

DEISM

EXAMINED BY REASON AND MORALITY,

AND

PROVED INCONSISTENT WITH EITHER.

ADDRESSED

TO ALL WHO HAVE ANY CONCERN ABOUT

RELIGION.

No doubt, but ye are the people, and
Wisdom shall die with you.

Job xii. 2.

BY R. LITTLE.

BROOKLYN:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY PRAY AND BOWEN.

. . .

1844.

P R E F A C E.

THE Substance of this small Essay has already appeared in print in the form of a Circular Letter to the Independent Churches of Warwickshire. The favourable terms in which some were pleased to speak of it, induced the author to put it in a new form, for more extensive circulation. Among the variety of Religious Tracts that are circulated in the country, the author hopes this may contribute to the general good ; if persons who are capable, will interest themselves to put it into the hands of those whom it most concerns. He hopes to be forgiven for leaving the plural pronoun we, unchanged throughout this tract ; he had several reasons for it, and he thinks, pride was not one of them.

Hanley, March 15th, 1800.

DEISM EXAMINED, &c.

IT would be inexcusable supineness, in an age when objectors to the Bible religion, are so bold and positive in their rejection of its evidence, for the Preachers of that holy system of truth to be silent or reserved in pleading its cause. Should we not rather dispute every inch of ground with our adversaries, and show ourselves determined not to yield a single point, which can be maintained with sound reason, and a good conscience? Certainly. Or otherwise, you who have committed yourselves to our instruction and spiritual care, will reproach us justly for neglecting your best interest, and leaving you a defenceless prey, to the *cunning craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*. But it shall not be so. No, we long to have you so established in the faith of the gospel, that the assaults of error may be unavailing; and to have those divine principles so influential on your minds and behaviour, that you *may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*. That these happy ends may be attained, we recommend to you the serious study of God's holy word. An acquaintance with the things revealed as the divine will, is the surest defence

against every enemy to our spiritual advantage. In reading, meditating upon, and acting according to the sacred scriptures, you will be freed, in many cases, from that perplexity, and indecision, which visibly characterize those who forsake this fountain of truth. *Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light unto my path.* When designing men would seduce you from the ways of righteousness, a knowledge of your duty, derived from this source will prompt you boldly to say, *We ought to obey God rather than man.* But it is a lamentable fact, that many, who have an opportunity to read the holy volume, and examine the evidence of its divine origin and authority, do neither: but, from a preconceived dislike to its contents, conclude, that it is not a revelation made by God. They object, that *its principles are complicated; that its doctrines are inconsistent with each other, and with plain matter of fact in the visible world: that the penmen of these books are unknown, though different names are affixed to them, that the christian doctrine of redemption, effected by the sufferings of the Deity incarnate, but ill corresponds with the notions we certainly ought to entertain of the insignificance of man, in the vast scale of the universe; and that the world has not been benefited, but injured by the reception of christianity.* In addition to these, and a few more objections of small importance, the deniers

of revelation allege, that the *Light of Nature*, and the *use of Reason*, are sufficient to instruct them in every branch of knowledge that is necessary for men. You, brethren, will no doubt meet with men of this description; who will urge these arguments upon you, to stagger your faith. We should caution you therefore, against thinking that these objections to revelation are new, or unanswered. For it is usually urged, to give such opinions a greater weight, that they are the result of the inquiries of a more enlightened age: And that, although christianity might do very well for our ignorantly pious forefathers, yet we, their better instructed children, have sufficient reason to throw off a system which only suited a benighted period. But we are sure, that Infidelity, instead of being peculiar to the present day, was coeval with christianity itself. For it is impossible in the nature of things, that God should manifest his will to man, without its meeting the disapprobation of those who are depraved, and incapable of relishing the beauties of holiness. Hence, we hear an Apostle, complain of some in his day, who were *proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of truth*, 1 Tim. vi. 4, 5. Another sacred writer assures the church, that *there are certain*

