of life; but what is become of it now? Every philosopher knows, that all heavy bodies gravitate towards some point as their centre; that they possess mobility, divisibility, attraction, cohesion, and such like, while he honestly confesses that he knows no more of the essence of matter, than a child. He knows it to be consistent with the laws of nature, for a man to die, and directly repugnant to all her laws, for a bullet to remain suspended in the air, without the application of external force. Upon these points he can determine with absolute certainty, and yet remain an utter stranger to the essence of matter. By one bold assertion, however, without the shadow of an argument, our author has cut off the propriety of studying the sciences. If we can tell nothing about a miracle, we cannot point out a deviation from the laws of nature, and consequently are incapable of judging what is a conformity. This again paves the way for another absurdity, or rather a piece of
of

* Pages 49, and 50.

blasphemy,—that it is out of the power of GOD himself to work a miracle; for if it be impossible for a man ever to say when a miracle is performed (the purport of Mr PAINE's reasoning;) it is equally the same, in as far as man is concerned, as if our author defied Omnipotence to make the attempt. But let us take a moral view of this dreadful argumentation, and see where it will land us. If a knowledge of the whole extent of nature be necessary to aid us in judging when her laws are violated or suspended, it is equally reasonable to assert, that a perfect knowledge of the divine essence, is an indispensable qualification for judging of any thing he does. Let our author then be consistent, and commence an atheist, for he has now cut himself off from the deplorable privilege of being even a deist.

If we saw a bullet suspended in the open air, or a man actually dead returning to his former state of existence, we could be at no loss to pronounce them miracles, or suspensions of the well-known laws of nature, should Mr PAINE write himself to death in maintaining the contrary. He seems to vaunt exceedingly about the ascension of a baloon being capable of passing for a miracle, with a bundle of absurdities to the same effect. Electricity, magnetism,
or

or the suspension of animation when it is not extinct, may surprize the ignorant, but can never be deemed miraculous, as he boldly maintains. Men apparently dead by being a considerable time under water, have been restored to their wonted activity, by means of fumigation, friction, and such like; but he must be insane indeed, who can compare this with the resurrection of a man dead and buried, accomplished by a single word. In the instances adduced by THOMAS, there is no violence offered to the powers of nature; they are neither suspended nor reversed. It is some comfort to christians, that the miracles of their LORD and his apostles, were never denied by CELSUS, that monster of ignorance, sophistry and malice, although he wished to make the world believe that they were the result of magic. "Supposing," says that arch-enemy, "as many things to be true as are
 " written concerning healings and the re-
 " surrection, or concerning a few loaves
 " feeding many, of which many fragments
 " were left; or as many other things as
 " the disciples, speaking marvellously, have
 " written: Come, let us believe those to
 " be wrought by thee; they are of the same
 " kind with the works of inchanters*." This is reasoning by the lump indeed, and round-

* Origen against Celsus, l. 1

roundly taking things for granted without the least shadow of a proof. Did CELSUS or our author ever hear of legerdemain filling a man's belly, or making him believe he was full when hungry? A nimble-fingered rogue may delude the organs of vision, but the coats of the stomach are proof against his juggling. CELSUS however is intitled to our thanks for his acknowledgements upon this subject; and for such a favour, we shall pardon his stupidity. In another place he makes the christians say, we esteem him (that is JESUS) to be the Son of GOD, seeing he cured the lame, and the blind, and raised the dead. Then he breaks out into the following reverie; "O light and truth! With
 " his own voice he hath expressly confess-
 " ed according as ye also have written;
 " wherefore there shall come to you others
 " also using the like powers, wicked men
 " and imposters; and he names one SA-
 " TAN the worker of these things. So
 " that he denies not, that these things
 " are indeed nothing divine, but the works
 " of the wicked*." There is little of either light or truth here, but still a confession of the reality of the miracles performed by CHRIST, which is all I desire of the antient infidel.

I am

* Origen against Celsus, l. 1.

