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REMARKS

On a Late

PAMPHLET,

ENTITLED,

Christianity not founded on Argument.

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.

By JOHN LELAND, D. D.

AUTHOR of *An Answer to Christianity as Old
as the Creation*, by Dr. Tindal :

AND

*The Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament
Asserted, &c. against The Moral Philosopher.*



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I*T is proper to advertise the Reader, that the Letter now publish'd, and another which is to follow it, were written by the Author, some time since, at the Request of a Friend, before he had seen any of the Answers that have been made to that Pamphlet. After reading some of these Answers, he judg'd it unnecessary to publish these Remarks : But as some Persons, for whose Judgment he has a very great Regard, were of opinion they might still be of Use, he has consented to the Publication.*

ERRAT. P. 8. lin. 31. for *Truth* read *Faith*.

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*REMARKS on a late Pamphlet, entitled,
Christianity not founded on Argu-
ment, &c.*

S I R,

I Now send you, according to your Desire, some Remarks on a Pamphlet that has made some noise, and which hath a very odd Title, *Christianity not founded on Argument*. It is but very lately that I read it, tho' it be a considerable Time since it was first published. For, besides that I live at a distance from your great Metropolis, I have seen so much of these Gentlemen's Way of Writing, and have met with so little to inform the Understanding, or that can be called fair Reasoning and Argument, that I confess my Curiosity is not much raised by any thing that appears from that Quarter. But upon your acquainting me, that it was represented as a subtil Attack upon Christianity, and desiring my Thoughts upon it, I have read it over with some Care. The way of treating the Subject, and the Turn given to Things, is new and uncommon, the Style sprightly and agreeable; but upon the most impartial Consideration, I cannot think that Christianity has much to fear from this Gentleman, any more than from those that have gone before him.

He has chosen a Manner of Writing, which, it is probable, he supposed might answer his Purpose;

B

but

but which I think gives one no advantageous Opinion of the Sincerity and Candour of his Mind. He frequently speaks with great seeming Regard of our Saviour, of divine Faith, and of the Grace of God and his Holy Spirit. He makes much use of Phrases that have been employed by good Persons in a pious Sense; but it is plain, that all this is manag'd so as to expose Religion and Faith to the Derision and Contempt of Mankind. He carries the Ridicule so far, as to mix it with his Addresses to the Supreme Being. He formally pretends to *offer up his most ardent Prayers in behalf of his Friend at the Throne of Grace, that God would be pleas'd himself to illuminate and irradiate his Mind with a perfect and thorough Conviction of the Truth of his holy Gospel; that the same Holy Spirit, that first dictat'd that divine Law, would powerfully set to his Seal, and attest its Authority in his Heart.* With more to the same purpose *. Now, supposing what can scarce be doubted from the whole of his Pamphlet, that he does not believe the Truth and divine Original of the Gospel, and that he looks upon the Influence of the Holy Ghost to be meer absurd Cant and Enthusiasm, to pretend in a solemn manner to apply to God to illuminate him with a perfect and thorough Conviction of the Truth of his holy Gospel, and to send his Holy Spirit to attest its Authority in his Heart, seems to me to be a carrying Profaneness to a great height. Nor can I well conceive, how any Man that believes there is a Supreme Being, who is a Lover of Truth and Goodness,

* P. 112.

Goodness, and who concerns himself in the Affairs of Men at all, can allow himself to be guilty of such a solemn Grimace and Mockery.

You may perhaps think this Censure a little severe; but I cannot help adding, that it appears to me upon the most close and impartial Consideration, that the Tendency of his Pamphlet is to destroy all Religion and Reason itself, and to take from Men all Principles of every kind, those of natural Religion as well as reveal'd. With regard to Christianity, or the Faith of the Gospel, that it is his Design to expose it to Ridicule, I think no Man that reads his Pamphlet with any Attention can doubt. It is, according to the Representation he gives of it, such a strange and inconsistent thing, that no Man can tell what to make of it. It is a Believing without Understanding, without rational Conviction and Evidence; a Believing we know not why, and not only without Reason, but against it. It is a Faith that has nothing to do with *historical Evidence* or *moral Certainty*, or with the Scripture-Account of Facts relating to our Saviour; a Faith that *cannot be taught*, and which *it requires no Time to attain*. And therefore no Man should trouble himself to look for a Reason for believing, or take any pains either to get Information himself, or to instruct others in the Faith; and I think the manifest Tendency of this Scheme, if pursued, would be to banish Faith and Christianity out of the World.

But if he endeavours to banter us out of our Faith, perhaps he leaves us Reason and natural Religion to guide us. No; this he also effectually discards.

4 *Remarks on a Pamphlet, entitled,*

The Strain of his arguing is to shew, that no Religion can be rational, that is not founded on a free and impartial Examination and Enquiry. And at the same time, he does all he can to shew, that a free and impartial Examination is an impossible thing. That the Generality of Mankind are under a natural Incapacity for Reasoning themselves, or understanding it when proposed by others, and are incapable of judging if *there be the least of Induction or Inference in the case* *. And that the *ablest and best of Men* are *disqualified for fair Reasoning* or impartial Judging by their *natural Prejudices*; the Power of which he represents to be so great, that it is *as absolute a Disqualification for such a Trial as the greatest natural Incapacity* †. From whence it follows, that no Man living is capable of reasoning fairly or judging truly. He takes a great deal of pains, to shew that Reason can not be certain of any thing, nor of force enough to controul and govern the Passions; that it is ever varying and unstable, and can never come to a fixed Determination in any one Point whatsoever; And indeed, considering the Representation he makes of it, I cannot see but that he had as good deny all Men any Use of Reason or the intellectual Faculty at all; since, according to him, it must be of little or no advantage, and only tends to perplex Mens Minds with endless Uncertainties and Distrusts. Accordingly he has chosen to adorn his Title-Page with a Passage of *Cotta in Cicero*, where he is disputing against Reason and against Providence; and the Design of which is to shew, that Reason is an useless and even a pernicious thing. Several

* P. 17, 18.

† P. 23.

Several Parts of his Pamphlet seem to be particularly levelled against what has been usually thought of great advantage and importance, early Instruction and Education. He frequently argues, that if Religion be supposed to be a rational Thing, it would be a wicked Attempt to endeavour to instruct Children in it; for this would be to prejudice and prepossess their tender Minds, and destroy that free Enquiry which Reason prescribes. And as to Faith, they cannot be instructed in it, since this is a thing that *cannot be taught*, and the Understanding has nothing to do with it. All Men therefore must be left entirely to themselves without Instruction, under pretence of leaving them to the Grace of God, and to the Guidance of his Spirit. And if this also be exploded, as there is great reason to think it will, by this Gentleman and his Associates, as unintelligible Cant and Enthusiasm; and such it certainly is, according to the Description he gives of it, and which undoubtedly was intended by him to expose it to Contempt and Ridicule: I say, if this also be discarded as well as Faith and Reason; then I see nothing left to guide Men but their Passions, to which they must be given up without reserve, and the Force of which he so feelingly describes.*

And now we may see what a hopeful way Mankind would be in, if they were to follow the Tendency of this Writer's Scheme. And upon what Foundation such Gentlemen as these can set up for Benefactors to Mankind, who endeavour to set them loose from all Principles, and to ridicule Reason

* P. 30, 31.

6 *Remarks on a Pamphlet, entitled,*

son and Religion out of the World ; or what Good they can propose to Society or to their Country by it, is hard to see. Some others that have appeared against Revelation, have at least in shew pretended to set up Reason and Natural Religion for a sufficient Guide : But this Gentleman gives such an account of Faith and Reason too, and plays the one in such a manner against the other, that it looks as if it were his Design to destroy all Regard to either of them, and to set aside all Religion at once, Natural as well as Reveal'd. The manifest Tendency of his Performance, is to engage Mankind to give themselves no Concern about any Religion at all, or to educate their Children in any Principles, the natural Consequence of which would be a giving them up to Vice and Barbarism. But it is to be hoped, that when once People are made sensible of the Tendency of such a Scheme, it will in a great measure prove an Antidote to the Poison of it ; and that Piety and Good Sense is not so far lost in the World, that Men will lightly suffer themselves to be banter'd out of their Religion and Reason too. Such Attempts, one would be apt to think, should, with Persons that will allow themselves time for Reflection, turn to the advantage of Christianity. For it is natural to conclude, that if the Enemies of Christianity are oblig'd to use Arguments against it, which, if good for any thing, would be equally good against all Religion, it is a strong Presumption of its Truth, and that all Religion must stand or fall with it. For would any Man in his Senses, that understands Argument at all, or that is in any degree a Judge of good Reasoning, endeavour to
expose

expose Christianity by Arguments and Mediums that militate against all Religion and all Certainty of Reason, if he thought he could attack Christianity with success any other way ?

The same Observation may be made with regard to what this Writer so often repeats about moral Certainty and Evidence. When Men think they can shew that any Testimony or Evidence is not to be depended on, or that the Accounts of any past Facts are uncertain and to be suspected, the Method that Common-Sense directs to in such a Case, is not to inveigh against all Evidence and Testimony whatsoever, and against all Records of past Facts, as if they were all absolutely uncertain ; but to produce Reasons to invalidate that particular Evidence and Testimony, and shew why those particular Accounts are not to be depended on. And this undoubtedly is the Method the Enemies of Christianity would take, if they thought they were able to invalidate the Evidence produced for the Gospel-Records. But instead of this, they ridiculously fly out into general Invectives against all human Testimony and all moral Evidence. They harangue pathetically upon the Uncertainty of all past Facts, and all Accounts that are transmitted to us through the hands of fallible Men ; that is, all Records, Laws, and Accounts whatsoever of things which we ourselves did not see. This discovers a Consciousness, that the Evidence for the Facts and Records of Christianity is so strong, that they are not able to subvert it any other way, than by destroying the Credit of all Testimony, and all past Facts and Records whatsoever. I say, we must
suppose

8 *Remarks on a Pamphlet, entitled,*

suppose they are sensible of this, or else we must suppose them to be the very worst Managers of a Cause, the most miserable Bunglers, of any that ever pretended to Reason or Argument, which I believe they would be very loth to be thought to be.

These are some of the general Reflections that occurred to me upon reading this Pamphlet. But before I proceed to a distinct Consideration of it, it will not be improper to lay before you the Idea this Writer gives of the Nature of that Faith which the Gospel requires, and for which he pretends to be an Advocate, and of the Principle upon which it is founded, as far as I am capable of forming a Notion of it, by carefully comparing several Parts of his Book. And this will also furnish a farther Proof of this Gentleman's Candour and Sincerity.

He represents *a rational Faith*, that is, as he himself explains it, *an Assent to revealed Truths founded upon the Conviction of the Understanding, as a false and unwarrantable Notion* *. And therefore sets himself to prove, that in the Gospel *no Appeal to the Understanding was ever made or intended* †. He talks as if Infants were capable of Faith, before they are capable of exerting any one Act of Reason; and that the *Infant's Belief answers as effectually all the Demands of the Gospel, as that of the first Proficient, and highest Graduate in Divinity* ‡. And as he explains the first Beginning of Truth to be without Reason, or any Use of the Understanding, so he represents the *Perse-*
verance

* P. 7.

† P. 35, &c.

‡ P. 9, 69, 114.

verance in the Faith required in the Gospel, to be a blind and foolish Obstinacy to a present Notion, a disavowing all future Use of Reason for our Security*. And speaking of the true and genuine Faith, which, saith he, I contend for, he declares, that that Person best enjoys it, who never asked himself one single Question about it, and never dealt at all in the Evidence of Reason †. Agreeably to which, he represents that Zeal for the Faith, which the Gospel recommends, to be a blind irrational Heat, a potent Fire, a Zeal not according to Knowledge ‡. And tho' he observes, that we are ordered to be taught the Faith in our Childhood, yet he expressly affirms, that Faith and Religion can never be a thing that is to be taught, and that it must needs be something that does not require Time to attain ||. Accordingly he speaks of Faith all along, as if it were a thing absolutely completed at once, and which admits of no Degrees; and sets himself to shew, that Christ and his Apostles always required Persons to believe in an Instant, without allowing any time for Deliberation, or offering any Evidence to convince their Minds. *The Conviction*, as he expresses it, *was to precede the Evidence* **. And lest it should be alledged, that the Miracles wrought by Christ, and by the Apostles in his Name, were Evidences of his Divine Mission, he endeavours to shew that Miracles could be no Proofs at all, nor were ever intended by our Saviour himself as such ††. And finally, he affirms, that the first Principle of Faith is really what Philosophers call *arguing in a Circle, and begging the Question*.

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* P. 11. † P. 29. ‡ P. 25. || P. 17. ** P. 37—42. †† P. 46—50.

Question *. According to the Representation he here gives of the Faith which the Gospel requires, it is not to be wonder'd at, that he represents Persons of the meanest Understandings to be best qualified for Faith, and claims Men of the *brightest Intellectuals* on the side of Infidelity †.

But this is not all : The Faith required in the Gospel, according to this Writer's Representation of it, is not only a Persuasion without any Conviction of the Understanding, or any rational Evidence to support it; but it is directly contrary to Reason. He affirms, that there is *an irreconcilable Repugnance in their Natures betwixt Reason and Belief* ‡. And endeavours at large to shew, that they are *removed at the utmost distance from all possibility of amicable Terms and Reconciliation*; and, as he expresses it in the Margin of *Pag. 81.* that *Religion cannot admit the least Alliance with Reasoning*. And accordingly he asserts, that *there is no one Lesson that the Holy Writings have taken more care to inculcate, than this of denying our Reason*; that we are there strictly enjoined to *captivate our Reason*, i. e. as he explains it, *to lay it under the most absolute Restraint and Prohibition, not to permit it the least Opportunity or Freedom to exert itself, or interpose on any occasion whatever* ||.

