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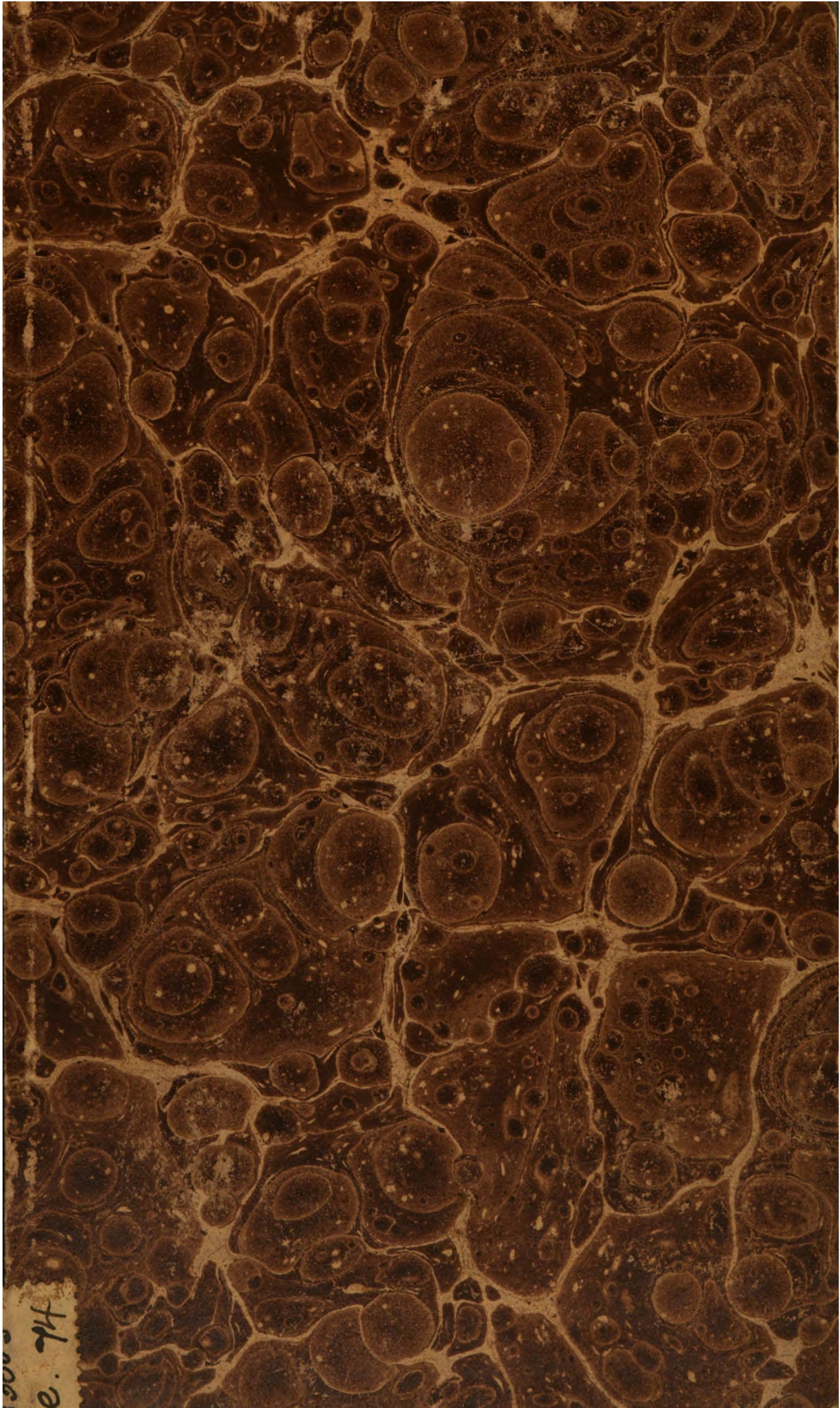
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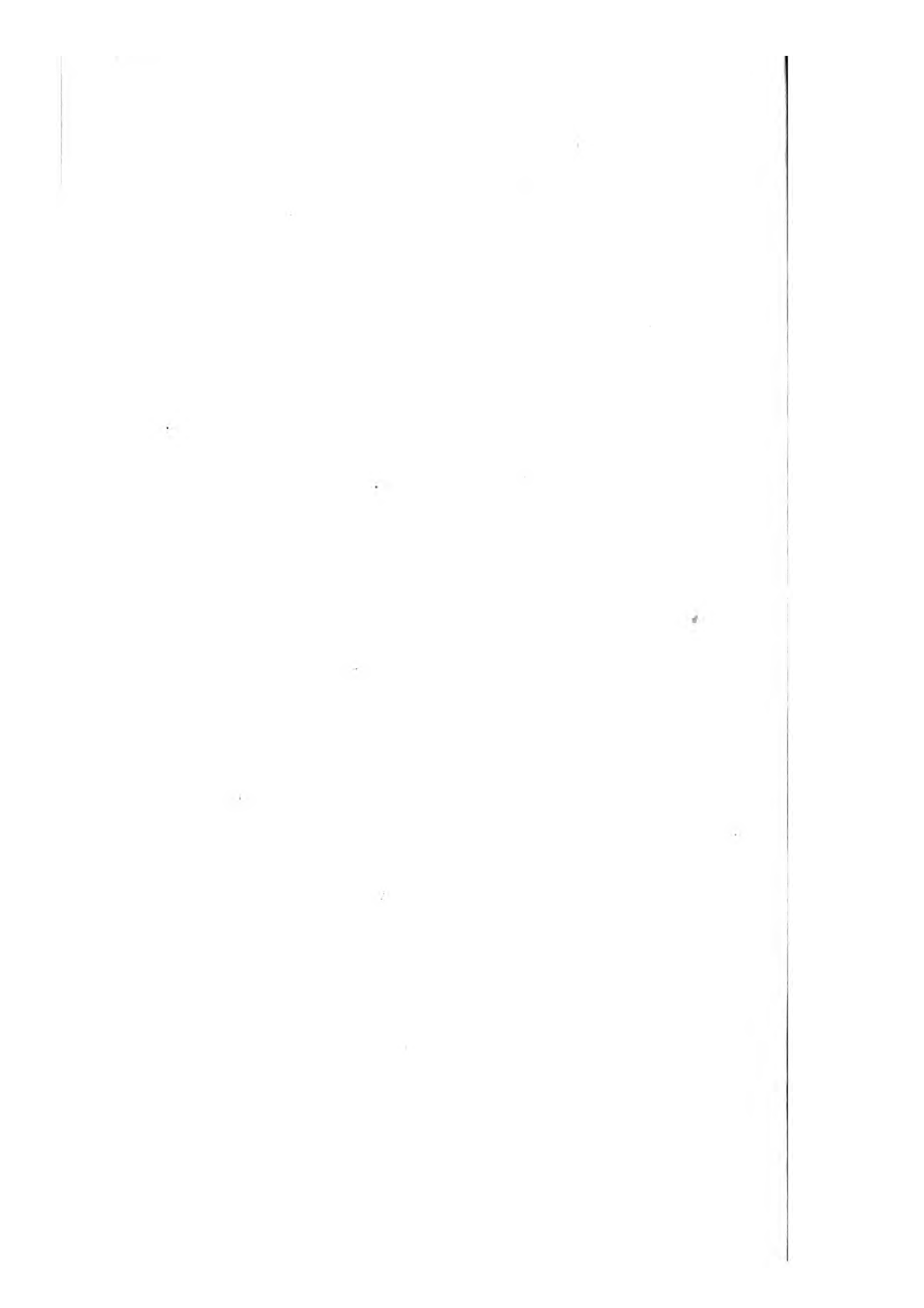
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CONSIDERATIONS

O N

DIFFERENCES of OPINION

A M O N G

C H R I S T I A N S ;

W I T H

A L E T T E R

T O

The R E V E R E N D M R. V E N N ,

In Answer to his *Free and full Examination
of the Address to Protestant Dissenters, on
the Subject of the Lord's Supper.*

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

As Deceivers, and yet true.

PAUL.

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Considerations on differences of opinion among christians.

SECTION I.

HAVING said, in my letter to Mr. Venn, as much as I think sufficient, by way of reply to his *examination* of my treatise; I was not willing to omit this opportunity of addressing, to the public, a few general considerations, relating to differences of opinion among christians. If the nature and spirit of his pamphlet be considered, there are but few persons, I imagine, who will think an answer, addressed to him only, in the least necessary, or expected from me. Indeed, I never considered the answering of Mr. Venn as my principal object; but I thought it afforded me a fair occasion of exposing the gross misrepresentations, and unworthy cavilling, which not Mr. Venn only, but too many others scruple not to make use of, in order to render those who differ from them, in some speculative points, odious to their fellow christians.

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This is not a complaint of mine only, or confined to the present occasion. Numbers of the faithful servants of Christ have been greatly injured, and have had their usefulness impeded, by the same ungenerous and unjust treatment. It has been the case, more or less, in all ages; and I am sorry to see such a prospect of the continuance of it in time to come.

How many worthy ministers of the gospel, who have taken great pains to understand christianity, and are seriously disposed to promote both the knowledge and the practice of it, to the utmost of their power, have their hands, as it were, tied up, by those who busy themselves in *spying out their christian liberty*. Many of them are so circumstanced, that, should they endeavour to serve the interests of christianity, and of mankind, in the way which they should think best adapted to answer the purpose; such a clamour, they cannot but foresee, would be raised, and so furious an opposition would immediately be made to them, that they are convinced they should do more harm than good by the attempt; and there are but few whose advantageous situation, ability, and firmness of mind, concur to enable them successfully to encounter the difficulties they would hereby involve themselves in; so that, being incapacitated for doing all the good they are desirous of doing, they are content to do the little they can do, in as quiet and inoffensive a manner as possible.

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possible; following the prudent advice of our Lord, who admonishes us, *not to cast our pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again, and rent us.*

That the interests of practical christianity should sustain so great a loss, is a thing truly to be lamented; and though, such is the state of things in this world, that these *offences will come*, and we are, therefore, to lay our account with meeting with them; we cannot help saying, with Christ, who foretold them, *Woe unto them by whom they come*; that is, to those who are the *criminal cause* of them.

Far am I from censuring those persons who are merely *mised*, or those who, in consequence of having been misled themselves, endeavour to mislead others. Every allowance should be made for all those who offend through *ignorance*, though they be carried away, even to the most violent acts of persecution, by a *zeal* that is merely *not according to knowledge*. But the woe of Christ will certainly fall with its whole weight upon those, who make a handle of the prejudices of mankind, to gratify their own pride, or promote their own worldly interests and ambition; and who labour to inflame those prejudices with a view to making them subservient to such base purposes. Nor will those escape animadversion, who are, *in part* only, actuated by such unworthy motives; and who, though they may think the cause they are engaged in is a

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just and good one, yet prosecute it with more ardour and vehemence, than a pure regard to the goodness of it would have excited in them.

Very few of the actions of men have, I believe, one simple cause. We are generally influenced by a variety of motives in whatever we do. It, therefore, behoves us the more carefully to distinguish the influences to which we are subject, and under which we really act. God forbid that I should take upon me to condemn any individual of his creatures. Himself only knows our hearts, and he will render unto every man according to his works. But the general *nature* of our motives, the kind, or class, to which they are reducible, may, in some measure, be known by the manner in which they operate. And the most distinct of all, in their nature and effects, are those which have the interest of *this world*, and those which have that of *another* for their object.

The man whose sole spring of action is *a concern for lost souls*, and a care to preserve the purity of that gospel, which alone teaches the most effectual method of their recovery from *the power of sin and Satan unto God*, will feel an ardour of mind, that will prompt him strenuously to oppose all those, whom he considers as obstructing his benevolent designs. An ardour of mind will likewise be felt by the man whose sole object is the advancement of his reputation, his party, or his fortune; but this *ardour* cannot
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be supposed to operate in the very same manner in both cases; so as that they cannot be distinguished by an attentive observer. There will certainly be some difference in their choice of *means* to promote their several ends. We should naturally expect more fairness, more candour, more meekness, and more generosity, from the *christian*, than from the mere *man of this world*. The passions of the latter would, also, be apt to run into personal animosity, envy, jealousy, hatred, and malice; whereas the utmost zeal of the former would not only ever appear to be consistent with, but would be greatly productive of, the most disinterested benevolence, and the most affectionate brotherly love. By this rule we may, in some measure, *try the spirits, whether they be of God*. But let the utmost diffidence and candour accompany every judgment we form, remembering that *we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ*.