I am well aware, that to have recourse to scripture authority against Mr PAINÉ, would be reasoning in a circle, taking for granted the very thing which he says is not proved; and therefore I resolved never to meet him with any mode of reasoning which he dare presume to reject. He cannot produce me an author contemporary with CHRIST, or any of his apostles, who was ever able to persuade the people of that very age, that LAZARUS was not raised from the dead; that JESUS did not feed five thousand men with food insufficient for twenty; or that he did not rise himself from the mansions of the grave. If CELSUS will not help him, in vain shall he expect the aid of PORPHYRY, TRYPHON, PLINY, TACITUS or JOSEPHUS. None of these men were friends to CHRIST, most of them avowed enemies; and therefore what could tempt them to acknowledge that miracles were wrought by him, the success of whose cause they could by no means relish, let Mr PAINÉ inform Europe, when he finds leisure. When a man wishes to be an enemy, to bring into contempt the character and transactions of another, he will be the last person in the world to confess the truth of any thing which enhances his reputation. I could easily prove that the four gospels, which contain the history of the life and transactions of CHRIST, bear

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higher marks of being authentic and genuine than any history in the world; but I will not quote from it as authority, in combating a deist, although he has quoted what seemed to please him from the books of *Job* and the *Psalms*.

Now, if miracles can be performed; if both jewish and heathen infidels confessed that they were done by JESUS; upon what new invented principles of logic will THOMAS get them denied? If a man should declare he had received a commission from God to publish a doctrine or doctrines to the world, upon the belief of which, depended the everlasting fate of the human race; and if he should bid the ocean be quiet, the tempest cease, the dead rise, and the dumb speak, to convince them he was no deceiver; will our author say, that he was leagued against his maker? Impossible! I have the charity to think that he is not yet quite so mad. This would charge the ALMIGHTY with the highest contempt for the honour of his own majesty, and the most lamentable cruelty towards the workmanship of his hands. Men may endeavour to cheat one another, but when a man directly appeals to GOD for the truth of what he affirms, and does works which are evidently beyond the reach of human wisdom and
power,

power, to establish what he asserts; no sophistry can free the GOD of nature from being the author of such a cheat, even supposing, for the sake of argument, that the devil could perform them. When such appeals are made, on occasions so momentous, the matter is no longer between man and man, but between GOD and man, and consequently to suppose imposition to be triumphant here, is either point blank to deny the divine existence, or that he has abandoned this our planet to the direction of chance. A certain person for whose moral character Mr PAINÉ professes great veneration, once said, If Satan be divided against Satan, how can his kingdom stand? But he has made GOD, Satan and CHRIST to conspire against mankind, by saying they may be deceived in the most momentous of all concerns, for which I leave him to account at a judgment-bar.

He next comments like a merry Andrew on the circumstance of JONAH being swallowed by the whale, which, he observes, may answer all cases of miracles. It is astonishing to consider what profound ignorance pervades his whole work. JONAH never called this a miracle, and he never once urged it as a proof to the Ninevites of his divine mission: What unpardonable effrontery to call that a miracle, which was
neither

neither named nor adduced as such; and which he has only set up for one, that he may have the pleasure of knocking it down! He has made a miracle also of our SAVIOUR'S temptation in the wilderness, the first time I frankly acknowledge, that I ever heard it receive the designation. That which proves every thing, proves nothing at all; and our author can make a miracle of any thing to serve a particular purpose, while at other times he affirms there can be no such thing. Speaking of miracles, he adds; "It is the most equivocal sort of evidence that can be set up; for the belief is not to depend upon the thing called a miracle, but upon the credit of the reporter, who says that he saw it; and therefore the thing, were it true, would have no better chance of being believed than if it were a lie*." If THOMAS meant that the belief of a miracle is not to depend upon itself to the spectators of its performance, it is a gross mistake. If he wishes to assert, that succeeding ages must believe it on the testimony of witnesses, he speaks like a child, by making a prodigious bustle about what every body knows. I have already said enough on the nature of human testimony, and proved that the supposition of its false-

* Page 51.

falsehood is often more impossible than the belief of its truth,—the very manner in which we remove every difficulty concerning the Divine existence. I have now examined every thing material in our author's pamphlet relating to the gospel, and the evidence by which its heavenly origin is supported. I might here put a period to my labours, and bid my readers adieu; but to make this reply as perfect as my poor abilities will admit, it may not be improper to try the merits of his arguing on the *Mosaic* account of creation, and the impossibility which he pretends there is in believing both the gospel and the discoveries of *Astronomy*. He who has very little learning, seldom fails to talk of that little on every occasion. What the praises of *Astronomy*, and the ridicule of linguistry had to do with a deistical refutation of revealed religion, it would require the art of divination to conjecture. It was perhaps to let his readers know that he had a smattering of *Astronomy*, and that he hated the languages because he understood them not. He who has heard of the fox and the grapes, may apply the fable on the present occasion, if he thinks proper.

