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Lord Viscount Bolingbroke**

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Bolingbroke, Henry St. John

London, 1754

Letters or essays addressed to Alexander Pope, Esq.

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LETTERS & ESSAYS

L E T T E R S

ALEXANDER POPE, Esq;

O R

AN INTRODUCTION

E S S A Y S

Dear Sir,

ADDRESSED TO

ALEXANDER POPE, Esq;

THE UNIVERSITY OF

to think I should not have been so long in
by having finished it long ago to give you
to be assured that the number of subscribers
is not less than 1000

LETTERS

OR

ESSAYS

ADDRESSED TO

ALEXANDER POPE, Esq;

LETTERS or ESSAYS

ADDRESSED TO

ALEXANDER POPE, Esq;

The INTRODUCTION.

DEAR SIR,

SINCE you have begun, at my request, the work which I have wish'd long that you would undertake, it is but reasonable that I submit to the task you impose upon me. Mere compliance with any thing you desire, is a pleasure to me. On the present occasion, however, this compliance is a little interest'd; and that I may not assume more merit with you, than I really have, I will own that in performing this act of friendship, for such you are willing to esteem it, the purity of my motive is corrupted by some regard to my private utility. In short, I suspect you to be guilty of a very friendly fraud, and to mean my service, whilst you seem to mean your own.

IN leading me to discourse, as you have done often, and in pressing me to write as you do now, on certain subjects, you may propose to draw me back to those trains of thought,
which

which are, above all others, worthy to employ the human mind, and I thank you for it. They have been often interrupted by the business and dissipations of the world, but they were never so more grievously to me, nor less usefully to the public, than since royal seduction prevailed on me to abandon the quiet and leisure of the retreat I had chosen abroad, and to neglect the example of RUTILIUS, for I might have imitated him in this at least, who fled further from his country when he was invited home.

You have begun your ethic epistles in a masterly manner. You have copied no other writer, nor will you, I think, be copied by any one. It is with genius as it is with beauty; there are a thousand pretty things that charm alike; but superior genius, like superior beauty, has always something particular, something that belongs to itself alone. It is always distinguishable, not only from those who have no claim to excellence, but even from those who excel, when any such there are.

I AM pleased, you may be sure, to find your satire turn in the very beginning of these epistles, against the principal cause, for such you know that I think it, of all the errors, all the contradictions, and all the disputes which have arisen among those who impose themselves on their fellow creatures for great masters, and almost sole proprietors of a gift of God, which is common to the whole species. This gift is reason, a faculty, or rather an aggregate of faculties, that is bestowed, in different degrees, and not in the highest certainly, on those who make the highest pretensions to it. Let your satire chastise, and if it be possible, humble that pride, which is the fruitful parent of their vain curiosity, and bold presumption; which renders them dogmatical in the midst of ignorance, and often sceptical

in the midst of knowledge. The man who is puffed up with this philosophical pride, whether divine, or theist, or atheist, deserves no more to be respected, than one of those trifling creatures, who are conscious of little else than their animality, and who stop as far short of the attainable perfections of their nature, as the other attempts to go beyond them. You will discover as many silly affections, as much foppery and futility, as much inconsistency and low artifice, in one as in the other. I never met the madwoman at Brentford, decked out in old and new rags, and nice and fantastical in the manner of wearing them, without reflecting on many of the profound scholars, and sublime philosophers of our own, and of former ages.

You may expect some contradiction, and some obloquy on the part of these men, tho' you will have less to apprehend from their malice and resentment, than a writer in prose on the same subjects would have. You will be safer in the generalities of poetry, and I know your precaution enough to know, that you will screen yourself in them against any direct charge of heterodoxy. But the great clamor of all will be raised when you descend lower, and let your muse loose among the herd of mankind. Then will those powers of dullness, whom you have ridiculed into immortality, be called forth in one united phalanx against you. But why do I talk of what may happen? You have experienced lately something more than I prognosticate. Fools and knaves should be modest at least, they should ask quarter of men of sense and virtue; and so they do till they grow up to a majority; till a similitude of character assures them of the protection of the great. But then vice and folly, such as prevail in our country, corrupt our manners, deform even social life, and contribute to make us ridiculous as well as miserable, will

claim respect for the sake of the vicious and the foolish. It will be then no longer sufficient to spare persons; for to draw even characters of imagination must become criminal, when the application of them to those of highest rank, and greatest power cannot fail to be made. You began to laugh at the ridiculous taste, or the no taste in gardening and building, of some men who are at great expence in both. What a clamor was raised instantly? The name of TIMON was applied to a noble person with double malice, to make him ridiculous, and you who lived in friendship with him, odious. By the authority that employed itself to encourage this clamor, and by the industry used to spread and support it, one would have thought that you had directed your satyr in that epistle to political subjects, and had inveighed against those who impoverish, dishonor, and sell their country, instead of making yourself inoffensively merry at the expence of men who ruin none but themselves, and render none but themselves ridiculous. What will the clamor be, and how will the same authority foment it, when you proceed to lash, in other instances, our want of elegance even in luxury, and our wild profusion, the source of insatiable rapacity, and almost universal venality? My mind forebodes that the time will come, and who knows how near it may be, when other powers than those of Grubstreet, may be drawn forth against you, and when vice and folly may be avowedly sheltered behind a power instituted for better, and contrary purposes; for punishment of one, and for the reformation of both.

BUT however this may be, pursue your task undauntedly, and whilst so many others convert the noblest employments of human society into sordid trades, let the generous muse resume her antient dignity, re-assert her antient prerogative, and instruct and reform as well as amuse the world. Let her give a
new

new turn to the thoughts of men, raise new affections in their minds, and determine in another and better manner the passions of their hearts. Poets, they say, were the first philosophers and divines, in every country; and in ours, perhaps, the first institutions of religion, and civil policy, were owing to our bards. Their task might be hard, their merit was certainly great. But if they were to rise now from the dead, they would find the second task, if I mistake not, much harder than the first, and confess it more easy to deal with ignorance than with error. When societies are once established, and governments formed, men flatter themselves that they proceed in cultivating the first rudiments of civility, policy, religion, and learning. But they do not observe that the private interests of many, the prejudices, affections, and passions of all, have a large share in the work, and often the largest. These put a sort of bias on the mind, which makes it decline from the strait course; and the further these supposed improvements are carried, the greater this declination grows, till men lose sight of primitive and real nature, and have no other guide but custom, a second and a false nature. The author of one is divine wisdom, of the other, human imagination; and yet whenever the second stands in opposition to the first, as it does most frequently, the second prevails. From hence it happens, that the most civilised nations are often guilty of injustice and cruelty, which the least civilised would abhor, and that many of the most absurd opinions and doctrines, which have been imposed in the dark ages of ignorance, continue to be the opinions, and doctrines of ages enlightened by philosophy and learning. If I was a philosopher, says MONTAIGNE, I would naturalise art, instead of artifying nature. The expression is odd, but the sense is good, and what he recommends would be done, if the reasons that have been given, did not stand in the way; if the self-interest of some men, the madness of

others, and the univerfal pride of the human heart, did not determine them to prefer error to truth, and authority to reason.