When persons expressly avow the motives of their conduct, not to acquiesce in their declarations has the appearance of questioning their veracity; because it is taken for granted, that every man must know the principles of his own conduct; but the human mind is so complex a thing, that there is great room for self-deception; especially in cases where the passions and affections are strong, and when they occasion *similar emotions*, as well as produce *similar effects*. In this case a bystander may be a better judge than a

man's self. A zeal for our *opinions*, and a zeal for our *party*, on the advancement of which our own personal reputation and influence depend, are necessarily connected, and reciprocally promote one another. For the same reason, a dislike of opinions has an affinity with the dislike of those who hold them, as men who are embarked in an interest opposite to ours, and whose credit and authority obstruct our own. And all the emotions of mind that are excited by the same objects, how different soever they be originally, by frequent association mix together, so that the parts of that *complex feeling* which results from their union, are no longer distinguishable. When two persons, who have had frequent intercourse, have been a long time at variance, and the subjects of their contention have been numerous; can either of them analyze the sudden emotion they will feel upon an unexpected meeting, and by which they may be instigated to some instant and violent act?

We often begin to act with one motive, but, as we proceed, we come insensibly within the influence of others; so that, in some cases, the habit shall continue, though the original motive have no force at all; and yet it may be impossible to say, in what part of this progress the influence of one motive ceased, and that of another began; the change of character being insensible, and altogether imperceptible.

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For my own part, I have no doubt, but that the leading men among the Methodists were influenced, originally, by none but the best of all motives, a generous concern for the souls of men. Nothing else, I think, can account for their conduct, as they were then circumstanced; but finding themselves, by degrees, at the head of a large body of people, and in the possession of considerable power and influence, they must not have been *men*, if they had not felt the natural love of power gratified in such a situation; and they must have been *more than men*, if their subsequent conduct had not been, more or less, influenced by it; and if they had not acted in many cases, just as the heads of any other party would have acted. I am far from meaning to insinuate by this, that their original motive is become extinct. I hope it is still the *leading* one with them; but it becomes every man to distrust himself, and carefully to examine his own heart. Otherwise, as I believe may have been the case with many persecutors, we may begin with the love of God, or a regard to his glory, and end with the most diabolical dispositions.

These observations may throw some light on the seemingly different accounts that St. Paul gives of his own character and conduct, before he was converted to christianity. Before the chief priests and council of the Jews, he declared, Acts xxiii. 1. that *he had lived in all good conscience before God until that day*, and before Agrippa,

Agrippa, Acts xxvi. 5. that *he thought with himself he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*; whereas, writing to Timothy, he says (1 Tim. i. 14, 15.) that *he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, injurious, and the chief of sinners*, though, at the same time, he adds, *he had acted ignorantly, in unbelief*. They may also serve to illustrate the following passage in the prophet Jeremiah; and as the words are those of God himself, they ought to command a general and very serious attention; and more especially should they alarm every man, who imagines himself to be actuated by religious motives, when he is instigated to any act of violence against another; whether it be to the injury of his person, his fortune, his reputation, or his interest. Jer. xvii. 9, 10. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

The application of this doctrine may be made both by those who seem enraged at others, for holding opinions which they think damnable; and by those who insult and laugh at others, for opinions which they think to be merely ridiculous and absurd. In many cases, I am satisfied, that the pure *love of truth* is, on both sides, absorbed in passions of a very different nature. I could overlook every thing in a man, who, I thought, meant nothing but my everlasting welfare;

fare ; or to inform me of any thing that I was ignorant of, and desirous of knowing ; but those persons who have these pretences in their mouths only, when they are far from their hearts (though they may deceive themselves as well as others) are by no means intitled to so favourable a reception.

It behoves us, however, carefully to distinguish between this *latent insincerity*, under the influence of which men deceive themselves, and that *direct prevarication*, with which those who are engaged in debate, are too ready to charge one another ; as if their adversaries *knowingly* concealed, or opposed the truth. This is a crime of so heinous a nature, that I should be very unwilling to impute it to any person whatever. It is possible, indeed, that, in the heat of controversy, when the eyes of the public are upon a person, and he is afraid of appearing in a disadvantageous light, he may use a little sophistry, in order to seem to have the better of an argument ; but for a man voluntarily to undertake the defence of error, and knowingly to pervert the scriptures, in order to make them favour his purpose ; and especially to persist through life in avowing sentiments which he really believes to be false, argues the heart to be so void of all principle of rectitude ; it is such an insult upon the God of truth, and such a contempt of his judgments, that I think human nature could never become so depraved and desperate

perate as to be capable of it; and that no situation in human life could supply a sufficient temptation for such conduct.

If a man do but *suspect* that he is engaged in a cause that will not bear examination, he is naturally disposed to be silent; or if, confiding in his skill in disputation, he should be tempted to challenge another to oppugn it, it would be in conversation only; and it must manifest a degree of temerity equal to madness to proceed to *write* in such a case, when he could take no advantage either of his own presence of mind, or of the weakness and embarrassment of his adversary. There are such well known instances of the force of prejudice, that I had rather ascribe any opinion, how absurd soever, or any defence, how weak soever, in a man how sensible and intelligent soever, in other respects, to *wrong judgment*, than to a *bad heart*. I can hardly imagine any case, in which, exclusive of all consideration of candour and charity, the chance would not be in favour of the former.

If this remark be just, with what caution and tenderness should we censure any person, with respect to a point of mere speculation. To abuse any one because he does not see things so clearly as I may think I do myself, is cruel with respect to him; and has a much worse aspect with regard to God, who made us both, and who has placed us in our different situations for seeing, judging, and acting. How should I be affect-
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ed at the great day of judgment, to be convinced of the integrity, and perhaps the right judgment, also, of an adversary, whom I should have treated in so illiberal and insulting a manner.

It is unhappy, in some respects, that christians are divided into so many sects and parties. This circumstance, however, was certainly *foreseen*, and therefore wisely *permitted* by that great and good being who governs all things; and it will, I doubt not, notwithstanding several intermediate ill effects, contribute, at last, to the firmer establishment, and the greater efficacy of the christian scheme. In the mean time, let it be our joint care to obviate and lessen those necessary intermediate and temporary evils, which result from our differences of opinion.

Let every question in debate be proposed to the freest examination; and, without indecent passion, or personal animosity (which are equally a disgrace to us as men, or as christians) let us weigh the merits of every cause; and, without concealment or reserve, advance every thing that occurs to us in support of our respective opinions. If the pure *love of truth* influence us, we shall, in this way, much sooner find it. And, especially, being each of us conscious of the uprightness of our own intentions, let us not easily admit a doubt of the sincerity of others.

Let those who maintain that the mere holding of any *opinions* (without regard to the *motives* and

and *state of mind* through which men may have been led to form them) will necessarily exclude them from the favour of God, be particularly careful, with respect to the premises from which they draw so alarming a conclusion. Of all the tenets that can be the subject of debate, *this* has the most dreadful practical consequences. This belief lays such hold of the mind, and is apt to excite such a horror of the reprobated opinions, as, in the frail state of humanity, is with difficulty brought to be consistent with any esteem or love of the persons who hold them; and, from the *affinity of our passions*, is, in too many minds, capable of degenerating into absolute hatred, rancour, and the diabolical spirit of persecution. Such persons are apt to be so transported with zeal, that they will even *do evil that good may come*, and destroy the bodies of some, to promote, as they fancy, the good of the souls of others. Indeed, no other opinions than such as these can, with the least plausibility, be alledged in favour of persecution; and we find, in fact, that those have ever been the most violent persecutors, who have thought salvation and the favour of God appropriated to themselves. Where, therefore, such an opinion as this has unhappily been formed, we must guard ourselves against the effects of it, as we would against those of absolute insanity in the persons we conversed with; and should use every method

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we can think of to bring them from so fatal a turn of thinking, to a sober state of mind.

On the contrary, if we can be so happy as to believe, that there are no errors, but what men may be so circumstanced, as to be *innocently* betrayed into; that any mistake of the head is very consistent with rectitude of heart; and that all differences in modes of worship may be only the different methods, by which different men (who are equally *the offspring of God*) are endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent; our differences of opinion would have no tendency to lessen our mutual love and esteem. In this state of mind, most of our differences would be in a fair way of being terminated; and all that could remain would do no more than furnish an easy and agreeable exercise for the christian virtues of candour and moderation. Different parties in religion would then only afford room for a generous and friendly emulation, which of them should most advance the cause of truth, and recommend their several professions, by the most benevolent and exemplary conduct. Every man would speak or write with more or less warmth, in proportion to the apprehended importance of his subject; but this could never be so great, as to afford the least colour or pretence for the violence of those, who imagine that they are opposing *damnable heresies*; and could hardly ever betray them into any indecency or intemperance of language. Their
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anger would be most in danger of getting the better of their meekness and their pity, when they were attacked with the *pride* and *fury*, that is peculiar to those who fancy themselves to be the only favourites of heaven, and all the rest of the world to be reprobate from God and goodness.

Those persons who think that their salvation depends upon holding their present opinions, must necessarily entertain the greatest dread of *free inquiry*. They must think it to be a hazarding of their eternal welfare to listen to any arguments, or read any books that favour of heresy. It must appear to them in the same light as listening to any other *temptation*, whereby they should be in danger of being seduced to their everlasting destruction. And this temper of mind cannot but be a foundation for the most deplorable bigotry, obstinacy, and ignorance. Whereas those persons who have not that idea of the importance of their present sentiments, preserve a state of mind proper for the discussion of them. If they be wrong, as their minds are under no strong bias, they are within the reach of conviction, and thus are in the way to grow wiser and better as long as they live.

SECTION II.

MUCH has been said concerning the *practical tendency* of particular opinions in religion; but, in general, this has been done with little accuracy, whereas it is a subject that deserves the nicest attention of philosophers and divines; requiring an intimate knowledge of the human passions and affections, and of the various influences to which men are exposed in life. As to what Mr. Venn has thought proper to call *a proof of the incomparable excellence of the orthodox system considered in a practical view*, I do not so much as pretend to examine it at all; and he or his friends may, if they please, consider this, as a confession, that I am not able to refute what he has advanced upon that subject. I shall only, in this place, suggest a few *general observations*; and may possibly, upon some other occasion, enter into a more particular discussion of this truly curious and useful subject of inquiry.

All that can be done to influence men's *moral conduct* is, in the first place, to present to their minds sufficient *motives* of hope or fear; and, in the next place, in order to make that course of actions, to which these motives lead, pleasing and easy, so as to form a *habit*, and engage the heart and affections; we must give them such
ideas

ideas of the Divine Being, of their fellow creatures, of themselves, &c. (that is, of all the beings and things with whom they have any connection, and whom their duty respects) as will make them appear to be the proper objects of those dispositions and affections, which we are required to exercise towards them.

The great objects of hope and fear, which christianity presents to mankind, are the joys and torments of a *future life*. It is the conviction of the insufficiency and instability of every thing on this side the grave; it is a regard to *a treasure in heaven, which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and which thieves cannot break through and steal*; it is the firm belief and expectation of the great *recompence of reward*, that awaits our perseverance in well-doing, at *the resurrection of the just*; these, I say, are the considerations that raise the hearts of men above this world, and place them beyond the influence of its pleasures or pains; so that they can neither be seduced by the one, nor deterred by the other, from *keeping the commandments of God*. These great and leading motives to virtue, these considerations, whereby we become habitually to look upon ourselves as *citizens of heaven*, and only *pilgrims and strangers on earth*, must be nearly the same in all the forms of the christian religion; and, in proportion to the degree in which we give our attention to them, and thereby strengthen our faith in them, they must influence us all alike.

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D I F F E R E N C E S O F O P I N I O N . 17

All the difference, therefore, with respect to the practical influence of any particular opinions, can only be occasioned by the different views with which they present us, of those persons and things that are objects of our duty. I shall give a brief illustration of this in the idea that is exhibited of the Divine Being, according to what are generally called the *rational* and the *orthodox* systems.

According to all systems, God, our creator, preserver, and moral governor, is to be represented as the object of our reverence, our love, and our confidence; and this end seems to be completely effected by the *rational* christian, when he considers the Divine Being as having produced all creatures, with a view to make them happy, in a manner suited to their respective natures; bearing a most intense, and absolutely impartial affection to all his offspring; providing for their regard to virtue (the only security of their happiness) by equal laws, guarded with awful sanctions; inflexibly punishing all wilful obstinate transgressors, but freely pardoning all offences that are sincerely repented of, and receiving into his love and mercy all who use their best endeavours to discharge the duty incumbent upon them; when we consider him as most minutely attentive to all the works of his hands, invisibly conducting all events with a view to the greatest happiness of all that love and obey him; secretly affording them

all necessary assistance, in proportion to their real occasions, and abundantly and everlastingly rewarding, in a future life, their patient continuance in well-doing, during their abode in this state of trial and probation. How is it possible, made as we are, not to revere, love, and confide in such a being as this?

