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*The Nature of Religious Zeal,*  
IN TWO  
**DISCOURSES,**

The SUBSTANCE of which was delivered

AT THE  
**VISITATION**

OF THE

Worshipful PULTER FORESTER, D.D.  
ARCH-DEACON of BUCKS,

AT  
NEWPORT PAGNELL,  
April 27, 1774.

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By **J. BRIGGS, A.M.**  
RECTOR of CALVERTON, BUCKS.

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M.DCC.LXXV.



TO THE  
WORSHIPFUL  
PULTER FORESTER, D.D.

CHANCELLOR OF LINCOLN,

AND

ARCH-DEACON OF BUCKS,

AND THE REST OF THE  
CLERGY OF THE TWO DEANERIES  
OF BUCKINGHAM AND NEWPORT PAGNELL;

THESE DISCOURSES ARE,

WITH GREAT RESPECT,

INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR

MOST OBEDIENT,

AND MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR,

25...137

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THE  
N A T U R E  
O F  
R E L I G I O U S   Z E A L .

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General Epistle of ST. JUDE, Verse 3.

*That ye should earnestly contend for the Faith  
which was once delivered to the Saints.*

**W**HEN we see a Zeal for Religion enforced by the Precepts, and by the Example of our Saviour, and his Apostles, we cannot but acknowledge it to be a Duty incumbent on Christians.

When we consider its Nature, and the Manner of its Operation, how general and powerful an Engine it is in the Hands of Men; and how convenient, and reputable a Cover it supplies for their Errors, their Passions, and their Vices; we are alarmed at the Uses to which it may be applied.

And when we look into the History of those numerous Evils, which it has actually produced in all Ages of the Church, we shrink back with Horror from the Prospect; and, in our first Emotions, are almost tempted to doubt either the Genuineness of the Precept, or the Graciousness of its Design.

That a Religion, so conformable to the Dictates of the purest and sublimest Morality, and so friendly to all the tender and benevolent Affections, should have

occasioned many of the worst Evils of human Life: that the Gospel of Truth, Mercy, and Peace, should have led to the most odious Falsehood, and have armed Men with more than savage Fury and Cruelty to their mutual Destruction: that the Cause of Heaven should thus, I say, have been fought with the Weapons, and enlarged the Dominion, of the Kingdom of Darkness, may almost stagger our Faith; may excite Reflections injurious to the *Goodness* of God, if such be the Design, or the natural and genuine Effects of the Christian Dispensation; to His *Wisdom*, if Zeal (the authorized and hallowed Weapon of its Warfare) be, contrary to His Intention, generally and uniformly seen to produce them.

The Prejudices and Mischiefs to Christianity, that these disgraceful Contentions for it have occasioned, are infinite. They have

have depreciated its Value, raised Objections to its Truth, retarded its Progress, and diminished its Influence. They have been a Stumbling-block to the weak, and an Offence to the profane; the Shame and Confusion of its Friends, and the Triumph of its Enemies.

It will, however, upon a nearer Inspection of the Subject, appear, that they are perfectly consistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of God; that the Zeal which occasions them, is essential to the Propagation, the Purity, the Influence of the Gospel; natural, necessary, and unavoidable, in its serious Disciples; that the Consequences which spring from it, and which are so justly to be lamented, flow from the Imperfection, Ignorance, and Wickedness of Man, in the same Way that almost every other Evil in Society is produced; on which Account we

can scarcely hope they will ever be entirely remedied.

But it is our Duty, *Ours* more particularly, to guard against these malignant Effects of Zeal, both in Ourselves and Others, as much as possible: And let it be an additional Motive to *Us*, that the Sacerdotal Character hath been frequently, and Truth obliges us to confess not altogether unjustly, reproached with an opposite Conduct.

It will not, therefore, it is hoped, be thought unfuitable to this Occasion and Audience, if I endeavour, with this View, to bring to your Recollection the Grounds and Measures of the Duty of Religious Zeal: On what Reasons it is founded; by what Causes it is liable to be corrupted; in what Spirit, and with what Temper, it is to be exercised; to what Objects directed,

directed ; and within what Limits restrained.

Zeal, considered in general, springs from the Affection of the Mind for the Objects of seeming Good. To the Love of Happiness we are incited by a natural Impulse ; to the Attainment and Preservation of those Things that we suppose will in any Degree contribute to it, by a natural Desire. In the Warmth and Energy of this Desire, consists the general Nature of Zeal ; a Principle of Action, as universal as the Love of Happiness in Men ; and as various as their Pursuits thereof, in its Objects and Operation.

From hence it is easy to perceive the Reason and Necessity of that Zeal, which has Religion for its Object ; for, if Religion appear as a Good, it must, like every other

other apparent Good, engage the Affections of Men, and stimulate them to such Exertions, as are deemed the proper Means of promoting it.

But, how liable that Zeal must be to Corruption, and how mischievous in its Effects when corrupted, will be obvious if we attend to the Powers it assumes, and to the Nature of Mankind by whom they are exercised. The Biass which Education, Habit, and Authority fix upon the Mind ; and the Weakness of Reason and Conscience, when opposed to Interest and Inclination, are perceived in numberless Instances ; but in none more than those where Men can disguise their Enormities, under honourable Names and Pretences ; and of these the Duty of Religious Zeal furnishes so ample a Fund, that there is hardly any Wickedness that has not been committed with the professed

feffed Design of promoting God's Glory, and the Salvation of Mankind.

