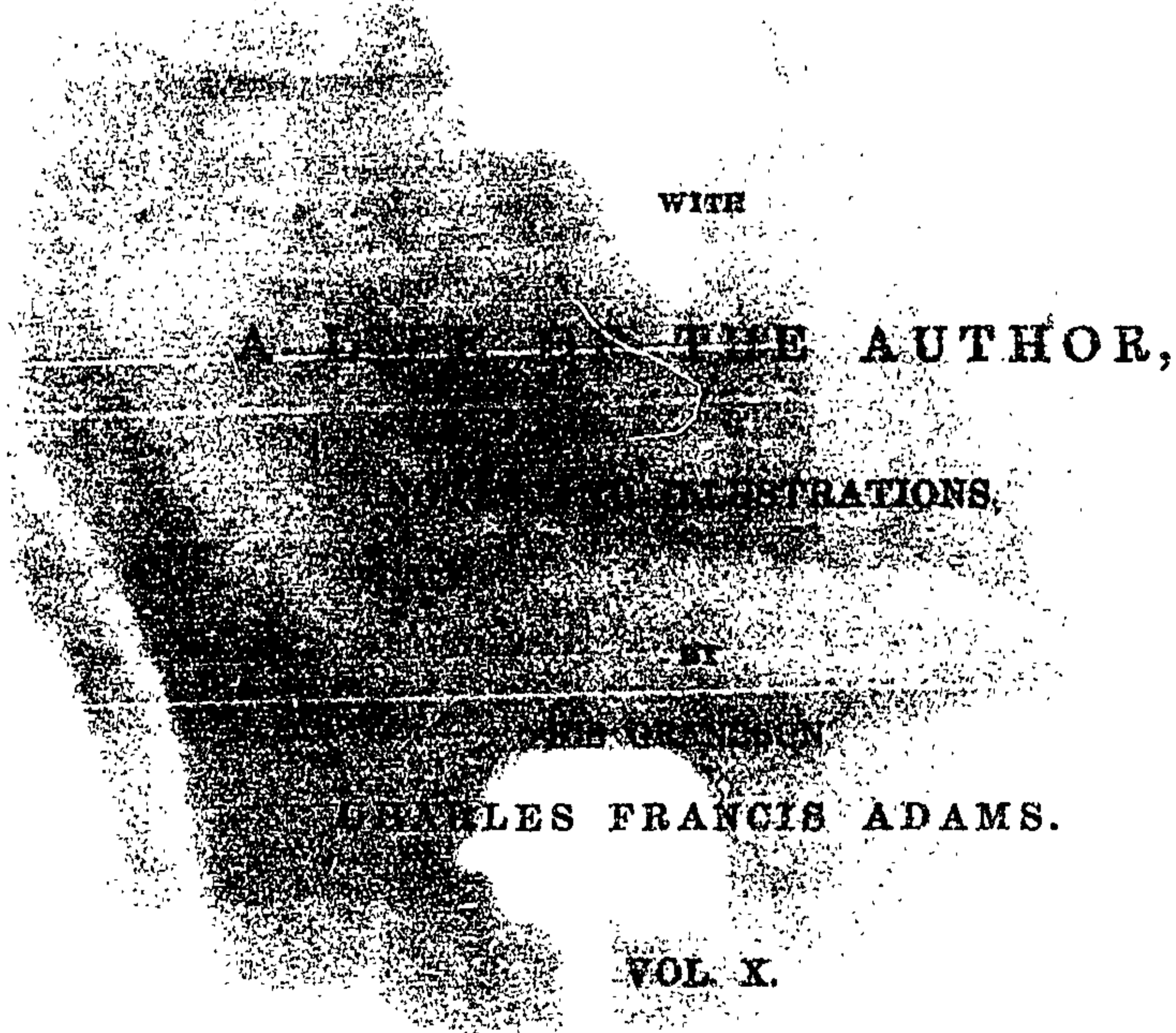


THE
WORKS OF
OF
JOHN ADAMS,

SECOND PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES:



BOSTON:
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY.
1856.

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GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

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VOL. X.

1

A

even my obscure name was often quoted in France as an advocate for simple democracy; when I saw that the sympathies in America had caught the French flame, I was determined to wash my own hands as clear as I could of all this fouiness. I had then strong forebodings that I was sacrificing all the emoluments of this life; and so it has happened, but not in so great a degree as I apprehended.