WHILST your mufe is employed to lash the vicious into repentance, or to laugh the fools of the age into fhame, and whilst ſhe riſes ſometimes to the nobleſt ſubjects of philoſophical meditation, I ſhall throw upon paper, for your ſatisfaction, and for my own, ſome part at leaſt of what I have thought and ſaid formerly on the laſt of theſe ſubjects, as well as the reflections that they may ſuggeſt to me further in writing on them. The ſtrange ſituation I am in, and the melancholy ſtate of public affairs take up much of my time, divide or even diſſipate my thoughts, and which is worſe, drag the mind down by perpetual interruptions, from a philoſophical tone, or temper, to the drudgery of private, and public buſineſs. The laſt lies neareſt my heart, and ſince I am once more engaged in the ſervice of my country; diſarmed, gagged, and almoſt bound as I am, I will not abandon it as long as the integrity, and perfeverance of thoſe who are under none of theſe diſadvantages, and with whom I now co-operate, make it reaſonable for me to act the ſame part. Further than this, no ſhadow of duty obliges me to go. PLATO ceaſed to act for the commonwealth, when he ceaſed to perſuade; and SOLON laid down his arms before the public magazine, when PISISTRATUS grew too ſtrong to be oppoſed any longer with hopes of ſucceſs.

THO my ſituation, and my engagements are ſufficiently known to you, I chooſe to mention them on this occaſion, left you ſhould expect from me any thing more than I find myſelf able to perform whilſt I am in them. It has been ſaid by many, that they wanted time to make their diſcourſes ſhorter, and if this be a good excuſe, as I think it may be often, I lay in my claim

claim to it. You must neither expect, in what I am about to write to you, that brevity which might be expected in letters, or essays, nor that exactness of method, nor that fulness of the several parts which they affect to observe, who presume to write philosophical treatises. The merit of brevity is relative to the manner, and style, in which any subject is treated, as well as to the nature of it; for the same subject may be sometimes treated very differently, and yet very properly, in both these respects. Should the poet make syllogisms in verse, or pursue a long process of reasoning in the didactic style, he would be sure to tire his reader on the whole, like LUCRETIUS, tho he reasoned better than the roman, and put into some parts of his work the same poetical fire. He may write, as you have begun to do, on philosophical subjects, but he must write in his own character. He must contract, he may shadow, he has a right to omit whatever will not be cast in the poetic mold, and when he cannot instruct, he may hope to please. But the philosopher has no such privileges. He may contract sometimes, he must never shadow. He must be limited by his matter, lest he should grow whimsical; and by the parts of it which he understands best, lest he should grow obscure. But these parts he must develope fully, and he has no right to omit any thing that may serve the purpose of truth, whether it please, or not. As it would be disingenuous to sacrifice truth to popularity, so it is trifling to appeal to the reason and experience of mankind, as every philosophical writer does, or must be understood to do, and then to talk, like PLATO, and his antient and modern disciples, to the imagination only. There is no need however to banish eloquence out of philosophy; and truth and reason are no enemies to the purity, nor to the ornaments of language. But as the want of an exact determination of ideas, and of an exact precision in the use of words, is inexcusable in a philosopher, he must
pre-

preserve them, even at the expence of style. In short, it seems to me, that the business of the philosopher is to dilate, if I may borrow this word from TULLY, to press, to prove, to convince; and that of the poet to hint, to touch his subject with short and spirited strokes, to warm the affections, and to speak to the heart.

THO I seem to prepare an apology for prolixity even in writing essays, I will endeavour not to be tedious; and this endeavour may succeed the better, perhaps, by declining any over strict observation of method. There are certain points of that which I esteem the FIRST PHILOSOPHY, whereof I shall never lose sight; but this will be very consistent with a sort of epistolary license. To digress, and to ramble are different things; and he who knows the country thro which he travels, may venture out of the high road because he is sure of finding his way back to it again. Thus the several matters that may arise, even accidentally before me, will have some share in guiding my pen.

I DARE not promise that the sections, or members of these essays will bear that nice proportion to one another, and to the whole, which a severe critic would require. All I dare promise you is, that my thoughts, in what order soever they flow, shall be communicated to you just as they pass thro my mind, just as they use to be when we converse together on those, or any other subjects; when we saunter alone, or as we have often done with good ARBUTHNOT, and the jocosse dean of St. Patrick's, among the multiplied scenes of your little garden. That theatre is large enough for my ambition. I dare not pretend to instruct mankind, and I am not humble enough to write to the public for any other purpose. I mean, by writing on such subjects as I intend here, to make some

trial of my progress in search of the most important truths, and to make this trial before a friend, in whom, I think, I may confide. These epistolary essays, therefore, will be writ with as little regard to form, and with as little reserve, as I used to shew in the conversations which have given occasion to them, when I maintained the same opinions, and insisted on the same reasons in defence of them.

It might seem strange to a man, not well acquainted with the world, and in particular with the philosophical and theological tribe, that so much precaution should be necessary in the communication of our thoughts on any subject of the first philosophy, which is of common concern to the whole race of mankind, and wherein no one can have, according to nature and truth, any separate interest. Yet so it is. The separate interests we cannot have by God's institutions, are created by those of man; and there is no subject on which men deal more unfairly with one another than this. There are separate interests, to mention them in general only, of prejudice, and of profession. By the first, men set out in the search of truth under the conduct of error, and work up their heated imaginations often to such a delirium, that the more genius, and the more learning they have, the madder they grow. By the second, they are sworn, as it were, to follow all their lives the authority of some particular school, to which "tanquam sculpulo adhaerescunt*;" for the condition of their engagement is to defend certain doctrines, and even mere forms of speech, without examination, or to examine only in order to defend them. By both, they become philosophers as men became christians in the primitive church, or as they determined themselves about disputed doctrines; for says HILARIUS, writing to St. AUSTIN, "Your holiness knows, that the greatest part of
" the

* TULLY.

“ the faithful embrace, or refuse to embrace a doctrine, for
 “ no reason but the impression which the name and authority
 “ of some body or other makes on them.” What now can a
 man who seeks truth, for the sake of truth, and is indiffer-
 ent where he finds it, expect from any communication of his
 thoughts to such men as these? He will be much deceived, if
 he expects any thing better than imposition, or altercation.

