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the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* (1974), and the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied* (1975).

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THE DUTIES
OF
CHRISTIANS TOWARDS DEISTS:

A Sermon,

*PREACHED AT THE UNITARIAN CHAPEL,
PARLIAMENT COURT, ARTILLERY LANE,
BISHOPSGATE STREET,*

ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 24, 1819,

On Occasion of the Recent

PROSECUTION OF MR. CARLILE,

FOR

THE RE-PUBLICATION

OF

Paine's Age of Reason.

BY W. J. FOX.

“Christianity stands in no need of prosecutions for its support.”
SPEECH OF THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL.

London:

Printed by George Smallfield, Hackney;

SOLD BY R. HUNTER, 72 ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, AND
D. EATON, 187 HIGH-HOLEBORN.

1819.

Price One Shilling and Sixpence.



PREFACE.

ON the Sunday preceding the trial of Mr. Carlile for the publication of Paine's Age of Reason, having occasion to discourse on the account of the persecution of Paul and Silas at Philippi, I made the following allusion to what I could not but consider as an imitation of the opposers of Christianity in that transaction :

“ And here I must be allowed to digress for a moment, to lament that the Christian name should have been sullied, stained, bloodily stained with the foulest enormity of Paganism and Imposture ; and that even here, in this boasted land of liberty, and now, in the nineteenth century, there should be Christian tribunals to whose bar the Unbeliever may be summoned to expiate his want of faith, or even his opposition to the faith, by pains and penalties, fine and imprisonment. The very fact is a libel on Christianity, and founded on a principle against which every one who values the character of his religion in the eyes of rational men should solemnly protest. If Deists will listen to you, persuade them ; if they will

reason, argue with them; if they write and publish, reply to them; if they misrepresent, expose them; but in the name of Christ, do not persecute them, do not abet or sanction their persecution. Fine and imprisonment! What need has Christianity of such supports? What means could its bitterest enemies devise more foully to disgrace its name, more effectually to obscure its truth? It will never prevail with such aid. O may it soon have 'free course,' free not more from hostility than from such fatal friendship, for then, and then only, will it 'be glorified.'"

Having thus freely expressed my opinion, it was my intention not to have adverted again to the subject, in the pulpit at least. During the progress, and at the termination of the trials, I found strong inducements to rescind this determination. The conviction of Mr. Carlile I had anticipated; but I had not anticipated the legal doctrines which were advanced to aid in procuring that conviction; and still more was I surprised and grieved at the feeling manifested by that part of the public which was allowed to be present during the trial, and by religious people generally. The decorous silence of a Court of Justice has sometimes given way to sympathy with the accused, but rarely indeed has there been a disposition to violate that

decorum by audible expressions of disapprobation, during a defence, or of applause at a verdict of *guilty*. The common language of Christians after the trials, as far as I could observe and ascertain, and with the exception of a liberal minority, was that of joyous congratulation, as if a Waterloo victory had been gained over Infidelity. To correct, as far as I can, this improper and unchristian feeling, as it appears to me, and inculcate "the duties of Christians towards Deists," as those duties are taught in the New Testament, is the design of the following Sermon, to which as I have rigidly restricted myself, it may be allowed me here to make a few brief remarks upon the trial.

In the Sermon I have taken for granted the legal propriety of the conviction; the pulpit was not the place for the discussion of that subject: to doubt it may be deemed presumptuous, but doubts I have, and why should they not be expressed? They may be resolved into the following objections:

1. It virtually rescinds the protection granted by the Legislature to Unitarians. That protection rests upon Mr. W. Smith's Bill, 53 Geo. III. which certainly was not intended, either by the introducer or the Legislature to protect Unbelievers, according to Mr. Carlile's interpretation; but by which it was clearly understood that

Unitarianism ceased to be an offence. According to the legal doctrines by which this prosecution was supported, and which are confirmed by the verdict of the Jury, who "are Judges alike of the fact and the law," Unitarianism is still an offence, and the liberal intentions of the Legislature in extending toleration to its professors are consequently defeated. It was contended by the Attorney-General, and allowed, and afterwards maintained by the Court, that the Blasphemy Act, 9 and 10 William and Mary, made no new offences, but only affixed statutory penalties to certain acts which were previously, and still are, offences at Common Law. The denial of the doctrine of the Trinity is consequently still an offence at Common Law, and punishable, upon conviction, at the discretion of the Court. The Attorney-General did not leave this to be inferred by others, but followed up his premises with their legitimate conclusion, "that any contumelious attack on the Trinity would even now be liable to prosecution." The word *contumelious* is here only a "word of surplusage," for the offenders described in the Act on which the argument rested, and whom the Attorney-General was describing as still offenders at Common Law, are those "who by writing, printing, teaching, or advised speaking, shall deny any one of the

persons of the holy Trinity to be God." It was also decided that to deny the truth of a doctrine was reviling, which is much the same thing as contumely. Now if the Legislature designed to secure to deniers of the Trinity, by Mr. Smith's Bill, "the most perfect toleration;" and of this we have the testimony of the Right Reverend Supporters of that Bill, we must demur to the propriety of a conviction on principles which tend to defeat that design, and to place us at the mercy of every bigot in the country. We have the shield of public opinion, as we had before. The prosecution of any sect of Christians is not a very probable event; but it should be understood that the principles of Toleration which protect us, extend also to others with whom the public may have less sympathy.

