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A
GUIDE TO REASON.

OR AN

EXAMINATION

OF

THOMAS PAINE'S *AGE OF REASON*,

AND INVESTIGATION OF TRUE AND FABULOUS THEOLOGY.

BY SAMUEL STILWELL.

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1794.

TO THE
CITIZENS
OF
The United States of America.

*My beloved Friends,
and Fellow Citizens,*

THE moving cause of this Examination of *The Age of Reason*, recommended to your protection by Thomas Paine, is the love I bear to GOD, the Truth, my Fellow-Citizens, and all Mankind universally.

I heartily wish your present and eternal Happiness; and am

Your Friend and Fellow-Citizen,

SAMUEL STILWELL.

A Guide to Reason.

THE Age of Reason, put under your protection by Thomas Paine, in my opinion, is the offspring of ignorance concerning the Scriptures ; or intended as an imposition on those who have not the knowledge of them. It appears to me very curious, and worthy observation, that Mr. Paine, in the first place, puts his work under the protection of the Citizens of the United States of America, and

and then goes on to inform us that the moving cause, and the necessity of the work, was the Revolution in France : It is truly a mystery, and very astonishing, that France, being left without any system of Theology, should make it necessary for us to abolish our present happy system. This I think, borders too much upon mystery for a person to meddle with who professes to deal in plain matters of fact.

From the example of his fellow-citizens of France, in making their profession of faith, Mr. Paine advances his creed :

“ I believe in one God, and no
 “ more ; and I hope for happiness
 “ beyond this life. I believe the
 “ equality of man ; and I believe
 “ that religious duties consist in do-
 “ ing

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“ing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy.”

The last sentence appears as if Mr Paine grew ashamed to transcribe the bible any farther in exact terms, and altered the construction: for every endeavour to make our fellow-creatures happy is an act of humiliation: but *doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly*, are scripture or bible phrases, to which it seems Mr. Paine was indebted for those moral precepts.

The equality of man, Mr. Paine says, was the doctrine of Christ; I say the scriptural or bible account of the Christian's God, is essentially one. Here it does not require any great degree of discernment to see that Mr. Paine is indebted to the very book he endeavours to invalidate

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date for the moral precepts he is labouring to make us believe are the productions of his fruitful reason.

After saying he does not believe in the creed professed by any church that he knows of, he adds, "My own mind is my own church." I cannot conceive by what new system of logic Mr. Paine can make out his mind, in its present situation, to be a church! The literal meaning of the word *church* is the collective body of christians, or the place which christians consecrate to the worship of God. Very few, I believe, will acknowledge Mr. Paine's mind to be the collective body of christians; and it is not very probable that it is, or ever will be, while he remains an anti-christian,

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christian, consecrated by christiain as the place to worship God in.

Mr. Paine says, "It is necessary
"to the happiness of man, that he
"be mentally faithful to himself."
If Mr. Paine had been faithful to himself and his friends, I believe he would not have published his sentiments on religion until he were better informed in the nature of true religion.

Infidelity, he says, does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving. I believe his Age of Reason was not intended for those who understand the bible and its authority, but for those who do not.

What Mr. Paine's motive is in endeavouring to make a revolution in the system of religion in America, I cannot tell. We have a happy government: the laws of
our

our land, by experience, are found to be good; and these laws are not inconsistent with our present system of religion, but are founded on good reason and the moral law, and precepts contained in the Bible.

He next infers, from the different systems of religion, that the way to God is not open to every man alike. This observation can be no ways applicable to the citizens of the United States of America: because every person here may worship God agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience. Neither is it applicable to the Christian system: because a man may embrace it, or he may not. If he embraces it, it teaches him that, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, he is to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*

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world; and to obey the moral precepts delivered by Christ, which Mr. Paine says are the best that ever have been preached, or that none have exceeded them.

