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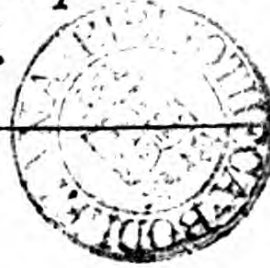
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*The Nature, Evidences, and Importance  
of Truth considered.*

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A

S E R M O N

Preached before the

UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,

At St. MARY's,

O N

ADVENT-SUNDAY, *Dec. 1. 1754.*

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By WILLIAM PARKER D. D.  
Chaplain in Ordinary to His M A J E S T Y,  
and F. R. S.

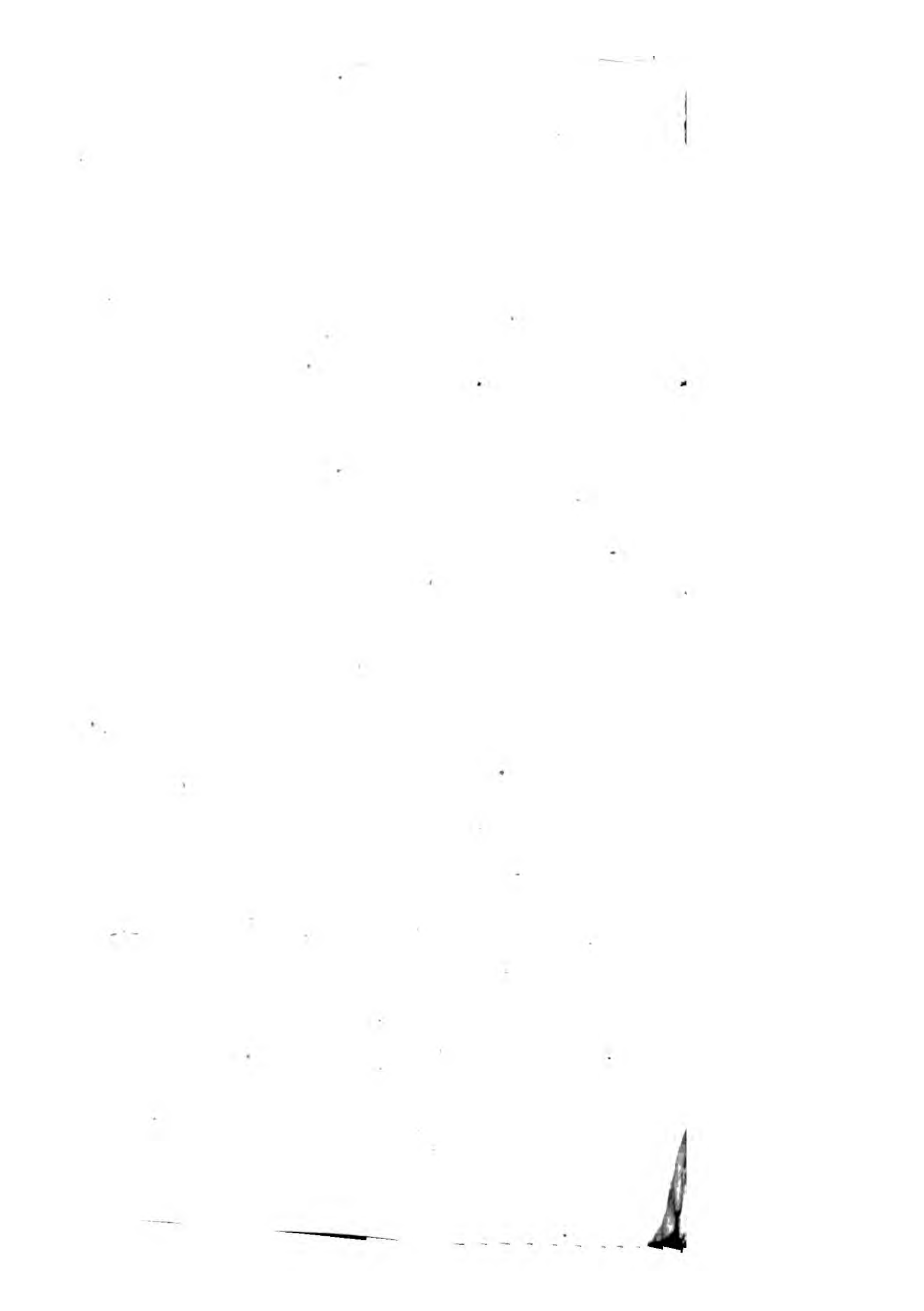
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and Heads of Houses.