2. That Christianity is part of the law of England, the common or unwritten law, has been often said, but I am not aware of any satisfactory evidence by which the assertion is supported. To try by a Jury, to hang a felon, are parts of the Common Law, which we derive from the customs of our Gothic ancestors. But it was not a crime with them to revile Christianity. Preaching it might perhaps have been treated as an offence. If the Common Law be traced to a period anterior to Trinitarianism,

Church-of-Englandism, Protestantism, Popery, or Christianity in any shape; and to such a period Trial by Jury and the punishment of felony may, I apprehend, be traced, it is difficult to conceive how it should afford any more protection to the believers than to the impugners of those systems.

3. If Christianity be part of the Common or unwritten Law of the land, it is to be presumed that it has become so in a justifiable, lawful, and honourable manner. The fact of its having become the law sanctifies the means by which it became the law. It establishes as a principle of the Common Law, that those means were not of a criminal character. Now the way in which Christianity gained this elevation was by free inquiry, by discussing and disproving the truth and excellence of the former religion of the country. Its success was therefore an establishment of the right to attack the religion of the country. This must be granted by the Christian, or he pronounces Austin, or whoever brought the gospel into England, a criminal, deserving fine and imprisonment for so doing. It must be allowed by the Church of England, or a similar condemnation is passed upon the Reformers who procured its substitution for Popery. Not only a general right of religious discussion, subject to limitations, but a specific

right to attack the religion of the country, (whether the use of that right be an evil or a good, on which, of course, the two parties will think differently,) is implied in, and legitimated by, the fact that Christianity has become the law of the land in virtue of that right. To destroy it (and the conviction of Mr. Carlile for its exercise does destroy it) is to vitiate the title of Christianity to be so considered.

4. Christianity is a vague term ; or rather it has been rendered vague by the diversity of opinions held by those who claim that name in common. What is *the* Christianity, to impugn which is a legal offence ? To this question no definite reply has ever been given ; and the fact is, that the reply depends upon the spirit of the times, and varies as that inclines to bigotry or liberality. Nothing is more common than for bigots to deny that name to those whose interpretations of the Scriptures differ materially from their own. Let such men obtain even temporary influence, and a law so indefinite will

“ Give ample room and verge enough
The characters of hell to trace.”

On the other hand, when this indefiniteness is liberally construed, and it could not be more liberally construed than by the Lord Chief-Justice, on Mr. Carlile’s trial, it may easily be

taken advantage of by the timorous, crafty, indirect enemy to Christianity, who is by far the most formidable, and its vengeance only falls upon him who goes openly, bluntly and argumentatively to his object. That is to say, it is not Deism that is punished, but honesty. Not the insidious artifice that corrupts, but the open hostility that disgusts. Not Gibbon, but Paine. The liability of a Deist to punishment, is in exact proportion to the openness with which he avows and pursues his object, and in which proportion he may be considered as less culpable in himself, and more harmless to society. This is surely not consistent with laws which make evil intentions the essence of criminality.

5. If Christianity be the law of the land, then the decision of Christianity is final and obligatory, as to whether any, and what punishment should be inflicted on those by whom it is denied and reviled. If the New Testament decides that they should be silenced, fined, imprisoned, banished, burned, then the production of such authority indubitably legalizes those inflictions. Its decision is the very reverse of all this, as I have shewn in the following Sermon. If it be said that the directions, which I have endeavoured to illustrate, are for the guidance of private individuals, and not of public functionaries, I ask where is its other code by which

they are to be guided? There is no intimation of the repeal of the general precepts, as to the particular case of their sitting in judgment upon Deists. If it be objected that Christ did not contemplate the adoption of his religion as law, I reply, 1st. the supposition falsifies the declarations of the Scriptures that he foresaw and foretold the future fortunes of his Church, and is therefore itself an offence on the principles of the objector; and, 2nd. that if Christ only contemplated private duties, then his religion, framed on that foundation, is incapable of becoming the law of this or of any country. The distinction, therefore, completely fails, from its inconsistency with the original supposition. The argument upon that supposition I cannot state better than by quoting a letter from a most estimable friend: "We are told Christianity is the law of the land. Admitted. This is the only concession we need; for then the law of Christianity, the law of charity, kindness, forbearance, forgiveness, rendering good for evil, blessing for cursing, is *the law of England*; and then it follows, too, that these prosecutions are illegal, because they are Antichristian."

Should it be urged that former convictions are a decisive proof of the legality of punishing unbelief, and that the Common Law is to be interpreted by precedents, it may be replied, in

the words of Blackstone, that " this rule admits of exception, where the former determination is most evidently contrary to reason, and much more, *if it be clearly contrary to the Divine law.*"

While as an Englishman I deprecate any limitation of the right of canvassing opinions, whatever those opinions may be, as a Christian I feel still more deeply the injury done to religion. As a Unitarian and a Dissenter, I regret that the first prosecution should have been conducted by one who has acknowledged the former title, and the second by one who still claims the latter. There are many, however, whose faith and practice are described by those denominations, many also of the Church of England, who lament with me the glaring inconsistency of publishing appeals to reason in behalf of the divinity of the gospel, to which the objector replies at the peril of his liberty and property. Deism has spread widely in our country; no inconsiderable proportion of the lower classes are honest and open unbelievers; and a larger proportion of the higher classes are, I fear, concealed unbelievers, who, while they discard Christianity themselves, think it an useful superstition to keep their inferiors in order. It is proper and necessary that Christians should exert themselves to reclaim both these classes, but that very necessity and that propriety also require the unsparing

rejection of all unhallowed means, of whatever may deepen prejudices, of whatever is alien from the spirit of their religion.