On the other hand, those who assume to themselves the distinguishing title of *orthodox*, consider the Supreme Being as creating all things *for his own glory*, and by no means for the general happiness of all his creatures; as imputing to all mankind the transgression of their first parent, and dooming every man, woman, and infant to everlasting and unutterable misery, for an offence to which they were no way accessory, of which it is impossible they should be, in any sense of the word, *guilty*; and for which it were absurd in them even to affect repentance. In this situation of things, when all mankind were incapable of doing any thing, in thought, word, or deed, but what tended to aggravate their condemnation; they suppose the universal parent arbitrarily to select out of the whole number a few, whom he designs for eternal happiness, leaving, that is, in fact, *decreeing* all the rest to everlasting and unspeakable misery. According to them, also, even the elect cannot be saved, till the utmost effects of the divine wrath have been suffered for them by an innocent person. The grace that saves them is ir-
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D I F F E R E N C E S O F O P I N I O N . 19

resistible, and irrevocable, so that they can never lose the divine favour.

If it be possible to revere, love, or confide in such a being as this, I must own that I know nothing of the human heart, or its affections. Sure I am, that *a man* of this character, and who should act in this manner, would be the object of dread and abhorrence, to all who should be so unhappy as to be dependent upon him. What advantage favourable to virtue can be made of the *imitation* of such a being as this? Must an earthly parent be encouraged to love one of his children, and to hate another of them, independent of a regard to their moral conduct; and must he never forgive an offence in any of them, till a full satisfaction, or atonement, have been made to him for it.

It is the great boast of those who stile themselves orthodox, and particularly of Mr. Venn, that their sentiments have a great advantage in inculcating *humility*. But when, without that peculiar system, we consider ourselves as *the workmanship of God*; that all our powers, of body and of mind, are derived from him; that he is *the giver of every good and of every perfect gift*, and that without him we can do and enjoy nothing, how can we conceive ourselves to be in a state of greater dependence, or obligation? that is, what greater reason or foundation can there possibly be for the exercise of humility? If I believe that I have a power to do the duty that

God requires of me; yet, as I also believe that that power is his gift, I must still say, *what have I that I have not received, and how then can I glory, as if I had not received it.* If the Divine Being have given me a *natural power* to move my arm, is not the obligation the same, as if he should, by a *supernatural power*, move it himself, whenever I have occasion for it?

If, conscious of many imperfections, and many failures in the discharge of my known duty, I have recourse to the divine mercy and clemency, is not my gratitude and humility as great, when I conceive that I am indebted for the pardon of my sins to the *free, unmerited* goodness of God; as it could be, if I thought the pardon I received was *purchased*, by a full satisfaction made to his offended justice? If the sense of gratitude and obligation, in this case, arise from my idea of the *freeness* of the gift, I think it must be greater upon the former supposition than upon the latter.

A sense of our obligation to our Lord Jesus Christ, also, as a person commissioned by God to *redeem*, that is, to *deliver, save, or rescue* us from a state of sin and misery; to give laws to mankind, to be Lord of all, and judge of the quick and dead, is as efficacious to attach us to him (as far as our regards to him are consistent with our primary regards to God his father; who, out his own love to mankind, sent him on this great and gracious errand) and to enforce obedience to his laws, as
any



any sense of obligation that can arise from any particular hypothesis whatever.

Upon the whole, notwithstanding what Mr. Venn, and others boast, it does not seem to be a *fact*, that those who call themselves orthodox are at all more humble, and lowly minded, or more free from spiritual pride, and ostentation, than others. As far as my observation goes, I am satisfied, that the contrary is the case: nor from any knowledge that I have, or can procure, concerning these professors and their principles, do I think that there is the least reason to conclude, that (if we separate what belongs to the *form*, from what is peculiar to the *power* of religion) their scheme has any one proper advantage for religious and moral purposes. On the other hand, it seems to me to be, in many respects, unfavourable to the true spirit of christianity, or to that temper and disposition of mind which is peculiarly called *christian*; consisting, in a more especial manner, of the virtues of humility, meekness, mercy, and benevolence. It is unfavourable also to genuine piety, and indeed to every branch of vital practical religion. I think I could point out the cause of this, but it would lead me much farther than I propose to enter into this subject at present.

If I be asked why those persons who hold these opinions are not abandoned to all wickedness, when their opinions evidently lay them under so little restraint. I answer, that this *is*

often the case, with those who pursue these principles to their just and fatal consequences; for it is easy to prove, that the *Antinomian* is the only consistent *absolute Predestinarian*. We see this exemplified in the many sects of Antinomians that have lately sprung up among those Dissenters who are called Independents. But our wise creator has by no means left our moral conduct at the mercy of our opinions; and the regard to virtue that is kept up, by those who maintain the doctrines above mentioned, is owing to the influence of some principles implanted in our frame; which, in many cases, will not suffer us to follow, or even to *perceive* the immoral tendency of the most licentious opinions; so that, in general, they are only those who are previously depraved, that openly avail themselves of them. The consideration of this should make us both humble and thankful.

Besides, the opinions above recited are so contrary to natural reason, and the general tenor of the scriptures, that *better sentiments* are continually obtruding themselves upon their minds; and these are the principles that, *really*, though *secretly*, influence the conduct of those who are truly pious and virtuous among them; and by no means the principles which they openly profess, when they are questioned about them: and it is happy that they do not distinctly perceive the inconsistency there is between their principles and their conduct. We are, also, so formed, that
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we naturally turn our chief attention to the most favourable aspect of our sentiments, as well as of every thing else belonging to us; so that we seldom attend to what is very shocking, and has a bad tendency in them.

It confirms this observation, that many of the more moderate Calvinists, as I am informed, and the greater part of the Methodists, seldom insist upon the doctrines of *absolute election and reprobation*, especially in their public discourses. This must be owing to their being secretly dissatisfied with them; to some latent suspicion, or confused kind of feeling, that they are not to be depended upon; at least that they are not fit to be the subjects of frequent meditation with the bulk of mankind, and that they are in great danger of being abused. Mr. Venn himself, though he makes a great parade of, I believe, every other branch of what he calls *orthodoxy*, in his answer to my treatise, is quite silent on this head. If his good sense be really staggered at these doctrines, a little more thinking will give him reason to entertain suspicions of the rest: for the whole system is closely connected, and the doctrine of *unconditional election*, together with that of the subjection of the whole human race to the everlasting wrath of God, on account of *original sin*, are the chief corner stones of the whole building. Take away these, and the whole *complex*, but *compact* fabric falls to the ground.

Difficult

Difficult as it is to account for the virtue of those who call themselves *orthodox* on the principles mentioned above, they are such as themselves must necessary allow: for they consider our sentiments as exceedingly licentious; and yet (whatever Mr. Venn may do) I know there are many among them, who cannot help acknowledging, that there are genuine marks of unfeigned piety and goodness among those they call *new schemers*. To account for this fact, therefore, *they* must have recourse to the influence of principles that are not explicitly avowed by us, just as I do with respect to them.

SECTION III.

I Cannot help wishing that persons of all sects and parties would study their *bibles* more and *books of controversy* less. But all persons have their *favourite authors*, to which they too much confine themselves, even to the neglect of those *authorities*, from their agreement with which all their merit is acknowledged to be derived. Were it not for this circumstance, it would be absolutely impossible that the individuals of mankind, whose intellects are so much alike, should differ so widely in their religious sentiments as they now do; at least that they should lay so great a stress on the points in which they differ.

Since

DIFFERENCES OF OPINION. 25

Since the understandings of men are similar to one another (at least so much, as that no person can seriously maintain that *two and two* make *five*) did they actually read only the same things, and had they no previous knowledge to mislead them, they could not but draw the same general conclusions from the same expressions. But one man having formed an hypothesis from reading the scriptures, another, who follows him, studies that hypothesis, and refines upon it, and another again refines upon him; till, in time, the *scriptures themselves* are little read by any of them; and are never looked into but with minds prepossessed with the notions of others concerning them. At the same time, several other *original readers* and thinkers, having formed as many other hypotheses, each of them a little different from all the rest, and all of them being improved upon by a succession of partisans, each of whom contributes to widen the difference; at last no religions whatever, the most distinct originally, are more different from one another, than the various forms of *one* and the same religion.

To remedy this inconvenience, we must go back to first principles. We must begin again, each of us carefully studying the scriptures for ourselves, without the help of commentators, comparing one part with another. And when our minds shall, by this means, have been exposed, for a sufficient time, to the same influences, we shall think and feel in the same manner.

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At least all christians, being sensible that they have, in many, and in the chief respects, *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*, they will keep *the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace*.

In reading books of controversy, the particular texts, from which favourite opinions are chiefly inferred, are kept continually in view, while others are kept out of sight; so that the person who confines himself to the perusal of them, necessarily forms a very wrong notion of the *general tenor* of the scriptures, and lays a disproportionate stress on particular opinions. He never looks into the scriptures, but it is with a state of mind that leads him to expect to find his favourite opinions either clearly expressed, or plainly referred to in every chapter. Now, it is well known, that all strong expectations tend to satisfy themselves. Men easily persuade themselves that they actually see, what they have absolutely depended upon seeing.

Were it possible for a number of persons to make but an essay towards complying with this advice, by confining themselves, for the compass of a single year, to the daily reading of the scriptures only, without any other religious books whatever; I am persuaded that, notwithstanding their previous differences, they would think much better of one another than they had done before. They would all have, more nearly, the same general ideas of the contents of scripture, and of the chief articles of christian faith and duty.

duty. By reading the whole themselves, they could hardly avoid receiving the deepest impressions of the certainty, and importance of the great and *leading principles*, those which they would find the most frequently and earnestly inculcated; and their *particular opinions*, having come less frequently in view, would be less obstinately retained. It was in this manner, I can truly say, that I formed the most distinguishing of my opinions in religion.

I do not say that this practice would have the same effect with all persons. I have no hopes of its succeeding with those who are advanced in life. I would not even recommend it to them; since the consequence of unhinging their minds, though by a conversion from error to truth, might possibly do them more harm than good. Nor have I much hope of those who are hackneyed in controversy, and to whom the methods of attack and defence, peculiar to any system, are become familiar. But I would earnestly recommend this method of studying the scriptures to young persons, before their common sense and natural feelings have been perverted; and while they are capable of understanding the obvious meaning of a plain expression.

In this case I cannot help thinking, that, notwithstanding the seeming force of the texts that are continually in the mouths of those who call themselves *orthodox*; and notwithstanding our
present

present translation of the bible, which (being made by men who were fully persuaded of the truth of that system) is, in many places, much too favourable to it; yet that both the general *tenor of the whole* (which, with a person who reads the scriptures much, cannot but have far greater weight than any particular texts whatever) and also that numbers of *emphatical single passages*, would effectually overrule any tendency to that is commonly called orthodoxy.

To mention only a single instance. Would not a constant attention to the general strain in which Moses, all the antient prophets, John the Baptist, our Saviour, and the apostles, address sinners, wear out, in time, every trace of the doctrine of unconditional election and reprobation? The language in which the Divine Being is uniformly represented as speaking, is, *As I live, saith the Lord, I would not the death of a sinner, but had rather that he should repent and live. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, oh house of Israel.* What a solemn, and cruel mocking of mankind would this be, if the Divine Being, at the same time that he made this declaration, was purposed that many, if not the greatest part of them, should not repent, but die without mercy.

SECTION IV.

LET all the different sects and parties of christians attend with candour to the opinions and practices of others, and freely adopt whatever they are convinced is good in any of them. There is no sect or party but hath something belonging to it of an *adventitious* nature, and that is no necessary part of the general system; and let not our party prejudices blind us so far, as to make us condemn and reject what is good in any sect of men, merely because they hold it; but be the system ever so bad, let us glean from it every good idea, and every useful custom. Were all parties faithfully to attend to this, the very worst of them would be made tolerable, and they would all soon be brought nearer to one another in affection and mutual charity, if not in opinion also.

Let us all accustom ourselves to the consideration of having *one proper head*, and make less use of other names, by way of party distinction. We are to call no man *father*, or *master* upon earth; for we have *one father, even God*; and *one master, even Christ*. The use that is made by many of the authority of the Reformers, and others, appears to me to be an infringement of this injunction. The use of the names of
men

men tends much more to enflame a party spirit, than any other method of distinguishing one another. Besides, by frequently calling one another *Arians, Socinians, Calvinists, &c.* we are too apt to forget that all these are only different denominations of *christians*; and in order to raise an odium against their adversaries, many scruple not, in so many words, to say they are *no christians*. Now had men kept to the distinction of opinions only, I cannot conceive how any man could ever have been called a *deist*, or an *infidel*, who professed to believe the divine mission of Christ. But the terms *Arians, Socinians, &c.* easily pass into that of *no christians*. This, however, is a most base, and disingenuous proceeding; and those persons might, with the same propriety, call their adversaries *Mahometans*.

