

## L E T T E R X.

From the BISHOP of LANDAFF to THOMAS PAINE.

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THE remaining part of your work can hardly be made the subject of animadversion. It principally consists of unsupported assertions, abusive appellations, illiberal sarcasms, *strifes of words, profane babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.* I am hurt at being, in mere justice to the subject, under the necessity of using such harsh language; and am sincerely sorry that, from what cause I know not, your mind has received a wrong bias in every point respecting revealed religion. You are capable of better things; for there is a philosophical sublimity in some of your ideas, when you speak of the Supreme Being, as the creator of the universe. That you may not accuse me of disrespect, in passing over any part of your work without bestowing proper attention upon it, I will wait upon you through what you call your — conclusion.

You refer your reader to the former part of the Age of Reason; in which you have spoken of what you esteem three frauds — mystery, miracle, and prophecy. — I have not at hand the book to which you refer, and know not what you have said on these subjects; they are subjects of great importance, and we, probably, should differ essentially in our opinion concerning them; but, I confess, I am not sorry to be excused from examining what you have said on these points. The specimen of your reasoning, what is now before me, has taken from me every inclination to trouble either my reader, or myself, with any observations on your former book.

You admit the possibility of God's revealing his will to man; yet "the thing so revealed," you say, "is revelation to the person only to whom it is made; his account of it to another is not revelation." — This is true; his account is simple testimony. You add, there is no "possible criterion to judge of the truth of what he says." — This I positively deny; and contend, that a real miracle, performed in attestation of a revealed truth, is a certain criterion by which we may judge of the truth of that attestation. I am perfectly aware of the objections which may be made to this position; I have examined them with care; I acknowledge them to be of weight; but I do not speak unadvisedly, or as wishing to dictate to other men, when I say, that I am persuaded the position is true. So thought Moses, when, in the matter of Korah, he said to the Israelites — "If these men die the common death of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me."

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—So thought Elijah, when he said—“ Lord GOD of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art GOD in Israel, and that I am thy servant ; ”—and the people, before whom he spake, were of the same opinion ; for, when the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, they said—“ The Lord, he is the GOD.”—So thought our Saviour, when he said—“ The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me ; ”—and, “ If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.” What reason have we to believe Jesus speaking in the gospel, and to disbelieve Mahomet speaking in the Koran? Both of them lay claim to a divine commission ; and yet we receive the words of the one as a revelation from GOD, and we reject the words of the other as an imposture of man. The reason is evident ; Jesus established his pretensions, not by alledging any secret communication with the Deity, but by working numerous and indubitable miracles in the presence of thousands, and which the most bitter and watchful of his enemies could not disallow ; but Mahomet wrought no miracles at all.

—Nor is a miracle the only criterion by which we may judge of the truth of a revelation. If a series of prophets should, thro' a course of many centuries, predict the appearance of a certain person, whom GOD would, at a particular time, send into the world for a particular end ; and at length a person should appear, in whom all the predictions were minutely accomplished ; such a completion of prophecy would be a criterion of the truth of that revelation, which that person should deliver to mankind. Or if a person should now say, (as many false prophets have said, and are daily saying,) that he had a commission to declare the will of GOD ; and, as a proof of his veracity, should predict—that, after his death, he would rise from the dead on the third day ;—the completion of such a prophecy would, I presume, be a sufficient criterion of the truth of what this man might have said concerning the Will of GOD. Now I tell you, (says Jesus to his disciples, concerning Judas, who was to betray him,) before it come, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he. In various parts of the gospels our Saviour, with the utmost propriety, claims to be received as the messenger of GOD, not only from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which were fulfilled in his person, and from the predictions which he himself delivered. Hence, instead of there being no criterion by which we may judge of the truth of the christian revelation, there are clearly three. It is an easy matter to use an indecorous flippancy of language in speaking of the christian religion, and with a supercilious negligence to class Christ and his apostles amongst the impostors who have figured in the world ; but it is not, I think, an easy matter for any man, of good sense and sound erudition, to make an impartial examination into any one

of

of the three grounds of christianity which I have here mentioned, and to reject it.