Does holy Scripture, in any detached Passages, seem to give a Countenance, and Colour to their Proceedings? It is of little Consequence that those Passages are obscure, are doubtful, are contradicted by others more numerous and more clear, by Reason, and by the whole evident Design of Christianity. These are Considerations they can easily overlook; they have God's express Command for what they do.

Are they even unable to press one single Text into the Service of their Passions, or Designs? They have nevertheless, God's general Authority; their Purposes are holy, and the End is to sanctify the Means.

And

And by this kind of Sophistry, not indeed unusual on other Occasions, do Men get rid of their Scruples; hiding both from themselves, and others, the Deformity of vicious Actions, under the Semblance and Pretext of Duty; and sheltering every odious Passion, and corrupt Interest behind the venerable Name of Zeal for Religion!

From such Considerations as these some have been led to assert, it would have been for the Benefit of Mankind, had Zeal never been numbered among Christian Virtues.

But, for the same Reason, our Zeal for Civil Liberty and Civil Government; for Arts and Literature, and indeed for every thing that is most useful and beneficial to Mankind, ought likewise to be proscribed. We should remember, that the *best* Things

Things are liable, and perhaps are *most* liable, to be perverted to the *worst* Purposes ; and that it is not allowed in just Reasoning, to conclude against the general Use of a Thing, from its accidental *Abuse*. The Necessity of Zeal towards the Propagation of the Gospel, is obvious ; the gracious Purposes of that Dispensation, we know ; and we must be blind, or to the last Degree prejudiced, not to see, or not to acknowledge, the general, great, and beneficial Influence it has had upon Society, notwithstanding those Corruptions.

It is common with Men deploring the Evils of Zeal, to think and speak of them as appropriated to *Religious* Zeal alone. But these exclusive Censures are not just. They flow alike from every kind of Zeal whatever be its Object. And they must necessarily do so in every Contention ;  
where

where the Affections, Interests, and Passions of *Men* are concerned, and their Wrath inflamed by Opposition.

And, it is further to be observed, that very many of those particular Mischiefs, that have usually been ascribed to *Religious* Zeal, have, in Truth, owed their Origin to other Causes ; which the discerning Readers of History will see, and the candid will acknowledge.

Religion indeed is so powerful an Engine in a State, that seldom are any great Changes attempted to be introduced therein, where that is allowed to remain entirely inactive and unconcerned. But to ascribe to Religious Zeal, the Evils produced by every Effort of Policy, every Struggle for Power in which it may have happened to be employed as an Auxiliary, is to confound Effects with their Causes ;  
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and betrays a want of Attention, of Judgment, or of Candour.

To give an instance of this kind of Partiality. The *Rise* of the Civil Wars in this Kingdom in the last Century, are by a celebrated Historian ascribed to the Operation of *Religious Zeal*; and, to represent it in its lowest State of Degradation, of Zeal for trifling Ceremonies; the Use of the Surplice, the Ring in Marriage, the Sign of the Cross in Baptism. And this he asserts upon the Authority, as he would have us believe, of "all the Historians who lived near that Age; and even of all Authors who have casually mentioned those Transactions; who have agreed in ascribing them to so mean and contemptible an Origin \*."

\* Hume's Hist. Vol. vi. p. 389, 390. Edit. Quart. 1773.

There is hardly however any Truth of this Kind better established in History, than that those Wars *did not* take their rise from a Zeal for those, or for any other Ceremonies; but from a Zeal for the Interests of *Civil Liberty*, almost, if not altogether, unconnected with the Cause of Religion; which did not, till some Time after, come to be blended with them. And so far is it from Truth that all Historians, and even all Authors who have casually mentioned those Transactions, have agreed in ascribing them to the Causes this Writer mentions; that I believe he is the only one, I am sure he is the only one of any Eminence, who has given Way to a Conceit, of which even *his own* Account, prejudiced and partial as it is, furnishes a sufficient Refutation \*.

\* For a full Verification of these Points, the Reader is referred to "Letters on Mr. Hume's History" (P. 228 et sequentibus).

There are likewise some Mistakes in the general Nature of Religious Zeal ; which, by ascribing to it Qualities that do not belong to it, would load it with the Ignominy of Crimes, of which it is entirely innocent.

And of this too the same History furnishes a remarkable Instance \* : “ It being, according to this Author, almost a general Rule; that in all Religions, except the true, the Zeal that induces any Man to *suffer* Martyrdom, would also make him willing to *inflict* it on all those who differ from him.” In which Observation it is difficult to discover, either Truth, or Common Sense; or indeed any thing, but the Malice of its Author. But he knew to what Inferences it would give Rise; and that it had no very rigor-

\* Hume's Hist. Vol. iv. p. 413.

ous Examination to fear, from those for whose Use it was designed \*.

With

\* The Passage not having, that I know of, been taken Notice of before, may be worth preserving, as a Specimen of the “ Candour, the Impartiality, and Ingenuoufness which Mr. Hume's Admirers tell us (vid. Preface to his Dispute with Rousseau) distinguish his Character and Writings.”