In truth, my "Defence of the Constitutions" and "Discourses on Davila," were the cause of that immense unpopularity which fell like the tower of Siloam upon me. Your steady defence of democratical principles, and your invariable favorable opinion of the French revolution, laid the foundation of your unbounded popularity. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

Now, I will forfeit my life, if you can find one sentiment in my Defence of the Constitutions, or the Discourses on Davila, which, by a fair construction, can favor the introduction of hereditary monarchy or aristocracy into America. They were all written to support and strengthen the Constitution of the United States.

The wood-cutter on Mount Ida, though he was puzzled to find a tree to drop at first, I presume knew how to leave off when he was weary. But I never know when to cease when I begin to write to you.

TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Quincy, 17 July, 1813.

Your letters to Priestley have increased my grief, if that were possible, for the loss of Rush. Had he lived, I would have stimulated him to insist on your promise to him to write him on the subject of religion. Your plan I admire.

In your letter to Priestley, of March 21st, 1801, dated at Washington, you call the Christian philosophy "the most sublime and benevolent, but most perverted system, that ever shone on man." That it is the most sublime and benevolent, I agree; but whether it has been more perverted than that of Moses, of Confucius, of Zoroaster, of Sanchoniathon, of Numa, of Mahomet, of the Druids, of the Hindoos, &c., &c., &c., I can-

not as yet determine, because I am not sufficiently acquainted with these systems, or the history of their effects, to form a decisive opinion of the result of the comparison.

In your letter, dated Washington, April 9th, 1803, you say, "in consequence of some conversation with Dr. Rush, in the years 1798-99, I had promised him, some day, to write him a letter, giving him my view of the Christian system. I have reflected upon it since, and even sketched the outlines in my own mind. I should first take a general view of the moral doctrines of the most remarkable of the ancient philosophers, of whose ethics we have sufficient information to make an estimate, say of Pythagoras, Epicurus, Epictetus, Socrates, Cicero, Seneca, Antoninus. I should do justice to the branches of morality they have treated well, but point out the importance of those in which they are deficient. I should then take a view of the deism and ethics of the Jews, and show in what a degraded state they were, and the necessity they presented of a reformation. I should proceed to a view of the life, character, and doctrines of Jesus, who, sensible of the incorrectness of their ideas of the Deity and of morality, endeavored to bring them to the principles of a pure deism, and juster notions of the attributes of God, to reform their moral doctrines to the standard of reason, justice, and philanthropy, and to inculcate a belief in a future state. This view would purposely omit the question of his divinity, and even his inspiration. To do him justice, it would be necessary to remark the disadvantages his doctrines have to encounter, not having been committed to writing by himself, but by the most unlettered of men, by memory, long after they had heard them from him, when much was forgotten, much misunderstood, and presented in very paradoxical shapes. Yet such are the fragments remaining as to show a master-workman, and that his system of morality was the most benevolent and sublime, probably, that has ever been taught, and more perfect than any of the ancient philosophers. His character and doctrines have received still greater injury from those who pretend to be his special disciples, and who have disfigured and sophisticated his actions and precepts from views of personal interest, so as to induce the unthinking part of mankind to throw off the whole system in disgust, and to pass sentence as an impostor on the most innocent, the most

benevolent, the most eloquent and sublime character that has ever been exhibited to man. This is the outline!"

"*Sancte Socrate! Ora pro nobis!*" Erasmus. Priestley, in his letter to Lindsey, inclosing a copy of your letter to him, says, "he is generally considered as an unbeliever. If so, however, he cannot be far from us, and I hope in the way to be not only almost, but altogether what we are. He now attends public worship very regularly, and his moral conduct was never impeached."

Now, I see not but you are as good a Christian as Priestley and Lindsey. Piety and morality were the end and object of the Christian system, according to them and according to you. They believed in the resurrection of Jesus, in his miracles and inspirations. But what inspirations? Not all that is recorded in the New Testament or the Old. They have not yet told us how much they believe or disbelieve. They have not told us how much allegory, how much parable they find, nor how they explained them all in the New Testament or Old.

John Quincy Adams has written, for years, to his sons, boys of ten and twelve, a series of letters, in which he pursues a plan more extensive than yours, but agreeing in most of the essential points. I wish these letters could be preserved in the bosoms of his boys. But women and priests will get them; and I expect, if he makes a peace, he will have to retire, like Jay, to study prophecies to the end of his life.

I have more to say upon this subject of religion.

TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Quincy, 18 July, 1813.