Such is the goodly Representation this Gentleman is pleased to make of what he calls the *genuine Faith* of the Gospel. And at the same time he frequently repeats it, that God requires this Faith of all Persons under pain of Damnation: that is, he requires them all, on pain of Damna-

tion,

¶ P. 78.

† P. 72.

‡ P. 70, 86.

|| P. 84.

Christianity not founded on Argument. II

tion, to believe without Evidence or any Conviction of the Understanding, to believe in an Instant, and *every Moment* of their *Lives* *, even before they are capable of Understanding, to believe without Reason and against it.

Agreeable to this Description of Faith, is the Account he gives of the Influence of the Holy Ghost, which he makes to be the sole Principle of this Faith. He represents him, as working a full Persuasion in the Soul, without any Conviction of the Understanding, and as engaging Men to believe at once, without knowing why they believe. That he *irradiates the Souls of Believers at once with an irresistible Light from Heaven, that flashes Conviction in a moment; and that thus our Faith is completed in an Instant, and the most perfect and finished Creed produced at once, without any tedious Progress in Deductions of our own* †. He calls this a *secret Whisper, Inspiration, and infused Evidence* ‡. And that it is *a constant and particular Revelation imparted separately and supernaturally to every Individual* ||. And this he explains to be of such a nature, as to render all outward Instructions entirely needless. That there is *no occasion to apply to Libraries for farther Information; nor must we be left to take any the least part of our Instructions from one another* **. That in interpreting Scripture, *there must not be any thing left to the Skill of the Workman* ††. So that all Help of Commentators, Knowledge of Languages, &c. is to be discarded. For the Holy Ghost abides for ever as an *uncorrupted Commentator in our own Breasts.*

C 2

Breasts.

* P. 17. † P. 59. ‡ P. 58. || P. 112. ** P. 60. †† P. 61.

Breasts *. Yea, the Scriptures themselves are, according to his account of the matter, entirely needless. He opposes the inward Attestations of the Spirit, to *mere manuscript Authorities, and Paper-Revelations*, as he calls the Scriptures by way of Contempt. Those that are instructed by the Spirit, need not concern themselves about the *Credit of antient Miracles, or the Genuineness of distant Records*, nor will think any *human Testimony* (and this Writer always represents the Testimony by which the Gospel-Records are conveyed to us under that Idea) *of consequence enough to engage a Moment's Attention upon this Subject* †. So that according to his Representation of the matter, a Man that has the Spirit, will not regard the Accounts given us in the Gospel of the Life, Miracles, Resurrection, Ascension of our Saviour, and the other extraordinary Facts there recorded, as of any consequence at all, and will believe as well without them as with them.

He speaks as if all Believers were so far under the Influence of the Spirit, as to be rendered infallible. That the Holy Ghost, that *great Dictator and infallible Guide* ‡, has *promised to abide with us to the End of the World, that we might not be left liable one Moment to a Possibility of Error and Imposition* ||. And he represents this Spirit as *speaking the same thing to all, and bringing them to think all alike* **. So that, according to the Account this Gentleman is pleased to put upon us as the Gospel-Account of Faith, and of the Spirit, all Believers are made to *think all alike*, tho' we plainly see they

* P. 61. † P. 59, 60. ‡ P. 56. || P. 60. ** P. 58.

they differ from one another in several things; and tho' they hold contradictory Sentiments, yet they are all infallibly guided by the Holy Ghost, and *not liable one Moment* to be mistaken.

Thus he places the sole Foundation of the Christian Faith upon a thing that is evidently false in fact, and that is, the immediate infallible Inspiration of every particular Person. And at the same time he utterly discards all moral Certainty and Evidence, as if Faith had nothing to do with it; that is, the Evidence whereby the Gospel-History, the sacred Records come down to us. He declares, that this *is indeed the highest Degree of rational Evidence that the Nature of the Subject can possibly admit of* *; but yet that it is altogether uncertain, and not to be depended on. He often degradingly calls it *human Testimony, in its Nature ever liable to Error*; and that it is *nothing more than the precarious Conjecture of a fallible Judge upon the traditional Testimony of a fallible Witness* †. That it is a Being *left to the Courtesy of a few Reporters* ††. And that it is *to us no more than an uncertain Hearsay; the uncertain Assertions of fallible Men relating it after one another* **.

Thus have I laid together in one view the Account this Writer gives us of Faith, and of the Spirit, and the Evidence on which Christianity is founded. This is what he calls the *Revealed and Scriptural Account of the matter* ††. And he applauds himself for having *pointed out what is really and positively the authorized Principle of Faith*; and for having *carried on his Detection of a false Principle*

* P. 32. † P. 31. †† P. 51. ** P. 52, 53. †† P. 68.

74 *Remarks on a Pamphlet, entitled,
Principle to a satisfactory Conclusion in the Discovery of a true one**. And he declares with an Air of Assurance, that the Account he gives *depends not for its Support upon the bare Strength of any single Quotation whatever, but on the joint Tendency and Tenor of the whole †*.

I do not think there can be a more complete Scheme of Absurdity and Enthusiasm, than what this Gentleman here puts upon us for the true Scripture-Account of Faith, and of the Spirit, and of the Nature of Gospel-Evidence; which he undoubtedly intends for exposing the sacred Writings, but which, with all equal Judges of things, tends only to expose the Unfairness of this Writer, and the little Regard he hath to Truth and Candour. But this is the way of these Gentlemen, in writing against Christianity. They never can allow themselves to give fair and equal Representations of things, but throw them into false Lights, in order to make them appear ridiculous. In any other case but this, such a Conduct would scarce be thought consistent with common Honesty. And I know not how to account for it, but that it proceeds from a Consciousness that they cannot succeed against Religion by fair Representation and equal Argument.

The Account this Writer gives of the Nature and Grounds of the Christian Faith, is not more absurd in itself, than different from the Representations made to us of it in Scripture. According to him, Faith and Religion is a thing that can *never be taught*; according to the Gospel, Faith ordinarily

* P. 106.

† P. 105.

ordinarily comes by *bearing* and teaching *. According to this Writer's Account of it Faith, is *completed at once*, made perfect *in an Instant*, and is not a thing that *requires Time to attain*. But according to the Representation made of it in the Gospel, Faith may be sincere tho' weak, it admits of several Degrees, it is a thing capable of Growth, and which ordinarily takes time and pains for its Establishment and Improvement †. Upon his Scheme, all outward Teaching is perfectly needless, and Christians are not to receive *the least Part of their Instructions from one another*; according to the Gospel, outward Teaching is necessary; Christians are exhorted to *teach and admonish one another*. And the Plan upon which the Christian Church was established was this, that they should be formed into sacred Assemblies, in which there should be Persons whose proper stated Office it should be to teach, and in order to this to give themselves to *Reading, to Exhortation and Doctrine*; and Provision was made for a Succession of such Persons in the Church, who should *be able to teach others also* ||. The Faith recommended in the Gospel is a Faith that is joined with Knowledge, and whereby the Understanding is enlightned **. But the Faith described by this Author is a Faith without Knowledge, and that has nothing to do with the Understanding. According to him, the Zeal for the Faith required of the Professors of Christianity, is a Zeal not according to Knowledge; but in the Gospel, a Zeal *not according to Knowledge*

* Rom. x. 14, 17. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. † Rom. xiv. 1.
2 Theff. i. 3. Jude 20. || 2 Tim. ii. 2. ** Phil. i. 9.
Col. i. 9, 10.

ledge is disapproved, and represented as not a Zeal of the right kind *. Faith, according to his Representation of it, is a thing for which no reason should or can be given. But the contrary is plainly supposed in the Gospel, where it is required of Christians as a Duty, that they be *ready to give an Answer to those that ask them a Reason of the Hope* that is in them †. And it is insisted upon as a proper Qualification in the Teachers of the Gospel, that they *be able to convince the Gainsayers* ‡. As he represents it, all Examination and Enquiry is absolutely inconsistent with the Nature of Christian Faith; whereas in the Gospel, we are commanded to search and try; an eminent Instance of which we have in the *Beræans*, who are highly commended for doing so; and their Believing is represented as the Result of their Examination and Enquiry **. According to his Account, the Christian Faith has no dependance at all upon the Miracles or external Attestations given to our Saviour, or any of the extraordinary Facts recorded in the Gospel; but according to the Account given us in Scripture, our Saviour appealed to the Miracles he wrought, as illustrious Attestations to his divine Mission; and the very End for which *these Things were written*, was, that we *might by them be brought to believe on the Name of the Son of God, and that believing we might have Life in his Name* †.

This may give a general Idea of this Gentleman's Performance; and perhaps such a general View of it might be sufficient. But at your
desire

* Rom x. 2. † 1 Pet. iii. 15. ‡ Tit. i. 9. ** 1 Theff. v. 21. Act. xvii. 11, 12. † John xx. 31.

desire I shall enter on a more particular Examination of it. The Strength of this Pamphlet, as far as it has any appearance of Reason or Argument, seems to me to lie chiefly in the former Part of it, where he undertakes and sets himself formally to prove, that *Reason or the Intellectual Faculty could not possibly both from its own Nature and that of Religion, be the Principle intended by God to lead us into a true Faith* *. This is oddly and not very accurately expressed. But his Meaning evidently is, that it is not the Will and Design of God that we should make use of our intellectual Faculty at all in believing, and that God never intended to lay any Evidence before our Understanding to induce us to believe, nor that our intellectual Faculty should at all judge of the Evidence proposed. This is what he applies himself formally to prove, and he seems to have a very good opinion of this Part of his Argument, which he thinks he has managed so as to render the other Part of his Pamphlet needless †.

His first Argument rests upon this Foundation, that Men are required in the Gospel *to think all alike*. And he thinks it a *preposterous Scheme, that of Unity in Opinion proposed to be effected by Reasoning* ||. He makes the same Supposition in other Parts of his Book, concerning our being obliged or required *to think all alike*; that is, as he seems to understand it, to have exactly the same Sentiments in all Points in Matters of Religion. But this is not what Christianity requires. The Passage that hath most of an appearance this way,

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* P. 7. † P. 106. || P. 9.

is that of St. Paul to the *Corinthians*: *Now I beseech you, Brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no Divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same Mind and in the same Judgment* *. But any one that carefully examines that Passage and the Context, will find that the Apostle's Meaning is not, that it was necessary for them to be perfectly of the same opinion in all speculative Matters, to which he hath there no reference at all, but that they should shun those *Factions and Contentions*, that *Envy and Strife*, and that *Party-Spirit* that he heard was among them †; and that they should be joined in *Unity of Heart and Affection*. In like manner, when he prays for the believing *Romans*, that the *God of all Patience and Consolation* would grant them to be *like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus, that with one Mind and one Mouth they might glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* ||; which is another Passage referred to by this Writer **: his Design is not to insist upon it as of absolute necessity, that there should be a strict Uniformity in Opinion; but that they should preserve an *Unity of Affection*, and should all join in glorifying God with one *Heart and Mouth*, which he there supposes they might do, notwithstanding smaller Differences. Nothing is more evident than it is from many Passages in that Epistle, particularly the whole XIVth Chapter, that the Apostle is very far from insinuating, that every

* 1 Cor. i. 10. † 1 Cor. i. 11. iii. 3. || Rom. xv. 5, 6. ** P. 65.

every Difference of Sentiments with regard to any thing in Religion is inconsistent with a true Christian Faith. For he there supposes the Christians to whom he writes to differ in several things, and exhorts them to mutual Forbearance, and not to judge or condemn one another on account of those Differences. That they that are *strong* ought to bear the Infirmities of the *weak*, i. e. of those that *are weak in Faith*; and that they should be united in Love and Charity, and in a brotherly Disposition towards one another. And this seems to be every where the Meaning of that Phrase, of being *like-minded, and of one Mind, or the same Mind**. This also is what the Apostle intends by their *keeping the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace* †. A noble Passage, that breathes an admirable Strain of Charity, tho' this Gentleman seems very willing by an odd Gloss to turn it into Ridicule ‖. What he represents in a gibing way as a great Absurdity, is very true, that tho' Men *cannot be all of one Opinion, they may be of one Faith*; that is, *one Faith* in the sense St. Paul speaks of it, *viz. one Faith* in the great Essentials of it; and, with regard to lesser Matters, they should, as he there advises, *forbear one another in Love*. This forbearing one another, which is so often urged as the Duty of Christians, plainly supposes that there is an Allowance in the Christian Scheme for Diversity of Opinions in religious Matters. This Gentleman's first Argument then fails him, which proceeds upon this Supposition, that

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* See to this purpose Rom. xii. 16. Phil. ii. 1, 2, 3. 1 Pet. iii. 8. † Ephes. iv. 3. ‖ P. 75.

the Gospel or the Christian Faith lays Men under a necessity of *thinking all alike*.

It is true, there are some main Principles, a Belief of which seems to be required of all that would pass for the Disciples of *Jesus*. But this is no Argument at all, that Christianity is not founded on rational Conviction or Evidence. There are some Principles necessary to be believed in natural Religion, as well as reveal'd; and to require any Religion at all, is to require a Belief of some Principles, because they lie at the Foundation of it.