men crept in unawares—ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, Jude 4. This is sufficient therefore, to show, that deistical, and atheistical notions, are not new; and that, that age was well acquainted with them, in which christianity spread and flourished. Besides it is not merely the staleness of these objections, which ought to inspire you with confidence in holding the truth; but the innumerable answers and complete refutations they have received both from ancient and modern defenders of our holy religion. If we were to state the grounds on which infidelity may be refuted, and the belief of revelation established, it would only be the echo of what hundreds of the wisest, and best of men, have insisted upon in every age. And had not Deism a brazen front, she would be ashamed to take the field in such miserable armour; the weakness of which has so repeatedly been proved. But why do we say take the field? She rather shuns the light of fair discussion, and like the wily sharper under the mask of friendship, robs the unsuspecting. You, brethren, whose age and experience have convinced you of the excellency and suitableness of true religion; we conceive, are not in danger of being seduced by such attempts. But, for the sake of the numerous youth in all our congregations, whose warm passions, and inexperience

may easily betray them into this snare, we shall devote this essay to a few reflections, designed as an antidote to the fatal poison. The objections to the Bible being the Word of God, which we have already noticed, are the most material which are usually urged ; and may be easily over-ruled. That *christianity is a complicated system*, may be admitted, without injuring our cause. For such a complication of evils, as abound in the moral character of men, undoubtedly require a variety of motives, and means to remedy them. But if it is intended by the objection, that the morality of the Bible is obscure, and hard to be understood, the charge is false : since nothing can be more clear than these precepts. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart ; and thy neighbour as thyself. Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.* That “its doctrines are inconsistent, with each other, and matters of fact in the visible world ;” Supposes first—That we are perfectly acquainted with the whole plan and execution of the divine government ; and that we judge from our knowledge of the whole, about the fitness of its parts ; or, secondly—That a different system of religious truth, has made its appearance, more exactly consonant with the daily facts which are occurring among the children of men. But, as both these suppositions are manifestly false, the objection must fall to the ground.

As for the *penmen* of these books, it has been shewn by some, that the *internal evidence*, of the divine origin of these writings, is sufficient to establish our faith in them, even though it could not demonstrably be proved, that Moses had any hand in writing the Pentateuch : or Paul, the epistles which bear his name. But it is unquestionably certain, that these were the true authors. And stronger evidence may be adduced for it, than that Homer wrote the Illiad, Pope translated him into English, and Milton took him for his model, when he wrote Paradise Lost; though all these are acknowledged facts in the literary world.

Should “the insignificance of man,” be urged against the christian doctrine of redemption; we should answer with Dr. Beattie : “Great extent is a thing so striking to our imagination, that sometimes, in the moment of forgetfulness, we are apt to think, nothing can be important, but what is of vast corporal magnitude. And yet, even to our apprehension, when we are willing to be rational, how much more sublime, and more interesting an object, is a mind like Newton, than the unweildly force, and brutal stupidity of such a monster, as the poets describe Polyphemus.* Who

* *Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademtum.*” Virg.

A Monstrous bulk, deform'd, deprived of sight.

that had it in his power, would scruple to destroy a whale, to save a child? Nay, when compared with the happiness of one immortal mind, the greatest imaginable accumulation of inanimate substance, must appear an insignificant thing. Let not us then make bulk the standard of value; or judge of the importance of man, from the weight of his body; or from the size or situation of the planet that is now the place of his abode.”*

But it is said, 'The world has received no benefit from Christianity. We are at a loss to judge whether the proportion of insolence, or ignorance, both of which are mingled in this assertion, be the greatest. Consider, brethren, the present state of a great part of Africa, where millions live in wretched ignorance, and mutual enmity and rage. Read the lamentable, but true description of the ancient heathen world, drawn by St. Paul, in his first chapter to the Romans. Know for a certainty, that that polite nation, among their very sports enjoyed the sight of men murdered by each other, and by wild beasts, in the Theatre; and that these wretched victims sometimes, amounted to twenty or thirty thousand in a month. Then, look at Britain, in the eighteenth century. Has christianity done no good? But after all, the real benefit of christianity, is not to be estimated, but from the characters and conduct of those who personal-

* Evidences of the Christian Religion, Vol. 2, page 143.

ly live under its influence. This cannot be said of all those who bear the christian name. But surely the most stubborn Deist must admit, that, if all men lived according to the principles inforced in our Lord's sermon on the mount, they would be much better, and happier than they are. Therefore it is evident, *the tendency of christianity* is to do more good than any other system can.