I have more to say on religion. For more than sixty years I have been attentive to this great subject. Controversies between Calvinists and Arminians, Trinitarians and Unitarians, Deists and Christians, Atheists and both, have attracted my attention, whenever the singular life I have led would admit, to all these questions. The history of this little village of Quincy, if it were worth recording, would explain to you how this hap-

pened. I think I can now say I have read away bigotry, if not enthusiasm.

What does Priestley mean by an unbeliever, when he applies it to you? How much did he unbelieve himself? Gibbon had him right when he denominated his creed "scanty." We are to understand, no doubt, that he believed the resurrection of Jesus, some of his miracles, his inspiration; but in what degree? He did not believe in the inspiration of the writings that contain his history. Yet he believed in the Apocalyptic beast, and he believed as much as he pleased in the writings of Daniel and John. This great and extraordinary man, whom I sincerely loved, esteemed, and respected, was really a phenomenon; a comet in the system, like Voltaire, Bolingbroke, and Hume. Had Bolingbroke or Voltaire taken him in hand, what would they have made of him and his creed?

I do not believe you have read much of Priestley's "Corruptions of Christianity," his History of early opinions concerning Jesus Christ, his predestination, his no soul system, or his controversy with Horsley. I have been a diligent student for many years in books whose titles you have never seen. In Priestley's and Lindsey's writings, in Farmer, Cappe, in Tucker, or Edward Search's *Light of Nature Pursued*, in Edwards and Hopkins, and, lately, in Ezra Stiles Ely, his reverend and learned panegyrist, and his elegant and spirited opponents. I am not wholly uninformed of the controversies in Germany, and the learned researches of universities and professors, in which the sanctity of the Bible and the inspiration of its authors are taken for granted or waved, or admitted or not denied. I have also read Condorcet's *Progress of the Human Mind*. Now, what is all this to you? No more than if I should tell you that I read Dr. Clarke, and Dr. Waterland, and Emlyn, and Leland's *View or Review of the Deistical writers*, more than fifty years ago, which is a literal truth.

I blame you not for reading Euclid and Newton, Thucydides and Theocritus, for I believe you will find as much entertainment and instruction in them as I have found in my theological and ecclesiastical instructors, or even, as I have found, in a profound investigation of the life, writings, and doctrines of Erastus, whose disciples were Milton, Harrington, Selden, St. John, the Chief Justice, father of Bolingbroke, and others, the

choicest spirits of their age; or in La Harpe's history of the philosophy of the eighteenth century; or in Vanderkemp's vast map of the causes of the revolutionary spirit, in the same and preceding centuries. These things are to me the marbles and nine-pins of old age; I will not say the beads and prayer-books. I agree with you as far as you go, most cordially, and, I think, solidly. How much farther I go, how much more I believe than you, I may explain in a future letter. Thus much I will say at present. I have found so many difficulties that I am not astonished at your stopping where you are; and, so far from sentencing you to perdition, I hope soon to meet you in another country.

TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Quincy, August, 1813.

Κριοὺς μὲν καὶ ὄνοις διζήμεθα, Ξύρνε, καὶ ἵππους
 Εὐγενέας, καὶ τις βούλεται ἐξ ἀγαθῶν
 Κτήσασθαι· γῆμαι δὲ κακὴν κακοῦ οὐ μελεδαίνει
 Ἐσθλός ἐνὴρ, ἦν οἱ χρήματα πολλὰ διδῶ.

Behold my translation!

“My friend Curnis, when we want to purchase horses, asses, or rams, we inquire for the well-born, and every one wishes to procure from the good breeds. A good man does not care to marry a shrew, the daughter of a shrew, unless they give a great deal of money with her.”¹

What think you of my translation? Compare it with that of Grotius, and tell me which is the nearest to the original in letter and in spirit.

Grotius renders it, —

Nobilitas asinis et equis simul, arietibusque
 Dat pretium: nec de semine degeneri
 Admissura placet. Sed pravæ e sanguine pravo,
 Si dos sit, præsto est optima conditio.

¹ “The expressions *good* and *bad* men, which in later times bore a purely moral signification, are evidently used by Theognis in a political sense for nobles and commons.” Müller, *Literature of Ancient Greece*.

pendence of America; but the most sensible of the Episcopalians, the Baptists and Quakers, and the Presbyterians, with very few exceptions, prevailed against them, as they believed they would be overpowered, with the help of the other colonies, if they resisted. I could not avoid remarking, that I was chosen, unanimously, speaker of the House of Representatives of this State, when, of all the members present, there were but six, including myself, who were esteemed whigs.

That you may continue to enjoy health and every other blessing is the sincere prayer of, dear Sir, your old friend,

THO'S MCKEAN.

TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Quincy, 25 December, 1813.

Answer my letter at your leisure. Give yourself no concern. I write as a refuge and protection against *ennui*.

The fundamental principle of all philosophy and all Christianity is, "*Rejoice always in all things.*" "Be thankful at all times for all good, and all that we call evil." Will it not follow, that I ought to rejoice and be thankful that Priestley has lived? Aye, that Voltaire has lived? I should have given my reason for rejoicing in Voltaire, &c. It is because I believe they have done more than even Luther or Calvin to lower the tone of that proud hierarchy that shot itself up above the clouds, and more to propagate religious liberty than Calvin, or Luther, or even Locke. That Gibbon has lived? That Hume has lived, though a conceited Scotchman? That Bolingbroke has lived, though a haughty, arrogant, supercilious dogmatist? That Burke and Johnson have lived, though superstitious slaves, or self-deceiving hypocrites both? Is it not laughable to hear Burke call Bolingbroke a superficial writer; to hear him ask, "who ever read him through!" Had I been present, I should have answered him: "I, I myself! I have read him through, more than fifty years ago, and more than five times in my life, and once within five years past. And, in my opinion, the epithet 'superficial' belongs to you and your friend Johnson more than to him." I might say much more; but I believe Burke and Johnson to have been as political Christians as Leo X.

I return to Priestley, though I have great complaints against him for personal injuries and persecution, at the same time that I forgive it all, and hope and pray that he may be pardoned for it all above. Dr. Brocklesby, an intimate friend and convivial companion of Johnson, told me, that Johnson died in agonies of horror of annihilation; and all the accounts we have of his death corroborate this account of Brocklesby. Dread of annihilation! Dread of nothing! A dread of nothing, I should think, would be no dread at all. Can there be any real, substantial, rational fear of nothing? Were you on your death-bed, and in your last moments informed by demonstration or revelation that you would cease to think and to feel at your dissolution, should you be terrified? You might be ashamed of yourself for having lived so long, to bear the proud man's contumely; you might be ashamed of your Maker, and compare Him to a little girl amusing herself, her brothers, and sisters by blowing bubbles in soapsuds; you might compare Him to boys, sporting with crackers and rockets, or to men employed in making more artificial fireworks, or to men and women at fairs and operas, or Sadler's Wells exploits; or to politicians, in their intrigues; or to heroes, in their butcheries; or to Popes, in their devilisms. But what should you fear? Nothing. *Emori nolo; sed me mortuum esse nihil aestimo.*

To return to Priestley — you could make a more luminous book than his upon the "Doctrines of Heathen Philosophers, compared with those of Revelation." Why has he not given us a more satisfactory account of the Pythagorean philosophy and theology? He barely names Ocellus, who lived long before Plato. His treatise of kings and monarchy has been destroyed, I conjecture, by Platonic philosophers, Platonic Jews or Christians, or by fraudulent republicans or despots. His treatise of the universe has been preserved. He labors to prove the eternity of the world. The Marquis D'Argens translated it in all its noble simplicity. The Abbé Batteux has given another translation. D'Argens not only explains the text, but sheds more light upon the ancient systems. His remarks are so many treatises, which develop the concatenation of ancient opinions. The most essential ideas of the theology, of the physics, and of the morality of the ancients are clearly explained, and their different doctrines compared with one another, and with the

modern discoveries. I wish I owned this book, and one hundred thousand more that I want every day, now when I am almost incapable of making any use of them. No doubt, he informs us that Pythagoras was a great traveller.

Priestley barely mentions *Timæus*; but it does not appear that he had read him. Why has he not given us an account of him and his book? He was before Plato, and gave him the idea of his *Timæus*, and much more of his philosophy. After his master, he maintained the existence of matter; that matter was capable of receiving all sorts of forms; that a moving power agitates all the parts of it, and that an intelligence directed the moving power; that this intelligence produced a regular and harmonious world. The intelligence had seen a plan, an IDEA (*logos*), in conformity to which it wrought, and without which it would not have known what it was about, nor what it wanted to do. This plan was the idea, image, or model, which had represented to the Supreme Intelligence the world before it existed, which had directed it in its action upon the moving power, and which it contemplated in forming the elements, the bodies, and the world. This model was distinguished from the intelligence which produced the world, as the architect is from his plans. He divided the productive cause of the world into a spirit, which directed the moving force, and into an image, which determined it in the choice of the directions which it gave to the moving force, and the forms which it gave to matter.