If he thinks that future happiness ought to lie open to saint and sinner alike, and that rewards and punishments are not consistent with reason, then a man's will in this way of reasoning is his law, and all legislative authority becomes at once unnecessary. I have too good an opinion of Mr. Paine to believe that he saw that these consequences necessarily result from his Reason: if they do not, I have not the right power of reason; and am led to conclude that our reason is depraved, and cannot be an unerring guide to true theology. Mr. Paine's definition of *revelation* is too weak to need any confutation.

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“ When Moses told the children
 “ of Israel that he received the two
 “ tables of the commandments
 “ from the hands of God, they
 “ were not obliged to believe him,
 “ because they had no other autho-
 “ rity for it than his telling them
 “ so.” But Moses does not call
 upon them to believe this message
 by his merely telling them so : his
 credentials come with the message ;
 so that it is no hearsay revelation,
 for the people all saw the display of
 supernatural agency, the moun-
 tain smoking and quaking, and the
 voice waxing louder and louder ;
 with many other displays of the
 Almighty power, that left it with-
 out contradiction : so that a migh-
 ty dread seized the people, and
 they all believed ; and the autho-
 rity was so good, that none of them
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that I know of have disputed it since.

It may be said, These are circumstances we do not believe. I answer, Mr. Paine did not deny a part of this story : and if the authority is good for any part of it, we have the same authority for the whole. The same may be observed in respect to the birth of Christ. Mr. Paine mentions nothing of the star seen in the east, that led the wise men to the place where the infant Saviour was ; nor of the slaughter Herod made of the young children, in order to destroy the Prince of peace : but makes a particular note of God's visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children. But it is not found in all the bible that God punishes the children for their father's sins, the children
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dren being innocent; though we frequently see children suffering on account of their father's sins. Let one instance suffice. The father by drunkenness brings his children to a suffering state.

Mr. Paine says that the story concerning the birth of Christ was believed only by the Gentiles, and that the Jews never credited the story. This impious assertion I flatly deny: for many of the Jews believed in him, and within the circle of my acquaintance I have known an instance of a Jew embracing the Christian religion.

He then proceeds to sap the foundation of the Christian system, by comparing it with the heathen mythology. This step completely overturns his own system; for it was by Reason and Philosophy that
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the heathens found out so many gods ; and this was the very foundation of their mythology. The philosophical reasoners introduced the multiplicity of gods ; and if the Almighty had not revealed himself to man some other way, it is not unlikely that our modern philosophers would have found out as many more gods as they have made new discoveries in the planetary system.

As to the resurrection and ascension of Christ, there was sufficient demonstration of them to convince all but those who were determined not to believe. Even the circumstances that happened at his death, to go no farther, were sufficient demonstrations to prove to all Jerusalem, and all succeeding generations that lay open to conviction, that

that Christ was the Divine Person he professed to be.

But Mr. Paine says, that a thing which every body is required to believe, requires that the proof and evidence of it should be equal to all. If we follow this great Revolutionist, he will lead us into great absurdities. For instance: a man signs a will in the presence of two or three witnesses; after his death these witnesses act as proxies for all the parties concerned, and we rest our belief in the veracity of the witnesses. This is just and reasonable, and the most convenient; and this example we take from the bible. But, agreeable to Mr. P.'s way of reasoning, all the parties concerned, and (if the estate should fall in dispute) the court and all the jurors, must have seen the will
signed

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signed, or the case could not be decided. Upon the same principles Christ must come every year, or every day, to satisfy the incredulity of man. If nothing is to be believed but what we have ocular demonstration of, the present harmony that subsists in our religion and government, with the happiness attending them, or communicated to us by them, is at once involved in a thousand difficulties, and we must fall the unhappy victims to a biassed Reason.