But then it is argued, that the light of nature, and the use of our reason are quite sufficient, without any divine revelation being given. A thousand facts join issue to contradict this bold assertion. Indeed it seems as impossible to ascertain, of what use our *reason* would be, in *moral* and *spiritual* things, without revelation, as to prove the utility of our eyes without light. And the very opposers of *revelation*, yea the whole world, are indebted to it, for all the ideas they have upon subjects, which bear any affinity to truth. "The doctrine of sacrifices, and that of the immortality of the soul, and the whole chaos of what is termed natural religion, can be nothing less than the residuum of a very early and sad corruption of revelation. The nearer you approach to the times, in which revelation was given to man, or the place where it has been preserved, you find the use of sacrifice, the great object of revelation, to prevail; and the farther you recede, both from, the time and place of revelation, you find moral

darkness increasing, till you come to those, who have not so much as a name for God in their language, or, so much as, the least notion of a sacrifice, or immortality.”*

What portions of revelation might be carried, by different colonists of Islands and Continents, in their various emigrations, we cannot say; but it has been lately proved, that some traces of the scripture doctrine of the Trinity, are discoverable in the religious belief of the remote Islanders of Otaheite;† a people that forty years ago, were unknown to Europeans. From these hints you will easily discover, how weak the objections to the Bible are; though generally urged with all the confidence of triumphant vanity. But we mean to impress on your minds, one argument for the truth of our holy religion, which seems to have been too much neglected in controversy upon the subject, and which has with us considerable weight. It is THE MORAL TENDENCY OF A DISBELIEF OF DIVINE REVELATION. Undoubtedly, there are certain *principles* and *practices*, which are in their nature and consequences, *wrong*; and will be confessed so by all considerate men. No sentiments, nor religion whatever, can make *injustice* and *intemperance*, less evils than they really are. For however they may be practised

* Lectures, dedicated to Edward Gibbon, Esq.

† See Evangelical Magazine, for January, 1797, page 28.

without immediate punishments, and, in some cases, encouraged; yet every impartial person will pronounce them wrong. There are also certain *dispositions* of the mind, which must always be *unpleasant* and *injurious*. Such as *uncertainty, doubtfulness*, and their opposite, *excessive credulity*, which believes every bold assertion without proof; and sometimes swallows the greatest absurdity. That system which naturally produces these *evil practices* and *uncomfortable tempers*, must be itself defective, and unworthy the attachment of wise men. We shall shew you that this is the case with Deism: and on the contrary every thing virtuous and consistent, is the offspring of true christianity. It is vain that some exclaim, "There are thousands who believe in your religion, who are unjust and profane." We know there are many, that profess to believe, who are so: But, in reality, their wickedness arises from a want of *believing*, and *living under the influence* of the system they espouse. For the Bible does not teach *injustice*, or *profanity*. It may however, be undeniably proved, that persons, who firmly disbelieve divine revelation, and adopt their own reason as their guide, have by the *principles they espouse*, been involved in the evils we have mentioned above. We trust when this point is clearly evinced, that the specious arguments for infidelity, will have but little weight on your minds.

He who rejects revelation as his guide, must experience the greatest uncertainty, in the most important affairs. Is there a God? Who is he? What are his attributes and perfections? Whatever imaginations Deists may frame to themselves on these topics, without the assistance of divine revelation, they must be merely conjectural. Unaided reason cannot tell us whether the Sun is, or is not a Deity. Whether the whole frame of the universe be not a body in which the divine nature resides, and animates the whole; as some of the ancient heathens seem to have thought; we cannot by the light of nature decide. Therefore, if men should ever reason themselves into the belief of the existence of the Supreme Being, it would be a matter of endless doubt and perplexity to them, who he is, and what his nature is, and what his influence over men. We will now take the frank confession of one of the wisest men who knew nothing about a revelation, on this subject. Cicero, in his book *De natura Deorum*, says, "Those who assert the being of the Gods, run into such a variety and difference of opinions, that it is troublesome to report: they say so many different things of the shapes of the Gods, of their places, seats, and actions; of their lives, and, which touches the point more nearly, some of them affirm, the Gods do nothing; are free of all government, and care of affairs: Others that