It was not easy to ascertain from the language held during the trials, whether Christianity was considered as entitled to legal protection from attack because it was true, or only because it was established. Although the accused was not allowed to enter into reasonings against its truth, yet both the prosecutor and the Court advanced a variety of arguments in favour of its truth, as if, notwithstanding their repeated declarations to the contrary, that were really the question at issue. The impropriety of trying such a question before such a tribunal, is most glaring. If Christianity be only protected because it is established, then to assail any established religion is a crime also; and instead of its being a duty to "preach the Gospel to every creature," it is a duty to preach it to no creature whose Ruler has taken idolatry, or Mohammedism, or any other unchristian system, under his patronage. If the protection of the established religion be essential to the security of Governments, then is a limit fixed to the diffusion of Christianity, and societies whose lists of members are graced with some of the highest names in Church and State, are the enemies of social order all over the world.

I lament that Mr. Carlile, by his defence,

strengthened the prejudices which before existed against himself, his faith or want of faith, and his associates. Had he excited greater sympathy, my feeble efforts to abate those prejudices would have been unnecessary. Unitarians especially have reason to complain, that although he derived from their writers the most effective part of his defence, he was so continually guilty of the injustice of confounding their opinions with his own. Deists they certainly are, as Deist is opposed to Atheist, and so are all Christians, and so are all Religionists. But though this may be the original and proper meaning of the term, common usage has restricted it to deniers of Christianity, which Unitarians certainly are not. He may have learned this calumny from our reverend or mitred antagonists, but this was no excuse for its repetition. So far as our opinions coincide with his, no fear of obloquy prevents their avowal. With a brief statement of what they agree in, and wherein they differ, I conclude this preface.

Unitarians agree with Deists, and differ from the majority of Christians,

1. In rejecting the notion of a Triune God, and of a partial or inexorable Deity.

2. In reprobating the priestcraft which makes religion the instrument either of public oppression, or private cupidity.

3. In maintaining the right of discussing freely all opinions.

Unitarians differ from Deists, and agree with other Christians in believing,

1. That a series of revelations, confirmed by miracles, has been made by God to mankind.

2. That the Old and New Testament contain an authentic account of those revelations.

3. That Jesus Christ had a divine commission, that he rose from the dead, and that he will come again to judge the world.

There are two points in which, generally speaking, the opinions of Unitarians are opposed to those both of other Christians and of Deists.

1. In asserting the importance of good works in their immediate connexion with our future destiny, which is diminished on the one hand by a supposed indifference in the Deity to the conduct of his creatures, or the want of definite commands and authoritative sanctions, and on the other by the substitution of faith alone as essential to salvation.

2. In resting the hope of future existence upon the doctrine of the Resurrection, and not upon the Orthodox and Deistical notion of the natural Immortality of the Soul.

W. J. FOX.

Hackney Road,
November 1, 1819.

A SERMON,

&c.

—♦♦♦—
LUKE vi. 31 :

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

THIS maxim is the foundation of the morality of the New Testament. We are bound, as Christians, to regulate our conduct by it; and my present purpose is to shew in what way it should affect our behaviour towards those by whom the religion which we esteem of divine authority is disbelieved, attacked, and even reviled.

You will readily suppose that my attention has been directed to this subject by the recent prosecutions of an individual for the republication of Paine's *Age of Reason*, and of Palmer's *Principles of Nature*; and such is certainly the fact. If any have come, however, with the expectation of hearing remarks, of a political or personal nature, on the proceedings of a Court of Justice, or on those who presided over, or

were parties in those proceedings, they will be disappointed. I know too well the legitimate boundaries of pulpit discussion to enter upon such a field, and shall consider the subject only in a general view, as it relates to the regulation of your feelings, and the discharge of your duties towards unbelievers.

It has long appeared to me that the liberality which has unquestionably advanced amongst Christians, and moderated the asperity of sectarianism, has by no means been proportionably extended towards Deists. Aliens from the household of faith, they have been considered as without the pale of charity. Their continued and almost solitary exclusion is not altogether unaccountable. Liberality has been increased by various causes in which they had no share. Missionary and Bible Societies, and a number of similar institutions, by bringing partisans together upon common ground, and uniting them cordially in the pursuit of a common object, have opened their eyes to each other's virtues, and removed a thousand prejudices which were the food of bigotry. But prejudices have only been removed as to the parties thus uniting and co-operating. While they have drawn closer to each other, the Deist has been left at his original distance. Unconcerned in the cause, or concerned only as an opponent,

more or less active, he has not been privileged to participate in the beneficial results. While the once alienated children of the Christian family were reunited, he, excluded from their social endearments, as unwelcome to their sight as ever, shunned by all, hated by some, stood far aloof, a solitary orphan. Even Unitarians, outcasts as they themselves are from the fraternities of reputed orthodoxy, and pledged by the character of their religious system to the most extensive liberality, have but too often been deficient in the duties which I intend this evening to state and enforce. Goaded by the calumny which would identify them with those who reject the Saviour, they have, in repelling so unjust an accusation, caught too much of the tone of their opponents, and given the most undesirable proof of their affinity to other Christians, by that unfairness towards the disbeliever which does not become any Christian. However it be accounted for, I have a painful conviction of the fact, that Christians, as a body, do not in their writings, preaching, conversation, and behaviour on public occasions, or in private life, treat Deists in that way which charity should prompt, or even which is demanded by justice, to which, as fellow-men, they have a right, and which is by far the best calculated to win their attention, disarm their opposition, and

correct the aberrations of their minds. This conviction has been much increased by observing the manner in which religious people were affected by the late trials, and the emotion, which would otherwise have been uppermost, of disgust at seeing Christianity under the protection of law-officers, and its insults avenged by legal penalties, was lost in regret that Christians could witness such proceedings with pleasure, applaud the verdict which pronounced open unbelief a crime, and find in the imprisonment of a Deist matter for congratulation.