Behold the Goodness and Mercy of God, at a time when heathen superstition and philosophical idolatry had introduced a multitude of gods! The Lord of the Universe, in order to teach mankind their duty to God and their fellow-creatures, in a way the most easy to
 their

comprehension, condescends to impregnate the womb of a Virgin, contrary to the natural act of generation, that the Person so conceived should not be depraved in his understanding. In the breast of this illustrious Personage the Mighty God implants his Holy Spirit, and this Spirit is a part of God, if the spirit of a man is any part of the man. Being thus endowed with power from on high, he becomes the Representative of God to man ; and in this respect or view he is called God : because he represents the Father in person, and delivers a rule of life to mankind that if observed and practised will constitute them happy here and happy eternally. Now does it require a very deep penetration to see that the Christian's God is One, and only
only

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only One. The Divine mission of Christ they were not called upon to believe without the interposition of the Almighty power, which there was a sufficient display of at his birth, in his life-time, and at his death and resurrection. This I have as good a right to believe as Mr. Paine has to believe the history of the heathen mythology.

After the heathen mythology was abolished, and the people adhered to the Christian religion, if they ran into gross absurdities, it was not because the doctrines of Christ were impure, but because personal emoluments biassed their reason, and they took that for right which was absolutely wrong. The ludicrous parts of Mr. Paine's Age of Reason I shall treat with the silent contempt they deserve.

G

Mr.

Mr Paine says, " The Old and
" New Testament, beginning with
" Genesis and ending with Revela-
" tions, is a book of riddles, that re-
" quires a revelation to explain it."
It is very reasonable to infer, from
this assertion, that he intended to
make it appear that a revelation
has been made to him: for, after
this, he undertakes to explain the
19th Psalm, and part of the book of
Job. But I recollect but one riddle
in all the book, and that is already
explained.

At one time he says, " Nothing
" that is here said can apply, even
" with the most distant disrespect,
" to the real character of Jesus
" Christ. He was a virtuous and
" amiable man. The morality that
" he preached and practised was of
" the most benevolent kind; and
" though

“ though similar systems of mora-
 “ lity had been preached by Con-
 “ fucius, and by some of the Greek
 “ philosophers, many years before,
 “ by the Quakers since, and by
 “ many good men in all ages, it has
 “ not been exceeded by any:”—at
 another time condemns it as a book
 of riddles. If this is not treating
 the preaching and character of Je-
 sus Christ with disrespect, and con-
 tradicting himself, I do not under-
 stand plain English. But I believe
 if any person of common sense will
 read the Old and New Testaments
 with attention, they will easily dis-
 cover that the practical parts there-
 of, necessary for the rule and go-
 vernment of our minds and actions,
 are comprehensible by almost the
 weakest capacity.

He says, “ The parts of the bible
 “ known

“ known by the name of the Pro-
 “ phets, are the works of the Jew-
 “ ish poets and itinerant (or travel-
 “ ing) preachers.” That the prop-
 phesies are in a poetical stile, we do
 not deny: but that they, at the
 time when they were written, did
 not contain predictions of future e-
 vents, I do deny; because many of
 the events that those prophecies are
 expressive of, have happened since
 that time. Let any one prove to
 the contrary if he can. Whether
 we call them songs, or hymns, or
 psalms, or prophecies, and the per-
 sons who wrote them musicians,
 poets, prophets, or shepherds, it
 does not alter the literal meaning
 therein contained.

I believe, with Mr. Paine, that
 those prophets were travelling
 preachers; and I also believe that
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many of the people to whom they preached experienced the righteous judgments of God in consequence of not believing what they said and wrote. It is not improbable that there were tunes affixed to some part of the prophecies, and that the people who sang or played those tunes on musical instruments were at that time known by the name of prophets: but this makes nothing against them.