But this will come in better, in considering the Author's next Argument; which is to this purpose:

That in the Gospel *Questions are propounded to us under the Restraints of Threats and Authority*. And he thinks it absurd and contradictory for a Man to be threatned into a rational Belief, *to be talk'd to of Danger in his Decisions, to have the Rod held out with the Lesson, and to have Propositions tendred to his Reason with Penalties annexed**. This is what he seems to lay a particular stress upon. He frequently takes notice of the Command laid upon us to believe, and the Threatnings denounced against Unbelief, as a Proof that Christianity is not a reasonable Religion.

It is to be observed, that in all that he saith on this head in different Parts of his Pamphlet, he is pleas'd to consider Faith and Unbelief as a mere speculative Assent or Dissent to certain Propositions, separated from all moral Dispositions and Qualifications whatsoever. Whereas any one that considers

* P. 8.

considers the Scripture with Attention, will find that this is not the Representation there made of that Faith on which so great a stress is laid in the New Covenant; or of the Unbelief, against which such Penalties are denounced. They are still supposed to be of a practical Nature and Tendency, and to take in good or bad Dispositions of the Mind, which are reckoned as included in the Faith there required, or the Unbelief there condemned.

But there is one previous Question that deserves to be distinctly considered, because it seems to lie at the Foundation of the Author's whole Argument on this head; and that is, whether the believing any Principles whatsoever can in any case be required of any Man as a Duty? This is what he seems to deny. He will not allow that any Man can be obliged by any Authority whatsoever to assent to any Truth at all, that is proposed to his Reason or Understanding. And that it would be the highest Tyranny and Injustice for God himself to require this, even with regard to those Truths that are of the greatest Certainty and Importance. That *it is impossible to conceive any the least Connexion between the Notion of Duty, and assenting rationally to any Proposition, however strongly supported**. This appears to me to be a strange Assertion. It is in effect to say, that no Man can be oblig'd to it as a Duty, to make a right Use of the Reason God has given him, nor can God himself require him to do so. He cannot so much as require his reasonable Creatures to believe and acknowledge his own supreme Dominion or Perfections, though
founded

22 *Remarks on a Pamphlet, entitled,*

founded on the clearest Reason and Evidence, nor consequently to obey and worship him. For it is manifest, that if a Man may without blame deny a God and a Providence, he may without blame neglect to render that Obedience and Adoration that is due from reasonable Creatures to the Supreme Being. Thus our Author has found out an admirable Expedient, by freeing Men from all Obligations to believe any Principles whatsoever, to free them from all Obligations to any Religion at all. Whereas, supposing God has given Men Faculties, by a right Use and Improvement of which they are capable of discerning Truth, especially in Matters of great importance to their Conduct, and to their Happiness; then it is both in itself fit, and is what God may justly require, that they should make a just Use of their Reason and Understanding for discerning Truth. And if through a Neglect of using and improving their Reason in a proper manner, they do not discern or acknowledge those Truths; then that Neglect or Abuse of their Reason and Understanding is really a Fault, and God may punish it as such.

What this Gentleman offers in support of his Scheme, amounts to this, that our *Reason is ever necessitated to determine just as she does of herself, and is by her nature incapable either of paying Compliments, or giving Offence. That the different Light things appear in to different Men, must necessarily create a different Sense of things**. And before this, he had observed, that the Determination we come to, is a *necessary and independent Event,*

Event, under no Influence of ours †. Upon this Foundation he asserts, that a *Determination either right or wrong, in Matters that are not self-evident, or in which there is the least of Induction or Inference, and such are the most important Points of Religion, must be in itself equally meritorious ‡.*

The whole Strength of his Reasoning here depends upon this Supposition, that by the very Constitution of our Nature, and the Frame of the Human Understanding, we may be unavoidably necessitated to take Error for Truth, or Truth for Error, even in Matters of the highest importance; and that, without any fault of our own, after the best, the strictest and most impartial Enquiry and Examination, we are capable of making. But this is a Supposition that ought not to be admitted, because it resolves all our Errors into the Will and Constitution of God himself; whereas I think it is much more reasonable and modest to suppose, that Men's Errors in Matters of great importance, are owing to themselves, to some wrong Affections and Dispositions of Mind, some Fault in their Enquiry. And their professing the contrary, is no Proof at all; because it cannot be expected, supposing it ever so much their own Fault, that they would be willing to own it to be so. But God, who searches their Hearts, may know it, and condemn them on the account of it. And where the Neglect of a good Practice follows upon a wrong Judgment flowing from faulty Causes, he may justly punish them both for that wrong Judgment, and for the evil Practice consequent upon it.

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† P. 5. ‡ P. 17, 18.

For my part, I cannot be brought to think, that Truth and Falshood is so indifferent to the Human Understanding, that we are carried with equal Innocence to believe the one and the other, after the Evidence is fairly laid before us; and this with regard to Matters of great consequence to our Duty and Happiness. Since it cannot be denied, that there are some Truths of very great importance, that lie at the Foundation of all Religion, and of a good and virtuous Practice; it is as certain, that it is the Will of God, that his reasonable Creatures should know and believe those Truths, as it is that he would have them practise the Duties that arise upon the Acknowledgment of those Truths, and to which they are necessarily presupposed, *e. g.* It is as certain that it is the Will of God, that Men should believe there is a God that made and governs the World, and that there is a necessary Difference between moral Good and Evil, as that it is his Will that Men should worship him, should love and reverence him, should submit to his Authority, and obey his Laws, and should practise Virtue, and abhor Vice. I cannot therefore think, that he hath so formed Men, and given them such Faculties, that even making the best use of them, and without any fault at all, or wrong Disposition on their parts, they may be invincibly ignorant of those Truths, or may innocently disbelieve or deny them. And as we may plainly see in numberless Instances, that Mens Affections and Appetites lead them wrong in their Actions, so I doubt not they frequently cause them to pass wrong Judgments of things. And any one that knows any thing of
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Mankind, must be sensible that they are not determined by mere naked Evidence, but that some corrupt Affection, some wrong Byas of Appetite or Interest, which is really a Fault, in many instances corrupts and depraves their Judgment ; and that this might be guarded against, if they used all the Care and Pains that is really and absolutely in their power, and which the Importance of the thing deserves and demands.

It is particularly certain, that with regard to Truths of a moral and religious Nature, our believing or not believing them, is often very much influenced by the good or bad Dispositions of the Mind, and has a great Effect upon the Practice. And therefore believing in these Cases may be an important Duty, and Unbelief may be very criminal. Nor can I see why God may not, as the supreme Legislator, interpose his Authority to require the one, and to warn Men against the other. This could not be properly called an arbitrary or unjust Proceeding, as this Writer represents it, or an erecting a Tyranny over the Understanding. To require Men to believe without Evidence, or without a Reason for believing, or to believe contrary to Reason and Evidence, is unjust ; but for God to require his reasonable Creatures to believe, when he himself knows there is sufficient Evidence to engage them to believe, and that it will actually have that effect upon them, if it be not their own fault, and if they carefully attend to it with that Disposition of Mind that becomes them, has nothing in it unjust or unbecoming him as the God of Truth, the wise and righteous Governor of the World.

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For by requiring them to believe in that Case, he doth not require them to renounce or give up their Reason, or forbid them to make use of it ; but he requires them to make a proper Use of their Reason, and of the Faculties he has given them, to lay their Minds open to Conviction and Evidence, and to endeavour to get them clear'd from the Influence of corrupt Inclinations, and culpable Prejudices.

I cannot therefore think, that this Part of the Author's Argument hath any thing in it to prove that Christianity is not founded on Reason, or agreeable to it. If God should in his infinite Goodness send a Messenger, or Messengers, to bring Doctrines and Laws of great importance to Mankind, as it may be justly expected that in such a Case he would take care, that they should be attended with sufficient Attestations to convince the World that he sent them ; so it is very reasonable to suppose, that he would require those to whom this Revelation, with its Evidences, was made known, to believe and to obey it. For to what purpose would it be to give a Revelation, and to interpose in an extraordinary manner for confirming it with the most illustrious Attestations of a divine Authority ; if, after all, it were left to Men as an indifferent matter, whether they believed or received it or not ? And to deny that God himself has a right to require it as a Duty of Men, to believe and receive what he has revealed, and confirmed by such Evidence, as he who knows the human Mind, knows to be sufficient to convince honest and well-disposed

disposed Minds, is a strange Doctrine, and abhorrent from the common Sense of Mankind.

Supposing Faith to be a Principle of holy Obedience, such a Persuasion as forms the Soul to a sincere Compliance with the Terms of the divine Covenant; and this it may be, and be at the same time a rational Persuasion; it is highly becoming God to encourage and to reward it. And such is the Faith which the Gospel requires, and on which it lays so great a stress. Again, supposing Unbelief brings with it a Disobedience to the divine Laws, and disqualifies a Man for the Practice of those Duties which are of great importance in Religion, and without which we cannot, according to the divine Covenant, be entitled to the promised Benefits; and that this Unbelief is also owing to faulty Causes, to bad Dispositions of Mind, and to the Influence of corrupt Passions or Interests, which pervert the Judgment, and hinder the Mind from a fair examining the Evidence; I think it cannot be denied, that such an Unbelief would be very criminal. Now it is certain, that the Unbelief condemned in the Gospel, is always supposed to be of this kind. It is represented as owing to bad Dispositions, as the Source and Principle of it, and as attended with Disobedience to the Laws of the Gospel as the Fruit and Effect of it. And if God saw that this would be the general Case of those that should disbelieve the Gospel, this would be sufficient to justify the general Threatnings and Declarations there made against Unbelievers. And if in any particular Instance Unbelief should happen to

be owing to any invincible Impediment or Incapacity, the Supreme Lawgiver will know how to make proper Allowances; for he will always deal justly and equitably with all Men. But as the other is the common Case of Unbelievers, so it is proper the Declarations on that Head should be general, and go upon that general Supposition. And if Unbelief be criminal, as upon such a Supposition it would certainly be, it would deserve Punishment; and if it deserves Punishment, it is right to threaten it with the Punishment it deserves. Nor would it be unbecoming a wise and just God to take this way to warn his reasonable Creatures against it, and lay before them the evil Consequences of such a Conduct. This might be really a Kindness to them, as it would awaken their Attention to Truths and Duties of the highest consequence to their Happiness, and on which the Cause and Interests of Virtue do very much depend. And if this be an Influence upon their Minds, it is such an Influence as God the Supreme Lawgiver has a right to exert over the human Mind, and which, Reason obliges us to own, would be highly proper in such a Case.

The next thing this Gentleman offers to shew, that the Christian Faith cannot be a rational thing, is, that *we are ordered to be baptized into it.* This he represents as *the known Original of Faith, the great Root whence all our religious Impressions notoriously spring;* and that by *the Baptismal Ceremony Men commence true Believers at once:* And this, *even whilst they have not the least Share or Symptom*
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of Understanding *. He seems to lay a great stress upon this, and returns to it in several Parts of his Pamphlet †. And he observes, that *the Infant's Belief answers as effectually all the Demands of the Gospel, as that of the first Proficient, and highest Graduate in Divinity* ‡.

The Strength of his Argument here depends upon the sneering Account he gives of the Nature of Baptism. But there needs no more to show the Weakness and Fallacy of it, than to state the Case of Baptism according to the Gospel-Notion of it; in which alone Christianity is concerned. At the first founding of the Christian Church, the first Work was to bring Persons over to the Faith of the Gospel, by setting before them the Evidence whereby it was confirmed; and then when they were once converted to the Faith, they were, according to the divine Appointment, to be baptized, which was a solemn taking upon them a Profession of the Christian Religion, and a bringing themselves under the most sacred Obligations to obey its Laws. And there is nothing in this but what is perfectly consistent with Faith's being founded upon good and rational Evidence; nor can so much as a Shadow of an Argument be brought from it to prove, that because Persons were ordered to be baptized after they believed, therefore they did not, or could not use their Reason or intellectual Faculty to lead them into that Belief. Our Author is sensible of this, and therefore he lays the stress of his Argument upon the Baptism of Infants, which he represents in his

* P. 9. † P. 69. ‡ P. 114.

his own way. Let us therefore argue with him upon the Supposition, that it was the Will of God that not only adult Persons, who themselves embraced the Christian Faith, but that their Children too should be baptized. And I cannot see how it follows from this, that therefore Faith is not a rational thing. For as to adult Persons, their being commanded to be baptized upon their believing does not in the least prove that they did not embrace the Christian Faith upon a rational Conviction. And as to Infants, they have no Faith at all; nor does their being baptized suppose they have any. All that it supposes, is not that they do themselves believe, but that they are the Children of Believers; and are by that sacred Rite entered into the visible Society of Christians, solemnly dedicated to God, and commended to his Grace and Blessing by such as do themselves believe; and who solemnly undertake to see that they be carefully instructed in the Principles of the Christian Faith, when they come to Years capable of it, and that they be trained up to a holy and a virtuous Practice.

So among the *Jews*, no adult Person was allowed to be circumcised, without professing his Belief and Adherence to the Law of *Moses*; and his being circumcised, was to be regarded as an open Declaration of it. This was no proof at all, that he did not embrace that Law upon a rational Conviction, but rather supposed that he did so. But when he was himself circumcised and openly professed that Law, his Children, if he had any, were to be circumcised too; which was not understood

stood as a Declaration that they also believed, of which they were not yet capable; but that they were dedicated to God as the Children of his professed People, and to be trained as they grew up in the Belief and Acknowledgment of the living and true God, and the Practice of his Law.