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## JOHN XVIII. 38.

*Pilate saith unto Him, what is Truth?*

**W**HATEVER might have been the intent of Pilate in asking this question, whether merely to scoff at our Saviour's doctrine, or to cavil, where he had nothing reasonable to object; we find it was not asked with a desire of information: for he did not wait for a reply. How lightly soever persons in subsequent ages may have thought upon the subject, yet one point is well worthy of their notice, that truth is deeply founded in the nature and relations of things: and it will have it's weight, and influence on our happiness, whether we esteem it, or not. It consists in assertions or denials made according to nature and the relations of objects, according to their agreements or disagreements with each other. The justice or rectitude of these assertions, or denials, and the consequent persuasions arising from them will have a strong effect upon moral action: and moral action is closely

closely connected with natural happiness or misery.

What one kind of truth or falshood is, truth in common conversation, and how great it's importance in social life; we are all pretty well sensible, even without a definition. We know it to be a representation of things, or facts, as they really are: falshood the reverse. We are no less sensible of the ill effects arising from a general violation of truth in common life. Yet wherein is the principal harm arising from hence, but that it draws our fellow beings into false persuasions concerning things to which they stand related, into consequent misconduct, and error of action, in the common concerns of life? And if truth current in common conversation be of such moment, shall not truth recorded in writing be judged of equal concern at least? the violation or misrepresentation of it be esteem'd an equal trespass upon mutual confidence? for what are books, but written language, or written conversation addressed to the world, instead of single persons? and may not falshood propagated, or truth misrepresented therein, be much more fatally mischievous, as the venom may become more diffused? This should excite men to be zealous in the defence of truth, for the common benefit of mankind, of individuals, and the body social.

*Pro-*

*Probable* truth, we know, is at best oftentimes hardly to be discerned ; especially where objects are but imperfectly known, and consequently the relations are but obscurely seen. This is the foundation of mysteries to inferior understandings like those of men, which to superior capacities are well-comprehended truths. Yet, even with respect to the inferior faculties, there may be evidence enough to satisfy, that the relations of objects exist, though there is not ability enough to comprehend perfectly, or perspicuity enough to demonstrate mathematically the manner *how* they exist. But what can be the merit of studying to perplex truth, where open signatures of reality are found, if there *be* such a thing as reality ? It will be our prudence then, the discretion at least of those who are just entering upon the stage of knowledge and experience, to be upon their guard against such authors, as argue against principles acknowledged in all preceding ages. It will be their just caution at least, not to deny truths by hypothesis, or merely upon a principle of adherence to some sceptical author. For is it more probable, to instance only in *one* case, that historians of all ages should have been determined voluntary impostors, or that the man who could assert, or surmise such general delusion to be, if I may so express it,

it, imposed by whole-sale, should have been himself grievously out of humour with mankind, extremely jealous, or extremely prejudiced against his fellow-creatures, to suspect so heavily their opinions or their honesty?

In my last discourse upon the words of the text I proposed to inquire,

*First*, wherein truth consists; and what are the different capacities, and qualifications requisite for the ready perception thereof;

*Secondly*, what are it's different kinds of evidence;

*Thirdly*, into the importance of truth;

*Fourthly*, into the injury they do to society, who study by delusive sophistries to invalidate it's evidence; and likewise into some few inconsistencies of a late writer, who has endeavoured to undermine, or destroy the force of all probable argument;

*Lastly*, what inferences may be drawn, under each discourse, suitable to this place and audience.