Few men have, I believe, consulted others, both the living
 and the dead, with less presumption, and in a greater spirit of
 docility than I have done; and the more I have consulted,
 the less have I found of that inward conviction on which a
 mind that is not absolutely implicit, can rest. I thought, for a
 time, that this must be my fault. I distrusted myself, not my
 teachers, men of the greatest name, antient and modern.
 But I found at last, that it was safer to trust myself than them,
 and to proceed by the light of my own understanding, than to
 wander after these “ ignes fatui” of philosophy. If I am able
 therefore to tell you easily, and at the same time so clearly
 and distinctly as to be easily understood, and so strongly as not
 to be easily refuted, how I have thought for myself, I shall be
 persuaded that I have thought enough on these subjects. If I
 am not able to do this, it will be evident that I have not
 thought on them enough. I must review my opinions, disco-
 ver, and correct my errors.

I HAVE said, that the subjects I mean, and which will be the
 principal objects of these essays, are those of the first philoso-
 phy, and it is fit therefore, that I should explain what I under-
 stand by the first philosophy. Do not imagine that I under-
 stand what has passed commonly under that name, metaphysi-
 cal pneumatics, for instance, or ontology. The first are con-
 versant about imaginary substances, such as may, and may not
 exist.

exist. That there is a God we can demonstrate; and altho we know nothing of his manner of being, yet we acknowledge him to be immaterial, because a thousand absurdities, and such as imply the strongest contradiction, result from the supposition that the supreme Being is a system of matter. But of any other spirits we neither have, nor can have any knowledge, and no man will be inquisitive about spiritual physiognomy, nor go about to enquire, I believe, at this time, as Evodius enquired of St. AUSTIN, whether our immaterial part, the soul, does not remain united, when it forsakes this gross terrestrial body, to some aethereal body, more subtil, and more fine, which was one of the Pythagorean, and Platonic whimsies; nor be under any concern to know, if this be not the case of the dead, how souls can be distinguished after their separation, that of DIVES for example from that of LAZARUS. The second, that is ontology, treats most scientifically of Being abstracted from all Being, "de ente quatenus ens." It came in fashion whilst ARISTOTLE was in fashion, and has been spun into an immense web out of scholastic brains. But it should be, and I think it is already left to the acute disciples of LEIBNITZ who dug for gold in the ordure of the schools, and to other German wits. Let them darken by tedious definitions, what is too plain to need any; or let them employ their vocabulary of barbarous terms, to propagate an unintelligible jargon, which is supposed to express such abstractions as they cannot make, and according to which however they presume often to control the particular, and most evident truths of experimental knowledge. Such reputed science deserves no rank in philosophy, not the last, and much less the first.

I DESIRE you not to imagine neither, that I understand by the first philosophy, even such a science as my † Lord BACON

Vol. III. S f. describes,

† Advan. of Learn. lib. 2.

describes, a science of general observations, and axioms, such as do not belong properly to any particular part of science, but are common to many, "and of an higher stage," as he expresses himself. He complains, that philosophers have not gone up to the "spring-head," which would be of "general, and "excellent use for the disclosing of nature, and the abridgment "of art;" tho they "draw now and then a bucket of water "out of the well for some particular use." I respect, no man more, this great authority, but I respect no authority enough to subscribe on the faith of it, to that which appears to me fantastical, as if it were real. Now this spring-head of science is purely fantastical, and the figure conveys a false notion to the mind, as figures, employed licentiously, are apt to do. The great author himself calls these "axioms," which are to constitute his first philosophy, "observations." Such they are properly, for there are some uniform principles, or uniform impressions of the same nature to be observed in very different subjects, "*una eademque naturae vestigia aut signacula diversis materiis & subjectis impressa.*" These observations, therefore, when they are sufficiently verified and well established, may be properly applied in discourse, or writing, from one subject to another. But I apprehend that when they are so applied, they serve rather to illustrate a proposition than to "disclose "nature," or to "abridge art." They may have a better foundation than similitudes, and comparisons more loosely, and more superficially made. They may compare realities, not appearances; things that nature has made alike, not things that seem only to have some relation of this kind in our imaginations. But still they are comparisons of things distinct, and independent. They do not lead us to things; but things that are lead us to make them. He who possesses two sciences, and the same will be often true of arts, may find in certain respects a similitude between them, because he possesses both. If he

did not possess both, he would be led by neither to the acquisition of the other. Such observations are effects, not means of knowledge, and therefore to suppose that any collection of them can constitute a science of an "higher stage," from whence we may reason "à priori" down to particulars, is, I presume, to suppose something very groundless, and very useless at best to the advancement of knowledge. A pretended science of this kind must be barren of knowledge, and may be fruitful of error, as the Persian magic was, if it proceeded on the faint analogy that may be discovered between physics, and politics, and deduced the rules of civil government from what the professors of it observed of the operations, and works of nature in the material world. The very specimen of their magic, which my Lord BACON has given, would be sufficient to justify what is here objected to his doctrine.

LET us conclude this head by mentioning two examples among others, which he brings to explain the better what he means by his first philosophy. The first is this axiom †, "if to unequals you add equals, all will be unequal." This, he says, is an "axiom of justice, as well as of mathematics," and he asks whether there is not a "true coincidence between commutative, and distributive justice, and arithmetical, and geometrical proportion?" But I would ask in my turn, whether the certainty that any arithmetician, or geometrician has of the arithmetical, or geometrical truth, will lead him to discover this coincidence? I ask whether the most profound lawyer, who never heard, perhaps, this axiom, would be led to it by his notions of commutative, and distributive justice? Certainly not. He who is well skilled in arithmetic, or geometry, and in jurisprudence, may observe, perhaps, this uniformity of

S f 2 natural

† Si inaequalibus addas aequalia, omnia erunt inaequalia.

natural principle or impressiō ; because he is so skilled, tho to say the truth it be not very obvious : but he will not have derived his knowledge of it from any spring-head of a first philosophy, from any science of an “ higher stage ” than arithmetic, geometry, and jurisprudence.

