

say, if, at any time whatever, they have found in me even the shadow of imposture or hypocrisy; let them declare what they know, and expose me to the world. I not only consent to it, but beg them to do it; dispensing with every obligation they may think themselves under to the contrary. Let them speak out boldly, not what they would have me be, but what they know I am. Let them judge of me from their consciences; I am not afraid to trust my honour in their hands, and promise to take no exceptions at what they may truly aver.

Let those who charge me with the want of religion, because they themselves have none, and cannot conceive how others can have any; let these, I say, first agree, if they can, among themselves. Some of them discover only an atheistical system in my works; others again pretend, that in my writings I aim at glorifying God without believing in him in my heart. They tax my writings with impiety, and my sentiments with hypocrisy. But if I publicly teach atheism, I am not in that, according to their notions, an hypocrite; and if I affect to believe what I do not, in that I inculcate no impiety. Thus by comparing their contradictory imputations, their calumny exposes itself; but malevolence is blind, and passion is incapable of reason. I do not, indeed, pretend to that degree of faith which is so much the boast of persons of indifferent probity, that implicit belief which hesitates at nothing, but readily admits of every thing that is proposed to it, and throws aside or dissembles concerning those objections it cannot resolve. I have not the happiness to see in revelation the evidence they pre-

tend to find there; and if I declare myself in its favour, it is because my heart induces me to it, because it presents nothing to me but consolation, and because there appear to me as many difficulties in rejecting it; but it is not because its evidence appears to me demonstrative, for in reality it doth not. Indeed I am not sufficiently learned ever to understand a demonstration which requires such profound erudition to deduce and comprehend. Is it not, however, very whimsical to conclude; that I, who openly profess my doubts and objections, am an hypocrite; and that those people who are so very positive, and who decide so absolutely on most points, and are so certain of every thing, without having better proof than myself; that those people, in short, who are not a jot more learned than I am, and who, without obviating my objections, reproach me with proposing them, should be accounted sincere?

But to what end should I be a hypocrite, and what should I gain by it? I have openly made an attack on particular interests, have stirred up all parties against me; the cause of God and of humanity is what I have maintained, and who is there concerns himself about that? What I have written on this subject hath not made the least impression; nor is there a soul who thinks himself obliged to me for it. Had I declared myself openly in favour of atheism, the devotees could not have used me worse, and my other enemies, not less dangerous, would not have given my reputation such frequent stabs in secret. Had I declared myself openly in favour of atheism, the one party would have attacked me with more reserve, in seeing me defended by
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the other, and observing me disposed in myself to revenge: But a man who fears God, is himself little to be feared; his party is not formidable; he is alone, or nearly so, and the world may safely do him a great deal of wrong, before he will think of returning it. Had I declared myself openly in favour of atheism, in thus separating myself from the church, I should at once have deprived its ministers of the means of incessantly harrassing me, and making me bear all the little airs of their ecclesiastical tyranny: I should not have been subject to so many idle censures; but, instead of so furiously condemning my writings, they would have been under the necessity of refuting them, which would not have been quite so easy. In short, had I declared myself openly in favour of atheism, they would at first have made a little clamour, which would have soon subsided; and I should have been soon at peace, as have been all others: the people of God would have taken no cognisance of me, nor thought they did me a favour in not treating me as a person excommunicated; so that I should thus have been quit with the world. The saints of Israel would not have writ me anonymous letters, venting their charity in pious abuses; they would not have taken the trouble to assure me, in all meekness and humility, that I was a wicked wretch, an execrable monster, and that it had been but too happy for the world had some good Christian but taken care to stifle me in my cradle. Again, the well-meaning part of mankind, regarding me, on their part, as a reprobate, would never have tormented themselves or me to bring me back into the right way: they would not have pulled me to the right and to the left,

nor have wearied me out with their remonstrances: they would not have reduced me to the necessity of commending their zeal, while I condemned their importunity; or of gratefully acknowledging they were called, to plague me to death with their good-will.

No, my Lord, to be an hypocrite, I must be both a madman and a fool: I should be mad to turn impostor for any thing I require of mankind; and a consummate fool, not to see that the method I have taken, could lead only to misfortunes in this life; and that, if even I might reap some advantages by it, I could not do it without contradicting myself. It is not too late, indeed, to take these advantages now; I need only bring myself to impose on the world for a moment, and I might triumph over my enemies. I am not as yet arrived at old age, and may possibly have long to suffer; the public opinion respecting me may change once again! But if ever I arrive at honours or fortune, by whatever means I may attain them, I shall then be assuredly an hypocrite.

A friend to truth doth not stake his reputation on one opinion or another; whatever he says, provided it be what he thinks, conduces to his purpose. He who is interested only in being sincere, hath no temptation to deceive; and there is no man of common sense, who doth not prefer the most simple method when it is also the most certain. My enemies may make the most of their abuse; they will not be able to deprive me of the honour of being a man who speaks truth on all occasions; of being the only author of these times, as well as of many preceding ages, that hath written sincerely, and hath said
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only what he believed. They may for a while sully my reputation by dint of false reports and calumnies; it will, sooner or later, however, triumph over them; for while they will be varying in their ridiculous imputations, I shall remain the same, and, without any other art than my native frankness, shall have it always in my power to disappoint them.