It hath been observed then, in my former discourse, that the evidences of truth are different,  
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according to it's different kinds of objects correspondent in nature: consequently he, who demands a different kind of evidence from that which the nature of things admits, is unreasonable; because he acts inconsistently with the nature and relations of things, which require his assent. For evidences are not always proportioned to the importance of the truth proposed. History admits only of *probable* evidence, yet the importance of history is universal. It is one of the great privileges of a rational being, agreeably to the sentiments of a learned heathen, to compare the past with the present, and from thence in the connective chain of events to infer the future.

Ancient patriarchal history, as recorded in the books of Moses, may perhaps be thought by some to have little relation to us: but surely whatever comes to us with divine credentials, as a revelation of the will of the creator from the creator himself, must be of consequence. As it serves to distinguish some of the first æras of the world, but especially as far as it points at gospel truth, and contains any thing predictive or prefigurative of gospel revelation, it must be of greater moment. All succeeding history, as it opens gradually, till it arrives at the full display of this revelation, must be of the highest importance, as



it is one of the strongest proofs of the divine original of the gospel, drawn from the completion of prophecies, the accomplishment of ancient types and figures. This leads us then,

*Thirdly*, to make some few remarks upon the importance of truth, whatever its evidence may be.

And here nothing can be said of it more important than this, that truth is the light and guide of life. Whosoever walketh in ignorance, walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth. Therefore was Jesus called *the light of the world*, because he came to reveal, *and bear witness unto the truth*. As truth is founded in the nature of things, and is closely inherent in their very essence; so happiness must be connected with it: forasmuch as happiness must arise from the conformity of our nature to the intentions of objects with which we are connected. False notions of objects therefore lead men into false pursuits of happiness, and are the great foundations of disappointment, which is the ground of misery.

Truth then, and true conceptions of things, ought to be the first and prevailing object of our pursuit, in the pursuit of true felicity. Its importance may not always be proportioned to its evidence; nor consequently is it necessary that  
*every*

*every* study should be equally important to *every* man, any more than that *every* truth should be so. Relations to different objects will make different truths important. Rashly therefore doth he argue, who would have all men engaged in the pursuit only of one, and the same truth. However *one* there is universally necessary, and the pursuit of that one, will certainly denote the the highest discretion and prudence, which conducts to the most solid, and permanent happiness. The study of revelation, if God hath made a revelation, (and surely it must be of consequence to moral agents to inquire, whether the creator hath revealed his will or not,) must be the most interesting of all studies. It is the advantage of the generality of those who have the happiness to be educated in this place, that their time is dedicated to this most *important* study, for so we may venture to stile it, as in one place it is so stiled by our author himself<sup>a</sup>.

But the pursuit of any truth almost, except historical, is in other places held very cheap by him: and even this is very much degraded in general below the dignity of science. Indeed for any man to bestow a great deal of time upon that, which has no visible end or use, may be trifling in effect, and a kind of

<sup>a</sup> P. 173.

comparative idleness. And where intuitive knowledge, universally acknowledged principles, or propositions mathematically demonstrated are plainly repugnant, the pursuit can hardly not appear ridiculous. But still no *real* truth is without *some* consequences: and therefore hastily to pronounce the search after *any* to be absolutely void of all possible use, because the end is not immediately visible to us, is certainly a very bold, if not presumptuous assertion at least; and a very contemptuous way of treating the judgment of those, who are engaged therein. All philosophical inquiries certainly have their possible ends and uses; especially all modern researches into the recesses of nature have been shewn by experience to convey their respective benefits to mankind in general, though not visible to every inquisitive eye; as they have their connexions with nature, or as they are industrious travels after her, in search of her relations. Particular experimental uses have sometimes been struck out, after the general speculative principles have been long discovered, and effects have been thereby satisfactorily linked on to their proper causes. Witness the late application of geometrical propositions to natural experimental philosophy. For where laws of action can be deduced by geometrical principles, the cause shewn equal to the effect,

effect, the effect exactly correspondent to the cause, neither greater, nor less, but accurately proportioned, and experiment joins in concert to confirm the deduction, such knowledge must be very satisfactory, and pleasing to the human mind, as well as very beneficial to individuals, and to human society. It is wrong to imagine, that all valuable knowledge, or useful study should be confined merely to political narrations of history.