I anticipate the misconstruction, by some, of my motives for making this effort, and am prepared to brave it. "Strike, but hear!" The subject is of importance, and never did I enter the pulpit under a more imperious sense of duty. I am no sceptic, as to the essentials of Christianity. Its truth is my trust; its evidences are, to my mind, most convincing; its moral loveliness charms my heart; to its holy precepts I would yield unreserved submission; in the removal of its corruptions and the extension of its influence I would exert all my powers and spend all my days; and its promises I regard as a sure foundation for the immortal hopes of man. Why is so divine a religion, invulnerable to the darts of hostility, wounded in the house of its friends? Why are not those friends more tho-

roughly imbued with its just and liberal principles?

Were it possible to forget Christians, and look only at Christianity, the astonishment which many pious people feel at the fact that there are unbelievers would be fully justified, and the low estimate formed of their minds or characters would be greatly palliated. If impartially weighed, how can the evidences for the divine mission and resurrection of Jesus be resisted? They leave, indeed, the possibility of error, and so does all moral evidence; yet on that evidence man continually acts without hesitation, and must, if he acts at all; nor is it deemed a valid objection, in any similar case, that we cannot arrive at mathematical demonstration. The variety, multiplicity, and cogency of the proofs of the divinity of the Christian religion, place us on the highest ground of conviction which can be reached by this species of evidence. It is possible, but barely possible, that the predictions of ancient prophets, who announced the calamities or prosperity of various countries; who foretold the coming of the Messiah, the place and time of his birth, his character and conduct, the brilliance of his miracles, the purity of his doctrines, the severity of his sufferings, and the triumphs of his cause, were words spoken at random, and that, notwithstanding the

history forms so striking a counterpart to them, all is to be accounted for by fortunate guesses and accidental coincidences : it is possible, but barely possible, that Jesus should form of himself a notion of the office of the Messiah completely unlike that which his countrymen entertained, and act upon this fancy, though certain that his imposture would bring neither wealth, honour, nor enjoyment, but hatred, persecution, and death ; that his miracles were merely delusions, though his acute and bitter enemies did not attempt to deny or disprove the facts, but fully allowed them, and ascribed his powers to the agency of evil spirits : it is possible, but barely possible, that a clan of ignorant deceivers should frame a religion with delineations of the character of God, and the duties and prospects of man, infinitely superior to what the wisest and best philosophers ever taught ; should propagate it at the peril of every thing dear to man, and succeed in establishing it in the world, in defiance of the opposition of priests and potentates, of the wise, the wealthy, and the powerful of that age : it is possible, but barely possible, that a system so framed and propagated should prevail over all hostility, and become the admiration of the wisest, the delight of the virtuous, the refuge of the afflicted, the source of knowledge, holiness and joy, to the

world. But if this bare possibility be fact, how wretched is our condition! Where shall we look for truth, when accumulate sufficient proof, or in the moral world what solid resting-place shall we ever find? It appears to me, that we must admit such evidence, or we must admit nothing; must own no proof whatever, except that of our senses, if indeed that is to be excepted, and incarcerate ourselves in the dark dungeon of eternal scepticism.

Christians! draw not too hastily the inference that, if the conclusiveness of these and other proofs be not seen, it can only be attributed to the mental perception being dimmed by the effluvia of a corrupted heart. He to whose sight alone the heart is open, who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust, can alone be qualified to pronounce such a condemnation; and to him much may be visible which you cannot perceive, productive of an effect so undesirable without inculpating the individual. Nay, you may imagine various pleas which, in the judgment of charity, ought to be admitted, for the claims of an avowed and active Deist not to be ranked, in sincerity and rectitude, materially below an honest and active Christian.

Is there not in some minds an inherent and constitutional tendency to scepticism, a tendency resulting from that physical organization which

combines, in some unknown proportion, with early association to form character? I would much rather believe that there is, than believe that every Deist, in a Christian country, is made hostile to truth by the love of iniquity, because it is not only more charitable but more plausible. In every department of science and history, and where neither the love of virtue nor of vice could be gratified by the conclusion, there have been men who *could not* yield credence without a greater degree of evidence than sufficed to produce conviction in others. Amongst those who alike admit the authority of the Scriptures there is a gradation of creeds, indicative of a variety of estimates of the evidence requisite to prove a doctrine scriptural. Even the most orthodox leave some few points on which it is allowed to believe or disbelieve, without the imputation of moral turpitude, and thus, in fact, admit the principle, that the conclusiveness of evidence may be modified by causes for which we are not responsible. To call this human frailty is saying nothing; for who is frail, he who requires the greater, or the lesser quantum of proof? Each, the other being made a standard; both, compared with a third; all equally, in the judgment of him who tracing variety in all the other works of God, believes its natural existence in the mental constitution

of man. This diversity exists amongst the believers in Christianity, even as to the proofs on which they admit the divinity of their religion. Suppose those proofs could be represented by a given number, say 50. That which produces conviction in one may be represented by 10; another requires 20; a third 40; another, not satisfied with less than 60, remains an unbeliever. More evidence would have included some who are Unbelievers; less would have excluded some who are Christians. But whether Providence had seen fit to give more or less, their moral characters would have been precisely the same; the Christian who, on the one supposition, would have been a Deist, would not have been less meritorious; the Deist who, on the other supposition, would have been a Christian, would not have been less depraved. I could easily find, amongst you, two firm Christians, of whom the one had required twice as much evidence for his faith as the other. Does the latter attribute the total rejection of Christianity to depravity of heart? He is equally liable to the same charge from the more facile believer. No man can indicate for another the mathematical point at which culpable credulity ends, and culpable scepticism begins. He might as well profess to tell the depth to which a ball, with any given momentum, would penetrate into any