Again, with a kind of sneer, he says, "It is somewhat curious, that
 " the three persons, whose names
 " are the most universally recorded,
 " were of very obscure parentage.
 " Moses was a foundling, Jesus
 " Christ was born in a stable, and
 " Mahomet was a mule-driver:"
 and (I may add) Thomas Paine, the
 founder of the new system, who
 professes

professes to be wiser than all these together, is in a fair way of becoming more contemptible than any of them. He calls St. Paul a manufacturer of quibbles, as if we were to be sneered out of the truths of our religion. If any person will read the epistles that go under the name of St. Paul, and particularly those written to Timothy and Titus, and they will be convinced that they contain plain moral precepts, not contrary to those preached by Jesus Christ, which Mr. Paine professes to hold in high esteem.

Mr. Paine appears to be as ignorant of the nature and design of Prayer, as he is of the contents of the bible. Prayer is not dictatory, nor telling the Almighty something He does not know, as he seems vainly to suppose : but it is the
power

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power of reflection that informs us what is necessary for us, or what we stand in need of, and by what means our wants are supplied, that we may be the more thankful for what we receive, and what we enjoy.

He says in another place, “ Man
 “ frequently fails in accomplishing
 “ his end, from a natural inability
 “ of power to the purpose, and fre-
 “ quently from the want of wisdom
 “ to apply power properly.” If this
 observation be true, it is a sufficient
 reply to all the arguments that can
 be made to prove that every man
 has a sufficient power of reason to
 direct him into the knowledge of
 true theology, and his duty to God,
 himself, and his fellow-creatures.
 I do not wish to reject Reason, nor
 to prove that it is not good; but
 that the misapplication thereof is in-
 cident to man. “ It

“ It may be said that man can
 “ make or draw a triangle, and
 “ therefore a triangle is an human
 “ invention. But the triangle, when
 “ drawn, is no other than the
 “ image of the principle: it is a de-
 “ lineation to the eye, and from
 “ thence to the mind, of a principle
 “ that would otherwise be imper-
 “ ceptible.” The same may be said
 in respect to the bible. It may be
 said that a man can make the bible :
 but he cannot make the principle
 therein contained, no more than he
 can make the principle of a trian-
 gle. But it has been said, the bible
 may be altered and abridged. This
 does not prove that it is altered, nor
 does it alter the principles of justice
 therein contained. It may be said
 that the literal meaning may be
 misapplied. Still this does not al-
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ter the principle : it is immutable. He says, " Religion, considered as " a duty, is incumbent upon every " living soul alike ; and therefore " must be on a level to the under- " standing and comprehension of " all." Moreover he says, " Man " learns the theory of religion by " reflection." If these observations of his be true, his system of religion falls at once : for we are certain that every man has not the same power of apprehending the moral truths contained in the works of creation that he sees with his eyes ; neither has every one the same power of reflection. If you try the experiment, you will find that all will not agree in the inferences they draw from the same thing ; and the reflections they make will be of quite a different nature.

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While he is continually harping upon mystery, and telling us, religion does not consist in mystery, and is no way connected with it, he makes it appear that his system of religion lies all wrapped up in mystery; and goes about to make us believe that all the worlds with which he supposes the immensity of space is filled, is inhabited with the same species of beings as we are, when it is altogether probable that they are all of quite a different nature. Who can account for so low and contracted an idea from so wise a man?

Upon a survey of the whole, if you embrace Mr. Paine's system of religion, it will be necessary for you to furnish yourselves with a pair of globes, a microscope and telescope, and every necessary apparatus to
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find out the principles and properties of a triangle; and then apply yourself to the use of these to gain the true knowledge of God and your own duties. If you succeed, you might have done it a much easier way. If you do not, I shall not be mistaken. But if you will take my advice, read the bible; and you will find that it contains the most excellent moral precepts and directions how you may attain to all the knowledge of God necessary for us to know. And if you add to this mental reflections, with a desire to be taught by Him who can make you wise unto salvation, you will use the means to attain that great lesson, "Know thyself."

If you learn this, you will see how consistent the bible is with your condition, and how consistent the laws
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of our country are to our well-being; and let this stimulate us to be faithful subjects to God and our country, and endeavour by so doing to make each other happy.

FINIS.