And supposing it was the Will of God, that in like manner in the Christian Church not only adult Persons who themselves believed, but the Children of such should be baptized, all that could be justly concluded from it would be, not that the Christian Faith is not a reasonable thing, but that the God of Truth and Purity well knew the Doctrines of Christianity to be highly important, and agreeable to Truth and Reason; and therefore would have Children betimes instructed in those Doctrines; and that he knew the Duties there prescribed to be of great consequence to our Happiness, and therefore would have Children early trained up to the Knowledge and Practice of those Duties. And this does not hinder, but rather obliges the Person who was thus early baptized, to consider those sacred Truths when he grows up; and then he is not to believe them because he was taught them in his Childhood, but because he himself considers the Evidence brought for them, and finds it reasonable and convincing; and in like manner, it does not hinder him from examining into the Nature and Importance of the Duties required of him, but rather obliges him to do so, that he may perform those Duties from a full Conviction of their Reasonableness and Excellency.

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To his Question therefore, *Can a Man be baptized into a rational Religion?* I answer, yes. A Man that is convinced of the Truth of such a Religion, and believes it upon good Evidence, may be reasonably baptized into it; *i. e.* he may solemnly, by that outward sacred Rite, profess his Belief of that Religion, and oblige himself to the Duties it prescribes; which is the design of Baptism with regard to the Adult. And with regard to Infants, it may be very reasonable for a Man that himself believes it upon rational grounds, to baptize his Child, *i. e.* solemnly by that sacred Rite to devote his Child to God, and to bring him as far as in him lies under Engagements to embrace and practise that excellent Religion, as soon as he is capable of doing so; at the same time solemnly obliging himself to take care that the Child be betimes seasoned with the Knowledge of sacred important Truth, and formed to the Practice of Piety and Virtue. And there is nothing improper, in supposing that it is the Will and Appointment of God, that Children should betimes be brought under such Engagements, when he knows them to be in themselves fit and reasonable, and of such a nature that it will be their Duty and their great Advantage when they come to Years of Discretion personally to approve and to fulfil them. If this be laying Prejudices and Prepossessions in their way, it is prepossessing them in favour of Truth and Virtue; and it is every way agreeable to the divine Wisdom and Goodness, to lay them under such a Prepossession, and what the Author of our Beings has a right to do. And therefore his doing that, can never be
justly

justly brought as an Objection against the Reasonableness of a Revelation.

THIS leads me to another Argument advanced by this Writer, to shew that Faith is not a reasonable thing, and that is, because we are ordered *to be taught it in our Childhood.* “ If the Assent God required were to be a rational one, it would be highly wicked and unjust to prepossess Men’s tender Minds in any manner before they came to the full Use of their rational Faculties. But now that we are actually commanded with early Diligence to retain our Children as so many sure Votaries to the Cause we profess ourselves; it is plain that a rational Assent is by no means calculated for, or expected at our hands*.” He is so fond of this Thought, that he repeats it, as his manner is, in other Parts of his Book, where he observes, that supposing Faith rational, “ The officious Piety of what they call Education would be highly partial and unjust, and would be nothing else but the undue Cultivation of the most notorious and palpable Prejudices; the anticipating unfairly the Strength of the supposed Evidence, &c. †”

I must own, this way of talking appears to me very extraordinary. That can never be a just Argument against the Reasonableness of a divine Revelation, which it would be reasonable to expect, supposing a Revelation really given. And of this kind is this Gentleman’s Argument here. For, supposing a Revelation really given from Heaven, and that it is in itself agreeable to Reason, and of

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* P. 11, 12. † P. 102, 103.

an excellent Tendency, then certainly the more reasonable and excellent its Doctrines and Injunctions are, the more proper it would be, and the more for the Good of Mankind, that Children should be instituted in it betimes, and trained up in a Knowledge of its divine Principles. For the Justness of this Consequence, I appeal to the Experience and Observation of all Ages, and to the common Consent of Mankind, and especially of the wisest and best of Men, who have ever agreed that it is a Matter of the greatest Importance to take care to train up Children betimes in good Principles, and cultivate good Dispositions in them. And if greater care was taken this way than there generally is, there is great reason to think that Mankind would be much more generally happy and virtuous than they are.

It is plain to any one that has made just Reflections on Human Nature, that the Author of our Beings designed that we should be instructed in our Childhood. For we are so framed and constituted, that we must necessarily depend for the Beginnings of our Knowledge very much on those that are about us. We are in a special manner cast by God and Nature on the Care of our Parents. All will own, that they are obliged to take care of the Bodies of their Children; and must no care be taken to instruct and principle their nobler Part, their Minds? To cultivate the Seeds of Reason, and to form them to the Knowledge of sacred Truth, and to a virtuous Practice? This is what Reason, the Good of Mankind, a Love to their Children, and a Desire of their Happiness, requires
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of Parents; and the Neglect of it has been always regarded as a criminal thing. It may be said, this is to prejudice and prepossess them; but it is a Prepossession that Reason directs to: And to neglect this, under pretence of leaving them to their own unprejudiced Reason, would be to leave their Minds entirely rude and uncultivated, and give them up to Vice and Ignorance. This Gentleman pretends, that according to the Judgment of Reason, *it would be a wicked thing to prepossess their Minds in any manner, before they come to the full Use of their rational Faculties.* The plain Meaning of which I take to be this, that they must be left without all Instruction of any kind, till they arrive to the Age of Manhood. No Attempt must be made to instruct them in any Branch of Learning or Knowledge, or to put Books into their hands, because Books and Instructions of Tutors or Masters would probably prepossess them. Every Man must be left to find out the Whole of Religion and Knowledge for himself, by the mere dint of his own Reason and Industry. And what would be the consequence of this, but universal Barbarism? *Our Passions, as this Gentleman observes, are most prevalent in those early Years, when Reason is least able to form her Judgments in our Assistance.— They must needs have got the start in their Advances, before she can by her Nature have made any considerable progress in those salutary Principles, which are to regulate or subdue them. For want of timely Notice, we may more than probably have embarked in wrong Measures at setting out, and be lost in the Power of Habit beyond Recovery, be-*

fore we know where we are. All this, and more to the same purpose, our Author produces *, to shew that Faith is necessary from the Beginning; from whence, by a strange way of arguing, he infers, that it is not a rational thing, since it must anticipate the Exercise of our Reason. But all that it proves is this, that it is necessary to endeavour to instill such Principles into the Minds of Children betimes, as may be of use to correct and regulate their Passions and Affections, before they can themselves go thro' the tedious Process of such an Examination, as he supposes to be necessary to a rational Faith. But it does by no means follow, that because it is proper to instruct Children betimes in the Principles of Faith and Religion, even before they are capable clearly of themselves to discern the Evidence; therefore the Principles of Faith are not confirmed by good and rational Evidence, or that the Faith of the Children when they grow up, and can see the Evidence, may not become in the properest sense rational.

Nor can it justly be pretended, that the Prepossession of Education takes from a Child, when he comes to Maturity, the Use of his own Reason, and the Liberty of Judgment. It is still in his power to examine into the Truth and Reasonableness of what he was taught before. And surely this will scarcely be denied in the present Age, when it is become so fashionable a thing to throw off the Principles of Education; and when there are so many Instances of Persons, that instead of being prejudiced in favour of the Religion in which they

they were educated, seem rather to be prejudiced against it, and to be ready to discard it for that reason; and who, as this Author advises *, *explode under the name of Prejudice all the Effect of their Education.*

Another of his Arguments to prove that the Christian Faith is not a rational one, is drawn from the Nature of Examination and Enquiry. The Strain of his Reasoning is to this purpose; that Reason requires us to examine before we believe, whereas the Faith required in the Gospel is absolutely inconsistent with a fair Examination. He observes, that “ there is not one single Argument from Reason, why a Man should not return of course to Neutrality, the first Moment he begins to think for himself. That nothing is more evident, than that to examine fairly, we must come unprejudiced and indifferent to the Examination. Examination in the very Term implies a Suspense of Conviction; and therefore if Religion admits at all of Examination, it must necessarily admit likewise of (at least a temporary) Disbelief. The rational Christian, whoever he be, must of course have originally set out a Sceptick—and that a Man may, nay must, disbelieve a while for Information’s sake—.” And yet all Doubting and Disbelief is what the Gospel condemns †. The Author had said the same thing before ‡, and he returns to it in several Parts of his Pamphlet.

But the whole of his Reasoning here proceeds upon a wrong Foundation, *viz.* that all Examination

* P. 9. † P. 12, 13. ‡ P. 5. 6.

3) *Remarks on a Pamphlet, entitled,*

tion necessarily supposes a perfect Neutrality or Indifferency of Mind, and a temporary Disbelief. It is manifest, that in examining into the Truth of Facts, it is not necessary that we have an absolute Doubt of those Facts, or be perfectly neutral and indifferent about them, before we enter on a particular Examination. It is very usual to examine into Facts that we were pretty sure of in general before, and yet this may not hinder the Examination and Enquiry from being just and exact. And the same may also hold, with regard to Doctrines and Principles. It is not at all necessary to a fair Examination of Principles, that a Man be perfectly neutral and indifferent to them when he begins the Enquiry, or that he should actually disbelieve them. In many cases this would be unreasonable, in some scarce possible, except the Things he enquires or examines into are Things which he never heard of before. For if he enquires, *e. g.* into Doctrines or Principles in which he had been carefully educated and instructed, and when instructed had Reasons given him, which appeared to him good and sufficient; it would be absurd to suppose that he should not be influenced by those Reasons, till he saw cause to alter his Sentiments. For it would be as irrational to disbelieve the Principles in which a Man was educated, for no other Reason, but because he was educated in them; as it would be, to believe them merely for that Reason. When a Man has reason to believe a Thing, and no sufficient Reason that he yet knows of to the contrary, it would be unreasonable entirely to suspend his
Assent

Assent to it, merely because it is possible to be false, tho' he has no reason to think it so.

A Man may enter upon an Enquiry with a Belief that what he enquires into is true, or at least very probable, for the Reasons which have been given him; but yet with a Resolution to examine more closely, and search more narrowly into the Validity of those Reasons and Evidences. And it is sufficient to a fair Examination, that he applies himself to it with a Mind honestly prepared and disposed to receive and submit to whatever Evidence shall arise in the Course of the Examination or Enquiry. This is all the *Neutrality*, if this Gentleman will call it so, that is necessary to a fair Enquiry, *viz.* a Disposition or Resolution to embrace Truth, on which side soever it shall upon a careful Search appear; and this Neutrality may be where a Man at present thinks he has much more reason to believe, than the contrary. All the Doubt that is strictly and absolutely necessary to a fair Examination is, that it is possible what he enquires into may be otherwise than he at present apprehends it. But a Man may believe a thing possible to be false, and yet have great reason to believe it true. And it may well happen, that in the Course of his Examination, he may see still greater Reason to believe and be assured of what he thought at first only probable. In which case, the Examination may be carried on very fairly, *i. e.* with a Mind open to Conviction and Evidence, without entertaining any considerable Doubt, or ever once seeing cause absolutely to suspend the Assent concerning it. Thus, *e. g.* if a Man has been carefully educated

cated in the Belief of a God, and of a Providence, and the moral Differences of Things; and at the same time has been instructed in the Reasons upon which these Principles are founded, it is not necessary to a fair Examination into those Principles, that he should be perfectly indifferent with regard to them, or should disbelieve them; he may very consistently carry on an Examination and Enquiry, without having his Belief of them shocked either in the Beginning or whole Progress of it, because as he goes on in the Examination, the Evidence may rise fuller to his view, and his Convictions may grow stronger. And I doubt not this hath also been the case of many excellent Persons of great Abilities and Probity, and of free Judgments, who have examined the Evidences for Christianity. They have come to the Examination with a good Opinion of it at first, but yet with a Resolution impartially to consider and follow the Evidence that should arise; and the more they examined, the more they found reason to believe it; and therefore were never obliged during their Examination absolutely to suspend their Assent to it, or to refuse to govern their Practice by its Precepts.

There is no need therefore to suppose with this Writer, that all the Time of Examination and Enquiry must be an *infidel Interim*, as he calls it*, or to talk of the Danger of Death's coming upon us whilst we are carrying on this Enquiry, and of our lacking Faith the *necessary Passport*, &c. For a Person may fairly carry on the Enquiry, and yet neither during all that time disbelieve the Principles,

principles, nor neglect the Practice of the Duties of Christianity; yea, may still have his Faith more strengthened as he goes on, and his Resolutions more established for a Christian Practice.

We may see by this, how just this Gentleman's Insinuations are, as if all Enquiries and *Disquisitions into the Truth and Authentickness of Revelation were Practices utterly inconsistent with the Pretensions of such as call themselves Christians, or expect any Benefit from the Gospel-Covenant, to which they are always presumed Parties* *. For supposing God hath given us a Revelation, which he knows is attended with sufficient Evidence to satisfy a reasonable and well-disposed Mind, he may very consistently require us both to examine and to believe it; because he knows a firm Belief of it will be the Effect of a fair Examination, if it be not our own faults. His Design may be in effect this: Examine fairly and carefully, and you will see such Evidences of its Truth and Excellency, as will make your Belief and Obedience a reasonable Service.

Nor can I see but a Parent who takes great care and pains in training up his Child to just and worthy Sentiments of Religion and Virtue, may very consistently bid him examine and enquire when he grows up, without desiring him to disbelieve what he has taught him. There would be nothing absurd in his addressing him thus: I have endeavoured to instruct you in the Reasonableness of the Principles of Religion, as far as I was able to do it; and now you are come to a Capacity

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city of judging for yourself, I recommend it to you, to examine those things, and the Reasons and Evidences on which they are founded, with a Mind open to Evidence and a Love of Truth; and am persuaded that the more you do so, the more you will be convinced of their Reasonableness and Excellency. This is a way of recommending Enquiry and Examination perfectly consistent with a firm Belief of the Truth of the Things enquir'd into; nor is there any thing unreasonable in such a Proceeding.