THE second example is this axiom ^a, “ that the destruction of things is prevented by the reduction of them to their first principles.” This rule is said to hold in religion, in physics, and in politics, and MACHIAVEL is quoted for having established it in the last of these. Now, tho this axiom be generally, it is not universally true ; and to say nothing of physics, it will not be hard to produce, in contradiction to it, examples of religious, and civil institutions, that would have perished if they had been kept strictly to their first principles, and that have been supported by departing more or less from them. It may seem justly matter of wonder, that the author of “ the advancement of learning ” should espouse this maxim in religion, and politics, as well as physics, so absolutely, and that he should place it as an axiom of his first philosophy relatively to the three, since he could not do it without falling into the abuse he condemns so much in his “ organum novum ^b ; ” the abuse philosophers are guilty of when they suffer the mind to rise too fast, as it is apt to do, from particulars to remote, and general axioms. That the author of the “ political discourses ” should fall into this abuse, is not at all strange. The same abuse runs through all his writings, in which, among many wise, and many wicked reflections, and precepts, he establishes frequently general maxims, or rules of conduct on a few particular examples, and sometimes on a single example. Upon the whole

^a Interitus rei arcetur per reductionem ejus ad principia.
^b —ut intellectus à particularibus ad axiomata remota, et quasi generalissima, —salvat, et volet.

whole matter, one of these axioms communicates no knowledge but that which we must have before we can know the axiom, and the other may betray us into great error when we apply it to use, and action. One is unprofitable, the other dangerous; and the philosophy, which admits them as principles of general knowledge, deserves ill to be reputed philosophy. It would have been just as useful, and much more safe, to admit into this receptacle of axioms, those self-evident, and necessary truths alone, of which we have an immediate perception, since they are not confined to any special parts of science, but are common to several, or to all. Thus these profitable axioms, "what is, is; the whole is bigger than a part," and divers others, might serve to enlarge the spring-head of a first philosophy, and be of excellent use in arguing, "ex praecognitis et praeconcessis."

If you ask me now, what I understand then by a first philosophy? My answer will be such as I suppose you already prepared to receive. I understand by a first philosophy, that which deserves the first place on account of the dignity, and importance of it's objects, "natural theology or theism, and natural religion or ethics." If we consider the order of the sciences in their rise, and progress, the first place belongs to natural philosophy, the mother of them all, or the trunk of the tree of knowledge, out of which, and in proportion to which, like so many branches, they all grow. These branches spread wide, and bear even fruits of different kinds. But the sap that made them shoot, and makes them flourish, rises from the root through the trunk, and their productions are varied according to the variety of strainers through which it flows. In plain terms, I speak not here of supernatural, or revealed science, and therefore, I say, that all science, if it be real, must rise from below, and from our own level. It cannot descend

descend from above, nor from superior systems of being and knowledge. Truth of existence is truth of knowledge, and therefore reason searches after them in one of these scenes, where both are to be found together, and are within our reach; whilst imagination hopes fondly to find them in another, where both of them are to be found, but surely not by us. The notices we receive from without concerning the beings that surround us, and the inward consciousness we have of our own, are the foundations, and the true criterions too, of all the knowledge we acquire of body and of mind; and body and mind are objects alike of natural philosophy. We assume commonly that they are two distinct substances. Be it so. They are still united, and blended, as it were, together, in one human nature: and all natures, united or not, fall within the province of natural philosophy. On the hypothesis indeed that body and soul are two distinct substances, one of which subsists after the dissolution of the other, certain men who have taken the whimsical title of metaphysicians, as if they had science beyond the bounds of nature, or of nature discoverable by others, have taken likewise to themselves the doctrine of mind, and have left that of body, under the name of physics, to a supposed inferior order of philosophers. But the right of these stands good; for all the knowledge that can be acquired about mind, or the unextended substance of the Cartesians, must be acquired, like that about body, or the extended substance, within the bounds of their province, and by the means they employ, particular experiments and observations. Nothing can be true of mind, any more than of body, that is repugnant to these; and an intellectual hypothesis, which is not supported by the intellectual phaenomena, is, at least, as ridiculous as a corporeal hypothesis which is not supported by the corporeal phaenomena.

IF I have said thus much in this place concerning natural philosophy, it has not been without good reason. I consider theology, and ethics as the first of sciences in pre-eminence of rank. But I consider the constant contemplation of nature, by which I mean the whole system of God's works, as far as it lies open to us, as the common spring of all sciences, and even of these. What has been said, agreeably to this notion, seems to me evidently true; and yet metaphysical divines and philosophers proceed in direct contradiction to it, and have thereby, if I mistake not, bewildered themselves and a great part of mankind, in such inextricable labyrinths of hypothetical reasoning, that few men can find their way back, and none can find it forward into the road of truth. To dwell long, and on some points always, in particular knowledge, tires the patience of these impetuous philosophers. They fly to generals. To consider, attentively, even the minutest phaenomena of body and mind mortifies their pride. Rather than creep up slowly, à posteriori, to a little general knowledge, they soar at once as far, and as high, as imagination can carry them. From thence they descend again armed with systems and arguments à priori, and regardless how these agree, or clash with the phaenomena of nature, they impose them on mankind.

IT is this manner of philosophizing, this preposterous method of beginning our search after truth, out of the bounds of human knowledge, or of continuing it beyond them, that has corrupted natural theology, and natural religion in all ages. They have been corrupted to such a degree, that it is grown, and was so long since, as necessary to plead the cause of God, if I may use this expression after *SENECA*, against the divine, as against the atheist; to assert his existence against the latter,

to

to defend his attributes against the former, and to justify his providence against both. To both, a sincere and humble theist might say very properly, "I make no difference between you on many occasions; because it is indifferent * whether you deny, or defame the supreme Being;" nay, PLUTARCH, tho' little orthodox in theology, was not in the wrong, perhaps, when he declared the last to be the worst.

IN treating the subjects about which I shall write to you in these letters, or essays, it will be therefore necessary to distinguish genuine and pure theism, from the unnatural, and profane mixtures of human imagination; "what we can know of God, from what we cannot know." This is the more necessary too; because, whilst true and false notions about God and religion are blended together in our minds, under one specious name of science, the false are more likely to make men doubt of the true, as it often happens, than to persuade men that they are true themselves. Now in order to this purpose, nothing can be more effectual than to go to the root of error, of that primitive error which encourages our curiosity, sustains our pride, fortifies our prejudices, and gives pretence to delusion. This primitive error consists in the high opinion we are apt to entertain of the human mind, tho' it holds, in truth, a very low rank in the intellectual system. To cure this error, we need only turn our eyes inward, and contemplate impartially what passes there from the infancy to the maturity of the mind. Thus it will not be difficult, and thus alone it is possible, to discover the true nature of human knowledge, how far it extends, how far it is real, and where, and how it begins to be fantastical.

SUCH an enquiry, if it cannot check the presumption, nor humble the pride of metaphysicians, may serve to undeceive others.

* Utrum deum neges an infames.

others. LOCKE pursued it. He grounded all he taught on the phaenomena of nature. He appealed to the experience and conscious knowledge of every one, and rendered all he advanced intelligible. LEIBNITZ, one of the vaineft, and moft chimerical men that ever got a name in philofophy, and who is often fo unintelligible, that no man ought to believe he understood himfelf, cenfured LOCKE as a fuperficial philofopher. What has happened? The philofophy of one has forced it's way into general approbation: that of the other has carried no conviction, and fcarce any information to thofe who have mifpent their time about it. To fpeak the truth, tho it may feem a paradox, our knowledge on many fubjects, and particularly on thofe which we intend here, muft be fuperficial to be real. This is the condition of humanity. We are placed, as it were, in an intellectual twilight, where we difcover but few things clearly, and none intirely, and yet fee juft enough to tempt us with the hope of making better and more difcoveries. Thus flattered, men push their enquiries on, and may be properly enough compared to * Ixion, who "imagined he had JUNO in his arms whilft he embraced a "cloud."