The *Mosaic* account of the creation seems too childish and insignificant for his
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*copernican-head**. “As to the account of “the creation” says he, “with which the “book of *Genesis* opens, it has all the appearance of being a tradition†.” It gives me pain to hear such consummate folly from such a quarter. There are two classes of men who may be ruined by the pamphlet under review; infidels who wish it to triumph, and those, in a staggering situation, who know not what to believe. The former are contented with ridicule and no argument, while the latter are easily led aside by a sophistical play upon words. Where is the traditional appearance of the *Mosaic* account of the creation, when it allows in general terms all the discoveries of a GALILEO, a COPERNICUS, or a Sir ISAAC NEWTON? It speaks of the formation of our earth, sun, moon and stars in language more simple and sublime than our author could ever reach. It therefore acknowledges the solar system at least, and no proof can be adduced to shew, that it includes not the universe under the expression, “he made the stars also.” But the age of MOSES’ world has given very great offence, and of consequence we shall see if it is well
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* *Copernican-head*. A head filled with the knowledge of Astronomy as explained by COPERNICUS a native of *Thorn*, whose System was corrected and enlarged by Sir ISAAC NEWTON.

† *Page 12.*

well founded. The universe must have had a beginning sometime, for to suppose it eternal is to make it GOD himself. If then it ever began to be;—if ever there was a time when it was not, the same blasphemous objection is equally applicable upon the supposition that it is ten thousand millions of ages old; as that it is not quite six thousand years. GOD never began to exist, and consequently a single moment comes as near to his eternity as ten thousand ages. If this earth, says the infidel, be scarcely six thousand years old, what was GOD doing from eternity, before he began to create? I retort the question upon him, and ask in my turn; suppose it is one hundred millions of millions of millions of centuries since the formation of all things, what was God doing before its commencement? The scripture account of creation is in perfect unison with every subsequent astronomical discovery, and the period from which it dates the birth of nature, is only liable to a similar objection with every other hypothesis.

Our author goes on, and says, “ Though
 “ it is not a direct article of the christian
 “ system, that this world that we inhabit is
 “ the whole of the habitable creation, yet
 “ it is so worked up therewith, from what is
 “ called the Mosaic account of the creation,
 “ that

“ that to believe otherwise, that is, to be-
 “ lieve that GOD created a plurality of
 “ worlds, at least as numerous as what we
 “ call stars, renders the christian system of
 “ faith at once little and ridiculous, and
 “ scatters it in the mind like feathers in
 “ the air. The two beliefs cannot be held
 “ together in the same mind, and he who
 “ thinks that he believes both, has thought
 “ but little of either*.” Now, I believe
 both, I have thought a good deal upon
 both, and I know it is impossible to prove
 that the one persuasion is incompatible with
 the other. If a man thinks our earth the
 only habitable globe which the Divine Be-
 ing has formed, he may be a good man
 and a good christian; and if he is convinced
 that the worlds in the immensity of space
 exceed our calculation, where is the repug-
 nancy between that and the belief of the
 gospel? Christianity never utters a sentence
 against the belief of a plurality of worlds,
 but asserts it on every proper occasion. But
 says the enemy of CHRIST, if you believe
 that there are innumerable worlds in the
 vast expanse, you must have a mean idea
 of the majesty and wisdom of the AL-
 MIGHTY, to suppose that he could be so
 much taken up with this diminutive spot.
 What! Send his beloved Son, or, as some
 of

* Page 40.

of you call him, his eternal Son, to suffer and die for the sins of a handful of beings? Let THOMAS speak for all his brethren, because he has a knack at representing things in the most favourable light for the cause of infidelity. "From whence," says he "could arise the solitary and strange
 " conceit that the ALMIGHTY, who had
 " millions of worlds equally dependent on
 " his protection, should quit the care of
 " all the rest, and come to die in our
 " world, because, they say, one man and
 " one woman had eaten an apple. And
 " on the other hand, are we to suppose
 " that every world in the boundless crea-
 " tion, had an EVE, an apple, a serpent,
 " and a Redeemer? In this case, the person
 " who is irreverently called the Son of
 " GOD, and sometimes called GOD him-
 " self, would have nothing else to do than
 " to travel from world to world, in an
 " endless succession of death, with scarcely
 " a momentary interval of life*." At the fatal
 stupidity of mankind I have often sighed in
 secret. While they deem five or seven
 years necessary to learn to make a table, a
 spoon, or a pair of shoes, they think no
 qualifications requisite for expounding the
 doctrines of divinity. A mechanic out of
 employment, with nothing to recommend
 him but impudence, equal to his folly, will
 F aban-

abandon the hammer, and knock his head against the pulpit. Conscious that he will every where meet with as big fools as himself, he knows he must always find employment, while he can distend his gullet. What such a man is to the pulpit, Mr PAINÉ is to the press, when he writes upon *Theology*.