“ There was one Philpot, possessed of such Zeal for Orthodoxy, that having been engaged in Dispute with an Arian, he spit in his Adversary's Face, to shew the great Detestation which he had entertained for that Heresy. He afterwards wrote a Treatise to justify this unmannerly Expression of Zeal; and, he said, he was led to it to relieve the Sorrow conceived from such horrid Blasphemy; and to signify how unworthy such a Miscreant was, of being admitted into the Society of any Christian. Philpot was a Protestant; and now falling into the Hands of People as zealous, and more powerful than himself, he was condemned to the Flames, and suffered at Smithfield.” And then follows this Reflection, of which the Author entertained so good an Opinion, that he added it to the later Editions of his History. “ It seems to be almost a general Rule, that in all Religions, except the true, no Man will suffer Martyrdom, that would not also *inflict* it willingly on all those who differ from him. The same Zeal for speculative Opinions is the Cause of both.”

With what view all this is done, it is easy enough to perceive; but whilst we seek not to disguise any of the Corruptions and Mischiefs that have arisen, or that do indeed proceed from a misgoverned Zeal

Here then we see a general Rule, inferred from a single Instance; from an Instance too, wherein it is taken for granted, that one who suffers, when he *cannot avoid suffering*, (that is by falling into the Hands of People more powerful than himself) suffers by his *own Choice*; that a Breach of *good Manners* (for he represents it as no more) implies the worst of *Crimes*; and that *spitting in an Adversary's Face*, is little less than *roasting him alive*.

As to the Reserve in Favour of the *true* Religion, in which it seems it is possible for a Man to suffer Martyrdom, without wishing to inflict it on all who differ from him; it will not amount to much, with any Person at all acquainted with Mr. Hume's Sentiments of Religion, as they appear in his Writings. At all Events, it belongs to those alone to thank him for the Exception, that have the Benefit of it. A Catholic, a Mahometan, or a Heathen has at least a Chance, that *his* Religion may come under the Denomination of the *true*; from which Piece of good Fortune, Mr. Hume expressly excludes the established Religion of his Country. For it was the Martyrdom of a Protestant, and his supposed Willingness to have inflicted the same Punishment on all who differed from him, with which Mr. Hume introduces, on which he forms, and to which he applies his general Rule.

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for Religion, referring them to their true Cause, the Weakness and Wickedness of Mankind; let us justify it, where Truth and Reason will support us, from those which do not belong to it.

A truly Christian Zeal consists in a sincere and earnest Desire, founded upon a Principle of Duty, to promote the Honour of God, and the Good of Men; by spreading the Knowledge, inculcating the Belief, and enforcing the Practice of the genuine Doctrines of Christianity. What those are, and with what Weapons, and what Degree of Earnestness, our Contentions for them are to be carried on; we are to learn from Scripture and Reason,

The first Care of such a Zeal, will be to inform itself thoroughly of the Doctrines, whether they be of God: Knowing, that

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without

without this Care, it might teach for the sure Word of Truth, the Errors of fallible Men.

Its next Concern will be, that the Means it recurs to in promoting those Doctrines, be such as Reason, and Religion allow; just, charitable, and prudent. Without which, even its well-meant Endeavours will be criminal, and their Success destructive of the very End, and Design of Christianity.

In Matters of mere Speculation, and Opinion; in Things either doubtful or indifferent; and about which, both good and wise Men may differ in their Sentiments, without Injury to Religion, unless it be by the Want of Candour in their Disputes about them; it takes but a very small Part.

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In promoting Doctrines however true, important, and indisputable, it remembers always “ what Spirit it is of;” that “ the Son of Man came not to destroy Men’s Lives, but to save them;” not to break the Bonds of natural Affection, but to reconcile them both to God, and to each other.

It does not think itself justified in *Lying* for the *Truth*, nor in the Commission of any Evil, not even for the Sake of any Good. It is solicitous that Men should entertain true Notions of God, and of their Relation, and Dependence upon him; of their Duty, and the Means of conciliating his Favour; but it is, if possible, more solicitous that this Knowledge should produce its proper Effects upon their Lives, and Conversations. It can unite the greatest Detestation of Sin, with the most unfeigned Charity to the Sinner;

the most sovereign Contempt for dissingenuous Sophistry, in the Perversion of Truth, with undissembled Good-will for the Persons of those who are guilty of it. It does not confine God's Mercies to a Sect, or Country; reprobating, at the same Time, all those who are not included within its own narrow Circle; but looking on Mankind at large, as common Children of one common Parent, "who made of one Blood all Nations of Men," it embraces them with the Affection of Brethren; reverencing Virtue, and sincere Piety wherever found; making all proper Allowances for natural, and unavoidable Error; and severe only to wilful Blindness, or obstinate and assuming Wickedness, and to the Doctrines that encourage, and promote them. It accommodates itself with Christian Prudence to Times and Seasons; to the Errors, the Passions, the Faults and Infirmities of Mankind; winning

ning them to a Love for Truth by every virtuous Art, and becoming, with the Apostle "all Things to all Men, that it may by all Means save some." It knows how to combat the Errors of Ignorance, with Tenderness; the Prejudices of Education, without Rage; and the Contradiction of Infidels that "will not receive our Saviour, without calling down Fire from Heaven," or kindling it upon Earth, to consume them. It is a genial and vital Heat, a mild and heavenly Flame, a Fire that enlightens, warms, and burns not. It is equally remote from that Fever of the Mind, which breaks out in delirious Acts of Violence, Cruelty, and Rage in the Cause of Religion; and that Lethargy which makes Men insensible, and dead to its Interests.

These are the sure Marks, the genuine Qualities, and Offices of a well-informed,  
and

and well-regulated Zeal. To apply, and compare them with some of its worst, or most usual Corruptions, will exhaust all that I have to offer upon the Subject.