In all our disputes about different tenets, and modes of the christian religion, let us be careful not to lose sight of the *great end and design of christianity* in general, *viz.* that Christ came to *blefs mankind, in turning them away from their iniquities; to redeem (or deliver) us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* The chief thing, therefore, that we should attend to, and the only rule for estimating the importance of any opinions, is their efficacy for this moral purpose. Let us, then, not suffer ourselves to be deceived by mere words, and *pompous sounds*. As to those who follow other rules of estimating the im-

importance of opinions, and who think that *mere belief* can be of any avail to recommend them to the favour of God; they ought, as I observed before, to have very good reasons for their persuasion. For, if once the above mentioned plain and obvious rule be quitted, it will not be easy to find another that can be applied to any good purpose. After losing this clue, men will be involved in an endless labyrinth. They will often cry *peace, peace, to themselves, when there is no peace*; and they will, also, often *fear, where no fear is*.

I have nothing more to recommend to the different sects and parties of christians, but to remember that we are all *men*; and to be aware of the force of prejudice, to which, as such, we are all liable. If we be not strangely infatuated indeed, we shall be sensible, that there have been great and good men of all parties. Ridley and Latimer, were men who entertained very different opinions, with respect to the points which are now denominated *orthodox*; yet they were both burned at the same stake, and suffered martyrdom with equal constancy. This consideration alone, if sufficiently attended to, cannot fail, I should think, to stagger the faith of those, who believe the favour of God to be confined to any one party, especially if they be naturally men of modesty and candour. As *men*, however, we are certainly all of us fallible, and liable to adopt opinions without sufficient evidence. Let us, therefore, as becomes reasonable beings, in
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these circumstances, be careful to keep our minds always open to conviction; let us cultivate humility, and a diffidence of ourselves, and earnestly apply to *the God of truth*, that *we may be led into all truth*.

What effect these considerations may have upon my readers is very uncertain. It is not improbable, but they may inflame the animosity of some against the author and his friends; but on others, it may be hoped, they will have a different and more favourable influence. If they be of any use to make any persons *think and reflect*, and *search the scriptures* more than they have hitherto done, it is all that I desire; having no doubt, but that the result will be favourable to what I think to be the cause of truth and virtue. Whether we preach or write, we are properly compared to those who *sow seed*; and this it is our duty to take every proper opportunity of doing, though we know not whether it will be productive or not. Eccl. xi. 6. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper.* For though *Paul may plant, and Apollos water, it is God that gives the increase*; that is, the success depends upon the operation of causes, and the influence of circumstances, which, though they be unknown to us; are under the direction of that great being, who, in his infinite wisdom, disposes of us and of all things. *May his will be done, and to him be glory, through Jesus Christ.* Amen.

T O

The Reverend Mr. VENN.

CURIOSITY, from the influence of which neither myself, nor you, Sir, I presume, are exempt, induced me to purchase the pamphlet which you have been pleased to write, in answer to one of mine, on the subject of the *Lord's supper*. Having heard of your design to animadvert upon my *Address*, within a few weeks after it was first published, and seeing your piece formally announced to the public a considerable time before it made its actual appearance; I was in hopes that your humanity would have paid so much regard to my situation, as to have contrived the most expeditious conveyance of a letter expressly *directed to me*; and that you would not have let the contents of it be known to half the nation, before I was made acquainted with them myself; but I was disappointed in that expectation, and prevented by it from seeing your book so soon as I should otherwise have done.

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Upon the receipt of your much-expected performance, I was not at all surpris'd at the *bulk*, or the *price* of it, considering the *time* you had taken about it; but I own that this circumstance made me rather wonder at the *warmth* of it. Had you, indeed, written and published immediately upon conceiving the first hint of this important composition, without asking the advice of any of your friends, there would have been no wonder, if it had borne the marks of a glowing, though disorder'd imagination, or betrayed the symptoms of vehemence, and impetuosity of temper; and the circumstances of the publication would have been an apology for you. But all things of this nature generally *cool* with time and reflection. If, after I have written any thing with more ardour than usual, I can but have patience to let it lie by me a few days, in a place where I can now and then cast my eye upon it; like Tarquin with his poppies, I keep striking out the bolder expressions, and softening the harsher ones continually; and if, after this, I show it to a friend, I am generally persuad'd to lower the spirit of it still more; till, at last, the composition becomes so tame, gentle, and moderate, that the generality of my readers can go along with me, and bear it pretty well. But time may, perhaps, have a contrary effect with you, and tend to heighten and inflame your natural vehemence. If so, I may be thankful that you did not delay your publication still longer;
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and the next time you are pleased to honour me with another of your productions of this kind, I beg I may have the advantage of contending with the *Hercules in his cradle*.

When I consider the intemperate heat of this performance of yours, I cannot help wondering at the choice which my old orthodox friends have made of a *champion* to fight their battles for them; and especially that they should have gone so far *out of their way* to seek for such a one. Really, Sir, you must pardon my mistrusting any thing you are pleased to assert, but I cannot help suspecting you may have mistaken those of them with whom you have conversed upon this subject, and have obtruded yourself, unasked, into a business in which you have no concern; or, which is the same thing, that you have indirectly begged the compliment. I should be glad, at least, to know the names of those Dissenters, who have entertained so very high an opinion of your abilities in controversy; that they should so suddenly, and, as it were, by *instinct*, apply to you in this difficult conjuncture. There are, to my knowledge, numbers among themselves who, without any disparagement to you, are full as able to support the characters of gentlemen, scholars, and christians in a debate (as low a state as learning and charity are now in with them) and I should much rather have chosen one of *them* for a free discussion of the question between us.

I think I shall shew some degree of skill in arrangement, if I can reduce into any tolerable method, the various subjects of your *Examination*, and reply to what you have advanced concerning them with any perspicuity. On the first view of your performance, I own that I am ready to despair. However, I shall endeavour, in the first place, to consider what you have said relating to my account of the Lord's supper, which is properly the thing in debate; and, secondly, your account of my religious sentiments in general, together with the idea you have been pleased to give of my heart; neither of which, as I conceive, you had any business with. When I have done this, I shall conclude with a few reflections for your benefit, for my own, and that of all those who may chuse to interest themselves in our friendly debate.

I shall follow your example so far as to take notice of what you have said of my *title page*, before I enter upon any of these heads of discourse. *This*, you say, p. 2. *breathes the same unwholesome savour with the book itself.* I can, with great truth, assure you, Sir, that I meant no offence to your *nostrils* upon this occasion, not being aware of any peculiar sensibility of that organ in you. I find, however, that this is an instrument of considerable consequence to you; since it appears that, by the same sense, you afterwards (p. 88.) perceive me to be a *RANK deist at the bottom*; and you represent the
 Lord's

Lord's Supper as *smelling strong of the old superstitious notion of atonement*. Indeed your figures, in many parts of your work, are drawn from such subjects, as I have not been used to attend to; and, perhaps, I may not, on that account, be sensible of all the delicacy, propriety, and force of them.

My *motto*, it seems, has given you offence. You are *surprized*, you say, p. 2. *and grieved to see a sentence of an atheistical poet prefixed to a treatise on the Lord's supper*. Now I, really, never thought of the *atheism* of the poet at the time; and whatever the poet was, there is no atheism in the sentence I have quoted from him. I have heard of serious preachers taking for their text a saying of the Devil; and I should never have imagined, that any *scholar* would ever have objected to an apt sentence from any *classic author*.

After considering how greatly this simple ordinance of the Lord's supper had been abused, particularly in the reign of popery; and how much *hay* and *stubble* has been built upon this *foundation of the apostles*; if I had spoken Latin myself, I could hardly have used any other words than those I have quoted, *Quantum est in rebus inane*; which you have given no proof of your knowledge, either of that language, or of my sentiments, in translating, *Much ado about nothing*. If you can relish a plain *English pro-*

verb, as well as a *title of a play*, the English of it is, pretty nearly, *Much cry, and little wool*.

Your conjecture concerning my reason for changing the quotation in the second edition, shows a great deal of ingenuity. *In the first edition of the Address*, you say, p. 3. *the Doctor's motto was quoted from its original author Lucretius, a chief of the sect of the Epicureans, the sect which encountered St. Paul at Athens. Probably, being told that this was rather too barefaced, the Doctor quotes it, in his second edition, from Persius the Stoic.* By the way, did not the *Stoics* encounter St. Paul at Athens, as well as the *Epicureans*? See Acts xvii. 18. In order to quicken your sagacity on a future occasion, I shall tell you how the case really was. When I first thought of the passage, I imagined it had been in Lucretius; afterwards I recollected, that, though something to the same purpose might be found in that author; yet that the words, as I had quoted them, were in Persius only; and therefore, in the second edition, I changed the reference.

The indignation you have expressed at this motto, and your reasoning about it, is of a piece with every thing you have advanced in your examination of the book itself. I suspect, however, that the *surprize* and *grief* you express at my quotation of a heathen poet is affected, or you could never have chosen a motto for yourself from a *popish cardinal*. I hope you
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are not secretly a believer in the doctrine of *transubstantiation*. You infer much from motto's, and our debate relates to a distinguishing article in the popish creed. I could make other observations on your motto; but I think I have trifled enough already in replying to your remarks on mine.

SECTION I.

HAVING premised thus much, I come to consider what you have advanced relating to my account of the *Lord's supper* itself. This part of your work, you are pleased to call *strictures*; and, indeed, there is a peculiar propriety in that title, for you only *carp* at a word or a phrase here and there, without so much as considering what goes before or after, or seeming to take in the whole of my meaning.

You begin your remarks with saying, p. 40. that *I ascribe the neglect of the Lord's supper wholly to some general mistake of the proper nature and design of the institution*, and you flourish away, after your loose manner, upon so *partial and defective* an account of the matter. But I do not find, in the page you refer to, that I have used the word *wholly* at all. There may, for any thing I know, be even more reasons than
you

you have mentioned for this neglect; but I did not make it my business to combat them all. In the latter part of my treatise, I expressly mention, and consider more reasons than this one; and if, in any part of the book, I have used the word *wholly*, it has been through inadvertence, and what you might have seen was evidently contrary to other parts, and the general strain of it.

But this is a consideration that never prevents your dwelling upon any expression that can, by any force, be tortured to bear a sense contrary to what is evidently my own; so that you have the pleasure of demonstrating, in your own manner, the same thing that I had done in mine. You have even the assurance to advance, p. 3, that *one of my assertions must be on the supposition that the Lord's supper is no positive command, binding every professed christian*; when, to inculcate this very doctrine, is the professed design of my whole treatise. You even say, p. 64, that *I am pleased, tanquam ex cathedra, to dispense with all manner of contempt poured upon, and an intire neglect of, the Lord's supper; as if the authority of the apostles, to command obedience in the name of God, was already cancelled*. You certainly write for those who read your book only, and do not seem to have considered what they might say who should happen to read both. From reading your remarks, one would imagine that my treatise, instead of being a *serious persuasive*

suasive to communion, as I intended it to be, was written with a design to dissuade people from it.

Equally disingenuous are your remarks, p. 54, upon my assertion, that *the only opinion declared by receiving the Lord's supper is, that Christ was a teacher sent from God*; which you are pleased to call *nothing better than the ravings of enthusiasm, tho' not of the devout sort*. With me, and I believe every body else, the belief that Christ was a teacher sent from God, implies a belief of the whole gospel, and an obligation to live according to it. And if you had read my book, with any other attention than to find fault with it, you would have found a great deal in it of a very serious nature to that purpose.

You had no occasion to take so much pains to prove, p. 52, that the profession of christianity was a different thing in the times of the apostles from what it is now. I am as sensible of it as you can be; and nothing to the contrary appears in any thing that I have written. But, notwithstanding this, it is easy to gather from the writings of the apostles, that many persons, even in those days, made profession of christianity, and even preached Christ, who, in the moral sense of the word, were not christians. St. Paul very strongly intimates as much when he says, 1 Cor. ix. 27. *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away*. Yet we do not find that these
merely

merely *nominal christians* were excluded from the Lord's supper. This was only the case with the *incestuous person* at Corinth; nor was he excluded from the Lord's supper in particular; but the christians were forbid, in general, to have any society or connection with him; probably that his conduct might not be a disgrace to the christian name. And have not I supposed *ex-communication* in case of scandalous immorality? In this imperfect state, it is evidently our wisdom, to suffer many *tares to grow up with the wheat*. The proper time for separation is the day of judgment; when it will be done effectually and finally.