To be contented to know things, as God has made us capable of knowing them, is then a firft principle neceffary to fecure us from falling into error; and if there is any fubject upon which we fhould be moft on our guard againft error, it is furely that which I have called here the "firft philofophy." God is hid from us in the majefty of his nature, and the little we difcover of him, muft be difcovered by the light that is reflected from his works. Out of this light, therefore, we fhould never go in our enquiries and reasonings about his nature, his attributes, and the order of his providence: and

* Lord BACON.

yet upon these subjects, men depart the furthest from it, nay, they who depart the furthest, are the best heard by the bulk of mankind. The less men know, the more they believe that they know. Belief passes in their minds for knowledge: and the very circumstances, which should beget doubt, produce increase of faith. Every glittering apparition that is pointed out to them, in the vast wild of imagination, passes for a reality: and the more distant, the more confused, the more incomprehensible it is, the more sublime it is esteemed. He who should attempt to shift these scenes of airy vision, for those of real knowledge, might expect to be treated with scorn and anger, by the whole theological, and metaphysical tribe, the masters, and the scholars. He would be despised as a plebeian philosopher, and railed at as an infidel. It would be founded high, that he debased human nature, which has a cognation, so the reverend and learned doctor CUDWORTH calls it, with the divine, that the soul of man, immaterial and immortal by its nature, was made to contemplate higher and nobler objects than this sensible world, and even than itself; since it was made to contemplate God, and to be united to him. In such clamor as this, the voice of truth and of reason would be drowned, and with both of them on his side, he who opposed it would make many enemies, and few converts. Nay, I am apt to think, that some of these, if he made any, would say to him, as soon as the gaudy visions of error were dispelled, and till they were accustomed to the simplicity of truth, "pol me occidistis." Prudence forbids me, therefore, to write as I think to the world, whilst friendship forbids me to write otherwise to you. I have been a martyr of faction in politics, and have no vocation to be so in philosophy.

BUT there is another consideration which deserves more regard, because it is of a public nature, and because the com-

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mon interests of society may be affected by it. Truth and falshood, knowledge and ignorance, revelations of the Creator, inventions of the creature, dictates of reason, fallies of enthusiasm, have been blended so long together in our systems of theology, that it may be thought dangerous to separate them; left by attacking some parts of these systems we should shake the whole. It may be thought that error, itself, deserves to be respected on this account, and that men who are deluded for their good, should be deluded on.

SOME such reflections as these it is probable that ERASMUS made, when he observed in one of his letters to MELANCTHON, that PLATO, dreaming of a philosophical commonwealth, saw the impossibility of governing the multitude without deceiving them. "Let not christians lye, says this great divine, but let it not be thought neither, that every truth ought to be thrown out to the vulgar." "Non expedit omnem veritatem prodere vulgo." SCAEVOLA and VARRO were more explicit than ERASMUS, and more reasonable than PLATO. They held not only that many truths were to be concealed from the vulgar, but that it was expedient the vulgar should believe many things that were false. They distinguished at the same time very rightly, between the regard due to religions already established, and the conduct to be held in the establishment of them. The Greek assumed, that men could not be governed by truth, and erected on this principle a fabulous theology. The Romans were not of the same opinion. VARRO declared expressly, that if he had been to frame a new institution, he would have framed it "ex naturae potius formulâ." But they both thought that things evidently false might deserve an outward respect, when they are interwoven into a system of government. This outward respect every good citizen will shew them in such a case, and they can claim no more in any.

He will not propagate these errors, but he will be cautious how he propagates even truth, in opposition to them.

THERE has been much noise made about free thinking, and men have been animated, in the contest, by a spirit that becomes neither the character of divines, nor that of good citizens; by an arbitrary tyrannical spirit under the mask of religious zeal, and by a presumptuous, factious spirit under that of liberty. If the first could prevail, they would establish implicit belief and blind obedience, and an inquisition to maintain this abject servitude. To assert Antipodes might become once more as heretical as arianism, or pelagianism: and men might be dragged to the jails of some holy office, like GALILEI, for saying they had seen what in fact they had seen, and what every one else that pleased might see. If the second could prevail, they would destroy at once the general influence of religion, by shaking the foundations of it which education had laid. These are wide extremes. Is there no middle path in which a reasonable man and a good citizen may direct his steps? I think there is.

EVERY one has an undoubted right to think freely: nay, it is the duty of every one to do so, as far as he has the necessary means, and opportunities. This duty too is in no case so incumbent on him, as in those that regard what I call, the first philosophy. They who have neither means nor opportunities of this sort, must submit their opinions to authority: and to what authority can they resign themselves so properly, and so safely as to that of the laws, and constitution of their country? In general nothing can be more absurd than to take opinions, of the greatest moment, and such as concern us the most intimately, on trust. But there is no help against it in many particular cases. Things the most absurd in speculation become

necessary in practice. Such is the human constitution, and reason excuses them on the account of this necessity. Reason does even a little more; and it is all she can do. She gives the best direction possible to the absurdity. Thus she directs those who must believe because they cannot know, to believe in the laws of their country, and conform their opinions and practice to those of their ancestors, to those of CORUNCANIUS, of SCIPIO, of SCAEVOLA, not to those of ZENO, of CLEANTHES, of CHRYSIPPUS*.

BUT now the same reason that gives this direction to such men as these will give a very contrary direction to those who have the means, and opportunities the others want. Far from advising them to submit to this mental bondage, she will advise them to employ their whole industry, to exert the utmost freedom of thought, and to rest on no authority but her's, that is their own. She will speak to them in the language of the Soufys, a sect of philosophers in Persia, that travellers have mentioned. "Doubt, say these wise and honest free-thinkers, is the key of knowledge. He who never doubts, never examines. He who never examines, discovers nothing. He who discovers nothing, is blind, and will remain so. If you find no reason to doubt concerning the opinions of your fathers, keep to them, they will be sufficient for you. If you find any reason to doubt concerning them, seek the truth quietly, but take care not to disturb the minds of other men."

LET us proceed agreeably to these maxims. Let us seek truth, but seek it quietly as well as freely. Let us not imagine, like some who are called free-thinkers, that every man, who can think and judge for himself, as he has a right to do,
has

* De nat. deor.

has therefore a right of speaking, any more than of acting according to the full freedom of his thoughts. The freedom belongs to him as a rational creature. He lies under the restraint as a member of society.