Having considered this Gentleman's Account of the Nature of Examination and Enquiry, it will be no hard matter to shew the Weakness and Fal- lacy of the Argument he builds upon it. He first supposes, that *a Man may, nay must, disbelieve a while for Information's sake*, and then asks, *Why may he not even disbelieve for ever, for want of In- formation? And if Doubting be once allowable, who shall ascertain the precise time for summing up the Evidence, and pronouncing Sentence?* He supposes that, according to the Scheme of those that are for a rational Faith, *the first Motions of Doubt are necessary Preparations, and therefore not in themselves criminal.* And then he asks, *By what Authority (if the Evidence happens never to take effect) can a Man be obliged ever to be resolved*?* I see no o- ther Tendency in this way of talking, but to pro- mote universal Scepticism. But the Foundation of it has been shewn to be wrong, *viz.* that Exami- nation in all Cases necessarily supposes a previous Disbelief. But if we should grant it to be so, it
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does not follow, that if a Man be allowed to doubt or disbelieve for a while, therefore he may be allowed to doubt or disbelieve for ever; and that if Doubting in some Cases may be innocent, *i. e.* before the Evidence is laid before him, therefore it may be also innocent after the Evidence is fully proposed to him. I think it cannot reasonably be denied, that Doubting in many Cases may be a Distemper of Mind, owing to very faulty Causes; and when once a Man's Doubting is become criminal, he is under a real Obligation to lay it aside, and to rectify it, and may be required to do so, at least by a divine Authority. When Evidences have been proposed sufficient to remove his Doubts, and his being still in doubt is owing to a bad Temper of Mind, to a faulty Affectation, to an Unwillingness to be convinced, and to submit to Evidence, which may often happen with regard to religious Truth; in that case, his persisting in his Doubt is really vicious and unreasonable; and all the time he persists in it, he is chargeable with a Crime, and accountable for his Conduct to the Supreme Judge, who knows the secret Disposition of his Mind, and may justly condemn him for it.

In *Pag.* 16, 17. our Author, by a high-flown Encomium on Faith, its great Necessity and Importance, endeavours to destroy its Reasonableness. He had represented, in strong Colours, the early Influence of Prejudices and Passions, to shew that Reason *comes too late* to our assistance, and is too slow in her Advances; whereas Faith is necessary to guide us from the beginning of our Lives. And then he goes on to observe, that Faith is *necessary to*

Stamp a Value on Morality, which, without it, is of no esteem or acceptance with God: That it is the necessary *Passport*, without which we cannot die safely. But what his Design is, in all this fine Harangue on the Necessity of Faith, he lets us know, when he asks, “ Is it now any unwarrantable Conclusion from all these Considerations, to infer, that Religion therefore *can never be a thing to be taught*, that it must needs be something that *doth not require Time to attain*, like other common Lessons and Sciences, which are indifferent in their Consequences? Since the very same Reasons that make it necessary at all, make it equally so every moment of our Lives.”

The Maxim here advanced by this Gentleman, that Religion or Faith *can never be a thing to be taught*, and that it is something which *doth not require Time to attain*, is a very convenient one for him, and would no doubt answer his Intention very well. For if Religion cannot be taught, it is certain the Intellectual Faculty is not designed to lead Men into it. And it would follow, that neither Parents should instruct their Children in the Principles of Religion, nor should any Persons be employed as publick Teachers; nor is there any need of the Scriptures, or of any Books at all for our Instruction; nor should any Man use means to understand Religion himself, or teach it to others.

The Method he takes to prove, that Faith or Religion can never be taught, and that it requires no time to attain, is pretty extraordinary. It is what he infers from the Account he had given of the Necessity of Faith. And he observes, that *the very same*

same Reasons that make it necessary at all, make it equally so every Moment of our Lives; that is, from the time of our Birth to our Death, and consequently equally necessary to Infants as to adult Persons, necessary before we have any use of our Reason, or are capable of being taught at all.

But this is a strange way of representing things. Let us grant all he can desire about the Necessity of Faith to our Acceptance with God, and to our Salvation, yet still it is necessary only in those that are the capable Subjects of it. The necessity of holy Obedience, and of good Works, or keeping the Commandments of God, is as strongly insisted upon in the sacred Writings, as that of Faith. But Common Sense teaches every Man to limit this, and the Nature of the thing limits it, that it must relate only to Persons that are capable of moral Agency; and therefore not to Idiots, nor Infants before they come to the Use of their Reason. And the same thing may be said with regard to the Declarations made concerning the Necessity of Faith. They are to be understood as relating only to those that are naturally capable of it. Allowing Faith to be never so necessary, the Meaning is not, either that an equal Degree of Faith is necessary to all the Adult, how different soever their Advantages or Opportunities may be; or that it is at all necessary, in any degree, to be actually in Infants, before they have any use of Reason, or are capable of *knowing good and evil*.

One thing he urgeth, to shew the absolute Necessity of Faith at all times, is, that it is necessary *to stamp a Value on Morality*. This is not true in
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46 *Remarks on a Pamphlet, entitled,*

the Extent in which he represents it, that without it the *best of Lives*, and the *most virtuous Actions*, are *highly criminal and displeasing to God*; tho' he endeavours to prove this, according to his manner, by some misapplied Texts of Scripture, which I shall not now turn aside to examine. But allowing it to be so, it will not follow, that Faith is necessary before we are capable of moral Agency. It is some time before Children are capable of Actions properly moral, and for which they are accountable as moral Agents, because it is some time before they are properly capable of exercising their Reason; in like manner, it is some time before they are in any degree capable of Faith. And by the time they are capable of Actions properly moral or religious, they are capable of believing too, as far as it is necessary for them to believe. So that Faith, and a good moral or religious Practice, may go together, from the time of their beginning to think and act rationally. And this, instead of proving that Faith or Religion cannot be taught, only shews the great necessity of teaching it betimes. And as their Reason or intellectual Faculty is for some time very imperfect, so their Faith is very imperfect too, and is capable of continual Increase and Improvement, as their Reason and Understanding improves. As Children begin very early to use their Reason, tho' in a very imperfect manner, so it is highly fit to begin to instruct them early in the Principles of Religion; and this may be fairly concluded from what our Author represents in so lively a manner, concerning the danger we are in betimes from the Snares of the World,
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and from irregular Appetites and Passions, which soon begin to operate and exert a great influence upon us *. It is therefore a great advantage to any Person, to be *from a Child acquainted with the Holy Scriptures*, as *Timothy* was. And it is a great Instance of the divine Wisdom and Goodness, that God hath provided a Revelation for us, by instructing us in which, we may have our Minds early seasoned with the most excellent Principles, and the most powerful Motives to engage us to a good and virtuous Practice. And Children may be gradually let into the Excellency of those Doctrines and Laws, and the Evidences whereby they are confirmed, in a way accommodated to their Capacities. They may be taught what they are to believe, together with the Reasons why they are to believe, as far as they are capable of receiving them, which undoubtedly will at first be in a very imperfect way. But yet it is such a degree of Faith as is suited to their Age; a Faith sufficient to influence their Practice, as far as Practice morally good and religious is required of them.

I had almost forgot an extraordinary Argument produced by this Writer, to shew that the Faith required of us, is not a rational Faith; and that is, that we are required to *pray for the Increase of our Faith*. From whence he thinks it follows, that it is *not expected that we should contribute to its Establishment by any Pains or Endeavours of our own* †. His Argument here proceeds upon the Supposition, that Prayer to God supersedes the Use of all Means or Endeavours on our parts, and that

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* P. 14.

† P. 10, 11.

we are never to pray to God for any thing, in which we are to contribute our own Endeavours; which is to say, that we are never to pray to God, either for a Blessing on our worldly Affairs, or to assist us in the Practice of Piety and Virtue: for it is evident, that in both these cases we are obliged to use our own Endeavours. But it appears to me, to be the most consistent thing in the world, supposing a God and a Providence, to use our own best Endeavours, and to apply to God for his Assistance and Blessing upon our Endeavours. And particularly, as it is our duty to make the best use we can of the Understanding and Faculties God hath given us, in enquiring after Truth; so Reason directs us, and it is what the best and wisest of Men in all Ages have been sensible of, to apply to the Supreme Being, *the Father of Lights*, and the *God of Truth*, to assist us in our Enquiries, to open and enlighten our Minds to a clearer Discernment of the Truth, and to dispose our Hearts for receiving it in the Love of it.

But he thinks it impossible, that *Grace can ever second or add to the Faith that is founded in Reason*. The Reason he gives, is, because *Increase of Evidence is the only Accession to be made to rational Persuasion*. Allow this, then whatever increases the Evidence, or sets it in a stronger light, or enables the Mind better to discern it, may make an Accession to a rational Persuasion. Now I think it cannot be denied, that the Father of our Spirits can, by his gracious Influence upon the Mind, enable it more clearly to discern the Evidence, can set it in a stronger light, and help to dispel vicious Prejudices;

Prejudices; and on such a Supposition his Grace would increase our Faith in a way agreeable to Reason. And if so, there is no Inconsistency in humbly applying to God for that purpose, at the same time that we use our own diligent Endeavours. And it may well be thought that a wise and good God, the Lover of Truth and Virtue, will be ready to assist good and well-disposed Minds, that are willing to embrace Truth and submit to Evidence; and who, at the same time that they use their own Endeavours in the best manner they are able, are sensible of their Dependence upon him, and humbly apply to him for Light and Assistance in a Matter of such Importance. And on the other hand, God may justly withhold his Assistance from those who from a vain and arrogant Conceit of themselves, one of the worst Dispositions for finding out Truth, do not apply to God for Light and Assistance, and perhaps ridicule his interposing in such matters.

This may help us to judge of what the Author further offers *, where he represents the applying to God by Prayer for the *confirming and continuing us stedfast in the Faith*, to be a *disavowing in the Fulness of our Conviction all future Use of Reason for our Security*. And he talks to the same purpose again †. But the resolving to make a future Use of our Reason is very consistent with our praying to God to confirm and continue us stedfast in the Faith. For here, as in the former Case, our Prayer still supposes the Use of Means on our parts. We must take all proper Methods to know more

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* P. 11. † P. 27.

and more of Religion, and to get a clearer view of the Evidence whereby it is confirmed, and to act under the governing Influence of it in the Practice of Righteousness and true Holiness; at the same time earnestly begging of God that he would continue his divine Assistances, and enlighten our Minds more and more in the Knowledge of sacred Truth; that he would cause us to see more of its Reasonableness and Excellency, and feel more of its happy Influence on our Temper and Conduct. In which case our Stedfastness in the Faith would not be, what this Gentleman is here pleased to represent the Christian *Perseverance* to be, *a blind and foolish Obstinacy to a present Notion*; but a steady Adherence to what we are persuaded of upon good and solid grounds, so as not to be drawn aside by any wrong Motives or artful Representations, or thro' a Levity and Instability of Mind, from important Truth and Duty. And there is nothing in such an Application to the Deity, but what would become any good and thinking Man, supposing Religion to be founded in Reason.

From *p.* 17. to *p.* 21. the Strain of his arguing seems to be this:—That if Faith were a rational Thing, the Generality of Mankind could not be justly required to believe, because this would be a thing absolutely above their Capacity. He sets himself to shew, that there are few that are *capable of reasoning at all*. And he particularly observes, that *the Nature and Evidence of Religion in the rational way is founded entirely on the Credit and Authentickness of History, in which it is impossible to give any rational Decision without a*
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good natural Turn for Reasoning, and even some very considerable Acquisitions in Learning. And then he insists upon a *Distinction*, which he thinks is not sufficiently attended to on this Subject, viz. That it is one thing whether a Proposition be true in itself, and another whether a Man be bound to apprehend or believe it. That therefore let Christianity and the Evidence for the *Historical Facts* of the Gospel be supposed to be never so true in itself, and convincing to those that have capacity to look into it; yet the Generality of Mankind cannot be bound to believe it, because they have not Capacity to discern the Force of the Proofs brought for it. It is a thing of which they can have no perception, nor can they frame any reasonable Notion about it; any more than a Man that has no Ear can perceive or judge of Musick, tho' never so fine or just.

It will easily be allowed, that a thing may be true, and yet all Men may not be bound to believe it; and that no Man can be obliged to believe a thing on rational grounds, when he is naturally incapable of perceiving or understanding the Evidence brought for it. But I differ very widely from this Gentleman in the Supposition he makes, that the Evidence for Christianity is absolutely above the natural Capacity of the Generality of Mankind.