All laborious collections of words in different languages and translations of them into the mother language of each country, how much soever the task may be ridiculed by our author<sup>a</sup>, are so many obligations heaped upon mankind by the compilers. The labour may appear dull to men of quick and lively genius; but the more tedious, and less entertaining the labour, the greater is the obligation conferred upon mankind thereby. For how would our author's own pupils be so well or easily qualified for the study of universal history, in all the learned languages, without such operose assistances prepared ready to their hands; if every man were first to compile his own glossary in each language, before he began? A work of life must precede the entrance of each pupil upon the study of history.

<sup>a</sup> P. 5.

Again, the speculative geometrician may be ridiculed by men whose only talent is a little rhetorical wit, perhaps only a little, low, smart buffoonry. Whereas great openings have been made into the wonders of nature, and the marvellous works of providence by the slow researches of the geometrical philosopher, and many useful discoveries deduced by mathematical laws.

There is in short, as Tully says of virtues, a kind of concatenation of truths among each other, so that one naturally infers another; where we did not perhaps at first perceive the connexion, or the several links of argument in the connecting chain. Wherever we find any man therefore treating almost every rational, generous kind of pursuit after truth, but his own, with contempt, we may in general with good reason suspect him of great pride, and self-conceit, of an high opinion about his own abilities, and knowledge, and skill in the application of his abilities. Whereas all men's minds were not originally formed or intended for the same studies, any more than all men's bodies were fashioned for the same labours. Society, and the very ends of social life require a difference in both. So that we may apply to different talents of the soul, what *St. Paul* writeth, under the same metaphor,

taphor, of different members of the body; *if the whole were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?* But now hath God dispensed the different talents of the soul, *as it hath pleased him*, and every talent hath it's proper uses in the body social.

Of the importance of truth *historical* let our author speak his sentiments in his own words: only let us first observe, that historical evidence is at best but *probable*: nay he will not sometimes allow to *ancient* history any degree even of probability itself: but this is to run into extremes, as I have observed, inconsistent with his own plan of study. Evidence indeed may be less cogent, the higher we advance up into ancient days: light, the further you recede from the luminous body, it is certain, grows less glaring, less distinct and forcible in it's impressions: but still this proves not, that there is no reality of existence in that body, or that the rays proceeding from it are not real rays, but phantoms. Let us however attend to this author's encomiums upon historical instruction. “<sup>a</sup> History, saith he, is philosophy speaking by example: <sup>b</sup> the school of example is the world: the masters of this school history, and experience. <sup>c</sup> By history, saith he, a man may ac-

<sup>a</sup> P. 40, 41.    <sup>b</sup> P. 15.    <sup>c</sup> P. 20.

“quire in a few years, the experience of more  
 “centuries, than any of the patriarchs saw. But  
 let us just observe here, that soon after we are  
 confined by him in our historical credit, within  
 the short line of two hundred years upwards  
 immediately preceding our own days. Yet saith  
 he, “<sup>a</sup> by history we are cast back, as it were,  
 “into former ages; we live with the men, who  
 “lived before us; and we inhabit countries that  
 “we never saw. <sup>b</sup> It shews us causes as in fact  
 “they were laid, with their immediate effects;  
 “and it enables us to guess at future events.  
 “Again, <sup>c</sup> history is conversant about the past;  
 “and by knowing the things that *have* been, we  
 “become better able to judge of the things that  
 “are.” Such are the praises of history allowed by  
 our author, and such is his consistency in rea-  
 soning!