That Massacres, Poisonings, and Assassinations; that Racks, Dungeons, and Fire should ever have been thought the proper Instruments of promoting the Religion of Christ; that the vilest Perfidies, and most savage Cruelties, that ever disgraced human Nature, should have been taught as Precepts of the Gospel, or practised for its Honour, and Advancement; is monstrous, and shocking to common Sense, no less than to every human Feeling. And yet, we know, this was once almost the only Method of converting Unbelievers, known, or practised in the Christian World.— But better were it to set Men loose at once from all Religion, and to leave them entirely to the Guidance of Reason and natural

tural Humanity; which would generally lead them to much more mild and merciful Conclusions; than to subject them to a Faith which authorises, which commands them to be false, treacherous, and cruel!

But let the Scandal of these melancholy Events rest where it ought to do; not on Christianity, which is altogether clear from every just Imputation of having authorised such Enormities; but on the Guilty in every Sect, and on every Doctrine that gives the least Encouragement to them.

Whatever is clearly revealed in holy Scripture, or may fairly be deduced from thence must be right; and therefore, should bear down any particular Scruples, which an Attention to Consequences, might produce. Whatever is collected from thence with a less Degree of Evidence, may be wrong;

wrong; and therefore it never can be our Duty to propagate it as undoubted Truth. If it has besides an evil Tendency; if it leads to Immorality, and to defeat the great and fundamental Doctrines and Designs of the Gospel; we may safely pronounce it to be false.

In the particular Case of Persecution for Conscience-Sake; should we even go so far as to allow it to be a disputable Point whether it be enjoined or not; when we consider the dreadful Evils of which it is productive; what is there to justify us in making it a Part of our Religion, or in venturing to act upon it?

In this Case, the Injury done to our Brethren is plain and obvious; our Warrant on the other Hand, from Scripture and Reason, of a dubious and uncertain Nature. Shall we then give up what is  
clear

clear and certain, for what is doubtful? shall we, upon the Authority of some few Texts, or Arguments of perhaps an ambiguous Appearance, act contrary to the whole Tenor of the Gospel, and that too where the very Lives of our Fellow-Creatures, and every thing that is most dear to them is concerned?

From this clear Principle of Reason which proportions our Assent to the Degree of Evidence before us, and which restrains us from asserting as divine, those Doctrines that are at the same Time both doubtfully revealed, and of a wicked and pernicious Tendency; we are enabled to pass Sentence on several other Corruptions of Religious Zeal.

For Instance, it appears from the whole Tenor of Scripture, from particular Passages, and from the evident Reason of the  
Thing,

Thing, that good Works are necessary to Salvation. To teach a contrary Doctrine has a natural Tendency to destroy Morality, to sooth Men into a loose Course of Life, to undermine the Foundations of Society, to raise unworthy Notions of God, and very dangerous ones of the Terms of Man's Acceptance with Him, if the Doctrine should not be true.

What shall we say then to those modern Zealots, who, upon no better Grounds than some mistaken Passages in St. Paul's Epistles, go about unsettling the Faith of their weaker Brethren, flattering the wicked with vain Hopes, and terrifying the well-meaning with unnecessary Fears; setting Men loose from the proper Duties of their Callings, to engage in unprofitable Questions, and uncharitable Censures, of the Character, and Condition of their Brethren?

That

That such are the Effects of denying the Necessity of good Works to Salvation, and of dwelling for ever upon the Doctrine of Faith, and Faith only; I appeal to Reason, and Experience. That the Doctrine is as false, and absurd, as it is pernicious, is clear from numberless Passages of Scripture; but more particularly from St. James, who asserts, that "by Works a Man is justified, and not by Faith only," and that "Faith without Works is dead." St. Paul indeed affirms, that a Man is "justified by Faith, without the Deeds of the Law." But the seeming Contrariety of these Doctrines admits an easy Reconciliation. To those that consider the several Occasions on which the two Apostles wrote; the different Adversaries they were engaged with, and the particular Scope of their respective Arguments, it will evidently appear, that the seeming Difference be-

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tween them, is a Difference of Words only; and that as to the Terms of Justification, they entirely agree. They both require a holy Life, springing out of a true and lively Faith; only St. James specifies the *Effect*, which necessarily implies the *Cause*; St. Paul insists solely on the *Cause*, which of Course involves the *Effect*.

But we need not go so far; for, supposing it even impossible to reconcile this seeming Contradiction, what else would follow, but that the two opposite Passages balancing each other, and their Authority being equal, no satisfactory Conclusion could be drawn from either? When to this we add, that principal Consideration in all doubtful Points, the evil Tendency of the Doctrine in Question, the great Danger of teaching that good Works are not necessary to Salvation, the Zeal of propagating it must appear highly blameable.

PART

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## PART II.

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General Epistle of ST. JUDE, Verse 3.

*That ye should earnestly contend for the Faith  
which was once delivered to the Saints.*

THE same Kind of Reasoning will be found equally applicable to another Instance of depraved Zeal, in which Religion is greatly interested; though it cannot indeed, in Strictness, be denominated *Religious Zeal*, on Account of its Object; which is the *Destruction* of Religion. I mean that earnest Contention, not for the Faith once delivered to the Saints, but for its Subversion; not for the Propagation of particular Errors, but for the

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the entire Ruin and Annihilation of Christianity; frequently with a View, as it is pretended, of substituting Natural Religion in its Place; and sometimes, for the Removal of both out of the World.