If the religion we profess contained nothing more than articles of faith, and points of doctrine clearly revealed to us in the gospel, we might be obliged to renounce our natural freedom of thought in favor of this supernatural authority. But since it is notorious that a certain order of men, who call themselves the church, have been employed to make and propagate a theological system of their own, which they call christianity, from the days of the apostles, and even from these days inclusively; it is our duty to examine, and analyze the whole, that we may distinguish what is divine from what is human; adhere to the first implicitly, and ascribe to the last no more authority than the word of man deserves.

SUCH an examination is the more necessary to be undertaken by every one who is concerned for the truth of his religion, and for the honor of christianity, because the first preachers of it were not, and they who preach it still are not agreed about many of the most important points of their system; because the controversies raised by these men have banished union, peace, and charity out of the christian world; and because some parts of the system favour so much of superstition, and enthusiasm, that all the prejudices of education, and the whole weight of civil and ecclesiastical power can hardly keep them in credit. These considerations deserve the more attention, because nothing can be more true than what PLUTARCH said of old, and my Lord BACON has said since; one, that "superstition," and the other, that "vain controversies" are principal causes of atheism.

I NEITHER expect nor desire to see any public revision made of the present system of christianity. I should fear an attempt to alter the established religion as much as they who have the most bigot attachment to it, and for reasons as good as theirs, tho not entirely the same. I speak only of the duty of every private man to examine for himself, which would have an immediate good effect relatively to himself, and might have in time a good effect relatively to the public, since it would dispose the minds of men to a greater indifference about theological disputes, which are the disgrace of christianity, and have been the plagues of the world.

WILL you tell me that private judgment must submit to the established authority of "fathers" and "councils?" My answer shall be that the fathers ancient, and modern, in councils, and out of them, have raised that immense system of "artificial theology," by which genuine christianity is perverted, and in which it is lost. These "fathers" are "fathers" of the worst sort, such as contrive to keep their children in a perpetual state of infancy, that they may exercise perpetual, and absolute dominion over them. "Quo magis regnum in illos exercent pro sua libidine*." I call their theology "artificial," because it is in a multitude of instances conformable neither to the religion of nature, nor to gospel christianity, but often repugnant to both, tho said to be founded on them. I shall have occasion to mention several such instances in the course of these little essays. Here I will only observe, that if it be hard to conceive how any thing so absurd as the pagan theology stands represented by the fathers who wrote against it, and as it really was, could ever gain credit among rational creatures, it is full as hard to conceive how the

* ERASMUS.

"artificial"

“artificial” theology we speak of could ever prevail, not only in ages of ignorance, but in the most enlightened. There is a letter of St. AUSTIN, wherein he says *, that he was ashamed of himself when he refuted the opinions of the former, and that he was ashamed of mankind when he considered that such absurdities were received, and defended. The reflections might be retorted on the faint, since he broached, and defended doctrines as unworthy of the supreme all-perfect Being, as those which the heathens taught concerning their fictitious, and inferior gods. Is it necessary to quote any other than that, by which we are taught that God has created numbers of men for no purpose but to damn them? “*Quisquis praedestinationis doctrinam invidiâ gravat †,*” says CALVIN, “apertè maledicit deo.” Let us say “*Quisquis praedestinationis doctrinam asserit, blasphemat.*” Let us not impute such cruel injustice to the all-perfect Being. Let PAUL, and AUSTIN, and CALVIN, and all those who teach it be answerable for it alone. You may bring “fathers” and “councils” as evidences in the cause of artificial theology: but “reason” must be the judge, and all I contend for is, that she should be so in the breast of every christian that can appeal to her tribunal.

Will you tell me that even such a private examination of the christian system as I propose that every man, who is able to make it, should make for himself, is unlawful, and that if any doubts arise in our minds concerning religion, we must have recourse for the solution of them to some of that “holy order” which was instituted by God himself, and which has been continued by the imposition of hands in every christian society from the “apostles” down to the present “clergy?”
My

* —jam pudet me ista refellere cum eos non puduerit ista sentire. Cum verò auri sint etiam defendere, &c.

† Cal. Inf. lib. 3. c. 21.

My answer shall be shortly this, it is repugnant to all the ideas of wisdom and goodness to believe that the universal terms of salvation are knowable by the means of one order of men alone, and that they continue to be so even after they have been published to all nations. Some of your directors will tell you, that whilst Christ was on earth, the apostles were the church, that he was the bishop of it, that afterwards the admission of men into this order was approved, and confirmed by visions and other divine manifestations, and that these wonderful proofs of God's interposition at the ordinations, and consecrations of presbyters, and bishops lasted even in the time of St. CYPRIAN, that is, in the middle of the third century. It is pity that they lasted no longer for the honor of the church, and for the conviction of those who do not sufficiently reverence the religious society. It were to be wished perhaps, that some of the secrets of electricity were improved enough to be piously, and usefully applied to this purpose. If we beheld a SHECINAH, or divine presence, like the flame of a taper, on the heads of those who receive the imposition of hands, we might believe that they receive the "Holy Ghost" at the same time. But as we have no reason to believe what superstitious, credulous, or lying men, such as CYPRIAN himself was, reported formerly, that they might establish the proud pretensions of the clergy; so we have no reason to believe that five men of this order have any more of the divine spirit in our time, after they are ordained, than they had before. It would be a farce to provoke laughter, if there was no suspicion of prophanation in it, to see them gravely lay hands on one another, and bid one another receive the Holy Ghost.

WILL you tell me finally, in opposition to what has been said, and that you may anticipate what remains to be said, that

laymen are not only unauthorized, but quite unequal without the assistance of divines to the task I propose? If you do, I shall make no scruple to tell you, in return, that laymen may be, if they please, in every respect as fit, and are in one important respect more fit than divines to go through this examination, and to judge for themselves upon it. We say that the scriptures, concerning the divine authenticity of which all the professors of christianity agree, are the sole criterion of christianity. You add tradition, concerning which there may be, and there is much dispute. We have then a certain invariable rule, whenever the scriptures speak plainly. Whenever they do not speak so, we have this comfortable assurance, that doctrines, which no body understands, are revealed to no body, and are therefore improper objects of human enquiry. We know too, that if we receive the explanations and commentaries of these dark sayings from the clergy, we take the greatest part of our religion from the word of man, not from the word of God. Tradition indeed, however derived, is not to be totally rejected; for if it was, how came the canon of the scriptures, even of the gospels, to be fixed? How was it conveyed down to us? Traditions of general facts, and general propositions plain and uniform may be of some authority and use. But particular, anecdotal traditions, whose original authority is unknown, or justly suspicious, and that have acquired only an appearance of generality, and notoriety, because they have been frequently, and boldly repeated from age to age, deserve no more regard, than doctrines evidently added to the scriptures under pretence of explaining, and commenting them, by men as fallible as ourselves. We may receive the scriptures, and be persuaded of their authenticity on the faith of ecclesiastical tradition; but it seems to me, that we may reject, at the same time, all the artificial theology which has been raised on these scriptures
by

by doctors of the church, with as much right as they receive the Old Testament on the authority of jewish scribes, and doctors, whilst they reject the oral law, and all rabinical literature.