Now if such be the just commendations of  
 historical knowledge in general, as much sure-  
 ly may be said with equal justice at least of  
*sacred* history, which contains the annals of di-  
 vine revelation, and divine oeconomy with mo-  
 ral agents, according to their respective exigen-  
 cies and occasions. Consequently it must con-  
 tain instruction as important at least, as any that  
 is convey'd by the records of experience in *pro-  
 fane* history, and therefore ought to obtain equal

<sup>a</sup> P. 40.

<sup>b</sup> P. 49.

<sup>c</sup> P. 67.

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attention at least to it's proofs, being derived from the God of knowledge, past, as well as present, who seeth throughout the whole line of experience at once.

Since therefore such is the importance of truth, such the uses of historical science, let us now proceed,

*Fourthly*, to examine the injury they do to society, who endeavour to invalidate the evidence, and authority of truth ; and to make a further remark or two upon the inconsistencies of our author, who has labour'd to undermine or destroy the force of all probable argument.

The principles of moral and religious truth, with their necessary deductions, are the only secure source and cement of social union. History is a confirmation of these principles, and the justice of these deductions, by experience. The more then you contract the stream of historical knowledge, in it's current from the fountain head of time, the more you reduce those confirmations deducible from experience, which give strength and vigour to moral principles. If all ancient *profane* history is to be traduced as a romance, where will be the great use of reading, what our author prescribes alone to be read ?

<sup>a</sup> See P. 82, 105, 115, 118, 122, 131.



where will be the benefit of considering, as to experimental knowledge, what never existed in fact? If all *sacred* history is to be set aside as <sup>a</sup> imposture, and yet revealed religion, as he asserts, <sup>b</sup> is only to be proved by historical evidence, where shall we christians go for proofs of our religion? Is not this desiring us to give up all proofs of our religion at once, and then to say, that there is no religion? In short, according to these tenets, what history remains for the accomplishment of the fine gentleman? since history, it appears, is to be his principal, if not his sole accomplishment. For the narrations of *modern* times may, by his own account, be liable to *equal* exception at least, nay perhaps have actually had equal exceptions made to them, even the very best of them, by equally sceptical modern writers. Because if we have less acquaintance with *ancient* facts, it may be said, we are apt to have more partiality about *modern* ones. Writers contemporary with the facts they relate, or nearly contemporary, it may be said, will always be liable to exceptions of party-prejudice, as those who write of distant times, are liable to exceptions of imperfect information in facts. “Contemporary writers, saith our author, are the most liable to be warped from the strait rule

<sup>a</sup> See P. 83, 85, 87.

<sup>b</sup> P. 175, 185.

<sup>c</sup> P. 135.

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“of truth.” A terrible shock this given by himself to the credit of modern history!

Almost every species of learning then is, in some place or other of his writings, represented by him as useless and ridiculous, but historical, and yet this is placed upon a very precarious foundation. It is history alone, that we are to depend upon for a proper rule of life, and yet in the next pages of his book we are advertised, that we have no reasonable dependence upon *this* rule. What is this, but to inform me, that I have no ground in science to set my foot upon, but this single spot, which he points out before me; and yet that this spot is so slippery, so fallacious, so hollow, and such treacherous ground, that I cannot with any safety rest my foot there? An uncomfortable prospect surely this, at setting out in science; to be under obligations of stepping forwards, and yet to have no ground to walk upon without peril!

Our author seems apprehensive of this objection to his letters, that <sup>a</sup> universal pyrrhonism might be established upon his principles, and therefore puts on the mask of guarding against it? But whilst he aims to exert his talent of wit upon the sceptick, <sup>b</sup> he either does not, or

<sup>a</sup> P. 137.

<sup>b</sup> P. 134, 169.

pretends not to see, that his own principles run deep into *universal* scepticism.