A Species of Zeal which whether we consider its Motives, or its Effects; is justly entitled to the Contempt, and Abhorrence of every Friend to Virtue, and Society.

That I am not supposing an uncommon Case, or that it is amongst the lowest Vulgar only that such Instances are to be met with, witness the Labours of many distinguished Writers; many that would pass for Men of the deepest Researches, and most enlarged Understanding; of the most unprejudiced and liberal Sentiments; that are passionately enamoured of the Beauty of Virtue; are filled with the warmest

warmest Love of Truth; the highest Veneration for the Rights of human Nature; the Interests of Society; the Happiness of Men; but whose great Employment it is, at the same Time, to instil Doubts into the Minds of Believers, to diminish the Reverence of Religion, and the Restraints of Duty.

And their Endeavours, in whatever Way they are exerted, are but too successful; the Generality of Men finding no Obscurity in that Reasoning, no Sophistry in those Arguments, no Folly in that Wit, no Absurdity in those Doctrines which are to free them from uneasy Restraints, and tormenting Reflections; and to give them, at the same Time, the *Pleasures* of Vice, and the *Reputation* of *Wisdom*.

Without entering into any Vindication of the Gospel, from Objections which

have been repeatedly, and solidly refuted; it is sufficient to shew, that upon their own Principles and Professions, the Zeal exerted by the great Patrons of Infidelity, in disseminating the Seeds of Irreligion, is altogether absurd, unnatural, and criminal.

The Truths, or, if they please, the Prejudices of Christianity, are salutary to Morals; to the Interests of Virtue; to the Peace, and Happiness of Individuals, and of Society. To subvert their Authority, and Influence, is to sap the Foundation of all Truth, Probity, and Justice among Men; and as far as those Endeavours prove successful, to people the World with a Race of Monsters,

It will be in vain to tell us that Reason, and natural Religion lead Men to the same Conclusion as Revelation does—the Necessity

sity of Virtue to Happiness. For why deprive Virtue of its best, and strongest Sanctions, when they see that Reason, even with the Aid of Religion, is much too weak to keep the Generality of Men to their Duty?

What Judgement then are we to form of that boasted Philosophy, which instead of contributing to the Good of Men, is solely occupied in making them more wicked, and miserable than they would otherwise be? What Opinion are we to entertain of those Philosophers, who, for the Sake of establishing perhaps some merely speculative Truths, care not if they demolish the whole Fabrick of Human Virtue, and Happiness?—Let one of the most eminent amongst themselves answer for us.

“ They are to be deemed the Pests of Society; even if the Opinions they ad-

vance against Religion be true; for their Endeavours are directed to loosen the Bands of it, and to take at least one Curb out of the Mouth of that wild Beast Man, when it were well if he were checked by Half a Score others \*."

That the very Author from whom the Force of Truth, in an unguarded Moment, extorted this Confession, should, in Contradiction to Sentiments so reasonable, and virtuous, have † directed the Publication of Writings which strike at the very Existence of all Religion, both Natural and Revealed; at a Time too when Death should have removed him for ever out of the Way of reaping any private Advantage from the Mischief he meditated;

\* Lord Bolingbroke, in Swift's Works published by Hawksworth, Vol. ii. p. 200, 201. O&A. Ed. 1767.

† Lord Bolingbroke in his Will ordered these Writings to be published after his Death.

was

was an Act of Wickedness for which we want a Name.

But, for the Happiness of Mankind, the Attack on Religion was as weak, as it was wicked; and, exclusive of the general Detestation which it excites, remains a Monument of nothing so much, as of the Decrepitude, and Dotage of Understanding, to which Vice, and Vanity may bring a reputed Genius,

There is indeed a Distinction to be made, where any particular Mode of Religion is, in its own Nature, manifestly and unavoidably, subversive of Truth, of Morality, of the Virtue, and Happiness of Mankind. The same Motives which would lead a virtuous Infidel to a Reserve in the one Case, prompt him to Opposition in the other.

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In Countries, for Instance, where the Inquisition is established; where Men's religious Opinions are adjusted upon the Iron Bed of Power, and are there lopped off, or stretched out to the exact Dimensions, which Ecclesiastical Tyranny has prescribed; a Man would, from a Principle of Self-Defence, and of Love to Virtue and Society, act very justifiably in his warmest Opposition to Usurpations, that so impudently invade the most sacred Rights of Mankind.

But in this Age, and Country of Mildness and Moderation, of political and religious Liberty; where that "rare Felicity," described by the Historian, is enjoyed in its utmost Extent; "of thinking whatever we please, and of declaring our Sentiments with Freedom \*;" where Religion is thoroughly purified from every

\* Tacitus.

destructive

destructive Prejudice, and where such Evils are not so much as pretended to be dreaded; what is there to induce, or to justify such an Attempt?

Christianity, if an *Error*, can do no *Harm*; Infidelity, if a *Truth*, no *Good*. And on the contrary, the former, though it should happen to be mistaken, is productive of numberless happy Effects; the latter, though it were right, of the worst Evils to which Mankind are subject.

But Philosophers, we are sometimes told, are answerable for the *Truth* only, and *not* for the Consequences of their Doctrines.—Be it so—let them propose what the Reason of Mankind can acquiesce in as undoubted Truth; and they shall not be charged with the Guilt of any Consequences that may result therefrom.—But do the most eminent  
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amongst them even pretend to have arrived at that Certainty? On the contrary, do they not themselves assure us, that “ \* Truth is hardly, if at all, within the Reach of Human Capacity ;” that “ † from a View of the manifold Contradictions, and Imperfections of human Reason, they can look on no Opinion even as more probable or likely than any other ?” and “ that the utmost that Philosophy can do in the Investigation of Truth, is to doubt ‡ ?”