When I said, that the Lord's supper is *a solemn but chearful rite in remembrance of Christ, and of what he has done and suffered for the benefit of mankind* (in which you say, p. 47, *I evidently suppress a great part of the truth, and injuriously conceal what is absolutely necessary to be believed with the heart, before the Lord's supper can be received according to the great end of its appointment*) I thought I had omitted nothing that any christian could possibly think of on the occasion. If Christ was, as you say, *a propitiatory sacrifice*; then, according to my definition, the Lord's supper is a memorial of a propitiatory sacrifice. But according to you, no just account can be given of the Lord's supper, except we include in it all the articles of your particular creed; and therefore you say, p. 1, that *I have attacked*
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what all the churches of Christ are agreed in, and have struck at the only foundation of the christian's hope. But have not I the same right to include in my definition, all the articles of *my* particular creed, and to say that every account of the Lord's supper (and for the same reason of baptism, and every thing else belonging to christianity) is imperfect, in which I do not find them? I thought I had taken a method which must have given satisfaction to every body, when my definition (agreeable to the account of the institution in the scriptures) was such, as might have been adopted by you, and all believers in christianity, whatever their particular sentiments might be. But your objection to this is agreeable to your conduct in general; which is to allow no persons to be christians but yourselves, and to brand with the name of deists, atheists, or pagans, all that cannot subscribe to your particular tenets.

If I have not, in my short treatise on the Lord's supper, entered into so particular a discussion of what Christ did and suffered for the good of men; which you, p. 45, repeatedly call *a shameful deficiency*; it was because it was not my professed subject. I took it for granted that my readers knew what Christ had done and suffered. You might, for the same reason, have asked why I did not particularly explain *who* Christ, that did and suffered so much, was; and *for whom* he did and suffered it; and in this manner
have

have called upon me, as indeed you do, in several parts of this treatise, to enter into every controverted point of divinity. But all this I judged to be quite foreign to my purpose. All the branches of the mathematics have a dependence upon one another, but is there, therefore, a *shameful deficiency* in every treatise upon any one of them singly taken? This remark is an answer to the greater part of what you have written.

You say, p. 36: *I continually cover myself under ambiguous expressions and innuendo's, as if afraid to speak out my own meaning. Tell us plainly, you add, what you call incumbrances to the religion of Jesus, and what you call vulgar errors.* Now I thought I had been a very plain, and free-spoken man; and that most of my opinions had been sufficiently known already. You yourself say, p. 91, that *I fight with a high hand against the truth*; making use, I suppose, of a battle-ax, and not a stiletto; or in the open European manner, and not like the American bush-fighting; and indeed you seem to think you have had sagacity enough to find me out, notwithstanding all my covers. However, dear Sir, only wait with a little patience, and you may, perhaps, be gratified with a knowledge of what I may be able to say upon *some* of the subjects you have mentioned; though you must allow me to do it at my own time, and in my own way. But you need not be very eager in looking
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for it; for *you* are not the person with whom I shall chuse to have any controversy upon those subjects. If I engage in one at all, it shall be with a man who has some command of temper, and a competent knowledge of the subject; in both which respects, I cannot help saying, you have given proofs of your being very deficient. Besides, you and I think so very differently, that we should have too far to go back, before we could come at any *common principles* to argue from.

My method of quoting all that the evangelists have said relating to the Lord's supper, you say, p. 42, *is very absurd*; that, *before I published my account, I ought to have known how fully the absurdity of this method had been exposed*; and for this purpose you produce a long quotation from some book, which you suppose I must have read; but you over-rate my acquaintance with books. I never saw the paragraph you quote before, nor do I, at this time, know whose it is. For any thing that I can tell, it may be an extract from some piece of your own; for I have not yet had the pleasure of perusing any thing of yours, besides the piece I am now animadverting upon.

You say, p. 44, I have *repeated, and affirmed in print, that nothing is overlooked, or concealed from my readers, necessary to an account of the nature and design of the Lord's supper, merely because I have placed before them the form of the institution.* But is this, Sir, a fair account of what I have asserted?

asserted? I have not *merely* placed before my readers the *form of the institution*; but have also quoted every text in the scriptures that has any relation to it, and have *commented* upon all the difficult passages that occur in them; and I cannot conceive what could have been expected more.

I have not proved, you say, p. 6, *neither is it in my power to prove, that there is one tittle of superstition either in the articles of the church of England, or in the Assembly's catechism on the subject of the Lord's supper; unless I can prove it to be superstition to maintain the reality of divine grace, and the vouchsafement of that grace to believers, duly observing the ordinances of God's own appointment; and with an aukward kind of parade, you say, that when I have proved this, I shall be your great Apollo; and that, in token of your thorough conversion to my philosophy, you will burn your bible, as a book of lies.* But how could you imagine I should undertake to prove any such thing, when you say, p. 58, *that you find in my book (notwithstanding the shameful deficiencies of it) every thing that is contained in your 25th article.* Indeed I fancy that I believe as much of *divine grace* as you do, perhaps something more; and also that the grace of God attends all believers in the due observance of his ordinances; but I apprehend that you must prove some *peculiar advantage* of this ordinance, above others, with respect to the communication of
divine

divine grace, before you can clear the above-mentioned books of the charge of superstition, and for this, I imagine, there is no foundation in the scriptures. This point, on which the whole of the argument turns, you have not so much as touched upon.

Pretending, as you do, to write for those *Dissenters*, whose opinions and practices I combat, you ought to have brought proofs from the scriptures, in vindication of those customs among them, which I censure as *unscriptural*. These things are not, indeed, provided for in the constitution of *your church*, superstitious as it is (and, therefore, I said, that the Dissenters have gone deeper into this superstition than you have) but being *employed* by Dissenters, you should have considered yourself as their advocate, have entered into their sentiments, and have pleaded their cause.

Really, Sir, I am afraid that *your dissenting brethren*, and *employers*, will have but little reason to applaud themselves for the choice they have made of your pen, when they consider how indifferently you have discharged the trust they reposed in you.

If you were conscious that you could not defend the peculiar principles and practices of the Dissenters on this subject, you had a sufficient reason for declining the compliment they paid you. But I cannot help suspecting that, thro' your great *willingness* to undertake this business,
you

you concealed from them the peculiar difficulties, which, as a minister in the church of England, you would necessarily lie under, in vindicating the practices of Dissenters.

By the way, I would advise you, Sir, not to be so very ready, upon every occasion, *to burn your bible*. You have a great deal to learn from it yet. For my own part, notwithstanding that you suppose I hold it very cheap, I could, with pleasure, spend the remainder of my life in the study of it, as the only rule of faith and manners.

In many other parts of your book, you make the same strange and aukward proposals of renouncing your bible (as *a heap of impious nonsense*, p. 20.) and your christianity, if my opinions be true; and (firmly persuaded as I am that they are true, and founded on truths revealed in those scriptures, the authority of which you risk so lightly) I cannot help being shocked at such expressions. They certainly show that you are *fully persuaded in your own mind*; and this I suppose is all the purpose they were intended to answer. I also am, perhaps, as fully persuaded in my own mind as you are; yet I should not chuse to make use of such a method of expressing it. I do not think it *decent*, or consistent with the reverence with which we ought always to speak of those sacred books. Cannot you find something of less value than the *scriptures*, and *christianity*, to pledge upon the truth of your opinions? Were

Were I in your place, I should think it more decent to say, I would hang, drown, or shoot myself, if it appeared that I was mistaken. But in this, you may say, I speak in character; for, as you observe, p. 82, we new schemers, both practice, and plead for suicide.

You blame me, p. 62, for *branding*, as you say, *the great and good Mr. Henry*. I meant no such thing; and I believe I have as high an opinion of the real worth of that man as you have, notwithstanding my opinion of his superstitious account of the Lord's supper. Besides, I barely *mentioned* the title of his chapter, which you own to be *a quaint one*; so that, if there be any ridicule, it is such as it has drawn upon itself, without my assistance. But even such a title as that necessarily conveys what I call superstitious ideas, and therefore deserves that kind of notice that I took of it.

I observed that *the censure which St. Paul passes upon the unworthy communicants at Corinth, relates wholly to such a manner of receiving this ordinance, as is no where practised at this day in any christian country, because the Corinthians ate and drank to excess on that occasion*; and really I did not expect that a remark, which I still think extremely just and obvious, would ever have been called in question. Yet you say, p. 48, that *it will follow, by the justest inference, that the same censure is perfectly applicable to others*; and you particularly *appeal to the whole body of*

real christians, whether Socinians, as well as infidels, hypocrites, and Pharisees, receiving the sacrament, are not in a state of heart as diametrically opposite to what men ought to bring with them to the Lord's table, as if they were then actually overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness. You, Sir, appeal to those whom you are pleased to call *real christians*, that is, to those who are of your own opinion, and who must be very impartial judges between us, to be sure. I appeal to *common sense*, and notwithstanding your peculiar method of reasoning about the matter (which I think not worth my while to examine) I abide by my first assertion. By such logic as yours, every Arian or Socinian, *as such*, may be represented as a profane swearer, a drunkard, a murderer, or whatever you please to make him.

In as bad a light as you consider *Socinians, infidels, hypocrites, and Pharisees* in receiving the Lord's supper, p. 8. I apprehend that you, Sir, as a clergyman of the church of England, are not at liberty to refuse administering it to them; so that you must either make yourself a partaker of their enormous guilt, or be suspended. If this be true, and all your conscientious ministers be laid under such difficulties as these, by the constitution of your church, how can you wonder that men of reason and religion should reflect upon it. If by *abusing very freely*, as you say, p. 56, *my manner is, the church of England*, you mean

mean bringing a *false charge* against it, I deny the accusation. If you mean that I speak with contempt and indignation concerning such things as these, I admit the charge. But if it move the indignation of a person only to *see* the difficulties you labour under, how *must*, at least, how *ought* you to be affected, who *feel* them?

SECTION II.

HAVING made as many remarks as I think are at all necessary, relating to the proper subject of our debate, I come, in the next place, to what is by far the most considerable part of your treatise, and without which your observations on my *plain account of the Lord's supper* would have made a poor figure indeed; I mean the view you have given the public of my *sentiments* in matters of religion, and of my *heart*. In this I can make no mistake in applying to myself, whatever you say of *free thinkers, free inquirers, new schemers, or Socinians*; for you scruple not to bestow any of these opprobrious appellations, and many more, promiscuously, to the same set of people. If they be not meant for me, I can see no meaning that they have on this occasion; and I really believe I am as much of what you are pleased to call a *new*

schemer, as any other person you can have in view.

In many things I admit your charge, without being ashamed of it. *After the manner which you call HERESY, so worship I the God of my fathers.* In other things, some of which I shall particularly recite, let the impartial judge betwixt us; and remember that *the God of truth sees, and knows us both.*

We new schemers, are, as you say, p. 8, *the determined adversaries of the Reformers.* We look down upon them all as a parcel of old fools, p. 28. *We set our faces, to a man, against them, and all their adherents.* We constantly dwell on these self-exalting ideas, till we are bloated with the conceit of our own rare abilities, as the only connoisseurs in religion.

In reply to all this curious eloquence, I can only say, that I believe I have, to the full, as high an esteem and veneration for those whom you call *Reformers*, as you have. Perhaps I may be able to conceive more justly of their merit, in consequence of having, like them, rectified (as I think) the errors in which I was educated.

You say, p. 12, *Let common sense judge whether a more impudent vanity can be conceived, than for free inquirers, of all people in the world, to exalt themselves above the Reformers in matters of a religious nature.* But, dear Sir, doth not a pigmy, standing on the head of a giant, see farther than the giant can do. I dare say you think yourself,



self, in many respects, wiser than Solomon himself, and without thinking yourself chargeable with any impudent vanity on that account. Besides, who are they that we must call *Reformers*, and by the opinions of which of them must we abide? Did not Calvin see farther than Luther, or do you rest where Luther did, and admit the doctrine of consubstantiation? Would you exactly follow the steps of Calvin; then you must use sports on the Lord's day, and instead of *writing* against, *burn* me at a stake, as he did Servetus. If the Reformers themselves differed from one another, why may not we differ from them all? You will hardly maintain their inspiration. What authority have you to suppose, that the Divine Being confined the reformation to that particular age? Is it not much more probable, that it was only begun then, and that it is our duty to carry it on.

Many of those tenets which you, by way of emphasis, term *the doctrines of the Reformers*, you acknowledge were not the opinions of the Reformers *as such*. They were held by them in common with the Papists, from whom they separated. How then can the authority of the Reformers give them any weight? Might you not, with as much propriety, alledge their authority for the belief of the being of a God, or that Mohanmed was an impostor. What, then, is your availing yourself of the name and authority of the Reformers in this case, but an

unfair and unworthy *artifice*, to inflame the passions of your readers, and make your adversaries obnoxious to their blind resentment?

Besides, have not I a right to consider Servetus, and Socinus in the light of Reformers, as well as Luther and Calvin? They, like them, were men who departed from the errors of popery. They were nearly cotemporary with those you call Reformers, and, in my opinion, carried the reformation farther than they did. But as you admit none to be called *christians*, but those who think as you do, with respect to the doctrines of christianity; so, in the same arbitrary manner, you will admit none to the high rank of *Reformers*, but those who reformed just as far as you approve of.