Indeed, according to his Representation, it is above their Capacity to know or believe any Religion at all. Man, according to his Account of him, instead of being formed a religious Creature, is naturally incapable of Religion, and therefore

should not give himself any concern about it. He here represents it, as if it would be the most unjust and tyrannical thing in God to require Men to believe any thing that *is not self-evident*, and in which there is the *least of Induction or Inference*; and consequently to require them to believe even the fundamental Principles of natural Religion, the Being of a God and a Providence: for it cannot be said, that these are properly *self-evident*; they are capable of being proved by *Induction* and *Inference*. Thus, in order to shew that Men are not capable of a rational Faith, he degrades the Generality of Mankind almost to a level with the Brutes in point of Understanding. He represents them as not *qualified for reasoning at all*; as incapable of any thing that has *the least of Induction or Inference* in it; that *their Souls are lodged in their hands*, as he politely expresseth it, *and their Apprehensions extend not beyond a simple Proposition, and they are thrown out at once at the very first mention of introducing a Medium*. But common Observation and Experience may convince any Man, that this is a very false and injurious Representation of human Nature. We plainly see, that the Generality of Men in their common Affairs and Conversation daily use Mediums, and make Inductions and Inferences. And there are few, that when they are tried, and apply themselves to it, are not capable of learning Things that depend upon Mediums, and which require an Exercise of the reasoning Faculty. And I doubt not, God, who designed Men for Religion, has formed them so, that the Generality of Mankind
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are capable of understanding the main Principles of it, as far as is sufficient for them, if they will really take that pains and care which becomes them in Matters of such Importance, and will use their Reason and the Faculties God has given them, as much as it is really in their power to do, and as they actually do in Things of far less consequence.

I acknowledge indeed, that it would not be very consistent with the State and Circumstances of the Generality of Mankind, to enter into a minute Discussion in a way of Reasoning into the several Doctrines and Principles of Religion, and regularly trace them by the force of their own Reflections thro' their genuine Connexions and Consequences. And this shews the great Wisdom and Goodness of God in the Method he has taken for the Instruction of Mankind, by comprizing all that is necessary and proper for us to believe and know, relating to Religion, in a written standing Revelation, which sets before us the main Articles of Truth and Duty in plain Propositions, which they may without much difficulty understand. And the Evidence that is brought to prove that this is a Revelation from God, and that the Persons who published it to the World in his Name were extraordinarily sent and commission'd by him, is such as is reasonably sufficient to convince any Man of common Understanding, that will apply himself closely to consider it. Nor is it necessary to a rational Belief, to enter into a particular Examination of every Difficulty and every Objection. A Man may firmly and upon good and solid grounds believe

believe a God and a Providence, without knowing the several atheistical Schemes that have been advanced, or so much as any one of them; yea, and tho' he may meet with some Difficulties, that he is not well able to solve. So in revealed Religion, a Man may see so much reason to be persuaded of the Truth of the extraordinary Facts by which it was attested, and he may have such a strong Sense and Discernment of its excellent Nature and beneficial Tendency, and the divine Characters of Wisdom, Goodness and Purity, that are discernible in it, as may render his Belief rational, and lay a Foundation for a holy Practice, tho' he does not know, or is not well able to solve all the Difficulties and Objections that a subtil Wit may raise against it.

And if there be any particular Persons of such weak Intellects or small Opportunities, that they are incapable of forming a just Notion of the main Principles of that Revelation, and the Proofs and Evidences on which it is founded, in which case we may be sure a merciful God will make all proper Allowances for their Weakness; this does not prove that Revelation to be useless, or not to be founded on good and rational Evidence. For, supposing God gives a Revelation at all, it is sufficient to justify its Reasonableness and Usefulness, if it be such that the Generality of Mankind of common Sense and ordinary Understanding or Capacity, by applying to it with the Care and Attention that becomes them in such a case, may sufficiently understand it and comprehend the Force of its Proofs, so far as to make it reasonable for them
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to receive it with a Faith that may influence their Practice, and have a happy Tendency to purify their Hearts and reform their Lives. And if some of its Proofs be such, that they could not have found them out of themselves, it is sufficient that they can comprehend them when laid before them by others. It is plain to any one that considers the State of Mankind, that we stand in need of mutual Assistance and Information in many Cases of great consequence. And it is every Man's Duty in such a case, to use Means to get the best Assistance and Information he can, and then to judge upon the whole by the Reason and Understanding which God hath given him. And I am persuaded, that a moderate Share of that Care and Pains that is taken in other Things, would ordinarily serve to give Men such a Notion of Religion and its Proofs, as may make it reasonable for them to yield an Assent to it, and to govern their Practice by it. And this has actually been the case of many that have not had more Capacity or Leisure than others, that thro' a faulty Negligence of Mind, or the Influence of corrupt Lusts and evil Habits, have lived in an ignorance of it.

As to what this Gentleman alledges, concerning the Incapacity of the Vulgar to judge of the historical Evidence of Religion, I think it may be justly affirmed, that historical Evidence is a kind of Proof as obvious to common Understandings as any that can be offered; far more easily comprehended, and which they can more easily judge of than they could understand or judge of metaphysical abstracted Reasonings; and which may be so circumstanced,
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that a Man of an ordinary Capacity may perceive the Force of it, and may see it reasonable for him to receive Things upon that Evidence. It cannot be denied, that with regard to many Events that happened many Ages ago, tho' the original Histories that give an account of those things are in the learned Languages; yet one that has not Learning himself may have such a moral Certainty concerning them from the Consent of those that do understand those original Histories, or from the Histories themselves translated into his own Tongue, that he may see plainly, that it would be perfectly unreasonable to doubt of the Truth of those Facts. Any Man of common Understanding may observe, that by the Acknowledgment of all Mankind, it is very reasonable to believe Facts that were done in past Ages, when the Accounts of them are transmitted to us in credible authentick Records. And those Records are justly accounted authentick, that were written by Persons who were well acquainted with the Facts they relate, and who at the same time appear to have been Persons of great Probity and Sincerity. And it gives great force to this, if the Facts themselves were of a publick nature, and especially if those Facts produced great and surprizing Changes in the World; but above all, if the Effects of them have continued even to the present Age. And it is no small Confirmation of all this, if it appears that those Records can be traced from this present Age, up to the very Age in which they were first written; *i. e.* the Age in which the Facts were said to be done, and still found to have been in being, and referred to in many Writings still extant. There

There is nothing in all this, but what may appear to carry great Reason and Evidence in it, to any Man of common sound Understanding. And it is easy to apply this to the Facts upon which the Christian Religion is founded.

The Accounts of these Facts are transmitted to us in the best and properest way, in which past Facts could be transmitted; that is, in Records written by Persons who profess to have been Witnesses to them, and who appear to have been perfectly well-acquainted with the Facts they relate. And an honest, tho' unlearned Man, may, by consulting those Records, without entering into any nice historical Disquisitions, find great reason to believe, that the Accounts there given of those extraordinary Facts are true, and to be depended on. Upon an attentive considering them, he finds all the Characters of Sincerity, and an impartial Regard to Truth, that can be desired in such Writings: He finds enough to convince him, that the Writers of them were excellent Persons, of great Probity and Simplicity, and who appear to have had no worldly Interests in view, nothing but the Glory of God, and the Good of Mankind, and whose whole Character and Conduct seems to have been the most remote from that of Impostors, that can be imagined. And this furnishes a good Argument, to convince his Reason, that such excellent Persons could never be guilty of such a solemn Imposture, such deliberate Villainy, as to have contrived such a Series of extraordinary Facts and miraculous Attestations, and to have endeavoured to impose them upon the World in the Name of God,

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even if it had been in their power to have done so. And there is no reason to think they could have done it, if they had been ever so willing, considering the Circumstances they were in, the Power and Malice of their Enemies, and the Nature of the Facts themselves; many of which were such, that it would have been the easiest thing in the world to have detected and exposed them, if they had not been true.

It greatly strengthens this, when he considers the Nature of the Religion that is taught in those Writings, and which is closely connected with the Facts there related. He plainly finds, that in that Religion, as laid down in those Writings, there are not the least Marks of worldly Ambition, Avarice, or Sensuality, nor any thing to flatter the corrupt Appetites and Inclinations of Men; that there is an uniform Spirit of Piety, Zeal, and Charity, running through the whole; that its Doctrines and Precepts are unquestionably pure and holy, and of the most excellent Tendency; that the Practice of Righteousness and Virtue is there carried to the noblest height, and enforced by the most important Motives; that it strongly condemns all Falshood and Impurity, and denounces the Wrath of God against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men. In a word, that the governing End of all seems to be the Glory of God, the Good of Mankind, and the promoting the Cause of Truth and Holiness in the World. This furnishes an obvious Argument, of great force and strength to convince him, that such a Religion, with the Facts on which it is founded, and which it necessarily supposes, and
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every where refers to, was not the Contrivance of Impostors and Seducers. Men of such a Character would never have taken such pains to establish such a Religion as this, and that in opposition to all their worldly Interests, and when they thereby exposed themselves to the greatest Sufferings, under which they had nothing to support them, but the Hopes of a Reward in another World, which, according to that Religion, if guilty of such deliberate Falshood and Imposture, they could not expect.

These are very natural and obvious Reflections, the Force of which may be made to appear to any Man of common Understanding, and which without entering into any great Refinements, or tedious Disquisitions, may be of great weight to convince him, that the Writings which contain the original Records of Christianity, and the Facts by which it was attested, are to be depended upon.

But besides this, if he pursues his Enquiries, he may easily find, that there are some general Facts relating to those Matters, which are universally acknowledged, and which no Man was ever so absurd as to deny. That there were such Persons as Jesus Christ and his Apostles, can no more reasonably be doubted than that there are Christians now in the World. And that Christ declared himself to be an extraordinary Person sent of God, that he professed to do many wonderful Works, and to instruct Mankind in Religion, and that he was crucified, is what the Heathens and Jews, the most virulent Enemies of Christianity, never pretended to deny.

And that his Apostles went abroad through the Nations after his Death, and published to the World that he was risen from the dead, and ascended up into Heaven, of which they declared themselves to have been Eye-witnesses; and that they professed to deliver the Religion they received from him, and pretended to work Miracles in his Name, is capable of as good Proof as that there were such Persons as the Apostles: Nor do the greatest Enemies of Christianity attempt to contest this. And it is also a Fact that cannot, with any shadow of Reason, be contested; and which is capable of the clearest Proof even from the Testimony of Heathen Writers now extant, and some of which are translated into our own Tongue *, that great Numbers of Persons in that very Age became Christians, *i. e.* received that Jesus who had been ignominiously crucified by the *Romans* and *Jews*, as their Saviour and their Lord: And that the Religion founded by him and his Apostles, though contrary to the most favourite Prejudices and Passions both of Jews and Gentiles, prevailed and spread in a short time to a wonderful degree, though it had the greatest Opposition made to it, and no worldly Advantages to recommend it. These are Facts which are so clear and certain, that a Man may as reasonably doubt of all past Facts whatsoever as doubt of them. And upon considering these things, it is natural to reflect, that there must have been something very extraordinary in the Evidence, that could induce such Numbers of Persons,

* Particularly *Suetonius*, in the Life of *Nero*; *Tacitus*, in the Fifteenth Book of his *Annals*; and *Pliny*, in the Tenth Book of his *Epistles*, Epist. 97.

sons, at a time when they had the best Opportunities of knowing the Truth of those things, to embrace the Faith of a crucified Jesus, in opposition to their darling Prejudices and worldly Interests. And this again makes the Account credible; that is given in those original Records, of the Evidence whereby Persons were brought to believe in Jesus, and to embrace his Religion; an Evidence arising from a Series of such extraordinary and illustrious Attestations, as demonstrated Jesus, who was crucified, to be sent of God, and the Religion published by him and his Apostles, to be divine. On such a View of things, the wonderful Progress of that Religion in such Circumstances, and the Zeal and Constancy of its first Professors and Adherents, may be well accounted for, which otherwise could hardly be done. And this, added to the Reflections just mentioned, arising from the Character of the Writings themselves, and the Nature of the Religion there contained, helps to set the Truth of the main Facts, on which that Religion was founded, in a yet stronger light.

It is no small Confirmation of all this, that it can be proved with great Evidence, enough to satisfy any reasonable Mind, that these Writings that contain the original Records of Christianity, have been and are still extant, and their Authority has been acknowledged from the Time in which Christianity was first founded, to the present Age. Never were there Writings that were dispersed into so many hands, or that were so frequently appealed to by Men of different Sects and Parties, on so many different Occasions. Not one Age hath passed
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from the time in which they were written to the present, in which those Writings have not been referred to, and many Passages, and often large Portions, cited out of them. This is a matter, of which an unlearned Man may have such an Assurance, by the concurring Testimony of those that have Opportunities of examining those things, however widely differing in their Sentiments in other matters, as well as by large Portions of original Writings translated into his own Tongue, that he cannot reasonably doubt of it. Especially when he finds, that those who seem willing to lay hold of all Advantages against Christianity, are not able to invalidate this Evidence; but instead of answering the distinct Proofs that have been brought, have recourse to general Clamours and Invectives against historical Evidence and moral Certainty, which they themselves freely admit in other Cases. And whereas they make a mighty Noise about Corruptions and Alterations in those Writings, by the Fraud of those through whose Hands they have been transmitted; a Man of a common Understanding, and an honest Mind, may be satisfied that these Clamours are groundless; because upon impartially examining those Writings, he finds no Marks of those Corruptions or Innovations there, that he is told have been introduced into the Christian Church in these latter Ages, no worldly Schemes of Ambition or Power. And tho' Christians are, and have been for many Ages, divided into many Sects and Parties, very different in many things from one another, yet he finds it generally agreed, that those Writings are preserved the same among
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them all, without any greater Differences than what must be expected to arise from a great Number of Copies dispersed in several Countries, and which do not affect any of the main Facts or Doctrines contained there. Nor have any of the different Parties been able, if they had attempted it, to alter those sacred Writings in favour of their peculiar Corruptions. Those Writings still exhibit an Idea of Christianity, as it was in its primitive Simplicity. And it is manifest, that if they had been designedly corrupted and interpolated in succeeding Ages after they were first published, they would have been in many things very different from what they now appear. And it is very remarkable, that those very Corruptions among Christians are plainly foretold there, and a great Apostacy pointed out by very remarkable Characters.