And is it under these Circumstances of acknowledged Uncertainty, that their absurd and atheistical Reveries are to pass for *Truth* ; and, under that Denomination, to be deemed innocent of the bad Effects they are calculated to produce ?

\* Treatise of Human Nature, Vol. i. p. 3, 4.

† Ibid. p. 466.

‡ Hume passim.

Whether

Whether real Truths are ever, generally, prejudicial to Mankind ; and whether, in any Case, it is a Part of Duty not to divulge them, may perhaps be a Question ; but it can admit of none, that to spread possible or probable Falsehood, generally subversive of human Virtue and Happiness, is highly criminal.

It was not thus, nor in this Spirit, that a virtuous Heathen philosophised ; when amidst those Lights that mere Reason could supply, and those Mists which it could not entirely dissipate ; he argued himself into a willing Belief, of what Christianity has since so clearly revealed, the Reality of a future State. “ If in this Persuasion,” says he, “ I err, I am pleased with my Error ; nor will I suffer so sweet a Delusion to be ravished from me as long as I live \*.” And it is the honest Language of Virtue and Reason.

\* Cicero de Senectute ad Finem.

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Our modern Philosophers, on the contrary, do all they can to defeat the Wishes, and stifle the Hopes of Nature; they would gladly extinguish that "Light of Life and Immortality" which the Gospel has brought into the World, to guide the bewildered Traveller in his Way to Happiness; and, instead of "rejoicing in that Light" themselves, they grudge its Comforts to others.

One might wonder, therefore, upon what Principle of Reason, which they profess to be governed by; of Virtue, which they pretend to reverence; of Love to Mankind, of which they boast; or even of a reputable *Self-Interest*, they would be thought to proceed.

In respect to others, the Labours of the Infidel, tend only to Mischief; to fill the World with Vice, and Misery.

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In respect to himself, the Consequences seem to be as little the Objects of Desire. If indeed his Views be only to profit, from whatever Quarter it may arise, it is acknowledged he judges not amiss. The Avidity with which those Writings are bought up, that pander to the Lusts and Vices of Men, as infidel Books always do, promises this Kind of Success even to moderate Talents. But though we can scarce doubt that such is often the chief Motive to such Publications, it is too detestable to be avowed by any one, that is not entirely lost to all Sense of Shame, as well as Duty.

Of those then that would be thought to act on Principles not wholly abandoned, we might ask, what Ends of even a reputable *Self-Interest* the Publication of sceptical Books can answer? Is it so desirable a Thing for a Philosopher to live

live in a World let loose from the Belief of a God and a Providence; of the Distinctions, and the Issues of Virtue, and Vice? Would it not, whatever Reasons or Temptations the Infidel may have, to conclude *himself* emancipated from the Obligations of Religion, still be for his Advantage, that they retained their full Force, and Influence upon the rest of the World? of which yet it is his Aim and Endeavour to deprive them.

It need not, however, continue any Matter of Surprise to us, that contrary to every Motive of Virtue, Reason, and Interest, Infidelity endeavours to make Profelytes; when we reflect how much stronger a Consideration Vanity is, with some Men, and upon some Occasions, than any other. To think with the rest of the World, is to be no wiser than the rest of the World; but to contradict and subvert

subvert the common Sentiments of Mankind, and in Points where they are most agreed, is Glory and Triumph. And it is astonishing to what Lengths this ridiculous Ambition will sometimes carry Men. We know that so senseless a Thing as Atheism has had its Martyrs; Martyrs that have submitted to Death, rather than acknowledge the Being of a God. For which what other Motive can be assigned, than the Ambition of appearing wiser, than the rest of the World?

We see the Workings of similar Passions even in an opposite Instance. The Apostle tells us, that in his Days, some even “preached *Christ* of Envy and Strife.” Had our modern Unbelievers lived when the Religion of the World was Heathenism, it is no improbable Supposition, that many of them might

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even have preached Christianity, from just the same Motive that they now oppose it.

Were they actuated by any Thing but Vice and Vanity, they would keep their Doubts, or Disbelief, within their own Bosom ; “ they would think, as the Infidel Author above-quoted expresses it, for themselves, and to themselves ; and, whatever Opinions they might entertain, would certainly think it their Duty not to disturb the Peace of the World by propagating them \*.”

This being the Case, what have the Friends of Religion, and Mankind, to oppose to their Attacks? Reason alone, is ever found an inadequate Remedy for Evils wrought in Contempt of Reason,

\* Lord Bolingbroke as above.

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and which, had that been attended to, would never have existed at all.

It is to those gangrened Passions by which they are generated, and to which they owe their Success, that our principal Attention should be directed. Could these be cured, we should hear little more of Infidelity. The Truths of Christianity, would then meet with as easy a Reception, as any other Truths which Men find no Interest, and can gain no Honour, by opposing. And the most likely Way to effect this, is to represent the Absurdities in which Infidelity abounds, in such Lights as to make Men ashamed of calling it *Philosophy*. These Caustics, so suited to the Nature of the Disease, and of the Patient, would more effectually, perhaps, than any Thing else, eat away that Vanity which is always in some Shape and some Degree at the Bottom of Infidel

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Writings ;

Writings; and keep down that Admiration, in which vicious Folly is so apt to hold them, and which almost alone qualifies them to do Mischief.