all things were made from the beginning, and regulated and moved for an infinite time." This same natural religionist was candid ; for further on he says, " Have you forgot what I told you in the beginning, that it is easier for me to tell you what is not my opinion, than what it is ?" We shall only add the testimony of another heathen, who had only the light of nature to guide him ;* it is not easy to know, what God would be pleased with, unless we be either immediately instructed by God ourselves, or taught by some person God has conversed with ; or arrive at the knowledge of it, by some divine means or other."

If it is said that modern unbelievers have clearer notions on these subjects than the ancients had ; it is sufficiently evident to what they owe their better understanding. They have been born and educated in a christian country, and by instruction, reading, and conversation, have obtained all their superior notions from that very religion, the truth of which they deny. But, indeed, consistently enough, many modern Deists, think all kind of religion a very doubtful thing, and seem contented, (dreadful thought !) with its being perfectly uncertain, whether there is a God who judges of human actions or not ! The very same difficulty occurs, on the scheme of Deism, about the former, and future state of the world. Whether it ever had a beginning, or shall ever

* Jamblicus, a Platonic Philosopher.

end. Whether human nature is endued with an immortal principle; or whether we shall perish like the brutes. Or, indeed whether either man or brutes perish. Whether they do not revive and live through successive generations according to the ancient doctrine of transmigration. Whether there is any difference between good and evil. On these topics mere reason is silent. She wants a standard to judge by; that is, she wants a revelation from the Supreme Being. Wild imagination steps in with a thousand propositions to solve these difficulties. But, after all, every solution proposed, is only imaginary; and their glaring inconsistency with each other, forms a strong presumptive evidence of falsehood. But,

He who rejects the Bible, as untrue, had need be much more disposed to believe every unfounded proposition, than those who receive it. It has often been said, that we greedily swallow without inquiry, whatever the custom of the country, the prejudice of education, or opinions of our forefathers impose on us. We here retort the charge. We say the Deist is over credulous. He believes without proof. He has given up his mind to the direction of the dogmas of a party, without daring impartially to weigh the matter himself. Must not he believe very strongly indeed, who can think that Jesus Christ, and Peter, and Paul, worked sham miracles for years, before thousands

of their enemies, and yet their imposition was never detected. Vast numbers of base men who joined with the apostles, and first christians, afterwards apostatized; and became their haters, and persecutors; yet they never hinted to the world that christianity was a designed imposition, schemed by crafty men. If you believe christianity to be a gross imposture, you must, of course believe, that twelve illiterate men were capable of imposing on the whole world a gross lie without detection; and the most sedulous endeavours of their adversaries could not silence them, without putting them to death; and that Jews, and Greeks, and Romans, and Mahometans, and Christians of all denominations, should agree together in all ages, to record one notorious falsehood, with the most surprising consistency; though in other particulars their judgment was as different as light and darkness. For it is certain that all these descriptions of persons, have, from different motives, borne testimony to the same event for near eighteen hundred years. If you believe the first preachers, of our religion were *cheats* and *liars*, it certainly supposes that these liars and cheats took immense pains to wean people from *falsehood*, and *hypocrisy*; and condemned all such characters to eternal burnings; and having suffered pain, ignominy, and unparalleled hardships to diffuse a mere imposition, rejoiced to lay down their lives in confirmation of the testimony they had given!!!