We rely, you say, p. 10. on the force of the human understanding to investigate truth, not on divine teachings. According to you, p. 86. we hold that the faculty of man is of itself sufficient to determine what it becomes Jehovah to reveal of himself, his councils, and his way of saving his rebellious creatures. Nay more, you assert, p. 35. that we believe no divine teachings. We speak great swelling words of man's power and excellence, though unenlightened and unrenewed; but not a word is heard from us of the spiritual blessings in heavenly things, which are, through grace and faith, the portion of real christians. Now really, Mr. Venn, I do not believe that we new-schemers, though called by you, *sons of pride*, p. 23, have
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any higher ideas of our own understandings than you have of yours ; and surely you will not say, that you make *no use* of yours in the investigation of religious truths. If you do not, be pleased to inform us by what extraordinary faculty you have attained this comprehensive and clear conception of those truths, and wherein it differs from what is called fancy and imagination in other men. In the mean time you must allow us to suppose, that you have employed your understanding on these subjects as well as we ; and to conclude, from the confident manner in which you assert your sentiments of them, that you have conceived much higher notions of its penetration and accuracy, than we durst ever presume to entertain of ours. It appears to our poor apprehensions, that the gospel is addressed to the reason and understanding of mankind. We are told also, that the author of it delivered this demand, *Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand.* We conceive, that *ourselves* also are comprehended under the obligation of this demand ; and if, while we employ our attention and understanding on what he hath taught, in the most serious and careful manner we are able, we be so unfortunate as to conceive somewhat differently from you, concerning the sense of some particular doctrines, we cannot help it. The command above-mentioned gives us no directions, nay, we conceive that it plainly infers a prohibition to resign our
under-

understandings to you, or any man, and receive your decisions with implicit acquiescence. You, Sir, in a full confidence, superior to all doubt or hesitation, concerning their absolute certainty may, as you do, be ready to stake your bible, nay, even be willing to pledge all your hopes of salvation upon the genuine orthodoxy of your sentiments; yet, pardon us, we must not, we dare not pay you the homage of our faith, which is due only to our one Father in heaven, our one Master, Jesus the Christ; awefully reverencing that declaration of his, *The word which I* (N. B. not Mr. Venn) *have spoken, the same shall judge you at the last day*, when we must give an account of the fidelity wherewith we have improved those two most valuable, and perfectly corresponding talents, our bibles and our understandings. For my own part, I believe the absolute necessity of divine teachings, and of a supernatural revelation, in order to the knowledge and worship of the true God. I believe that he himself is the only judge of what he is to reveal of himself, and when, and how to make the revelation. And, if I know my own heart, I thank him, with my whole soul, for the important discoveries he has been pleased to communicate to us; and especially that life and immortality are brought to light in the gospel of his son Jesus Christ.

In more than one passage of your book you will have it, that we new schemers, and myself in particular, *disclaim the divine authority of the scriptures.*

scriptures. Because I say that *the sacred books have come to us in the common course of divine providence,* you conclude, p. 52, that *I think myself at full liberty to take or refuse, as I please, of the things they record, just as much as with any common writers.* You say, that it is *a language blasphemous and execrable, to call those writings the word of God, when, according to my broad hint, they are the words of man and no more.* You say, p. 10, that *concerning inspiration itself we are very doubtful, regarding some parts of the bible as of suspicious authority; and that, with respect to the whole, we insist on a right to reject whatever appears to us unreasonable, be the words which affirm it ever so plain.*

Lastly, in proof of what you advance on this subject, you say, in a note, p. 27. *Dr. Priestley, in his catechism for children and young persons, published in 1767, instead of teaching them, as was the old orthodox fashion, down from the apostles, that all scripture was given by inspiration of God, would have them esteemed no more than a collection of books written by good men.* Now I will venture to recite this very question and answer *at full length,* as a sufficient proof of the weakness, to say nothing worse, of your charge. For if you read the former part of this answer, I may well presume that you read the latter part too, since the whole of it is contained in a very few lines.

Qu.

Qu. *What is the bible?*

An. The bible is a collection of books written by good men, containing an account of what God has done for mankind, what he requires of them, and what they have to expect from him.

If now, as you assert elsewhere, I believed *no divine teachings*, or inspiration, which way could I suppose that these good men became acquainted with what God has done for mankind, what he requires of them, and what they have to expect from him? If this does not evidently imply *divine communications* with these good men, I do not know what does. However, the language I have chose is the most proper that I could think of for the capacities of children. But possibly you, like the compilers of the Assembly's catechism, and many others, would have them drawn up for the purpose of *systems, creeds, or confessions of faith*, which is by no means my idea of the nature and proper use of catechisms.

There is no trace, you say, p. 35. in our writings, of the detestable properties of sin, not a trace of evangelical humiliation for it. Nay, if you are to be believed, p. 86, we maintain, that *sin is the inevitable effect of the imperfection of creatures, for which, therefore, to suppose the curse of the law incurred, is unmanly and illiberal.* Be pleased, Sir, to explain your meaning, and name the writers you refer to. We, new schemers, think that we believe as much as you old schemers, concerning

cerning the heinous nature of sin, and the wrath of God due to it, and preach it too.

If you are to be credited, we new schemers maintain, p. 86. that *men may merit the rewards of heaven by their own works, and that they have power to save themselves; that we preach a religion that contains no glad tidings of good things, no remission of sins, no mediator, no redeemer, p. 14. Our religion is nothing more than a bare rule of life, enforced by the revelation of a resurrection, p. 80, &c. &c. &c.* These are calumnies so impudent, that one is at a loss how to go about to refute them; and this, Sir, is exactly my case with respect to this, and many other of your accusations. This charge of yours is, however, very consistent with the former; for if we believe that the curse of God is not due to sin, what occasion is there for the doctrine of remission. But though we believe as much as you of the anger of God due to sin, we also believe that *to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him.* This is the grateful doctrine that Christ preached, and that we preach; and we think it to be *worthy of all acceptation*, a doctrine that contains *glad tidings of good things.*

If you are to be credited, p. 11, *instead of strenuously opposing the world, and vigorously attacking the vassals of pride, ambition, and avarice; we give them no molestation.* And with an air of boasting and arrogance almost peculiar to yourself,

self, you ask, *In what society of the free-inquiring stamp is it found, that their doctrines have the success promised to the preaching of the truth. Where are the lewd made chaste, the profane pious, the passionate meek, or the niggard bountiful.* According to you, then, we preach neither *faith*, nor *good works*. We think, however, that we preach both, in the scripture sense of the words, and we hope with some success too; though, with the prophet, we may sometimes say, *Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed.*

To enforce virtue, you say, p. 10. *we use moral arguments, not the command of the Almighty; its own natural advantages, not his express promises. To deter from vice, we urge its present evil effects upon men's worldly interests; very faintly, and very seldom, the wrath to come. We dwell on the branches of natural religion, not on the peculiar articles of revealed, &c. &c.* How consistent this charge is with that in the last paragraph, in which you represent us as *not preaching to enforce virtue at all*, I leave you to make out. But, passing by this inconsistency, I think I may challenge you to produce a single person, who has heard me long enough to be a judge, whether you have given a just account of the general strain of my preaching; and I am what you call a new schemer.

Will you labour, you say, p. 77, to appease an enraged conscience, by telling men (where your scheme
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with many terminates) that future punishment, and the wrath of God against sin, is a mere bugbear. This, you say, will not administer the least degree of relief, because, upon these very free principles, their presumption in gratifying their vile lusts was founded. Tush, say they, there will no harm happen unto us. Is there knowledge in the Most High? Cannot we repent when we will, and by repentance intitle ourselves to his favour. Well may you conclude this extraordinary account, with an appeal to every man, whether these notions (nearly the sum and substance, you say, of our rational principles) do not embolden men in their wickedness. But, dear Sir, this is the sum and substance of a religion, that has no existence but in your own brain.

You talk of my *blind rage*; pray, Sir, hath not your rage blinded you, so that you cannot see the manifest inconsistency of this strange account of our practical principles; for what signifies repentance, or the prospect of thereby entitling ourselves to the divine favour, if, as you say, we believe that God has no anger against sin; or if he had, he has no knowledge of our vices. According to your account of the new schemers, they are, to all intents and purposes, as much atheists, as Epicurus himself, or Lucretius after him.

Really, Sir, I am quite tired with following this phantom of your own raising. In the very same manner you may raise a thousand more,
and

and much entertainment may the pursuit of them yield you. If we really think and preach in the manner you are pleased to represent, it can be no wonder that, as you boast, p. 70, *virtuous conduct abounds more among you than among us.*

I observed, that *such a foundation hath the God of nature laid for the practice of virtue in our hearts, that it is hardly in the power of any error in our heads to erase it*; and it was an observation for which you ought to have thanked me: for were it not for this principle, who could pay any regard to moral conduct, and, at the same time, believe, as you profess to do, and as I have represented it. Instead of this, your comment upon my words, is very remarkable; observing, p. 67, that *in plain English I say, that men need be under no apprehension concerning their creed, be it what it may, since there is a certain antiseptic quality, as physicians call it, interwoven in our frame, which expels the bane of all false doctrine, however plentifully imbibed; and that from this time forward, truth can claim no pre-eminence over error; because it is as good for the soul to be without knowledge, as to have a right judgment in all things; which, you say, is one of the many precious consequences, which necessarily flow from my wild positions. In this, you say, we perfectly resemble the heathen, who made an intercommunity in the worship of their dungbill deities. Also, p. 10, you say, that we free inquirers maintain the innocence*
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of error. *This pernicious assertion*, as you call it, you seriously labour to confute, under five distinct heads, extracted, I suppose, from one of your sermons. But do you seriously think, that if I had imagined religious knowledge to have been a thing of no consequence, that I should have taken any pains to promote it.

Notwithstanding I advance, what I know to be true, and for the truth of which I appeal to any person who knows the world, and is acquainted with the usual acceptation of terms in the English language, that *some deists are men of the most irreproachable conduct in life*; I admit the observation you have quoted from my favourite author, Dr. Hartley; and from a serious conviction of the truth of it, one of the principal objects I have in view is to establish christianity on the surest foundations, particularly by freeing it from the corruptions which, at present, disfigure it, and prevent its reception in the world.

By the way, I cannot help wondering how you could possibly speak of this most excellent writer, as my *favourite*, and, at the same time, represent my sentiments as so exceedingly libertine, and all new schemers as absolutely destitute of seriousness; when, if you have really read that book at all, you must have perceived, in every page of it, marks of the warmest benevolence and devotion too. Next to the bible, *Hartley's Observations on Man*, is the book that I have recourse

course to, when I would read to do my heart good, though this work is too philosophical to be recommended to the generality of readers. Had you read that book a little more, you could not have written in the spirit that you have done.

Similar to the conclusion you have drawn in the last paragraph, is your candid remark upon my saying, that *I do not censure any man, or body of men, who do not chuse to celebrate this institution.* Mark, you say, p. 65, *the expression CHUSE.* Very well, let candour mark it, and it will be construed to refer to those who do not chuse, *through conviction of mind, or invincible prejudice;* to whom, I doubt not, the Divine Being will be favourable, and whom I, therefore, do not think it my business to censure. Others who, through a different influence, do not chuse to celebrate this institution, I *do* censure, and pretty severely, in the book itself. But of this, according to your general conduct, observed before, you have not thought proper to take any notice.

By this time I hope my reader will be prepared for the last charge you bring against me, which is that of *deism*. At first you advance it with some degree of diffidence, saying, p. 14, *I have my ne plus ultra somewhere; but whether at all short of absolute deism who can tell.* P. 15, you hint, that *my enlarged way of thinking is retailed from Toland and Tindall, and that I take the surest way to sink revealed religion down to mere deism.*

deism. Our *scepticism*, p. 17, is as destructive an enemy to the soul, as absolute infidelity. In p. 29, you represent the triumph of the whole conclave of *deists*, upon reading one of my paragraphs, and, in imitation of the ancient classics, you put a speech into the mouth of their chairman, which would be in the taste of Attic eloquence, were it not for a *pun* upon my name; for I cannot help thinking you had a view to it, when you repeat the word *priest* three times over; printing it in Italics, and capitals; and when you speak of a *priest nurtured in the strictest sect of the carpenter's religion*, you allude, I suppose, to my education. In p. 34, you say *we cavil at, and renounce what is peculiarly christian*; and, p. 69, that *we reject the authority of the Lord of conscience himself in matters of faith*. Lastly, being now grown warm, and bolder by this prolusion, you say, p. 88, that *my insinuations are enough, in spite of charity itself* (of which you, Sir, are certainly possessed of a sufficient quantity) *to make you believe, I am not a whit better than a RANK DEIST at the bottom*. I suppose there is some difference between a *deist*, and a *rank deist*; but as you have not been pleased to inform us wherein it consists, I can only conjecture, that by a *simple deist* you mean a deist of no long standing; and that by *rank deist*, you mean one who has been so long dead to christianity, that he is become quite *putrid, and offensive to your nostrils*.