And if that Ridicule, which has so often been employed in the Perversion of Truth, may be at all recurred to in its Defence, what ampler Range, what happier Exertions can it have, than in exposing Vice and Folly, assuming the Name, the Dress, and the Honours of Wisdom?

To some, perhaps, this may seem too light a Proceeding, upon so serious a Subject. But where can be the Harm, or the Injustice, of holding up to Derision those dishonest Labours, that aim at Reputation, by Reasonings, which are a Disgrace to Science; and, what is worse, have the most mischievous Influence

ence upon the Morals and Happiness of Mankind?

If under this Denomination, I take the Liberty to rank even the most profound Speculations of the *New Philosophy*, as it is called, it is with a serious Conviction that I do them no Injustice. Nor let it be thought Presumption to speak of them in this Manner. The Abilities of their Authors I mean not to controvert; nor to disparage their Dexterity in obscuring what is clear, and confounding what is true. It is not always *their* Fault, but that of the Cause they are engaged in, that their Reasoning is so weak, and their Conclusions so absurd. To believe that they are themselves imposed on by such Sophistry, would, notwithstanding the peculiar Confidence with which it is urged, be doing them Injustice. They know, as well as we, that the Philosophy

which they would pass upon the World for irrefragable; and as sufficient to annihilate Christianity, with those that are not *miraculously stupid*\*; is, when stripped of its verbal Obscurity and Ambiguity, even too contemptible for a serious Refutation. It is the evil Tendency of their Doctrines, and the unquestioned Currency which Men's vicious Inclinations give to them, that alone render them worthy of those solid Answers they have received. To enter into any laboured Confutation of them, is, on every other Account, doing them an Honour, to which they are not intitled. Nor is it often, in regard to their Authors, of much Effect; since we see Infidelity not ashamed to *republish*

\* Hume's Essays, P. 356, Quart. Ed. "Whosoever is moved by Faith to assent to it, (that is the Christian Religion) is conscious of a continued Miracle in his own Person, which subverts all the Principles of his Understanding; and gives him a Determination to believe, what is most contrary to Custom and Experience."

Aburdities,

Aburdities, of which it has been convicted, in a Way that leaves it nothing to reply\*.

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\* Other Reasons than that of having nothing to reply, have been given for this Reserve. "He has seen (say the Admirers of one particular Author of this Stamp, in the Introduction to a Pamphlet of his own) his Works frequently censured with Bitterness by Fanaticism, Ignorance, and the Spirit of Party; without ever giving an Answer to his Adversaries." (Vid. Hume's Dispute with Rousseau.)

He has seen, will every impartial Person say, his Works frequently convicted, in the clearest and fullest Manner, of the grossest Misrepresentations, and Self-Contradictions; of the plainest Perversions of Truth in History, in Science, in Religion. He has seen himself charged, with having endeavoured by metaphysical Sophisms, and Words without Meaning, to mislead the Weak and the Unwary; to throw down the Distinctions between Virtue and Vice; to subvert the Doctrine of a future State of Retributions; and in that respect of having done, what himself confesses, ought never to be done by any one that would be esteemed a good Citizen.—And all this he has seen, with a silent and seeming Indifference; which is to pass, if the World will be so satisfied, for "a Contempt of Adversaries, a Love of Peace, and a Regard to the Dignity of Science."

Many Persons, however, will be tempted to ascribe so unusual a Reserve, to other Motives. They will tell him,

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To render these as ridiculous, as they are absurd, would be doing an essential Service

that it is a Duty he owes to himself, and to the Publick; to vindicate, or to retract Doctrines justly thought so very injurious to Truth, and Virtue; and which he has laboured to establish upon the Ruins of both. That his Contempt of Adversaries is misplaced; and his Concern for the Interests of Peace, and the Honour of Science, on this Occasion at least, a mere Pretext. They will refer him to his own Conduct, and to the acknowledged Motives of it, in that only Instance where he has departed from his usual Silence; his Dispute with Rousseau. And when they see him so excessively jealous of his Reputation in one Instance — where it was not publicly attacked — and where most Men will agree it was in no Danger; — and so regardless of it, — where he is charged with Offences of a much more heinous Nature than a Violation of private Friendship\*, — and much more interesting to that Public to which he appeals; — so careful in providing an Antidote to Calumnies of that Sort — which might possibly appear — after his Death — in Memoirs that might possibly be written — by a crack-brained Author; — (for such Rousseau is in Mr. Hume's Estimation) and so unconcerned, where his honest Fame as a Man and a Citizen, is actually at Stake; when, I say, they consider all this, they will be apt to conclude, that his Reserve on the latter of these Occasions, however disguised, is the Result of Prudence; and that he declines entering into any Defence of his exceptionable Doctrines, from a Con-

\* Hume's Dispute with Rousseau, towards the End.

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Service to Mankind, without violating any Law that I know of, either of Reason or Religion. Nor is any Thing farther generally required for this, than to divest them of that unmeaning Jargon, that Mist of Words in which they are enveloped, and which would obscure the plainest Dictates of Reason and common Sense.

Whatever Difficulties may be found in Christianity, and whatever Imputations of Weakness, of Superstition, or even of *miraculous Stupidity*, the Belief in it may have procured us, from these profound Authors; there is no Credulity on Earth, that can digest the Doctrines of Infidelity, when exposed in their native Absurdity. A complete Collection of them, reduced into intelligible Language, and pursued with consciousness that they admit of none; and that he cannot even attempt it, without furnishing the only Proof that is wanting, of their entire Absurdity.