Thus a good Acquaintance with the sacred Writings may, in a great measure, furnish a Man of common sound Understanding, that knows no more than his Mother-Tongue, with an Answer to the most considerable Objections brought against Christianity. And if, besides all this, he finds in his own Sense and Experience, the happy Influence of those sacred Writings, and of the Doctrines and Motives there contained, upon his own Temper and Conduct, for forming his Soul to the most excellent Dispositions towards God and Man, for comforting him in his Afflictions, for engaging him to subdue and mortify his corrupt Appetites and Passions, for raising his Views to the Things which are above, and powerfully drawing him to the Practice of universal Holiness and Virtue: Taking all this together,

ther, his own Sensation, Reason, and Experience concur to furnish the most persuasive Evidence to convince him that it is divine. To all which it may be added, that a good and upright Man, who is willing to know and do the Will of God, and earnestly applies to him for his divine Assistances, may also expect the gracious Aids of his Spirit, for farther disposing his Mind more clearly and fully to discern and feel the Light and Force of the Gospel-Evidence. And that there is nothing in such a Supposition contrary to Reason, I may afterwards shew.

As to the Flirts this Gentleman gives at some of the Arguments that have been brought for Christianity, such as what he calls *ingenious Applications of mysterious Prophecies, and their References*; *the profound Calculation of Daniel's Weeks, the Analogy of Reason and Revelation*; let us suppose that there are Numbers of those to whom *the Precept of Believing is address'd*, who are not well able to trace these, and some other Arguments for Christianity, through *all their Connexions and Inferences*; this does by no means prove, either that these Arguments are of no use at all, or that the Generality of Mankind, though they do not concern themselves much about them, have not Evidence sufficient to lay a just and reasonable Foundation for believing. For the Wisdom of God has so ordered it, that the Proofs of Christianity, as well as of Natural Religion, even in its most important Principles, admit of great Variety of Illustrations and Arguments; some of general use, and fit to take hold of common Capacities, that will apply themselves

selves to consider them, and others that are fitted to give farther Light and Conviction even to Persons of greater Learning and superior Understanding; and who often are more liable to be assaulted with Doubts and subtil Objections than the Vulgar. And if these last are not capable of all the Proofs, the Force of which appears to the Learned, so neither are they liable to all the Difficulties and Objections that lie in the way of the other. And whereas this Author seems to think, that Religion, considering its Importance, ought to be self-evident; and that it cannot stand in need of *far-fetch'd Apologies, and labour'd Arts to reconcile and explain it,* nor can any Part of its Evidence be *founded on any Complication of Circumstances to be traced out with Industry and Address* *; for my part, I cannot see, why, when no other Knowledge or valuable Attainment can be obtain'd without Care and Industry, Religion alone should be inconsistent with it, and require no Pains or Care at all. If Religion be of such necessity and importance, it certainly deserves our Care and Diligence. And I cannot think it unbecoming the Wisdom and Equity of God so to order it, that Men cannot be truly religious, or attain either to the Knowledge or Practice of it without Care and Application. Many Arguments in behalf of Truths of the highest Importance may be laboured, and yet very useful: And there are many that both have leisure and capacity to consider and discern the Force of them. For tho', as this Gentleman expresses it, all *the Candidates of Heaven* be not *Scholars or Philosophers,*

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yet some are ; and if those Arguments be instrumental to the strengthening the Faith of such Persons, they answer a valuable End : And such Persons may be of use to assist the Faith of others. And I doubt not, many of those that are usually called Unlearned, tho' they could not of themselves without Assistance trace out the Applications of some Prophecies, or calculate *Daniel's Weeks*, yet may discern the Force of the Proofs, and reap the Advantage of them, when set in a proper light by others. But I find this Gentleman here, as in several other Passages of his Book, seems uneasy at all Attempts in defence of Christianity. He would fain persuade Christians never to meddle with Argument at all, or concern themselves about any of the Evidences or Reasons produced for it ; and, if they will believe him, all Attempts of this kind are useless, and even pernicious. And this, no doubt, proceeds from his great Friendship for Christianity, of which he has given so many convincing Proofs in this Performance. It is from the same Principle that he represents those as the best Christians, that *never concern themselves the least in any argumentative Tasks, &c* *. I allow indeed, that there are good People that perhaps do not much trouble themselves about the Proofs of Religion in an argumentative way ; and where their Faith has a purifying Influence on their Hearts and Lives, it is graciously accepted of God. And even in this case the Sense and Discernment they have of the internal Characters of Goodness and Purity in the Christian Religion, and the happy Influence they feel its Doctrines and

* P. 22,

and Motives have upon them, to engage them to the Practice of Piety and Virtue, is to them a persuasive Argument to convince them of its divine Original. But yet I think it can scarce be denied, that a Man that takes pains to consider the Evidences for Christianity, and in consequence of this firmly believes it, and governs himself by its excellent Rules, acts a better Part, and approves himself a better Christian, than he that is not so diligent to inform himself concerning it. But I suppose our Author would count those the best Part of Mankind, that never concern themselves about any Religion at all; which seems to be the Design, or at least the Tendency of several of his Arguments.

This Writer having done all in his power to prove that the Generality of Mankind are incapable of Faith or Religion if it be rational, sets himself next to shew, that even Men of Learning, yea, *the ablest and best of Men*, are *disqualified for fair reasoning*, or judging impartially of the Evidence of Christianity, by their *natural Prejudices*. That *Prejudice, ever earlier than the first Essays of Reason, is as absolute a Disqualification for such a Task, as the greatest natural Incapacity**. What he farther offers there concerning the Power of Prejudice, appears to me to have no other tendency than to introduce universal Scepticism; as if no Man living was capable of reasoning fairly, or judging truly. But it is not true, that the Prejudices to which all Men are in some degree subjected, do as absolutely disqualify a Man for forming a fair and equitable Judgment of Things, as *the greatest*

natural Incapacity. In the one case it is impossible, in the other it is far from being so. Where there is an honest and an upright Mind, open to Conviction, and ready to receive the Evidence that is offered, a Man may overcome his Prejudices and judge fairly and impartially, as appears from thousands of Instances both in Religion and other Matters. And particularly there were at the first Promulgation of Christianity numerous Instances of Persons, that broke thro' the strongest Prejudices, *natural Attachments to Customs, Persons and Things,* to borrow this Gentleman's Expressions, overcome by the Evidence that attended it, and the Proofs of a divine Original. If we have not those Prejudices now in our way, it is an advantage we should be thankful for; and if by being educated in a regard to Christianity we rather have Prejudices in its favour, a just and fair Examination and Enquiry may be carried on notwithstanding this, as hath been already shewn.

Our Author concludes this Part of his Attempt with observing *, that "It is to be remembered all along, and carried with us carefully thro' all these Considerations, that the great Command to believe is peremptory and absolute. No Conditions in the case, that we shall believe if we have *Time*, if we have *Abilities*, or if preceding *Prejudices* have not first taken too fast hold to prevent us." It is true, there are no such Conditions expressed, and it would be absurd if there were so. Supposing that upon giving a Revelation of his Will to Mankind, attended with such Evidence

Evidence as he saw and knew to be sufficient if it were not their own faults, God should command them to believe and to receive it, which I have shewn in such a case he might justly do; it would not be very wise to express it thus, Believe, and receive it, if you have *Time*; Believe, if you have *Abilities*; Believe, if *Prejudices have not taken too fast hold to prevent you*. This would have been regarded as giving an Allowance to Unbelief and Disobedience in the Law itself. People would soon have taken advantage of it. and it would have been the ready way to render them careless and negligent about it. If such a Command were designed to have any effect at all, it must be delivered in peremptory and absolute Terms, the better to awaken the Attention of Mankind, and engage them to apply themselves to consider the Evidence without delay, and to take pains to divest themselves of culpable Prejudices. If it appears, that they really had not natural Abilities, or were under an invincible Incapacity, which may be often pretended where it is far from being the case, the supreme Lawgiver will easily be able to make the proper Allowances, when he comes to judge them for their Conduct.

Nor does it follow from the Command's being expressed in general Terms, that an equal Degree of Faith is required of all Men in order to Salvation; or that all Men are *required at the Peril of their Souls to be in the right*; that is, to have a right Notion and Belief in all the Doctrines proposed to us to be believed. Thus our Author thinks fit to represent it in his Pamphlet. But nothing is
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more evident, than that in Scripture it is all along supposed, that there are different Degrees of Faith and Knowledge; and that Persons may be *weak in Faith*, who yet are sincere, and shall be accepted. Some are represented as *Babes in Christ*, some as *strong Men*: Some as knowing only *the first Principles of the Oracles of God*; others, as arrived to a higher Degree of Knowledge, and *going on unto Perfection*; a Faith that is true and acceptable in its first Commencement, is yet represented as capable of *growing exceedingly*, and of receiving great Increase and continual Improvement. With regard to Truths of the highest Importance, even in natural Religion, such as the Being of a God, and a Providence, tho' some Knowledge and Belief of this is necessary, and lies at the Foundation of all Religion, yet it is not absolutely required, that all Men should be equally right in their Notions concerning it, and in the Ideas they form of God and his Attributes. It is sufficient if there be such a Belief as engages them to love and reverence, to worship and obey him in Sincerity. The same may be said with regard to Christianity. It is not absolutely required as necessary to Salvation, that Men should believe and think rightly of all the Doctrines of the Christian Religion, tho' in themselves true and of great Importance; or that even in Points of the highest Consequence they should exactly have the same Ideas, and their Notions be alike clear and just. They may, with regard to some Things in those Doctrines, have mistaken Notions; but a merciful God will make Allowances for their Weakness, and graciously accept their
Faith

Faith as sufficient, if they know and believe so much of these Things, as engages them to love *Jesus Christ* in Sincerity, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World. Where this is the Case, Men shall be accepted according to the Gospel-Covenant, tho' there be a great variety in their Attainments, and in the Degrees of their Faith and Knowledge.

Hitherto this Gentleman has labour'd hard to prove that a rational Faith is unattainable or impossible; but from *p. 24.* to *p. 35.* he bends himself to shew, that supposing a Man to have attained to the highest degree of a rational Faith, it would be no way sufficient to answer the End, or to furnish out those Effects which are described in the Gospel to attend a just Belief. It will never produce that active Zeal for Religion, or that Constancy and Perseverance that is there required, or that Complacency and Satisfaction of Mind, which is the blessed Effect of a true and genuine Faith. It will not be sufficient to engage a Man to mortify his depraved Appetites and Passions, much less to suffer Martyrdom, if called to it, for his Religion.

In what he offers to prove, that a rational Faith can never produce that Zeal which the Gospel requires, the Force of his Argument depends partly upon the wrong Account he gives of the Nature of a true Christian Zeal, as if it were a blind irrational Heat, a Zeal not according to Knowledge, and partly upon Sceptical Principles, as if no Man can ever in Reason be certain of any thing, because it is possible he may be mistaken. But if by Zeal be meant what the Gospel intends by it, a hearty
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and ardent Concern for propagating important Truth and Duty, not by Methods of Persecution and Violence, which the Gospel never recommends, but by Persuasion and Argument, and all Methods consistent with Justice and Charity; this is what Reason cannot but approve. And the bare Possibility of a Man's being mistaken, will never be in reason sufficient to render him indifferent about what he apprehends upon the most impartial Consideration to be true, and of great consequence to the Cause of Religion and Virtue. In such a case, if he hath any love to Truth, or any concern for the Honour of the Deity, or for the Good of Mankind; that is, if he be a Man really of good Dispositions, he cannot but be desirous to spread the Knowledge of such Truths by all fair and just Methods that are in his power.

As this Gentleman, the better to answer his End, has thought fit to represent the Zeal required in the Gospel as a *Zeal without Knowledge*, an irrational Fervour, so to prove that a rational Faith cannot produce that Perseverance which is the Duty of Christians, he represents this Perseverance to be an obstinate Resolution to disclaim all farther Trial, and shut their Eyes against all Evidence that might be offered, tho' never so strong; and in effect to be what he had before represented it, a *blind and foolish Obstinacy to a present Notion*. But if by Perseverance be understood a steady and constant Adherence to what a Man is upon good grounds persuaded is Truth and Duty, so as not to suffer himself to be turned from it by worldly Bribes or Threatnings, or to be shaken by the Arts of subtil Seducers;

Seducers ; this is a Temper of Mind becoming a wife and good Man, and is what right Reason approves. That a Man ought not for any worldly Considerations to renounce and deny what he is convinced in his own Conscience is true and right, is a Duty that natural Religion prescribes ; and it is also highly reasonable, that when a Man has once got his Mind well-established in the main Principles of Religion upon good and solid grounds, he should not suffer himself to be easily turned aside by every Wind of Doctrine. It is thought very reasonable in other cases to proceed upon things well proved, to lay them down as Principles, and not to be for ever disputing them over again. Where a Thing is once confirmed by Arguments sufficient in their kind, the greatest Masters of Reason have acknowledged that we ought not to be shaken from it by Objections, tho' we may perhaps find it hard to answer them. And the contrary Conduct cannot properly be called an Openness to Conviction, but an Unsteadiness and Volatility of Mind, which is not the Effect of Reason, but is really a Disease, and a very pernicious one ; and which, where it prevails, hinders a Man from being ever settled in any Principles at all. This indeed seems to be what this Gentleman intends. The Strain of his arguing, *p.* 25, 26, 27. is to this purpose, that a Man can never come to a satisfying Certainty or *Assurance of Truth* in any point whatsoever, because he is not *infallible*, and may *possibly be mistaken* ; and because it is *not impossible but some new Evidence may succeed*, and he may hereafter see Things in a different light ; and that there-

fore a rational Faith must always be *precarious, and subject to change*. But this way of reasoning is very fallacious. A Man may be sufficiently certain of a Truth, to lay a just Foundation for a Satisfaction of Mind, and for a suitable Course of Action, when upon the most impartial Consideration it appears to him founded upon solid Arguments, tho' at the same time he knows he is not infallible. And it is very absurd, to pretend that no Man can ever be sure of what he is convinced by Reason and Argument is true, because there is a bare remote Possibility that some time or other he may alter his Judgment concerning it. I see no other tendency in all this, but to unsettle Persons from all Principles whatsoever, and to keep them in an eternal Fluctuation and Uncertainty; which is what neither Reason prescribes, nor the Author of our Beings ever intended.