I have already proved that the belief of ten thousand worlds is no more inconsistent with the profession of Christianity than one, and that the religion of JESUS never denies a single discovery made by the ablest astronomer. What then is the meaning of all this bravado, now quoted from our author? Can he, or any man, prove that the inhabitants of the other worlds either fell or did not fall, or what method of recovery infinite wisdom thought proper to devise, admitting for a moment that they had all rebelled? Will our champion, or the most fool-hardy of his coadjutors venture to say, that it was any way necessary for us to get a history of these things? It would be as consistent to expect an account of the making of logarithms in an *Essay on Poetry*, as a recital of the transactions of other planets in the concerns of our own. He speaks of the ALMIGHTY, as relinquishing the care of other planets by the concern we christians say he has demonstrated towards ours; but as christians never said so, as it cannot be inferred from

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a single article of their creed, it is a shameful, fallacious, and blasphemous conclusion of his own, and worthy of his pen. JEHOVAH cannot leave the care of a single atom he has formed to the guidance of blind chance, else anarchy and destruction would be the inevitable issue.

He loves mightily to play away upon the story of the apple, as he calls it, which I am sure will only gain a laugh among the refuse of mankind. In the breast of every scholar, it must excite pity for the author. Before he attempted to turn it into ridicule, he should have understood a particular subject, which I believe is too metaphysical for his volatile genius. Some things are evil in their own nature, independent of the will of GOD; others are only known to be so by the promulgation of his will, and others may be made so by his arbitrary appointment, if he thinks proper. All things indifferent in themselves, that is, which may be either done or not without contracting moral defilement, come under the last of these distinctions. Abstractly considered, it can never be proved criminal to eat an apple; but if GOD should prohibit the use of it for reasons best known to himself, to eat it would be as great an insult offered to his Divine Majesty, as the murder of a fellow creature. It is nothing to the purpose in the present

sent debate whether GOD ever did so or not; for since Mr PAINÉ dare not deny, that he may do so, whenever he pleases, none but a fool can smile at the idea.

I have seen the pamphlet of Mr WAKEFIELD as a reply to Mr PAINÉ, since I began to write, and therefore if he had even touched the vitals of our author's arguments, I should have been silent. But after the perusal of it, as a necessary precaution for avoiding every thing advanced by him, I found that the whole business of a refutation was left to another. From a sacred regard to a subject which I have studied for eight or nine years; from a wish to let infidelity see that some more powerful advocate must espouse its cause before it can have any reason to triumph, and to be of some service to such as wish well to the cause of christianity, though in a staggering condition.—I have undertaken the task: Whether I have done all the justice to it which might have been done, remains with the world to determine. I cannot help observing that men are indebted to Mr PAINÉ, and many others for such performances, because the world would never have been favoured with such a number of able defences of Christianity, had they not appeared. The religion of JESUS has sustained many a fierce attack, and come off triumphant in a thousand conflicts;

fiets; and therefore our author was more extravagant than the knight of *Mancha* when he encountered the wind-mill, to expect a victory over such a veteran.

I am sorry that Mr WAKEFIELD has exposed his weakness by a reply to our author, which is rather a vindication than a refutation. It is very deficient in point of argument, and the style is too turgid and pompous for a controversial work. His ironical story of the boy that was swallowed by a shark, has outdone Mr PAINE for absurdity and a contempt of things sacred, and puts his whole work beneath the notice of common sense. If I am not much mistaken, he is a Socinian, and therefore there is not a great deal between his creed and our author's; if they were as nearly related themselves, I would call them cousin-germans. He who has a gullet large enough to swallow the tenets of old FAUSTUS, ought to reject *in toto* the sacred records; for there is not in the universe such a mass of incoherent, unintelligible nonsense as the *Bible*, if Socinianism be true. In speaking of miracles, with a design to confront our author, Mr WAKEFIELD has got into altitudes beyond the reach of every human comprehension, and made the profoundest jargon of the schoolmen appear beautiful and consistent. He says that the impression made upon his mind who sees a miracle or any event

event whatever, does not exceed the impression of testimony on the mind of another who saw it not, by an *evanescent infinitesimal of efficacy*. Reader, if you understand this, much good may it do you, but so thick and impenetrable is my pericranium, that I comprehend it not. I am certain it is no defence of miracles, but it must leave our friend THOMAS in full possession of the field, and allow him to stalk about in triumph like the champion of the Philistines*.