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to their most obvious Conclusions, would furnish a stronger Satyr than has ever yet appeared, upon the human Understanding \*.

It may not be improper to add a few Words, in regard to the *controversial Writings* of the Advocates of Christianity. That they are sometimes carried beyond the Limits of Christian Moderation, no ingenuous Person will deny; or when they do offend in that respect, will attempt to justify. But that such Offences are almost peculiar to them; or that they exceed in Virulence the Practice of Writers on other Subjects of Controversy; or even the Example of their particular Adversaries, as is often objected to them, is not true in Fact; which it would be easy to evince from many Instances.

\* In p. 483, & seq. of Dr. Beattie's admirable Essay on Truth, the Reader will find a Collection nearly of this Kind, sufficient to verify the Assertion here made.

The Truth is, that this Polemical Spirit, is but too apt to insinuate itself into every Dispute of every Kind; and very often to the Disgrace of the Cause, which it would support. Nor do we pretend that the Advocates of Christianity are altogether exempt from it. But it is an Offence, for which they alone who are guilty of it, are answerable; and ought not to reflect any Dishonour upon the Christian Religion; which is so far from allowing, that it condemns every Breach of Charity in the strongest Manner.

We have indeed been surfeited with empty Declamations upon the *Rage of Theologians*, in their Contentions for the Faith. But to what, even allowing them to be just, do they amount; though the Use these Declaimers would make of them is obvious? They are glad to find a Relief from the Weight and Oppression of Argument, in the misgoverned Zeal of  
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their Opposers ; and would be very willing to transfer the Censure due to the Passions and Infirmities of Men, to Christianity itself ; which is as little answerable for *them*, as Philosophy is for the Follies, so often obtruded upon the World, under its Name.

That Men should betray the same Sort of Warmth in their Contentions for the Faith, that they do in every other, where they are in earnest, and the Matter is of Importance ; or that this Warmth should sometimes carry them to unjustifiable Excesses, is nothing wonderful. This, however, these profound Thinkers, these Men of liberal and enlarged Sentiments, cannot, or care not, to distinguish. Religion is to bear the Blame of those very Excesses, which it condemns.

Not that every Degree of Warmth, or even of Severity, is forbidden on these Occa-

Occasions. In the lesser Differences indeed that divide Christians ; to Mistakes that are not wilful ; to Errors that are not criminal, we can hardly be too indulgent. Nay even in regard to the indecent Asperities with which such Opponents may treat us, we can form an Apology for them, from the Nature of that Zeal with which they are animated ; and which, we know, is but too apt to transport even the best Men, beyond due Bounds ; but in Defence of the great Articles of Natural and Revealed Religion ; the Being and Providence of God ; the Truth and divine Authority of Scripture ; the Certainty of a future State of Retributions ; and the Moral Liberty of Human Actions ; it is, if I mistake not, that our Zeal is in its more peculiar Province. The very Attempt to subvert these Truths, is Treason against Mankind, and against Society. And, can we, ought we to be unmoved, when Doctrines so pernicious, instead of seeking

seeking that Solitude and Obscurity ; in which, if a Man is really foolish or wicked enough to entertain them, they ought to hide themselves ; come abroad in the Face of Day, challenging Respect, as the sublimest Efforts of Human Genius ; and Gratitude, as the most substantial Benefits to Human Kind ? And does any Law of Reason or Religion forbid us to express our Abhorrence of the Design, or our Contempt (where they deserve it) of the Absurdity, of such Writings ? Is it not the most probable Means of diminishing their Credit, and of counteracting their Influence, to hold them up in their true Shape, to the Detestation and Derision of the World ? And shall we, from mere personal Regards, and a Deference to Names, be so far wanting to the Cause of Truth and Virtue, as to forbear inflicting a Chastisement, so richly merited, and so much in our Power ?

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But still we should remember, that even in the best Cause, and against the unfairest Adversaries, there are Bounds, which Charity and Prudence forbid us to transgress. From Offences of the former Kind, we will forbear for our own Sakes, and theirs ; from those of the latter, for the Sake of Religion ; which is always found, whether justly or not, to suffer from the Misconduct of its Professors.

Let us not then, in our Defence of Christianity, disobey its Precepts ; nor by an Overflowing of uncharitable and imprudent Zeal, undermine its Credit,

But let us be cautious, at the same Time, of running into the other Extreme ; either deserting its Interests, from a mean and criminal Complaisance ; or injuring it perhaps still more, by a weak, timid, and partial Defence. Let us not appear in our Contentions for the Faith, like uninter-  
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ested and uninteresting Advocates, (re-  
 tained to plead a bad and desperate Cause,  
 of which we are ashamed); but with a  
 bold and honest Warmth. Let us not  
 only refute but retort the Accusations of  
 wicked Sophistry, with all the Strength  
 that the Goodness of our Plea can furnish;  
 and with all the Confidence that the Sense  
 of our Superiority, should inspire. Let us  
 always, in such a Cause, "speak boldly  
 as we ought to speak," and, in all our  
 Conduct, approve ourselves as Men seri-  
 ously convinced of the Truth and Impor-  
 tance of Christianity, and anxious for its  
 Success; and may the God, in whose Ser-  
 vice we are employed, bless and reward  
 our Labours. To whom, &c.

F I N I S.