What is it, you ask, the Bible teaches?—The prophet Micah shall answer you: it teaches us,—“to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our GOD;”—justice, mercy, and piety, instead of what you contend for—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Testament teaches us? You answer your question — to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman. — Absurd and impious assertion! No, sir, no; this profane doctrine, this miserable stuff, this blasphemous perversion of scripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Testament. I will tell you the lesson which it teaches to infidels as well as to believers; it is a lesson which philosophy never taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor sophistry disprove; the lesson is this — “The dead shall hear the voice of the SON of GOD, and they that hear shall live:—all that are in their graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

The moral precepts of the gospel are so well fitted to promote the happiness of mankind in this world, and to prepare human nature for the future enjoyment of that blessedness, of which, in our present state, we can form no conception, that I had no expectation they would have met with your disapprobation. You say, however,—“As to the scraps of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of the pretended thing, revealed religion.” — “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” — Is this a scrap of morality? Is it not rather the concentrated essence of all ethics, the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty towards each other may be derived? Duties, you know, are distinguished by moralists into duties of perfect and imperfect obligation: does the Bible teach you nothing, when it instructs you, that this distinction is done away? when it bids you “put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any.” These, and precepts such as these, you will in vain look for in the codes of *Frederic*, or *Justinian*; you cannot find them in our statute books; they were not taught, nor are they taught, in the schools of heathen philosophy; or, if some one or two of them should chance to be glanced at by a Plato, a Seneca, or a Cicero, they are not bound upon the consciences of mankind by any sanction. It is in the gospel, and in the gospel alone, that we learn their importance; acts of benevolence and brotherly love may be to an unbeliever voluntary acts, to a christian they are indispensable duties. — Is a

new commandment no part of revealed religion? "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, the law of christian benevolence is enjoined us by Christ himself in the most solemn manner, as the distinguishing badge of our being his disciples.

Two precepts you particularize as inconsistent with the dignity and the nature of man — that of not resenting injuries, and that of loving enemies. — Who but yourself ever interpreted literally the proverbial phrase—"If a man smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also?"—Did Jesus himself turn the other cheek when the officer of the high priest smote him? It is evident, that a patient acquiescence under slight personal injuries is here enjoined; and that a proneness to revenge, which instigates men to savage acts of brutality, for every trifling offence, is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained, in another place, to mean, the doing them all the good in our power; "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink;" and what think you is more likely to preserve peace, and to promote kind affections amongst men, than the returning good for evil? Christianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury—"it does not offer a premium for a crime,"—it orders us to let our benevolence extend alike to all, that we may emulate the benignity of GOD himself, who maketh "his sun to rise on the evil and on the good."

In the law of Moses, retaliation for deliberate injuries had been ordained—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.—*Aristotle*, in his treatise of morals, says, that some thought retaliation of personal wrongs an equitable proceeding; *Rhadamanthus* is said to have given it his sanction; the decimviral laws allowed it; the common law of England did not forbid it; and it is said to be still the law of some countries, even in christendom: but the mild spirit of christianity absolutely prohibits, not only the retaliation of injuries, but the indulgence of every resentful propensity.

"It has been," you affirm, "the scheme of the christian church to hold man in ignorance of the creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights."—I appeal to the plain sense of any honest man to judge whether this representation be true in either particular. When he attends the service of the church, does he discover any design in the minister to keep him in ignorance of his creator? Are not the public prayers in which he joins, the lessons which are read to him, the sermons which are preached to him, all calculated to impress upon his mind a strong conviction of the mercy, justice, holiness, power, and wisdom of the one adorable GOD, blessed for ever? By these means which the christian church hath provided for our instruction,