He who examines on such principles as these, which are conformable to truth and reason, may lay aside at once the immense volumes of fathers, and councils, of schoolmen, casuists, and controversial writers, which have perplexed the world so long. Natural religion will be to such a man no longer intricate; revealed religion will be no longer mysterious, nor the word of God equivocal. Clearness and precision are two great excellencies of human laws. How much more should we expect to find them in the law of God? They have been banished from thence by artificial theology; and he who is desirous to find them must banish the professors of it from his councils, instead of consulting them. He must seek for genuine christianity with that simplicity of spirit, with which it is taught in the gospel by Christ himself. He must do the very reverse of what has been done by the persons you advise him to consult.

You see that I have said what has been said on a supposition, that however obscure theology may be, the christian religion is extremely plain, and requires no great learning, nor deep meditation to develope it. But if it was not so plain, if both these were necessary to develope it, is great learning the monopoly of the clergy since the resurrection of letters, as a little learning was before that aera? Is deep meditation, and justness of reasoning confined to men of that order by a peculiar and exclusive privilege? In short, and to ask a question which experience will decide, have these men, who boast that they are appointed by God to be the

interpreters of his secret will, to represent his person, and answer in his name, as it were, out of the sanctuary*, have these men, I say, been able in more than seventeen centuries, to establish an uniform system of revealed religion, for natural religion never wanted their help, among the civil societies of christians, or even in their own †? They do not seem to have aimed at this desirable end. Divided as they have always been, they have always studied in order to believe §, and to take upon trust, or to find matter of discourse, or to contradict and confute, but never to consider impartially, nor to use a free judgment. On the contrary, they who have attempted to use this freedom of judgment have been constantly, and cruelly persecuted by them.

THE first steps towards the establishment of artificial theology, which has passed for christianity ever since, were enthusiastical. They were not heretics alone, who delighted in wild allegories, and the pompous jargon of mystery. They were the orthodox fathers of the first ages, they were the disciples of the apostles, or the scholars of their disciples; for the truth of which I may appeal to the epistles, and other writings of these men that are extant, to those of CLEMENS, of IGNATIUS, or of IRENAEUS, for instance, and to the visions of HERMES that have so near a resemblance to the productions of BUNYAN.

THE next steps of the same kind were rhetorical. They were made by men who declaimed much, and reasoned ill, but who imposed on the imaginations of others by the heat of their own, by their hyperboles, their exaggerations, the acrimony of their style, and their violent invectives. Such were the

* N. B. I chuse to borrow these expressions from CALVIN, in order to shew how much they ascribe who are supposed to ascribe the least to this order.

† Cal. inf. l. 4. c. 3.

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the CHRYSOSTOMS the JEROMS, an HILARIUS, a CYRIL, and most of the fathers.

THE last of the steps I shall mention were logical, and these were made very opportunely, and very advantageously for the church, and for artificial theology. Absurdity in speculation and superstition in practice had been cultivated so long, and were become so gross, that men began to see through the veils that had been thrown over them, as ignorant as those ages were. Then the schoolmen arose. I need not display their character, it is enough known. This only I will say, that having very few materials of knowledge, and much subtilty of wit, they wrought up systems of fancy on the little they knew; and invented an art, by the help of ARISTOTLE, not of enlarging, but of puzzling knowledge with technical terms, with definitions, distinctions, and syllogisms merely verbal: they taught what they could not explain, evaded what they could not answer, and he who had the most skill in this art, might put to silence, when it came into general use, the man who was consciously certain that he had truth, and reason on his side.

THE authority of the schools lasted till the resurrection of letters. But as soon as real knowledge was enlarged, and the conduct of the understanding better understood, it fell into contempt. The advocates of artificial theology have had, since that time, a very hard task. They have been obliged to defend in the light what was imposed in the dark, and to acquire knowledge to justify ignorance. They were drawn to it with reluctance. But learning, that grew up among the laity, and controversies with one another, made this unavoidable, which was not eligible, on the principles of ecclesiastical policy. They have done with these new arms, all that great parts,
great

great pains, and great zeal could do under such disadvantages, and we may apply to this order, on this occasion, “*si per-
“ gama dextrâ, &c.*” But their Troy cannot be defended, irreparable breaches have been made in it. They have improved in learning and knowledge; but this improvement has been general, and as remarkable, at least among the laity as among the clergy. Besides which, it must be owned that the former have had in this respect a sort of indirect obligation to the latter, for whilst these men have searched into antiquity, have improved criticism, and almost exhausted subtilty, they have furnished so many arms the more to such of the others as do not submit implicitly to them, but examine and judge for themselves. By refuting one another when they differ, they have made it no hard matter to refute them all when they agree: and, I believe, there are few books written to propagate, or defend the received notions of artificial theology, which may not be refuted by the books themselves. I conclude on the whole, that laymen have, or need to have, no want of the clergy in examining; and analysing the religion they profess.

BUT, I said, that they are in one important respect more fit to go through this examination without the help of divines than with it. A layman, who seeks the truth, may fall into error; but as he can have no interest to deceive himself, so he has none of profession to bias his private judgment, any more than to engage him to deceive others. Now the clergyman lies strongly under this influence in every communion. How indeed should it be otherwise? Theology is become one of those sciences which *SENECA* calls, “*scientiæ in lucrum ex-
“ untes:*” and sciences, like arts, whose object is gain, are, in good English, trades. Such theology is; and men who could make no fortune, except the lowest, in any other, make often
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the highest in this; for the proof of which assertion I might produce some signal instances among my lords the bishops. The consequence has been uniform, for how ready soever the tradesmen of one church are to expose the false wares, that is, the errors, and abuses of another, they never admit that there are any in their own: and he who admitted this, in some particular instance, would be driven out of the ecclesiastical company, as a false brother, and one who spoiled the trade.