substance, without knowing the power of resistance which nature has imparted to that substance. Nor can it be said that Christianity has exactly that degree of proof which makes scepticism criminal; for the external proof of Christianity, arising as it does from prophecy and history, must of necessity have been liable to considerable fluctuations, and is not in one generation or country what it is in another generation or country. And if it be asserted, that in all times and places it must have been powerful enough to overcome a constitutional tendency to doubt, unless strengthened by a vicious disposition, the assertion cannot be substantiated without a knowledge of the human mind, which belongs only to its Maker.

Amongst the most extensive causes of Deism are the corruptions of Christianity, the diversity of opinions held by its professors, and the guilt and mischief which, to so enormous an extent, are fairly chargeable upon them. Here, it is true, that the Deist ought to distinguish, but what Christian shall condemn him for not distinguishing? Not the advocates of these corruptions, for they deem them the genuine gospel. Not the actors of these enormities, for they pretend to justify them by the gospel. The majority of nominal Christians are worshippers of the Virgin Mary, and believers in Transub-

stantiation ; and a still greater majority believers in the Trinity. The majority of nominal Christians for ages were persecutors in fact, and the majority are still, I fear, persecutors in principle. Who is to be condemned for taking their account of their religion, rather than that of an insignificant minority ? But the books ; he is wrong in not taking his notions of it from the Sacred Books. Be it so. I think in that he *is* wrong ; but while millions reiterate the censure, I cannot help saying, *let him that is without sin cast the first stone.* Is there no vilified religion to whose sacred books Christians have never appealed to do it justice ? Are not cruelties and absurdities attributed to Mohammedism in conversation, from the press, and in the pulpit, which a Koran from the next bookseller's shop would shew to be mere calumnies ? Is not the Hindoo religion daily stigmatized as a system of the grossest idolatry, while an appeal to its Sacred Books is in our language, proving that they teach the purest Theism ? Nay, if nine Christians out of ten were asked whether the book prosecuted the other day contained arguments for the being and moral perfection of God, and a future state of existence for man, would they not answer in the negative, and do they not talk of it in terms only justified by that assumption ? One fault cannot justify another. I am not vindicating

the Deist. But if the same or a similar error be alike chargeable upon two classes, neither of them is entitled to adduce it as a proof of the depravity of the other.

That the great diversity of interpretations of the Bible, by different sects, should distract the mind of a man who never received from education, or has lost by circumstances, a preference for any one of them, and that he should think that the book must needs want that clearness by which truth is characterized, from which professedly almost any thing and every thing has been both proved and disproved, I can very well conceive, without ascribing to him either stupidity or malignity. The consequent rejection does not appear to me more strange than many of the interpretations. The heretics who think Deists in a damnable error for rejection, should remember that the orthodox think them in a damnable error also for false interpretation. A hundred voices cry to the Deist, "Be a Christian, or you cannot be saved, and ought not to be tolerated." He asks, "What is Christianity?" They give him a hundred different answers, and each condemns the rest. Until we, Christians, shall approach somewhat nearer to unanimity, our distractions will operate as a cause of, and furnish a palliation for, infidelity.

Ecclesiastical History is full of foul and bloody

deeds, the crimes of the corrupters of Christianity, of the men who have made its name the signal for desolating wars, the means of temporal or spiritual usurpations, the defence of oppressions and extortions, and the pretext for furious persecutions. However these enormities may be mitigated, the Christian Church has not yet disowned either the corrupters or the corruptions, but continues, to a considerable extent, to fraternize with the one, and symbolize with the other. While they do this, and yet allow the moral fruits of a religion to be its surest test, and appeal to that test on behalf of *their* Christianity, it cannot surprise us that those who look no further should disbelieve it, should shudder at it as the source of incalculable evils.

Without going further into this part of the subject, I will only observe, that the rejection of Christianity may be thrown into a series of propositions, every one of which propositions is maintained by some sect of Christians; and if each separately be not an evidence of moral depravity, neither can they in the aggregate, which will be only a sum of cyphers. One Christian affirms that Scripture teaches the doctrine of the Trinity, and another that that doctrine is a false doctrine. The combination of these assertions is the rejection of the Scriptures. Some affirm that they claim plenary inspiration,

and others allow that they contain reasonings to which we cannot assent, and assertions which we cannot reconcile. Here, again, agreement with both is fatal to the authority which both acknowledge. Opposition to all Christian sects in one particular may thus be analyzed into agreement with each sect in some other particular. Their several contributions make up the sum of Infidelity.