In publications of this kind, it is almost impossible to stand clear of ridicule. HORACE must laugh, and JUVENAL must frown. I have smiled when the subject would

* A Mr M'NEILLE has given the world an answer to Mr PAINE'S *Age of Reason*, which is indeed far superior to that of Mr WAKEFIELD. The one seems to be the language of infidelity under the mask of friendship; the other a production of an orthodox Christian. But I cannot help thinking that neither of them come up to the precise idea of a reply to a deist. To quote scripture to such a man as PAINE, and consider it as in the smallest degree conclusive in point of argument, is a begging of the question. Of this practice, however, Mr M'NEILLE is not very guilty, although I humbly apprehend that he has not answered the *Age of Reason*. The nature of controversial writings is such, let them be executed in as masterly a manner as possible, that the reader thinks he has abundant patience if he can attend to the subject, without being led away from it by what is foreign to the purpose. To follow WAKEFIELD through the greater part of sixteen pages in a defence of the divinity of CHRIST, was certainly to step very far out of his road, and give his judicious readers unexpected trouble. The dispute was between him and PAINE, who denies not any particular doctrine of *revelation*, but the whole of it.

would permit me, but the satire in general is here rather pungent. I have ever been of opinion that no author could be justified for a profusion, either of grave or ludicrous satire, where the subject was not interesting, because it was to give offence without any adequate gain to counterbalance it; but in the present debate, the case was very different. I had to list a writer, not like his unbelieving predecessors, who seemed afraid to alarm or insult the opinions of professing Christians by such open blasphemy as the *Age of Reason*. They apprehended that great deference and respect were due to the sentiments of so many myriads, and of consequence their design is less visible, and their diction less abominable. TINDAL'S Christianity as old as the Creation, is a striking proof of this. We all know the author's design was to set aside revelation, by attempting to evince the sufficiency of Natural Religion; yet in the whole performance, there is not a single sentence so shocking as the best of Mr PAINE'S. In this case it was impossible for me to be so mild and ceremonious, as the generality of writers, especially when they

Mr WAKEFIELD is a reputed *Socinian*, and therefore a vindication of the Trinity, or Divine nature of JESUS CHRIST against his *Sophistry*, would have been good employment for Mr McNEILLE in a separate performance. I hope, however, that his pamphlet will be of service to the seriously disposed, while infidels must have something more formidable; and I wish it success with all my heart.

they attempt to refute what might as well be let alone. Here the dearest interests of mankind are deeply concerned; the honour of GOD himself is treated with contempt, and silence therefore is treason against the Majesty of heaven. Here one cannot always be mild, without betraying that indifference about religion which is a disgrace to humanity.

Let not the advocates for the political sentiments of Mr PAINE any longer deny that the *Age of Reason* is his. The stile, the quaint expressions, and the manner of arguing, are so exactly the same with the *Rights of Man*, making a reasonable allowance for the difference of the subject, that he must be blind indeed who sees not where to get a father to it. You may no doubt be ready to cry out, you could not have expected such a piece from that quarter; but let this put you in mind of what VIRGIL says:

*Fronti nulla fides ; nimium ne crede colori**.

I anticipate with pleasure that happy day when christianity, after reiterated conflicts with infidelity, shall be universally believed, revered and obeyed. The mountain of the LORD shall be established upon the top of

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* 'Trust not too much to appearances,' is a free, though not a literal, translation of the above line.

the hills, and all flesh shall flow unto it. To survey mankind rising higher and higher in a conformity to the source of excellence; to see the light of the gospel diffused through the whole habitable globe; and to behold the never-ceasing employment of heaven begun upon earth, are indeed ravishing prospects. Then THOMAS PAINE (if ever there were such a man*) educated a quaker, and dying a deist, shall be forgotten as an untimely birth, and his theological writings consigned to the flames.

Reader, I have now brought this small performance to a close. I found considerable pleasure in reviewing the *Age of Reason*, not indeed on its own account, but because I humbly conceived that I might be instrumental in protecting all those from its pestilential influence, who may favour my pamphlet with a perusal. If my expectations have been too sanguine, I am not the first who has been disappointed. I trust my design is laudable. I undertook it with the honest intention of doing good, and I leave the issue to the management of that GOD who is love and truth in the abstract.

* See the last page of the *Age of Reason*.