Notwithstanding your extreme alertness in discovering heresy, and your talking so much about *deists*, and *rank deists*, I really question whether you have so much as consulted your dictionary to inform yourself what is the common acceptance of the word *deist*; for you say, p. 20, that *upon the new scheme, all the difference between christians and infidels will vanish; or, at most, the difference must consist in this alone, that infidels may vilify Jesus as an impostor, while these upstart christians, formed after your model, will regard him as a man employed by God to republish the law of nature, to be an example of virtue, to ascertain a resurrection, and, perhaps, to be the judge of the world.* Here the word *perhaps* seems to insinuate, that some of us do not believe that Christ will judge the world; but this insinuation is to be considered in the same light as all the rest that you have made. Yet in another place, p. 32, you say *we maintain, that the bible discovers nothing more to us than we knew from the light of nature, or might have known from the right use of our faculties.* Certainly, Mr. Venn, we, or you must have formed a very high opinion of the human faculties, to think that by the help of them we could have made the discovery of a resurrection, and that even, *perhaps*, Christ would judge the world.

As you seem to have such good intelligence concerning the *conclave of deists*, I wish, if it be no secret, that you would be pleased to inform
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me, and the rest of the world, where this general assembly is held; because, if all the deists in the nation, or only their representatives, the *rank deists*, meet in any one place, one might make some use of the information. But I cannot whisper, or give *memento's*, as you do, p. 57, in a book that is open to all the world.

I do not know whether it will be deemed any aggravation of your charge, that, after calling me a *rank deist*, you insinuate that I am a *pagan* also, when you say, p. 58, that *I had better pass over the articles of the church of England in silence, and establish, by the best arguments that I can invent, my own pagan ideas in religion.* I think if I had gone so far, and upon such grounds as these, I would have advanced a step farther. Indeed you do half advance it; for by laying the stress that you do upon my quoting an atheistical poet, and by putting atheistical language into the mouth of a dying new-schemer, you half insinuate that I am an atheist. By these helps your charge is now complete. As a deist, I believe in *one God*; as a pagan, I believe in *many Gods*, and as an atheist, I believe in *no God* at all. This would have been a fine round sentence, and for truth and consistence, would have been sufficiently of a piece with the rest of your pamphlet.

Perhaps you thought it necessary, to complete the character of new schemers, as deists, pagans, or atheists, that we should maintain the

lawfulness of *suicide*, and practice it too; and therefore you do not hesitate, p. 82, to ascribe both the opinion and practice to us. According to our scheme, you say, p. 81, *men have no inbred depravity to confess; and if they can but imagine they have acted their part well, they are taught to cherish a consciousness of their own merit. Possessed with self-complacency, you say, we can be in very good humour with divine providence, so long as our prosperity continues; but that our scheme excites murmurings, and often impious accusations against God, whenever his hand lies heavy upon us. In this case, enraged at what we judge to be an undeserved fate, we are instigated to destroy a life, become intolerable to our haughty spirits. Pride, inspired by a consciousness of virtue, according to the new scheme, inflames the wound of deep affliction, till distraction of mind ensues, and strangling is chosen rather than life. And indeed, you say, as if conscious that our free principles can do nothing to assuage the anguish, which desperately impells us to this catastrophe, it is common to hear many of us openly plead for the lawfulness of suicide. Pray, Sir, have you never heard of our pleading for the lawfulness of killing others, as well as ourselves? If not, you are not yet acquainted with all the depths of the new scheme, notwithstanding the care you seem to have taken to inform yourself concerning the rise, progress, and end of it.*

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The reader having been entertained with such a *caricatura*, as you have been pleased to sketch out, of our *principles*, which you say, p. 33. *are the same which the Holy Ghost calls damnable heresies*, he will not be surprized at the picture you draw of our hearts; and particularly of our intolerable *pride*, some elegant specimens of which I have produced already. You say, p. 35, that *we give up the meek, lowly temper of a christian, for the boastful, detestable temper of a Pharisee, or a Stoic*. You call us, p. 23, *the sons of pride*. *We bear*, you say, p. 12. *stamped on our foreheads the features of those who, in the scriptures, are called the disputers of this world, wise in our own eyes, and prudent in our own sight; and by keeping out of sight what revelation holds capital, and urging an earth-born feeble system of our own, open the way, in due time, for a bare-faced revolt from the authority of all revealed religion*. According to your prophecy, therefore, we shall, in due time, declare ourselves to all the world to be as *rank deists*, as you have had the sagacity to find out we are, *at the bottom*, already.

Our pride and conceit, it seems, are greatly subservient to our artifice and deceitful *sophistry*; for which you also celebrate us. *This delicious flattery*, you say, with great beauty and propriety of metaphor, p. 8. *is of great service to our cause; for by this slight of hand*, whereby we give ourselves out as the only judges of what ought to pass for pure christianity, *we put* A CLOUD of

witnesses, all directly against us, UNDER THE HATCHES. I will not dispute the propriety of this metaphor. It is very possible you may be a better seaman than I am, and may have seen *clouds put under hatches.* In the same strain you say, p. 10, that *we new schemers confide more in debate, where sophistry can use all its arts, than in humble prayer; at least, that we are always loud and violent in pleading for the former, but about the efficacy of the latter, we are silent as death.* I do not remember that I was ever loud and violent in pleading for debate and sophistry, how loud and violent soever I may have been when I have made use of them in any cause. Whether I pray or not, is known to God. If I believed nothing of the efficacy of prayer, I think I should not have composed or published any forms of prayer, or have recommended *family prayer* as I have done; but you may think there is some sophistry at the bottom even of this; for you seem to have formed the most strange and formidable idea of our subtlety and prevarication.

You say, p. 63, that *dealing after a subtle manner with the scriptures, my treatise seems to be a studied design intirely to pervert the words of our Lord; an elaborate device to give a view of the Lord's supper totally different from what he himself has given of it.* You say, p. 47, that *by evasion, I have evidently suppressed a great part of the truth, and injuriously concealed what is absolutely necessary to be believed;* and p. 51, that *I have artfully concealed,*

concealed, without positively denying, the very doctrines which the words of the sacred institution emphatically express. Is then my account of the Lord's supper so *evidently* contrary to truth, and the scriptures, that I cannot even have imposed upon myself by it? What end can you suppose I had in endeavouring, by sophistry, to convince others of what I myself knew to be false?

In more than one passage of my book, you say, p. 63, that I have overshot the mark, and from a blind rage against what I mistake for superstition, strike at the very power of godliness itself; and also that, in more than one passage, I publicly bewray the state of my own heart, respecting the grand subjects of revelation itself. Lastly, declaiming against what you call our opinions, p. 80, you call them a proud and detestable imagination, which no one, endued with a single grain of sincerity, can ever embrace.

You, Mr. Venn, who profess so great a reverence for the scriptures, did you never, in all the time you have been employed in meditating and executing your answer to my treatise, recollect any of their excellent admonitions about *judging others*; particularly that the Old Testament says, *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour*; and the New, *Judge not that ye be not judged*; and also that *we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.* My conduct, you say, p. 51, carries an awful appearance indeed, and so it would, if it were such as you have represented

fented it; but according to my poor notions, it is the spirit and tenor of *your* pamphlet that carry the awful appearance.

As the character you have given of the new scheme, and us the patrons of it, lies scattered in very distant places of your work, and as my remarks upon it, though connected, have taken up a good deal of room; I shall, for your benefit, and that of our readers, bring the several parts of it together. By this means, those who are acquainted with us will be better able to judge of the likeness, and of your skill in drawing. Also if any foreigner should think it worth his while to draw up an account of the several sects of *upstart christians* in England, he may find that of the *new schemers* done to his hand.

According to you, Sir, then, we infatuated new schemers, believing sin to be the unavoidable consequence of the imperfection of creatures, think it unmanly and illiberal to suppose the wrath of God to be due to it. In consequence of this, there is not, in all our writings, a single word concerning the heinous nature of sin, or a trace of evangelical humiliation for it, and about the efficacy of prayer we are silent as death. We claim heaven by our own works, discard the doctrine of a mediator, or redeemer, and preach a religion which contains no remission of sin. Bloating with the conceit of our own rare abilities, as the only connoisseurs in religion, we rely on the force of the human understanding, and not on divine teachings, and think

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ourselves better judges than God himself, of what is proper to be revealed to us. When the revelation is made, we not only make no scruple, but insist upon a *right*, to reject whatever appears to us unreasonable, how plain soever it be expressed in the books which contain the revelation. But this is not to be wondered at, since we believe nothing of the inspiration, or divine authority of the books, and consider the bible as the word of man, and not as the word of God. If, however, we think it worth our while, and that it will answer any end, to have recourse to the scriptures, being fond of sophistry, dextrous in the management of it, and loud and violent in the use of it, we read with a studied design to pervert the words of it, and employ elaborate devices to give views of things totally different from what they are in reality. As to the Reformers, who lay such a foolish stress on the scriptures, believing them to be the rule of faith and manners, we are their determined adversaries, and look upon them all as a parcel of old fools. Indeed, as to knowledge of any kind, we think it of no sort of consequence, believing it to be as good for the soul to be without it, as to excel in it. Rejecting the bible, as a book which contains a great deal of some kind of knowledge, we sink revealed religion into mere deism; and no wonder, since, at the bottom, we are no better than rank deists ourselves, and are paving the
way

way for an open revolt from all revealed religion.

When we preach, if we enforce virtue and dissuade from vice at all, it is by means of moral arguments, scorning to make use of the authority of God, or the peculiar motives of the gospel. But, indeed, the promoting of virtue is no part of our concern, for we flatter men's vices, and give no sort of molestation to those who are addicted to them. Through a blind rage, we strike at the power of godliness itself, and cannot help bewraying the state of our hearts. We are the sons of pride, and cannot be endued with a single grain of sincerity.

In consequence of all this, our preaching is observed not to have the effect that is promised to the preaching of the truth, but all manner of vice and wickedness prevail among us. After the profligate lives we lead, we comfort ourselves, when we come to die, with the belief that future punishment, and the wrath of God against sin, are mere bugbears. We say *no harm can happen to us, since there is no knowledge in the Most High*. If these consolations fail, we make no scruple of dispatching ourselves, I suppose, that we may get to hell the sooner; and in order that our companions in infidelity and wickedness may follow us as fast as possible, we are careful to leave behind us arguments in defence of suicide. This I should imagine, you, Mr. Venn, would think a very happy issue,
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provided we did but all do it at once, that so the earth might be fairly rid of such monsters; and that you, and those whom you call *the orthodox, the saints, and the whole body of real christians*, might have it all to yourselves.

SECTION III.

CERTAINLY, Sir, when you were collecting materials for your answer to my treatise, you raked together the opinions of all kinds of unbelievers, of christianity or orthodoxy, without distinction, and without considering how inconsistent many of them were with others, have heaped them indiscriminately on my devoted head.

In this manner have you been dressing up a bugbear out of your own imagination, and having the best right, that of *creation*, to give it what name you please, have called it a *new schemer*, and have been combating it with all imaginable success, to your own great satisfaction, no doubt, and that of your admirers. It is a satisfaction which I by no means envy you. I might, in my turn, have replied, by exhibiting a frightful picture of your peculiar scheme of religion, and of its effects upon the lives and hearts of men: for, notwithstanding your boasting, I really believe it to be not very favourable to
virtue

virtue and genuine christianity ; and I should have had little occasion to look farther than the pamphlet before me, for the proof of my assertion ; but I shall not do any thing of this nature in my answer to you.

What I say, is not out of any prejudice against you personally, or as *a Calvinist*, but merely in vindication of my own character, and that of those whom you call *new schemers*. As far as you are *of the truth*, and preach *the truth as it is in Jesus*, so far I heartily wish you *God speed*.

I firmly believe there is a wise superintending providence, with respect to all the sects and parties into which the christian name is broken, and I believe there is not one of them without its use in the whole scheme.

I rejoice in the peculiarly seasonable rise and spread of *Methodism*, in all its forms, as calculated to excite an attention to a future world, and a regard to that temper and conduct which will fit us for it, in many people, who were out of the reach of other methods of instruction. This, I hope, is the great object of the leading men among the Methodists, notwithstanding the *heterogeneous matter* which, through human infirmity, has mixed itself with their scheme. In other respects, too, I consider the Methodists, and those of the more serious clergy who favour them, and in some measure join them, in a light of importance.