Thus it comes to pass that new churches may be established by the dissentions, but that old ones cannot be reformed by the concurrence, of the clergy. There is no composition to be made with this order of men. He, who does not believe all they teach in every communion, is reputed nearly as criminal, as he who believes no part of it. He who cannot assent to the athanasian creed, of which archbishop TILLOTSON said, as I have heard, that he wished we were well rid, would receive no better quarter than an atheist from the generality of the clergy. What recourse now has a man who cannot be thus implicit? Some have run into scepticism, some into atheism, and, for fear of being imposed on by others, have imposed on themselves. The way to avoid these extremes, is that which has been chalked out in this introduction. We may think freely, without thinking as licentiously as divines do, when they raise a system of imagination on true foundations; or as sceptics do when they renounce all knowledge; or as atheists do when they attempt to demolish the foundations of all religion, and reject demonstration. As we think for ourselves, we may keep our thoughts to ourselves, or, communicate them with a due reserve, and in such a manner only, as it may be done without offending the laws of our country, and disturbing the public peace.

I. CAN--

I CANNOT conclude my discourse on this occasion better than by putting you in mind of a passage you quoted to me once, with great applause, from a sermon of FOSTER, and to this effect: "Where mystery begins, religion ends." The apothegme pleased me much, and I was glad to hear such a truth from any pulpit, since it shews an inclination, at least, to purify christianity from the leaven of artificial theology, which consists principally in making things that are very plain mysterious, and in pretending to make things that are impenetrably mysterious very plain. If you continue still of the same mind, I shall have no excuse to make to you for what I have written, and shall write. Our opinions coincide. If you have changed your mind, think again, and examine further. You will find that it is the modest, not the presumptuous enquirer who makes a real, and safe progress in the discovery of divine truths. One follows nature, and nature's God, that is, he follows God in his works, and in his word; nor presumes to go further by metaphysical and theological commentaries of his own invention, than the two texts, if I may use this expression, carry him very evidently. They who have done otherwise, and have affected to discover, by a supposed science derived from tradition, or taught in the schools, more than they who have not such science can discover concerning the nature, physical and moral, of the supreme Being, and concerning the secrets of his providence, have been either enthusiasts, or knaves, or else of that numerous tribe who reason well very often, but reason always on some arbitrary supposition.

Much of this character belonged to the heathen divines, and it is, in all its parts, peculiarly that of the antient fathers, and modern doctors of the christian church. The former had reason, but no revelation to guide them; and tho' reason be al-

ways one, we cannot wonder that different prejudices, and different tempers of imagination warped it in them, on such subjects as these, and produced all the extravagancies of their theology. The latter had not the excuse of human frailty to make in mitigation of their presumption. On the contrary, the consideration of this frailty, inseparable from their nature, aggravated their presumption. They had a much surer criterion than human reason, they had divine reason, and the word of God to guide them, and to limit their enquiries. How came they to go beyond this criterion? Many of the first preachers were led into it because they preached or writ before there was any such criterion established, in the acceptance of which they all agreed; because they preached or writ in the mean time, on the faith of tradition, and on a confidence that they were persons extraordinarily gifted. Other reasons succeeded these. Skill in languages, not the gift of tongues, some knowledge of the jewish cabala, and some of heathen philosophy, of PLATO's especially, made them presume to comment, and under that pretence to enlarge the system of christianity, with as much license as they could have taken, if the word of man, instead of the word of God, had been concerned, and they had commented the civil, not the divine law. They did this so copiously, that, to give one instance of it, the exposition of St. MATTHEW's gospel took up ninety homelies, and that of St. JOHN's eighty-seven in the works of CHRYSOSTOM; which puts me in mind of a puritanical parson*, who, if I mistake not, for I have never looked into the folio since I was a boy and condemned sometimes to read in it, made one hundred and nineteen sermons on the hundred and nineteenth psalm.

Now all these men, both heathens and christians, appeared gigantic forms through the false medium of imagination, and

* Dr. MANTON.

habitual prejudice; but were, in truth, as arrant dwarfs in the knowledge to which they pretended, as you and I and all the sons of ADAM. The former, however, deserved some excuse: the latter none. The former made a very ill use of their reason, no doubt, when they presumed to dogmatize about the divine nature; but they deceived no body. What they taught, they taught on their own authority, which every other man was at liberty to receive, or reject, which as he approved or disapproved the doctrine. Christians, on the other hand, made a very ill use of revelation and reason both. Instead of employing the superior principle to direct and confine the inferior, they employed it to sanctify all that wild imagination, the passions, and the interests of the ecclesiastical order suggested. This abuse of revelation was so scandalous, that whilst they were building up a system of religion, under the name of christianity, every one who sought to signalize himself in the enterprize, and they were multitudes, dragged the scriptures to his opinion by different interpretations, paraphrases, and comments. ARIUS and NESTORIUS both, pretended that they had it on their sides: ATHANASIUS and CYRIL on theirs. They rendered the word of God so dubious, that it ceased to be a criterion, and they had recourse to another, to councils and the decrees of councils. He must be very ignorant in ecclesiastical antiquity, who does not know by what intrigues of the contending factions, for such they were and of the worst kind, these decrees were obtained: and yet an opinion prevailing that the Holy Ghost, the same divine Spirit who dictated the scriptures, presided in these assemblies and dictated their decrees, their decrees passed for infallible dicisions, and sanctified, little by little, much of the superstition, the nonsense, and even the blasphemy which the fathers taught, and all the usurpations of the church. This opinion prevailed, and influenced the minds of men, so powerfully, and so long,

long, that ERASMUS, who owns, in one of his letters, that the writings of OECOLAMPADIUS, against transubstantiation, seemed sufficient to seduce even the elect, "ut seduci posse videantur, etiam electi," declares in another, that nothing hindered him from embracing the doctrine of OECOLAMPADIUS, but the consent of the church to the other doctrine, "nisi obstaret consensus ecclesiae." Thus artificial theology rose on the demolitions, not on the foundations, of christianity; was incorporated into it, and became a principal part of it. How much it becomes a good christian to distinguish them in his private thoughts, at least, and how unfit even the greatest, the most moderate, and the least ambitious of the ecclesiastical order are to assist us in making this distinction, I have endeavoured to shew you by reason, and by example.

It remains then, that we apply ourselves to the study of the first philosophy without any other guides than the works, and the word of God. In natural religion the clergy are unnecessary, in revealed they are dangerous guides.

long that Basilius, who owns, in one of his letters, that the writings of Origen were against manifestation, seemed sufficient to seduce even the clergy, "ut seducti posse videantur, etiam elabi," declares in another, that nothing hindered him from embracing the doctrine of Origen, but the content of the church to the other doctrine; "nil obstat contentus ecclesie." Thus, a critical theology, not on the demolition, not on the foundation, of christianity; was incorporated into it, and became a principal part of it. How much it becomes a good christian to distinguish them in his private thoughts, at least, and how wide even the greatest, the most moderate, and the least ambitious of the ecclesiastical order are to shift in making this distinction, I have endeavoured to show you by reason, and by example.

It remains then, that we apply ourselves to the study of the first philosophy without any other guides than the works, and the word of God. In natural religion the clergy are unnecessary, in revealed they are dangerous guides.

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