It is right that the tone of censure which Christians are apt to indulge in should be moderated by the recollection of these inducements, furnished by themselves, to doubt and disbelief; and it would also be right for Deists to remember that, aspiring to the character of reasoners and philosophers, it ill becomes them to be hurried away by appearances into the prejudgment of so important a case. I would say to them, Why do you not distinguish? You confound persecution with Christianity; but it is not more evident that Christians have persecuted, than that in so doing they have been, not obeying, but grossly violating the precepts of their Master. You confound a superstitious, mysterious, oppressive, political religion with Christianity; but in the Christian Scriptures you will find the delineation of that system presented, not for belief, but for condemnation, coupled with expressions of wonder and abhorrence; its prevalence foretold

and lamented, and its destruction identified with the establishment of the kingdom of heaven. You confound Christianity with the various books relating to it, and when you have shewn, perhaps successfully, that some contain historical errors, or others unsatisfactory reasonings, or that others are deficient in evidences of their authenticity, you proclaim a triumph as if you had destroyed Christianity: forgetting that Christianity existed before any of the books of the New Testament: that it is quite independent of the perfect accuracy and demonstrated authenticity of those of the Old Testament; and, that the real question at issue is, Did Christ teach the resurrection of man from the dead, and rise himself in confirmation of his doctrine, which unless you disprove you have done just nothing at all. That he did rise has always been asserted by Christians, from the time that we can make out that there were Christians; and for a long period the assertion was made under circumstances which offered the most decisive guarantee for its truth, by men who had opportunities for knowing, and who had every thing earthly to lose, but nothing to gain by their pertinacity. The calm discussion of their testimony is your proper task. This is the reasoning of Deism, while all else, in which, for effect, you have more largely indulged, is only its prejudices. If you

can disprove this assertion to others, Christianity must fall, and ought to fall. If you only disprove it to yourselves, still this fair and reasonable course will destroy the suspicions which some feel of your sincerity, hurl back with disgrace the charges which others make against your characters, moderate the antipathy which many have to your writings, and if unhappily you must be persecuted, would strip persecution of the last flimsy veil which hides the deformity of her countenance.

Whatever be the conduct of Unbelievers, let Christians discharge their duty towards them, a duty most emphatically and beautifully expressed in the text: "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." This noble and comprehensive precept is universal in its objects and definite in its injunction. It relates to our conduct towards *man*, be his station high or low, his colour white or black, his character virtuous or vicious, whether he be orthodox or heretic, Christian, Pagan, Jew, or Deist. Every man wishes the conduct of others to be just and kind towards himself; every man wishes not to be misrepresented, not to be persecuted, and every Christian who acts up to his religion will make these desires the standard of his conduct to others. The application of this maxim to the particular case of Deists, comprises all I

have to advance, either of censure or admonition.

Do justice to their opinions. You would have them be more just to yours, and complain, not without reason, of their identifying Christianity with various notions, some unessential and some opposed to it, merely because they have been advocated by men bearing ignorantly, hypocritically, or unworthily, the Christian name. How common to confound Deists and Atheists, although the very names indicate a direct opposition, and there is the immense difference between their creeds of a God and no God; a difference surely not less important than that between a revelation and no revelation. The great majority of them are also, I apprehend, believers in a future state. To talk, therefore, of their opinions dissolving all the bonds of society, destroying the obligation of an oath, and annihilating the distinction between vice and virtue, is mere declamation. It is the language of deception, of ignorance, or of bigotry. Even Atheism leaves the barriers of our natural sympathies, of habit, and present interest; and what better defence, or what other, has virtue in the thousands of nominal Christians, who, while they are noisily zealous for putting down Infidelity, require a God only to swear by, and a hell only to consign to it the objects of their indignation?

Be just to their characters, and as you would not have them estimate Christians by the ruffian conquerors of Peru, or the merciless assassins of St. Bartholomew ; by the avaricious priest who makes religion the pretext of plunder, or the crafty tyrant who perverts it into the machine of oppression ; by the dreaming enthusiast, or the gloomy fanatic ; so pass not on them the sweeping condemnation they may not deserve, which the notorious guilt of some will not justify, and which the merit of others ought to avert. If the sincere love of truth and goodness, if just claims to the regard and gratitude of all around, if friendship the most disinterested and unvarying, if pious feeling, pure and elevated, towards the Author of nature, and philanthropy the most diffusive, can form a title to high esteem, then have I known, well known, one instance, at least, in which it was due to an Unbeliever. There may be many such. If we take characters of rare excellence to shew the influence of Christianity, and reject the million, why should they be decried from the opposite result of a different process ? As Unitarians, we should remember Andrew Fuller's picture of our party ; as Protestants, such tales as that of Luther's sale of his soul to the Devil ; as Christians, the debaucheries and cannibal feasts ascribed by the Pagans to the early churches.

Nor does it become us to hesitate in admitting, or grudgingly to praise the good services which may have been rendered by Deists to the cause of human improvement. As members of society they have often done their duty, and done it well. In relation to religion there are two things deserving notice. He who saves a human mind from the dreary abyss of Atheism is entitled to the praise of Christians. Deists have written ably and forcibly on this subject. They are more likely to succeed in staying the flow of Scepticism towards this wretched termination than we are, as their reasonings will be regarded with less suspicion, and may proceed on principles less likely to be disputed; nor do I see why we should not both avail ourselves of their labours, and applaud their object. They have also done much for Toleration and Religious Liberty. It may be doubted whether there be a country in Europe where that cause has not been advanced by the writings of Voltaire [alone. True, they needed that liberty, and what religionist does not, in every land, with the exception of the single party that happens to be dominant?

Many of the objections urged by Deists against the books of Scripture, though far enough from disproving the truth and divinity of Christianity, are entitled to serious consideration, and merit a very different kind of treatment from that super-

cilious dismissal, or violent condemnation in the gross, which they often receive. By candid concession Christianity would rather gain than lose in real strength. That the early part of the book of Genesis is a compilation of ancient documents, and not the writing of Moses, has been the opinion of some most able divines and sincere believers. There are few, whose hearts are not absolutely cased in bigotry, who would not confess, did they speak out, that the extirpation of the Canaanites presents an embarrassing difficulty. Why should such things be defended, as if men's salvation depended upon the belief of them; or why should their exposure be sound criticism in the priest and blasphemy in the Deist? Let them labour in this way, and I will thank them for it; for every exploded error leaves more stable the truth with which it had been associated. Instead of trembling for the safety of every sentence, fondly clinging to every forgery, or impudently vindicating every inconsistency, or worse still, meeting argument by declamation, censoriousness or prosecution, let us candidly admit where we cannot refute, calmly reply where we cannot admit, and leave anger to the vanquished, and imputation of bad motives to those who are deficient in good arguments.