tion, I will venture to say, that the most unlearned congregation of christians in Great Britain have more just and sublime conceptions of the Creator, a more perfect knowledge of their duty towards him, and a stronger inducement to the practice of virtue, holiness, and temperance, than all the philosophers of all the heathen countries in the world ever had, or now have. If, indeed, your scheme should take place, and men should no longer believe their Bible, then would they soon become as ignorant of the Creator, as all the world was when GOD called Abraham from his kindred; and as all the world, which has had no communication with either jews or christians, now is. Then would they soon bow down to stocks and stones, kiss their hand (as they did in the time of Job, and as the poor African does now,) *to the moon walking in brightness, and deny the God that is above;* then would they worship Jupiter, Bacchus, and Venus, and emulate, in the transcendent flagitiousness of their lives, the impure morals of their gods.

What design has government to keep men in ignorance of their rights? None whatever.—All wise statesmen are persuaded that the more men know of their rights, the better subjects they will become. Subjects, not from necessity but choice, are the firmest friends of every government. The people of Great Britain are well acquainted with their natural and social rights; they understand them better than the people of any other country do; they know that they have a right to be free, not only from the capricious tyranny of any one man's will, but from the more afflicting despotism of republican factions; and it is this very knowledge which attaches them to the constitution of their country. I have no fear that the people should know too much of their rights: my fear is that they should not know them in all their relations, and to their full extent. The government does not desire that men should remain in ignorance of their rights; but it both desires, and requires, that they should not disturb the public peace, under vain pretences; that they should make themselves acquainted, not merely with the rights, but with the duties also of men in civil society. I am far from ridiculing (as some have done) the rights of man; I have long ago understood, that the poor as well as the rich, and that the rich as well as the poor, have, by nature, some rights, which no human government can justly take from them, without their tacit or express consent; and some also, which they themselves have no power to surrender to any government. One of the principal rights of man, in a state either of nature or of society, is a right of property in the fruits of his industry, ingenuity, or good fortune.—Does government hold any man in ignorance of this right? So much

the contrary, that the chief care of government is to declare, ascertain, modify, and defend this right; nay, it gives right, where nature gives none; it protects the goods of an intestate; and it allows a man, at his death, to dispose of that property, which the law of nature would cause to revert into the common stock. Sincerely as I am attached to the liberties of mankind, I cannot but profess myself an utter enemy to that spurious philosophy, that democratic insanity, which would equalize all property, and level all distinctions in civil society. Personal distinctions, arising from superior probity, learning, eloquence, skill, courage, and from every other excellency of talents, are the very blood and nerves of the body politic; they animate the whole, and invigorate every part; without them, it's bones would become reeds, and it's marrow water; it would presently sink into a fetid senseless mass of corruption. — Power may be used for private ends, and in opposition to the public good; rank may be improperly conferred, and insolently sustained; riches may be wickedly acquired, and viciously applied: but as this is neither necessarily, nor generally the case, I cannot agree with those who, in asserting the natural equality of men, spurn the instituted distinctions attending power, rank, and riches. — But I mean not to enter into any discussion on this subject, farther than to say, that your censure of government appears to me to be wholly unfounded; and to express my hope, that no one individual will be so far misled by disquisitions on the rights of man, as to think that he has any right to do wrong, as to forget that other men have rights as well as he.

[ *To be concluded in the next.* ]

A Short Account of Mr. WILLIAM ELLIOT, who departed this Life, May 5, 1797; in a Letter from Mr. DINNEN, to the EDITOR.

WILLIAM ELLIOT was born in the city of Cork, August 14, 1780. His parents being religious, took great pains to instruct him in the leading truths of the Gospel; and the Lord was pleased to bless their pious endeavours, so that he had the fear of God from his youth; was obedient to his parents, courteous to all, and manifested a desire to use the means of Grace. At length he became a member of the Methodist Society, in which he continued for some time: But neglecting to watch and pray, he lost his seriousness, adopted a light and trifling spirit, was drawn aside from the good path, and narrowly escaped the infidelity of the day. The Lord, whose wisdom is a great deep, visited him with affliction about last Christmas: the disorder at first, seemed to be a heavy cold, but terminated in a rapid consumption. One