Brethren, we have mentioned these things, to show you, that Deism, certainly requires men to lay aside their *reason*, to believe the grossest *absurdities*. But this is not the worst, for

It countenances and promotes the most abominable vices. All good men have ascribed their *re-*fraining from sin, to the *fear of the Lord*.* This supposes that such discovery had been made of the will of God that it might be falsely decided, what was pleasing, or what was offensive to him. But the man, who denies the existence of such a revelation, renders the *fear of God* unnecessary and useless. He leaves us to choose what conduct we best approve, without the smallest certainty about the disposition of the Supreme Being. And how far human reason will serve to ascertain the nature of sin and holiness, we may in some measure judge from the extraordinary language of Voltaire, the “Apostle of the Deistical World:”—“At the worst of times,” says he, “there is at most upon earth, one man in a thousand that can be called wicked. Hardly do we see one of those enormous crimes, that shock human nature, committed in ten years at Rome, Paris, or London, those cities where the thirst of gain, which is the parent of all crimes, is carried to the highest pitch. If men were essentially wicked, we should find every

* Examine these passages ; Gen. xxxix. 9. xlii. 18. Nehem. v. 15.

morning husbands murdered by their wives, &c.—as we do hens, killed by foxes.” This is a specimen of deistical morality. The very same writer calls the sin of Sodom, “an excusable mistake of nature.” So that scarcely any thing is worthy the name of sin, excepting a woman cuts her husband’s throat in his sleep.* Nor is such a detestable theory, without its effect. For we find, almost universally, that persons of deistical sentiments, are also profligate in their manners. Indeed, for the most part, they are apostates from a profession of christianity. They first renounced all obedience to its precepts; and then to countenance their departure, denied the truth of its principles. So true it is, that sin leads to infidelity; and infidelity, in return cherishes sin. A very striking anecdote of Mallet the free-thinker, is a strong proof of the tendency of Deism. He, and his lady at their own table, perpetually ridiculed the scriptures; and urged on their guests, in presence of the servants, the common argument against expecting a future state: Till at length the servants became as able disputants as the heads of the family. One fellow, thinking to profit by the doctrine, stole his master’s plate, and made off; but being taken and urged by his master, before some friends, to give a reason for his infamous

* See Fletcher’s appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense.

behaviour, he said, "Sir, I have heard you so often talk of the impossibility of a future state, and that after death there was no reward for virtue, nor punishment for vice, that I was tempted to commit the robbery." "Well, but you rascal (replied Mallet) "had you no fear of the gallows?" "Sir," (said the fellow, looking sternly at his master), "What is that to you, if I had a mind to venture that? You had removed my greatest terror, why should I fear the lesser."* Such are the blessed effects we may expect from the diffusion of the enlightened principles of Deism! We might indeed challenge the world to produce an instance of any single virtue, which is cherished by infidelity; or any vice, whose progress and prevalence it hinders. *The tendency of Deism to utter ignorance, and uselessness in society, is also strikingly evident.* Behold a man, who has drank deeply into the poisonous streams of infidelity: He is the father of a rising family. Sees his children, (if one grain of tenderness and love, has engaged their affection and confidence,) flock round his knees, and most inquisitively embarrass him, with a thousand questions, which philosophy alone can never answer. "Father, who made us, and you and all things?" We will suppose he has honesty enough to answer; "God."—"Who is God? and where is he?"—"I do not know."—

“How then do you know he made us?” “Did he ever speak to any body and tell them so? Shall we ever see God? Will he be good to us? Is the Bible a good book? Is it all true? Cannot you give us a better book to tell us about God, than the Bible?”—We must leave the Deist to answer these young immortals, as he can. But we suppose he will put off their queries with some evasive replies—till they have grown up mature in ignorance and sin; alike incapable of judging for themselves, and destitute of information; despised and avoided by the wise and good—and associating with the worthless and vain—they confirm each other in unbelief, and impiety. But we will draw these reflections to a close, by observing, that *infidelity is a scheme which only suits the pride and voluptuousness of this present life; and leaves men, miserable in death, through the awful uncertainty of a future state.* Will you then relinquish for a moment, the blessings of the gospel of Christ; the delightful promises of the Bible; the hope of associating with saints and angels in heaven; the happiness of being perfectly holy, and like that blessed Redeemer, (who once indeed was crowned with thorns, and crucified for us, but) who now lives, and reigns, admired and praised by all the heavenly host? Will you part with every claim to this exalted pleasure, for the empty, paltry system which is proffered you in its stead? Forbid it gracious God! We bow our knees, and bless, and