Suppose a Deist to be a prejudiced man, and I think many of them are prejudiced; is this such

a crime as to alienate him from all the sympathies of society? We find palliations for the prejudices of our own associates, and so we may for theirs. If a man opposes Christianity because he identifies it with mystery, superstition, hypocrisy, spiritual tyranny, bigotry, avarice, persecution, I lament the want of more accurate attention, which has confounded things so unlike, but I respect the feelings which, in consequence of that mistake, make him its determined enemy. One of their number has justly said that, "though freedom from prejudice is one part of liberality, yet to respect the prejudices of others is a greater, and it is certainly that part which most contributes to the peace, comfort, and pleasure of society."

Even their language, foul and revolting as it sometimes is, may have apologies which Christians forget to make. For every abuse and misrepresentation a parallel may be easily found in theological controversy. They are a foul blot, but a blot which has stained the pages of men whom all delight to honour. As to such failings charity should deal impartially, nor allow a larger license to the defenders than to the impugnors of our own tenets.*

* Many expressions used by Mr. Carlile himself, or read by him from Deistical works, evidently excited the strongest emo-

There is a sensitive apprehension about many good people, which ill beseems the man of enlightened mind and steady principle. "The Deist strikes at my religion:" Well, he is only breaking his weapon against a rock. "He argues against the holiest doctrines of my faith:" does he? Listen to his arguments, and if they be valid, allow their force; if not, rejoice in a faith which will stand the test of reason. "But he abuses and reviles:" then he disgraces himself and injures his cause, and do you with a better cause employ nobler weapons. "In this

tion of disgust in the Court, Jury, and spectators. Yet any one acquainted with the writings of controversialists, not excepting even those of the present day, could not but be aware that, if the loathsome task were undertaken, it might be accomplished, of shewing that every epithet of reproach, contempt, or abhorrence, applied on that occasion to the Scriptures themselves, has also been applied by professed Christians to those who differed from them in the interpretation of that volume, while they equally maintained its authority. Nay, some of his "blasphemies," at which so many shuddered, were the literal language of serious belief. Why should interruption, indignation and horror, be caused by his asserting that the Bible represented God the Father as dining with Abraham, when one of our most illustrious critics (Lightfoot) thus explains a passage in Genesis? "Some three months after this, the three persons of the Trinity dine with Abraham—the Son and Holy Ghost go down to Sodom, but the first person in the Trinity stayeth with Abraham."

he breaks the laws :” so it appears.—Ought a Christian to invoke the aid of such laws? I come now to the consideration of this question, and have no hesitation in saying that he ought to have nothing to do with them, unless it be to raise his voice for their repeal.

What is the effect of prosecuting Deism on the individual who is thereby consigned to punishment? You make of him a hypocrite or a martyr. You confirm his worst prejudices, and make him hate Christians and Christianity. Penalty and imprisonment were never yet the means of sincere conversion. Man clings to the faith for which he suffers; his enmity rises with your inflictions. Is it a good deed thus to make the gospel hated? Or suppose his spirit shrinks from the fiery trial. You have then made a hypocrite. No triumph that, for a good man to glory in. How does it affect his party? See, say they, how these Christians meet us; we argue, and they prosecute; we refute, and they imprison. What think impartial lookers on, or what the young, the undecided and the inquiring? In the contest of force with opinion, we all know which way sympathy naturally inclines, and you have to answer for giving them this bias towards Infidelity.

Such prosecutions are a breach of the great

principles of impartial justice and equal right, which are the foundation of civil society. The Christian has no more natural right to punish the Deist, than the Deist to punish the Christian. Persecuting laws, however small the number of persons in a state who are exposed to their operation, are an invasion of the social compact; at best, an usurpation of the majority over the minority, only to be vindicated on the assumption that power is right. We unite for the protection of life, liberty, and property, not for that of religious opinion. If the power to persecute be offered, you should have magnanimity enough to decline the unrighteous boon. Had Christians done this from the first, the Gospel might, ere now, have been universal.

I would not have on record such a confession, a tacit and implied confession at least, of the weakness of Christianity, and its need of the aid of the civil power. That it is so may be disclaimed in words; why should it be proclaimed by facts? It is a libel on the Gospel. That rock of ages needs no legal buttresses. If there be forms of Christianity which require that protection, let them be known for what they are, the reveries of men, and not the word of God, the creatures of the state, and not the offspring of heaven. Such churches are no stars in the

firmament; their light is the blaze of meteors, ominous and deadly; and rapid as that of meteors will be their fall.

But it is urged that though the Gospel is above human aid, the poor and ignorant should be protected from sophistical and demoralizing works. I know of but one way of protecting the ignorant, and that is, by destroying ignorance, by the diffusion of information. The best defence against sophistry is not its suppression but its refutation. Danger from books implies ability to read those books, and he who can read one book can read another; he who can read Paine can read the Bible. The New Testament, originally addressed to the poor, is a continued appeal to the understanding; its character is changed, if you make it any thing else. It knows nothing of implicit faith or blind obedience, and to make them its substitute is gross imposition. By the Toleration now allowed, the poor and ignorant, as they are called, are legally recognized as judges of the Trinitarian controversy, the Arminian controversy, the Episcopalian controversy; and surely not more ability is required for deciding on the merits of the Deistical controversy. Our Lord appealed to the poor on the divinity of his mission, and have we a less enlightened commonalty than Judea, sunk as it then was in ignorance and bigotry and barbarism?