He asserts it to have been long matter of astonishment to him, “<sup>a</sup> why christian divines have taken so much silly pains to establish mystery on metaphysics, revelation on philosophy, and matter of fact on abstract reasoning.” Objections similar to this have incautiously been made by others against some of our ablest and most pious divines, and therefore may deserve an answer. The reason of such pains is but too clear and manifest. For will not the unbeliever expect to be answered in the science within the sphere of which his objection is stated, or from whence his principle is taken? In order to convince the objector, will it not be necessary to prove either that the principle assumed by him is not true, or the consequence not rightly deduced? So far the argumentation will naturally fall within some learned science, perhaps of metaphysics, or some other branch of philosophy and abstract reasoning. Thus far the proofs or illustrations of different points of divinity may lie within different branches of science. And thus far the pains bestowed upon these sciences, and the topicks of argument deduced from thence will neither be *silly* nor useless. For is the theo-

<sup>a</sup> P. 175.

logist to prove, or illustrate by any *one* science only, that which naturally falls under the province of *another*? The unbeliever by such means might gain advantages over his christian antagonist, which our author probably could have wished him. For is a metaphysical doubt to be settled by history? Is a logical question to be answer'd by historical solution? Is a physical scruple to be satisfied by historical narration? Our author surely must have seen the weakness and fallacy of such reasonings. They are in short the disputers of this world, who make metaphysics, philosophy, and abstract reasoning much oftener necessary in divinity, than they otherwise would be. Besides, where is the harm of confirming, illustrating, or inculcating important truths by principles of *any* science, which may be judged best adapted to the purpose? An age, that professes science, seems to be satisfied only with arguments deduced from learned science. Revelation resting only upon historical ground, or it's own internal assertions, will not satisfy all; with many will not have it's full weight and influence. The morals of the gospel are, in this age, required to be proved not inconsistent with moral principles founded in the laws of nature: the doctrines of the gospel, though in some points superior to the adequate reach of human philo-

philosophy, yet not absolutely contradictory to principles of human abstract reason. And further, in the illustration or inculcation of moral truths, various topicks of argument, various motives for inforcement, various figures in description, may be very appositely borrowed, and accommodated to the purpose from various arts and sciences.

This suggests a serious inference or two from what has been offered in these two discourses, applicable to those, who are situated for education in this place; of which they will find the importance, as soon as they enter upon their respective employments in life, particularly they who are designed for the sacred office of the clergy.

The different kinds of truth, that exist in the world, and have their relation to us, and are the subject of modern speculation and conversation, the various ways in which truth may be conveyed, rendered conspicuous, and enforced, require applications to different kinds of science in those, who are desirous to be common friends of truth, and to discharge the duties of their respective callings with fidelity, especially those who are by their vocation appointed ministers of the word of truth. In this age of professed literature a greater degree of knowledge will be required of those, who have received an education

tion within these nurseries of learning, than would have been needful in darker ages. Among the laity *this* person may excell in *one* branch of science, *that* in another; it may perhaps hardly be more safe for him, who is called to be the minister of the word of truth, than for the orators of old amongst the Romans, to be *entirely* ignorant almost in any. *The priests lips are to retain knowledge*; he must have a mind opened and prepared to comprehend, and a mouth ready to explain truth. At this fountain the thirsty are to drink: happy is it for them, if when they ask, he is both willing and able to supply them with *living water*!

But let it be remembered, that every degree of finite knowledge is relative, all superiority of knowledge is comparative; being greater, or less, in proportion to the intellects of those, with whom it is compared: all instruction is to be adapted to the capacity of the learner, and suited to the nature of the truth delivered, or occasionally defended. Histories are to be confirmed; customs explained; parables unveiled; metaphors cleared; seeming inconsistencies reconciled; languages translated; idioms ascertained; precepts enforced; motives urged; affections excited. Application in the years of youth, and much subsequent industry will be requisite for the

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the right discharge of these several offices. The man of God must be, in the language of our saviour, *like an householder well furnished, that bringeth forth out of his treasures things new, and old.* He must be master of discoveries in science ancient, and modern, that he may occasionally make a proper use of them to the general improvement of his hearers.