In matters of Practice relating to the Affairs of this Life, it would be absurd to the last degree, to say that a Man must never act nor come to a determinate Resolution, till he is absolutely sure it could not possibly be otherwise. And it would be equally absurd, to advance this as a Principle in Matters of Faith and Religion, on which the Practice of Holiness and Virtue and our Preparations for a future World so much depend; and the Consequences of neglecting a proper present Practice upon bare remote Surmises and Possibilities, would be in this case infinitely more pernicious.

The last Part of his Argument, and what he most largely insists upon, is, that a rational Faith, *i. e.* a Faith founded on rational Conviction and Evidence,

Evidence, can never have force enough to engage us to mortify our *most beloved Affections and Appetites*, much less to engage us to suffer Martyrdom for the Truth, if called to it. He declaims upon this Subject with a great deal of Rhetorick, from *p. 30. to p. 35.* He paints the Difficulty of subduing the Passions, and of a virtuous Life, in the strongest Colours; and in such a manner, that one would be apt to think he felt in himself what he described, and that his own Inclinations and Appetites were much too strong for his Reason.

The Stress of his Argument lies here, that the utmost Certainty and Evidence that Faith can attain to in a rational way, is a moral Certainty and Evidence, and that this can never be sufficient to the Purposes of Religion. He is ready to grant *all the moral Certainty in the Proofs of Religion that you can reasonably desire; and farther, that this is indeed the highest degree of rational Evidence, that the Nature of the Subject can possibly admit of.* He supposes it to have *all the most favourable Circumstances, that the severest Malice of an exceptious Critick can demand**. One would think these were pretty large Concessions; but at the same time, and almost in the same breath, in which he seems to allow such a degree of Certainty to that moral Evidence, he represents it as after all *an Uncertainty, a doubtful Account; that it is still but human Testimony in its nature, ever liable to Error, as depending only on fallible Authors.* That it cannot produce a *thorough Conviction; and its true Amount in a time of Trial is, that it is nothing*

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* P. 31, 32.

76 *Remarks on a Pamphlet, entitled,*
more than the precarious Conjecture of a fallible
Judge, upon the traditional Testimony of a fallible
Witness. He has more to the same purpose, pag.
52, 53. where he seems willing to carry it so far, as
not to allow that any Man can be sure of any
thing, but what he himself sees with his own
Eyes.

It is very easy to declaim, in a plausible manner,
on the Weakness and Insufficiency of moral Evi-
dence, and the Fallibility of historical human Tes-
timony; and this seems to be a darling Common-
place with these Gentlemen. But it is all mere
Harangue, and only fit to impose upon those that
will suffer themselves to be carried away with
Sounds; since it cannot be denied, that this kind
of Evidence may be, and often is so circumstanced,
that the Man would scarce be looked upon to be in
his Senses, that should seriously deny or doubt of
it. It is but by moral Evidence, and the Testi-
mony of fallible Men, capable of deceiving and
being deceived, that I know there is such a Place as
Paris or *Rome*; for I never saw either of those Ci-
ties; and yet I can no more reasonably doubt of it,
than if I myself had been there. It is by moral E-
vidence that we have all our Laws, the Records of
our own or any other Nation, and that we enjoy
the Benefit of the Knowledge and Experience of
former Ages, and have any Assurance of past Facts;
and yet is there any Man of common Sense, that
does not as certainly believe many such Facts that
were done in former Ages, as he believes any E-
vent that happened of late Years, and within his
own Memory? It is manifest, that the Author of
our

our Beings, and the wise Governour of the World, designed that most part of our Knowledge should come in this way, and that we should be governed and determined by this kind of Evidence and Testimony, in many Cases of great Importance. The Necessity we are under to do this, ariseth from the very Frame of our Nature, and the Constitution of Things, and the Circumstances in which we are placed in the World, and consequently from the Will and Appointment of God himself. Why then should it be thought absurd to suppose that he should order it so, that our Knowledge of some important Matters of Religion should also come in this way? Can any Reason be assigned, why when this is allowed to be proper and sufficient with regard to all other Facts, it should not be admitted with regard to Facts in which Religion is nearly concerned? And yet our Author declaims pathetically upon it, *Pag. 50, 51.* and asks, *Are we to imagine, that God would ever leave a Matter of such Consequence upon such a Foundation?* If God has been ever pleased to give a Revelation to Mankind at all, all but the Persons that lived in the very Age and Place in which that Revelation was first made, must receive the Doctrines and Laws of it, and the Knowledge of the Facts by which it was attested in that way; and if that Revelation be transmitted to us in a way, which we ourselves should count unquestionable in any other Case, and we have as much assurance of the Facts, as we could justly expect concerning any Facts done at that distance, he may reasonably require our Assent; and our refusing in such a case to yield an Assent,

sent, could not be properly said to be owing to a Want of Evidence, because we admit such Evidence in other Cases, but to some other Causes, and those not very justifiable ones, and to an Aversion and Opposition of Mind to its Doctrines and Laws. And I am afraid, that in such a case it would hardly be accepted as a sufficient Excuse for Persons to plead, that they *laboured under the insuperable Incapacity of a particular Infidel Make, and Antichristian Complexion*, as he expresses it *, which put it *entirely out of their power to join in giving an Assent*; since this Infidel Constitution would appear not to be of God's making, but of their own.

If the Laws and Doctrines of the Christian Revelation are transmitted to us with as much Evidence as we could reasonably expect, supposing a Revelation really to have been given some Ages ago; and if we have all that Evidence concerning the extraordinary Facts whereby it was originally attested, which could well be expected supposing those Facts really to have been done; he that receives that Revelation, its Doctrines and Laws, and the Accounts of the Facts upon that Evidence, *i. e.* upon as high Evidence as the Nature of the thing will bear, may approve himself to God and his own Conscience, as having acted a right part, and such, as we may suppose, a wise and righteous God will graciously accept from reasonable Beings. And on the other hand, it may be justly questioned, whether they that refuse to accept a Revelation as coming from God, though attended with all the Evidence that any past Revelation could be justly expected

* P. 45.

expected to have, can approve themselves to the great Governour of the World and Lord of Conscience, as having acted an honest and reasonable part. For it is in effect, as if a Man should declare, let a Revelation have been given in former Ages never so well attested and confirmed, and tho' that Revelation is transmitted with all the Evidence, and in as sure a way as a Revelation given in past Ages could be transmitted, yet I will not receive it, because it was given in former Ages; that is, because I myself did not live at the time when it was first given. And it would be as reasonable to plead before a human Tribunal, I will not be governed by any Laws given in former Ages before I was born, nor acknowledge their Authority, tho' I have all the Proofs of their Authority that I can have concerning Laws enacted in former Ages. If any Man should pretend to act thus in the Case of human Laws, let him profess never so much Impartiality, and that he acts to the best of his Judgment, or declaim never so rhetorically on the Insufficiency of moral Evidence; I am apt to think, it would hardly hinder his being punished for violating those Laws, except the Court should be so kind as to take his making such a Plea for a Proof of his being not right in his Senses.

This Writer, under pretence of doing honour to Religion and Faith, all along supposes, that nothing less will do, than such an absolute Certainty as excludes all Possibility of Mistake. That *it is not sufficient to say, there is great Appearance of Probability; there must be an absolute Certainty, without the least Possibility of our being disappointed*

in our Security * : Or, as he elsewhere expresses it, that *it must be sufficiently calculated to extort an Assent from every one that hears it* †. As if no Evidence would be sufficient in Religion, but one that is plainly irresistible, and forces itself upon us whether we will or no. He frequently talks, as if every thing that had not such an absolute Certainty as to exclude all Possibility of the contrary, were for that reason *doubtful*, no more than a *precarious Conjecture*, incapable to produce a satisfying *Conviction*; when any Man that has ever reflected on the Nature of Evidence at all, must be sensible, that things may be so certain as to leave no room for reasonable Doubt, that yet are not so absolutely certain as to be without the least Possibility of Error.

It will be easily allowed, that the greater Certainty any Man attains to in Religion, it is the better, and more likely both to yield him thorough Satisfaction of Mind, and to have a happy Influence upon his Conduct. But it is far from being true, that there can be no right or saving Faith, without the highest possible Degree of Certainty and Assurance. That Faith is sufficient, though mixed with some Doubting, where a Man is satisfied that he has more convincing Reasons to believe the Scripture, than any thing that can be brought to the contrary, and when, in consequence of this, he is prevailed with to submit to its Authority and Laws, and to comply with the Terms of the Gospel-Covenant. If it were only very probable, that the Christian Religion is of God, it would

* P. 32.

† P. 110.

would be both our Duty and our Wisdom to embrace and receive it, and to govern our Conduct by its excellent Precepts. No Man could run a hazard in such a case, by receiving the Gospel, or at least a hazard equal to what he would run on the other side. Supposing, by obeying the Laws of the Gospel, he should deny himself some Liberties, and controul his Passions in the manner that Religion prescribes, which doth not require us to extirpate the Passions, but to govern them, and keep them within proper Bounds ; this is no more than what some of the greatest Philosophers and wisest Men in all Ages have advised to, as the best way for a Man's own Satisfaction and Tranquillity, and for preserving Body and Mind in a right Temper. Or, if he should be called to suffer Martyrdom, it is a Conduct that Reason prescribes, to suffer any temporal Losses and Inconveniences, and Death itself, even for the Probability of obtaining eternal Happiness. In other Cases, Men think it reasonable to hazard some present Loss, and to undergo some present Hardships and Inconveniences on the probable Prospect of some considerable Advantage to be procured by it. But where the Advantage proposed, is so infinitely great as the Rewards of Religion, it ought proportionably to have a more powerful Influence. And I think it cannot reasonably be denied, that the Man that had as great a Certainty of the Truths of Religion, and the important things it sets before us, as we have of many things that come to us by historical and moral Evidence, would be utterly inexcusable, if he did not govern himself by its Directions, whatsoever present

Inconveniences it might bring upon him : And he would justly deserve to be branded as guilty of the greatest and most criminal Folly, who, to gratify a present inordinate Passion and Appetite, would run the hazard of exposing himself even to the Probability of such a future Misery and Punishment, as the Gospel denounces against those that persist to indulge themselves in vicious licentious Courses.

But besides all that might be, and often has been offered, concerning the Sufficiency of that Evidence that can be brought for the Gospel-Revelation, it must be farther considered, that when all this is accompanied to the Minds of good Men with the Influences of the Holy Spirit, it may well be supposed to give it a still stronger Force. And it is the Doctrine of the holy Scriptures, and there is nothing in it but what is highly agreeable to Reason itself, that the wise and merciful Parent of our Beings, who knows our Weaknesses and the many Temptations of this present State, is ready to communicate his gracious Influences to assist humble and sincere Minds, sensible of their Dependence upon him, and who apply to him for his Help; which he can easily do, in such a way as is perfectly agreeable to the just Order of our Natures, and so as not to offer Violence to our Faculties, or to the Freedom that belongs to us as reasonable Creatures, moral Agents, and in such a way as not to render our own Endeavours, or the Exercise of our own Reason needless or useless. And supposing such divine Influences necessary in the present State of Mankind, that the Faith of the Gospel may
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have its proper Effect upon us, this can by no means be justly improved to shew that Christianity is not founded on Argument; for in this case, all the Argument and rational Evidence brought for it, is still supposed, and stands in all its force: Or, that Reason, or the Intellectual Faculty, is not designed to lead us into it; for the divine Spirit works by and with Reason, or the Intellectual Faculty. The Conviction wrought upon the Mind in this way, is still rational; and it is the Understanding that is enlightned and convinced. The Influence of the Spirit of God doth not exclude the Use of Reason, but sets the Reasonableness and Excellency of Religion in a more affecting light, and causes the Soul more strongly to discern the Characters of divine Wisdom, Goodness and Purity, that are in it, and to feel the Power of its Motives: Reason therefore, or the Intellectual Faculty, and the Influence of divine Grace, or the Holy Spirit, are not to be opposed to one another as inconsistent things, but are to be considered as in a friendly Conjunction, and the latter is designed by God, in his great Goodness, to give a farther Degree of Light and Force to the former.

I have now gone through the first Part of this Gentleman's Performance; and which, in my opinion, looks the most plausible of any thing he hath offered. The Strength of his Book depends upon the Principles here laid down; and for that reason I have considered them more largely than at first I intended to do. My Letter is already grown to such a Length, that I shall not now
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communicate some further Remarks I have drawn up on other Parts of this extraordinary Pamphlet. I may possibly, if you insist upon it, communicate them to you in another Letter. In the mean time, I am, &c.

APRIL 28th,

1743.

F I N I S.

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