I wonder that Priestley has overlooked this, because it is the same philosophy with Plato's, and would have shown that the Pythagorean, as well as the Platonic philosophers, probably concurred in the fabrication of the Christian Trinity. Priestley mentions the name of Archytas, but does not appear to have read him, though he was a successor of Pythagoras, and a great mathematician, a great statesman, and a great general. John Gram, a learned and honorable Dane, has given a handsome edition of his works, with a Latin translation, and an ample account of his life and writings. Zaleucus, the legislator of Locris, and Charondas of Sybaris, were disciples of Pythagoras, and both celebrated to immortality for the wisdom of their laws, five hundred years before Christ. Why are those laws lost? I say, the spirit of party has destroyed them; civil, poli-

tical, and ecclesiastical bigotry. Despotical, monarchical, aristocratical, and democratical fury, have all been employed in this work of destruction of every thing that could give us true light, and a clear insight of antiquity. For every one of these parties, when possessed of power, or when they have been undermost, and struggling to get uppermost, has been equally prone to every species of fraud and violence and usurpation. Why has not Priestley mentioned these legislators? The preamble to the laws of Zaleucus, which is all that remains, is as orthodox Christian theology as Priestley's, and Christian benevolence and forgiveness of injuries almost as clearly expressed.

Priestley ought to have done impartial justice to philosophy and philosophers. Philosophy, which is the result of reason, is the first, the original revelation of the Creator to his creature, man. When this revelation is clear and certain, by intuition or necessary inductions, no subsequent revelation, supported by prophecies or miracles, can supersede it. Philosophy is not only the love of wisdom, but the science of the universe and its cause. There is, there was, and there will be but one master of philosophy in the universe. Portions of it, in different degrees, are revealed to creatures. Philosophy looks with an impartial eye on all terrestrial religions. I have examined all, as well as my narrow sphere, my straitened means, and my busy life would allow me; and the result is, that the Bible is the best book in the world. It contains more of my little philosophy than all the libraries I have seen; and such parts of it as I cannot reconcile to my little philosophy, I postpone for future investigation. Priestley ought to have given us a sketch of the religion and morals of Zoroaster, of Sanchoniathon, of Confucius, and all the founders of religions before Christ, whose superiority would, from such a comparison, have appeared the more transcendent. Priestley ought to have told us that Pythagoras passed twenty years in his travels in India, in Egypt, in Chaldea, perhaps in Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon. He ought to have told us, that in India he conversed with the Brahmins, and read the Shasta, five thousand years old, written in the language of the sacred Sanscrit, with the elegance and sentiments of Plato. Where is to be found theology more orthodox, or philosophy more profound, than in the introduction to the Shasta? "God is one, creator of all,

universal sphere, without beginning, without end. God governs all the creation by a general providence, resulting from his eternal designs. Search not the essence and the nature of the Eternal, who is one; your research will be vain and presumptuous. It is enough, that, day by day and night by night, you adore his power, his wisdom, and his goodness, in his works. The Eternal willed, in the fulness of time, to communicate of his essence and of his splendor, to beings capable of perceiving it. They as yet existed not. The Eternal willed, and they were. He created Birma, Vitsnow, and Sib." These doctrines, sublime, if ever there were any sublime, Pythagoras learned in India, and taught them to Zaleucus and his other disciples. He there learned also his metempsychosis; but this never was popular, never made much progress in Greece or Italy, or any other country besides India and Tartary, the region of the grand immortal Lama. And how does this differ from the possessions of demons in Greece and Rome, from the demon of Socrates, from the worship of cows and crocodiles in Egypt and elsewhere? After migrating through various animals, from elephants to serpents, according to their behavior, souls that, at last, behaved well, became men and women, and then, if they were good, they went to Heaven. All ended in Heaven, if they became virtuous. Who can wonder at the widow of Malabar? Where is the lady who, if her faith were without doubt that she should go to Heaven with her husband on the one hand, or migrate into a toad or a wasp on the other, would not lie down on the pile, and set fire to the fuel? Modifications and disguises of the metempsychosis had crept into Egypt, and Greece, and Rome, and other countries. Have you read Farmer on the demons and possessions of the New Testament?

According to the Shasta, Moisayer, with his companions, rebelled against the Eternal, and were precipitated down to Ondero, the region of darkness.

Do you know any thing of the prophecy of Enoch? Can you give me a comment on the 6th, the 9th, the 14th verses of the epistle of Jude?

If I am not weary of writing, I am sure you must be of reading such incoherent rattle. I will not persecute you so severely in future, if I can help it, so farewell.