Men forget the progress of society when they talk thus ; they forget what the art of printing, or even the diffusion of education and knowledge during the last twenty years has done for man. There are but two things which can infidelize the poor of this country, and they are, the obstinate retention of the corruptions of Christianity, and the persecution of Deists. By those means perhaps it may be accomplished, for they and they alone, will rouse the best feelings of human nature against the name of Christianity.

The feelings of pious Christians are doubtless wounded by insulting language offered to all they revere. Let them meet it by a Christian spirit. Nothing will shew so well the heavenliness of their religion. Let them imbibe the spirit of the following beautiful remark of Robinson :—“ Is God dishonoured ? Imitate his conduct then. Does he thunder, does he lighten, does he afflict this poor man ? Behold his sun enlightens his habitation, his rain refreshes his fields, his gentle breeze fans and animates him every day, his revelat on lies always open before him, his throne of mercy is ever accessible to him, and will you, rash Christian, will you mark him out for vengeance ?” I fancy to myself a Christian, who has abetted a prosecution for Infidelity, reading such a passage as this. Does not his heart sink within him at the incorrectness

of the picture, an incorrectness produced by his instrumentality? "No," he may say, "the sun does *not* enlighten his habitation; I have consigned him to a dungeon. The rain does not refresh his fields; I have invaded his property. His home does not smile; I have filled it with mourning. Revelation is not open before him; I have made him loathe the book, and done the utmost of a mortal to reverse the benignity of God." Miserable man!

The conduct of Christ affords no encouragement for the protection of religion by power. Deists, to vilify him, and persecuting Christians to vindicate themselves, ascribe his forbearance to the absence of the means. It is a calumny! If he had not political power, he had miraculous power, and had this been a righteous use of it he would so have used it, and called down fire from heaven, instead of rebuking his disciples when they solicited him thus to punish the Samaritans. All his actions and his discourses contradict the assumption. The connexion of the text, both in Matthew and Luke, is directly in point.

In Matthew (vii. 11, 12) it follows a declaration of the compassion of God. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father

in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them ; for this is the law and the prophets." Some consider the term " therefore," as a mere expletive. I apprehend not. Can there be a more legitimate inference from the paternity of God, than the brotherhood of man? We are told, that Christianity is part of the law of England. However that may be, it certainly contains a moral law, of superior obligation on the believer's conscience to all human enactments, and by which he ought to be guided in using, or abstaining from the powers which those enactments may give him to restrain or punish others. For the case of Deists, "*this is the law,*" the law of Moses, according to the interpretation of Christ, the law of Christ according to every interpretation. No legislative authority can sanction or excuse the violation of this law by a Christian. In Luke, (vi. 27—37,) the connexion of the text runs thus: " But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other ; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to

take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? For sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? For sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? For sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." Are these precepts become a dead letter? Has Christianity its obsolete laws? Surely if there be any direction in the New Testament for our behaviour towards open oppugners, revilers, of our religion, we have it here. Can we obey this, and institute or abet prosecutions of them? When I heard the disciple of Paine, in imitation of him, renounce the obligation of loving our

enemies, I felt a momentary glow of triumph for Christianity : it was but momentary ; I felt where I was, and what was going on, and grieved at the difference between precept and practice.

Admit the principle of Persecution, and where will it stop? Allow it to Atheism even, and it will advance to Deism; allow it to Deism, and it will advance to heresy; and what *is* heresy? There is no medium in principle between the liberty of all, and the tyranny of a particular sect. Christians, you kindle a flame in which yourselves may perish.

Look back to your own founders, your martyrs, your reformers; what you say of Deists was said of them; what you do to Deists, was done to them; they outraged the feelings of the society in which they lived; they were condemned for the defence of the ignorant; they were held blasphemers; they were dragged as criminals to the bar. Are such recollections favourable to your reacting these scenes? What would an Apostle say, risen from the dead, and led into your Courts? Where would he naturally look for his fellow-disciple, on the bench or at the bar? How would he lament that all the sufferings of Christians by persecution, have not taught its professors to sympathize with the persecuted, to abstain from persecution!

I am not addressing Legislators ; but you have your share in public opinion ; let what influence you have be exerted for the promotion of universal religious liberty. The same principle, as to legislative interference, applies to religion as to trade. A celebrated minister of France consulted some eminent merchants, to know how he could best protect and advance the commerce of the country ; their reply is worthy of adoption. It was simply, “ Let it alone.”

There is a more excellent way than prosecutions to convert Deists and counteract their efforts. Christians, make your religion more defensible ; not in itself, that cannot be, but as exhibited in your opinions and practices. In your absurd creeds, in your rapacious claims, in your unholy alliance with the state, in your bigotry and persecution, in your tenacity of what is untenable, and in your want of practical conformity with the pure morality of Christianity, lies all the strength of Unbelief. That mighty change effected, which must come, when the reign of Antichrist is over, all hostility will be disarmed, and the genuine Gospel, rising from the ruins of corruption, like the fabled Phœnix in renewed youth from the funeral pile, shall spread its wings for a glorious flight, and

urge its resistless course around the globe. The sword then broken, whether drawn for Christianity or against it, more celestial weapons, mighty through God, shall achieve the victory of Truth, and “in the name of Jesus shall every knee bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”