Both they and you may do some kinds of good that are not easily within my reach ; and,
far

far from obstructing you, I rejoice in the prospect and consideration of it. I trust, also, that, notwithstanding your opposition (arising, I believe, from prejudice and ignorance, not from a hatred of the truth) God will bless my sincere endeavours to procure light for myself, and to diffuse it among others. With this view, among other schemes, I have opened the *Theological Repository*, which you are pleased to make the subject of your unmeaning sneers. I hope also, notwithstanding your opinion of the licentiousness of my principles, and of the badness of my heart, that, through the divine blessing, I shall not labour in vain, in another scheme which I have equally at heart, which is to promote the interest of *practical*, as well as, and in conjunction with, that of *rational* christianity.

Convinced as I am of the utility of several practices, which, in consequence of having been abused, have been too much neglected by those who are called the more *rational* Dissenters (a term which I am, surely, as much at liberty to use, by way of distinction, as you are to assume the title of *orthodox*, for the same purpose) particularly catechizing of children, the observance of the Lord's supper, and family prayer; I have endeavoured to recommend them by plain serious *addresses* to the persons concerned; and though *my little good*, in this way, be *evil spoken of* by you and others, I shall continue, as I have opportunity, to do something more, in order to
promote

promote that *vital* and *practical religion*, which, notwithstanding your cavilling, p. 32, I still think to be all that is *fundamental*, or, if you please (since you are so very exact in the choice of your metaphors) all that is *essential* in it.

The time we have to spend in this world is, at best, short, and precarious. I would, therefore, be solicitous to employ it to the best purpose, according to the ability and opportunity I may be favoured with of being useful to mankind; and would, therefore, spend as little of it as possible in any thing that approaches to *altercation*; but the cause of truth and the public may, sometimes, require that the mouth of slander be stopped. In these disagreeable circumstances, however, I hope I shall always preserve the temper of a christian, who, in meekness, though with firmness and intrepidity, *reproves*, *rebukes*, and *exhorts* them that oppose themselves; remembering that I myself am fallible, and, notwithstanding all the care I have taken in changing and forming my sentiments, I may have been too precipitate, and be still mistaken.

I trust, however, that, of all the errors into which men are liable to be betrayed, I shall never be seduced into the belief, that any *involuntary errors* whatever (whether they be mine, yours, or those of my greatest adversaries) will render us obnoxious to the final wrath of God. I trust that I shall always believe that *light coming into the world* will never be the cause of condemnation

demnation to any, but to those *who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil*; who must, therefore, know when they incur it, and be conscious that they deserve it; and shall never consider any *heresy* as *damnable*, but that of those who are *self-condemned*. Having experienced an almost entire revolution in my own religious sentiments, and finding, I trust, my heart better, as well as my head clearer in consequence of it; I hope I shall ever be ready to make sufficient allowance for the prejudices of others, at the same time that the recollection of my former ignorance will make me zealous to inform them better.

When I first heard of your intended answer to my treatise, I was in hopes that I might have derived some advantage from it; that I should have been able, from your candour and attention to the subject, to have corrected some mistakes I might have fallen into, or, at least, to have amended some obnoxious expressions, which, through inadvertence, might have escaped me in it; but I am afraid that your performance will be of very little service to me in either of these respects, whenever mine comes to a third edition. I have, however, such an opinion of your good sense, and of my remarks on your answer together, as to think, that if ever you do republish it, you will be able to correct several things which, upon farther recollection, you will think too hasty and uncharitable. You call

call your examination *free* and *full*, and indeed, Sir, it is *very free*, and *very full*; but what *kind* of freedoms you have taken, or of *what* it is full, I hope you will never again think of with pleasure. To apologize for your freedom, you say, *Is there not a cause*; I answer, By no means; because no *good cause* can require *calumny* and *falsehood*.

You are pleased to express some degree of respect for us Protestant Dissenters, and indeed, I cannot help considering you as in a kind of connection with us, on account of your attention to, and interference in this business, which belongs to Dissenters only. You even expressly say, p. 1, (though in a style somewhat peculiar to yourself) that the man *who does not feel a high veneration for some of us, must be devoured by a preposterous horrible bigotry to his own way*; nevertheless, *an enemy*, as you declare yourself, *to all persecution*, you give me what you call a *memento*, to show me, *with what an ill grace I revile your thirty-nine articles*, by telling me, p. 57, *that if I have not subscribed thirty-three of them, one clause excepted, I appear and act in a character I have no more right to assume, than a Gentleman has to act as a Justice of peace without his commission; and that if, without subscribing, I take upon myself to be a teacher of religion, I act contrary to the law of the realm, in that case made and provided*. But I hope that the *commission* you speak of will not be demanded of me when I
give

give an account of my ministry to the great shepherd and bishop of souls. And as to the laws of this realm, *in this case made and provided*, let the makers and providers of them, and do you who approve of them, judge, whether it be better to obey God, or man.

You are pleased to call the intimation you here give me, concerning my being obnoxious to the laws of this country, a *memento*, and solemnly to *aver*, that you have not taken notice of this circumstance, to bring the least inconvenience upon any man; for that you abhor every sort of persecution on account of religion. But is not a *memento to me*, in a book advertised in all the public news-papers, and exposed to public sale throughout the kingdom, a *memento to the civil magistrate* also? Certainly, therefore, if any mischief should, by this means, befall me, my blood will be required at your hands.

I shall conclude with returning you thanks for the good-will you express for me in your last paragraph, in which you say *you wish me a rich experience of the power of those truths, against which I fight with a high hand; and that I may employ myself, from henceforth, in the service of the best of masters, and the cause of the truth, as it is in Jesus.* From henceforth, I suppose, means from the time that I should have read your pamphlet; which I, therefore, conclude was piously intended to effect my conversion from rank *deism*, to high *calvinism*. A great effect, to

be sure! but I doubt not you thought the means were adequate to it; though you must, certainly, have thought me to be made of very different materials from the rest of mankind; if you could imagine that I was to be brought over from my present way of thinking in matters of religion without argument, good temper, or decent language.

I would not, however, have my orthodox friends absolutely to despair of my conversion, though this attempt hath proved abortive. I trust that I shall always keep my mind open to conviction, and if they be not so precipitate in a second choice of a champion, but proceed with more deliberation (as becomes them in a matter of so much consequence) I may still yield with a good grace. For their encouragement, I can assure them, that nothing you have done has in the least prejudiced their cause with me (what it may have done with *others*, I cannot say, and am not answerable for) the perusal of your pamphlet having left no trace of sourness, peevishness, or obstinacy upon my mind, more than I was impressed with when I first took it into my hands, so that the business is still *in integro*. And if, in the issue, contrary to their present expectations, they should be convinced, as I have been, that the opinions which now excite their horror and indignation are, nevertheless, agreeable to reason and the scriptures; that we whom they regard as *deceivers*, are yet true to the
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interests of God and of Christ; and should themselves come to profess that faith which they now labour to destroy; I shall, with the christians at Jerusalem, in the case of St. Paul, *glorify God on that account*, and receive their *acknowledgement of the truth* with joy, and without insult.

With respect to you, Mr. Venn, there is one probability of my having made a better choice of my present opinions in preference to yours, which I once held, than you have made of your own; which is (as I suppose you will allow) that I understand your principles, and am not unacquainted with what has been said in favour of them; whereas you appear, in this pamphlet, to be utterly ignorant of mine.

As you inform us, p. 2, that *the duty of your office* concurred with the request of Dissenters, to induce you to animadvert upon my treatise; I may presume that, though the latter of these motives should happen to be withdrawn, the former will operate so much the more powerfully, that, joined with an additional motive, arising from the principle of *self-defence*, it will prompt you to write *another letter*, in answer to this. I shall, therefore, flatter myself with the expectation of hearing from you again, and in less than *two years*. Taking this for granted, I shall (in order to save you the trouble of writing, and myself and others the trouble of reading, a great deal of superfluous matter, and to
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point out to you a method of writing less favourable to rambling and repetition) state, as distinctly as I can, what will be expected from you; and without which any reply you can make will be deemed little to the purpose.

1. In the first place, I call upon you as a *theologian*, and *scripture critic*, to state, with precision, your idea of the *Lord's supper*; and, as I presume you will not deny it to be the same with that which is expressed (though in an awkward and confused manner) in your 39 articles; prove that *the sacraments are sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and of God's good will towards us; by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen, and confirm our faith in him*, in a manner either *different from*, or *superior to* the effects of other christian ordinances. Prove that the Lord's supper is any thing more than *a rite in commemoration of the death of Christ, and the blessings of his gospel*; implying a solemn and public declaration of a man's being a christian, and his resolution to live as becomes a christian. In short, prove it to be any thing more than I have represented it.

2. If you still chuse to appear as the *advocate of the orthodox Dissenters*, I call upon you to assign good reasons why those who are merely *nominal christians*, though of decent lives, and fair characters, but who are not able to make out any thing that, in their sense of the word, could

could be called an *experience*, should be excluded from the Lord's supper. Prove this either by plain texts of scripture, or by arguments drawn from the known practice of the primitive church.

3. On the other hand, as *a minister of the church of England*, show the propriety of admitting to communion, not only merely *nominal christians*, but also known *infidels*, and persons of notoriously *profligate lives*, when, according to our excellent constitutions, *for that end made and provided*, as you say, they are obliged to receive it, in order to be admitted to a civil office; and explain the reasonableness of compelling conscientious ministers to concur in this scandalous profanation of a solemn religious rite.

4. As *a writer*, vindicate the account you have given of the sentiments contained in my book. Show that you have quoted fairly, represented justly, and endeavoured to refute what I have really asserted, in answer to the first section of my remarks on your pamphlet.

5. As *a writer*, also, I particularly call upon you to cite your authorities for every article of the black account you have given of those persons whom you call *new schemers*, including myself. Prove that we are *the determined adversaries of the Reformers*; that it is our opinion, that *the faculty of man is of itself sufficient to determine what it becomes Jehovah to reveal of himself, his councils, and his way of saving his rebellious creatures*; that we believe *no divine teachings*; that we disclaim
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the divine authority of the scriptures; and that we insist upon a right to reject whatever appears to us unreasonable in them, be the words that affirm it ever so plain. Show me in which of our writings there is no trace of the detestable properties of sin, or of evangelical humiliation for it; and that we think it to be illiberal and unmanly to suppose the wrath of God incurred by it. Give the names of those of us who pretend to merit heaven by our own works, and a power to save ourselves. Give your reasons for asserting, that we preach a religion that contains no remission of sins, no mediator, and no redeemer. Prove that we give men no molestation in their vices, and that we do not make use of the commands of the Almighty to enforce virtue. Tell us what dying new-schemer was ever heard to say, Tush! there will no harm happen to us. Is there knowledge in the Most High? as a proof that our principles embolden men in their wickedness. Show in what respects we new-schemers resemble the heathen, in the intercommunity of their dunghill deities; how myself, in particular, am no better than a rank deist at the bottom, and that our notions in religion are pagan. Demonstrate, finally, that our principles impell us to self-murder, and prove that any of us ever openly pleaded for the lawfulness of suicide.

If you do not chuse to be considered as a mere calumniator, one who makes no scruple of using any means, how unfair soever, to bring an odium upon others, in order to gain some end of

of his own; let the public see what you have to advance in support of *all* these charges, and do it *fairly* and *fully*; unless you shall think it sufficient to prove your charge against us in the same manner as you have done, p. 72, that *old Enoch, the seventh from Adam, was as orthodox as good Mr. Henry himself*. As to what you say about our being the *sons of pride*, and every thing else concerning the *immoral tendency of our opinions*, I presume that what you have said will be deemed quite sufficient, and that you have no occasion to make any addition to it.

Lastly, as a thing of infinitely more consequence than all the above-mentioned articles, and which, I am afraid, will be a matter of some pain and difficulty to you, I desire you, *as a man, and a christian*, to lay your hand upon your heart, and question yourself concerning the real *temper of mind* in which you wrote to me, the *true motives* of your conduct, and the *end* you had in view, in endeavouring, as you have done, to expose me, and those whom you call *new-schemers*, to the odium and indignation of mankind. Of this you need make no public declaration. It concerns only God, and your own mind.

If you be not able to give full satisfaction with respect to the above-mentioned articles, I need not inform you, that it will be expected of you, that you act, upon the occasion, like an honest man, who finds that he has been *overtaken in a fault*.

fault. This is the light in which I am willing to consider you. The best of us (notwithstanding we endeavour, according to our Lord's direction, to keep our *eye single*) are liable to be influenced by such a *mixture of motives* as I have mentioned, p. 4, so that we may *not know what spirit we are of*; and, being all of us conscious of our own infirmities, we ought to cherish a spirit of meekness and candour with respect to those of others.

Wishing you the very same good things that you have wished me, with the addition of as much modesty, candour, and meekness, as may be wanting to complete the christian part of your character, I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your very humble servant,



Joseph Priestley.

LEEDS,
AUGUST, 1769.