Wherefore, as the burthen upon him is great in respect to abstract speculation, that he may be the more fully at leisure to attend the task, the less he is encumbered with wordly avocations, especially the man who principally dedicates his time to any of these studies; an inference may be urged upon those who shall hereafter live in any degree of dignity, or office of magistracy among the laity; that they endeavour to make this burthen as easy as they can, by making the burthen of wordly cares fit as light upon him as possible. The man dedicated to abstract studies should not be overladen with necessary concerns of daily sustenance, which will *press down the soul* in her efforts to *muse upon many things.* Worldly cares will intrude themselves, and nature will force them upon him, where a sufficient provision is not made of temporal conveniences; much useful pious study has been prevented by necessary attention to  
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worldly business. To make the journey through life as easy as possible, to supply his kindred, and necessary dependents, that travel with him towards a better, with all convenient accommodations in the way, especially to vindicate those rights, and maintain those conveniencies, wherewith the state, in which he is conversant, supplies him, whatever may be our author's reproaches upon the clergy, will yet be the laudable desire of every good and virtuous man. It is the call of prudence; it is the call of nature; it is an universal obligation of humanity and honour. Such a watchful care in every man over himself, and family, and his social rights, has a natural tendency to the good of the community; whose welfare is compounded of that of individuals, excited by their respective honest sollicitude for those, that stand nearly related to them in nature.

Let not the laity therefore grudge any little emoluments granted by the piety of their forefathers towards the support of a christian ministry, or towards the education of men in such seminaries of science as this, who may be future defenders of truth; who may oblige the world with new and useful discoveries, and be successive ornaments to their country. Neither give the clergy difficulty in the recovery of their just

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rights;



rights; but labour to prevent difficulty. Since all such time as is bestowed in disputes upon those subjects, will in effect be stolen from your own spiritual improvement. Oblige not the clergy to maintain suits, which ill-wishing, uncharitable men may afterwards injuriously interpret vexatious or oppressive, though necessarily commenced for the recovery or preservation of their small patrimony, if I may so style it, inherited in descent from the generosity of ancient, pious benefactors; and where the voice of nature perhaps urged most powerfully for the security of all the little livelyhood, that their respective station in their profession admitted. Much less suffer any to harass or perplex them with suits, merely because it is known, that they are ill able to maintain a suit. This is not christianity; this is not common humanity. But the friend of truth will be a friend of right and equity; a friend and patron, and promoter of benevolence towards every place, and person engaged in the investigation or communication of useful, salutary science.

It will be the future province of some educated in this place, and before whom I now speak, to be employed in the investigation and support of such truth, as is very important to *social* beings, of civil, equitable, and legal truth; for  
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the detection and punishment of fraud under all its secret covers; for the protection of commutative or distributive justice, and the maintenance of civil right. A study necessary to the welfare of mankind, so long as men shall be created necessarily social beings, and many among them shall retain and cultivate very *unsocial* dispositions. To those then, who are intended for this study I would beg leave to observe, that *this* also, as well as *religious* science, is founded not upon mathematical, demonstrative, but upon probable, moral evidence. Such persons therefore will soon be sensible, what mischief is done to social establishment by all endeavours to invalidate the evidence of moral truth. Universal scepticism, or a distrust of all truth would be inconsistent with the principles of such a profession: for law supposes credit given to probable, historical evidence. Our author himself insists on the strong obligation lying upon persons engaged in the honourable profession of the law to apply themselves to history, in a remarkable passage, where he takes an opportunity of detracting as virulently from the general character of the modern professors of the law, as he had before incautiously, and very inconsistently done, from the credit and dignity of his own favourite science, that of history, and the writers that have signa-

lized themselves therein, the greatest number of historians, ancient, and modern. For in this passage he excepts very few, if he would willingly except any, of the modern professors of the law, out of the severe censure of "groveling all their lives in a mean but gainful application to all the little arts of chicane<sup>a</sup>." From hence we learn his charitable opinion of other professions, as well as of the clergy.