render thee ten thousand praises, that ever our eyes beheld the volume of thy holy word. Here, every difficulty, about creation, providence, or thy government of the world, is either explained, or resolved into thy inscrutable wisdom ! We have found the benefit of being led by its unerring precepts, and felt its precious promises like cheering cordials to our minds ! But above all, here we have discovered the glory of God, in the person of Jesus Christ ; in whom every excellency shines and to whom we are under everlasting obligations ! O ! never permit us to forsake this fountain of living waters : to seek supplies from cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water ! Brethren, we doubt not, but you will sincerely join us, in such an address as this to the Lord our God. And if so, we hesitate not to pronounce that man, a cruel malignant being, who would aim to deprive you of the consolation which your faith affords. For there is no infidel, who is, or can be certain, the Bible is untrue ; or that there is not a future state of retribution. If therefore, he would insinuate such ideas as must take away all your joy, which arises from a perfect confidence in these facts ; and which he cannot disprove, however bold he may be to deny ; he surely acts the part of that madman, mentioned by Solomon, who “ casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, and saith, Am I not in sport ? ”

To young persons of an inquisitive turn of mind, we would add a few words on the present occasion. Do not think that we wish to suppress a spirit of enquiry. It is the usual artifice of free thinkers, (so called) to suggest such a notion, to prejudice your minds against all the weighty reasons we urge in support of Christianity. But the imputation is unjust. We are sure that the more candidly and impartially you examine this matter, the stronger your faith in the holy scriptures will be. Be not therefore in haste to adopt any sentiments, without a full conviction of their truth. You have been taught from your infancy that the Bible is true, and that it came from God. But some such persons now say, they do not believe it to be true; nor that any part of it is a divine revelation. We would ask these, have you then received sufficient and indubitable evidence that your first belief was a delusion; and the former sentiments you held, without foundation? You have perhaps examined, what a few Deistical writers had to advance against religion; and being satisfied with their objections, have resigned tamely, your attachment to your former principles. But have you also examined the many valuable writings of those excellent men, who have defended christianity? Have you heard, how they reply to objections which are made? Or, have you indeed read with attention and care the sacred scriptures themselves since

your doubts arose, with a sincere desire, to obtain a personal acquaintance with them, and to be able to judge for yourselves ? If nothing of this kind has been attended to, it is no wonder the Bible is disbelieved ; but with how little candour is evident enough. We beseech you therefore, to act more honourably, and advantageously for yourselves. If doubts occur, take advice on both sides ; and always remember, that it will be best for you, that the Bible should prove divine : for Deism does not even *propose* to make men good, and happy ; and we have shewn, that it has no such *tendency* ; but if Christianity is true, it certainly does both.

Let us also attempt to remove that false gloss, which Deists put upon the scriptures. They say its principal doctrines are absolutely unintelligible and incredible. But only spend a few minutes in coolly reflecting on this subject, and we are persuaded, you will find nothing beyond belief in the gospel scheme. “ That there is a Mediator between God and man, cannot appear contrary to reason, or improbable, when we consider, that all the good things we receive, come to us by the intervention of various agents and instruments. The incarnation of the Son of God is not to us more unintelligible, than the union of a human body, with a human soul. To atone voluntarily for the sins of others, may be as possible to God, and in

him as consonant to equity, as among us, for one man gratuitously to pay another's debt. That there should be a resurrection of the body, is suitable to many analogies in nature ; and particularly to that alluded to by the apostle, of a new and flourishing vegetable, rising from a buried, and corrupted grain of corn."*

Consider these brief remarks, as a subject for further reflection. If they appear weighty and important, read them over again. Can this reasoning be easily refuted ? Do you merely *suspect* that our representation may be true ? Such a suspicion, arising in a bosom already tainted with infidelity, is a partial victory gained in favour of Truth. And if the mind of an individual, is by the perusal of this essay, more established in the belief of the Gospel it has not been circulated in vain.

* Dr. Beattie's Evidences of the Christian Religion.

FINIS.