Thus far however we may accord with him, that civil inquiries must oftentimes begin with the knowledge of civil history, and therefore some certainty in the evidence of civil history, whether ancient, or modern must be presupposed. The reason of ancient laws is founded in the circumstances, and state of things: and therefore we can never be satisfied, that we are fully acquainted with the reason and intent of these laws, unless we can rely upon the historical relation of the facts, that occasioned these enactments.

I might now further enlarge, from what has been said, upon the usefulness of these seats of literature, where the materials of future knowledge are early taken in, and preparations made for future experience in life. I might urge the hazard of setting out early in doubtfulness about established principles, or of cultivating such mo-

<sup>a</sup> P. 185, 186.

rals as may be the springs of scepticism, or of imbibing early prejudices against mankind, or their received opinions, merely perhaps because they *are* received: but this would carry me too far at present.

How ill, unsteady a friend moral scepticism is to the established order of political societies, we have but too strong an instance in one, who was born with abilities capable of becoming very useful in the body politic: and it is no wonder, that the author alluded to should merit so little confidence in political history, who hath industriously made it appear by his late legacy to the world, that he raised his superstructure, whether of conduct, or history, upon no solid foundation either of religious, moral, or social principles. The sceptick in every other branch of science must, in order to be consistent with himself, be equally so in the foundations of the political. It could not indeed be expected, that he should have any principles of policy to fix him, except those of prejudice, personal interest, particular temporary affection, or resentment, who disavow'd almost all other acknowledged elements of science, on which the sure foundation of politicks is laid: and how unsteadily personal motives are likely to influence, the conduct of that author hath sufficiently proved.

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One general caution then to men of *all* professions naturally occurs, very consonant to christian religion ; naturally preservative of social peace ; proper to be inculcated in these days : not to be fond of dispute ; nor, for the sake of shewing singular abilities, or a singular refinement in philosophy, studious to contradict, what mankind hath universally acknowledged : for the consequences of such a temper may lead men further, than they at first intended, till they come at length to that inveterate bigotry against truth, that their determination, agreeable to the expression of an ancient Roman, shall be, *etiamsi persuaseris, tamen non persuadebis.*

Let the youthful mind especially be cautious, how it sets sail in this dangerous ocean of doubtfulness, without any ballast, without any rudder, without any certain point of land in view. We see how many have been shipwrecked in old age, who thus have set out in youth. We see many that have wandered all their life long upon the sea of error ; sometimes indeed enjoying for a few hours an apparent sun-shine ; but oftener obscured in clouds, or thick darkness, and ever afraid to land.

Finally, my brethren, engaged in the ministry of the word of truth, or in preparation for that ministry, let us carry one remark ever with

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us, for our encouragment; that as all our knowledge is in a progressive state, and will probably continue so for ever, so according to our improvements, and the application we have made of our knowledge here, in the service of our great master, amidst his creatures, we shall preserve a proportionable station of eminence hereafter in our future life; always approaching nearer to our creator, though still even in an infinite progress, at an infinite distance from him. Yet thus improving, and thus refined, shall ye be as lights distinguished in the heavens, above many of lesser glory, whom your knowledge may have instructed; and whom either by authority, persuasion, example, or due distribution of civil sanctions, you may in the end have led to happiness; *when they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that have turned many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.*

F I N I S.

N. B. The foregoing references are made to the large edition of the letters on the study and use of history, vol. 1. printed 1752.

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Lately published,  
By the same AUTHOR,

I. The Nature and Reasonableness of the Inward Call and Outward Mission to the Holy Ministry considered.

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