“ But this frankness, it may be said, is unreasonable with regard to the public. The truth is not to be spoken at all times: and though sensible people may be of your opinion, it is not proper the vulgar should adopt such sentiments.” Such are the reflections which are made me on all sides; and perhaps such is the reflection you yourself would make me were we alone in your closet. Such changeable creatures are men! They vary their language as they do their habit, and speak the truth only in their night-gowns. When they are dressed, they are equipped only to deceive; and are not only knaves and impostors in the face of the world, but are not ashamed to punish, against the dictates of their own consciences, every one who dares not be as knavish and deceitful as themselves. But is the maxim itself true, that truth ought not to be spoken at all times? or rather, that all truth ought not to be divulged? Were it also true, would it thence follow that no error should be disproved? or that the extravagances of mankind are so sacred, that we should respect them all without exception? This is a point which ought to be examined, before I admit so vague and suspicious a maxim; which, were it true in itself, might be rendered false by misapplication. I have a great inclination, my Lord, to adopt here my

usual method, and to give the history of my ideas as a reply to my accusers; for I conceive I cannot more fully justify all I have dared to say, than by repeating all I have dared to think.

No sooner was I of an age to observe mankind, than I took notice of their actions, and listened to their discourse; when seeing their behaviour agreed but little with their conversation, I endeavoured to find out the reason of that difference; and discovered, that to be and to appear were two things, as different as those of speaking and acting; this latter difference being the cause of the former, and arising itself from a cause which remains to be pointed out.

This I found to exist in the present defective state of society, in every respect contrary to nature, which nothing can totally suppress; incessantly tyrannizing over her, and forcing her to reclaim her just rights. I traced the consequences of this contradiction, and saw that it was alone sufficient to account for all the vices of individuals, and all the evils of society. Hence I concluded, it was unnecessary to suppose men naturally wicked, when I could thus trace the origin and progress of their depravity. These reflections naturally conducted me to farther researches into the human mind, considered in a state of civil society; in which I found that the cultivation of science, and the propagation of vice, went hand in hand together, and increased in the same proportion, not indeed with regard to individuals, but to a whole people; a distinction which I have always been careful to make, though none of my opponents have attended to it.

I sought the truth in books; but there I found

nothing but falsehood and errors. I consulted authors themselves: but they were mere quacks, who diverted themselves with imposing on mankind; who had no rule of action but self-interest, and had no other God than reputation; ever ready to decry and calumniate the great who did not treat them as they pleased, and still more ready to lavish panegyric indiscriminately on those who might hire them.

By attending on those who were authorized to speak in public, I soon found they were either afraid or unwilling to say any thing disagreeable to those by whom they were authorized; and that being hired by the strong to direct the weak, they could only speak to the latter of their duties, and the former of their privileges. Thus public instruction will always tend to imposture, so long as those who administer it find their interest in deceit; and it is for them only that the truth is not proper to be spoken. But wherefore should I be an accomplice with men of this stamp?

Are there any public prejudices which ought to be respected? This may possibly be; but it must be when those prejudices are so intimately connected with the order of society, that they cannot be eradicated without rooting up at the same time those things by which they are counteracted; so that it may be expedient to permit the evil on account of the good. But when things are brought to such a situation that every change must be for the better, can there be any prejudices so respectable that we must sacrifice to them reason, virtue, justice, and all the benefits which truth may be productive of to mankind? For my part, I have engaged myself

self to speak the truth, whenever it may be useful, as far as it is in my power : This is an engagement also which I ought to fulfil to the utmost of my abilities, and which no one can fulfil in my stead ; because, every one being equally bound to all, no one can discharge the obligation of another. “ Divine truth, saith St Augustin, is neither mine, your’s, nor his ; but belongs to us all, on whom it forcibly calls to act in concert to make it known to the world, under the penalty of being useless to ourselves if we do not communicate it to others : for whoever would appropriate to himself a blessing which God would have every one enjoy, loses by that very usurpation the good of which he robs the public, and finds himself involved in error for having betrayed the truth.”

Mankind ought not to be instructed by halves. If they ought to remain in error, why ought they not to be left in ignorance ? To what purpose are there so many schools and universities, to teach them what they ought not to know ? What is the design of your colleges, your academies, and so many other learned institutions ? Is it merely to amuse and deceive the public, by vitiating their reason, and preventing their discovering of the truth ? Yes, ye professors of falsehood, it is to abuse, that ye pretend to instruct us, and, like the merciless robbers who hang up lanthorns on the rocks to deceive the unhappy mariner, ye light us on to destruction.

Such were my notions when I first took up the pen ; and in laying it down, I have no reason to change my sentiments. I have always observed, that the mode of public instruction had two essential defects, which it is impossible to

remove. The one is, the insincerity of the instructors; and the other, the blindness of the instructed. If men without passions were to instruct men without prejudices, their knowledge might indeed be more confined, but it would be more certain, and reason would always bear the sway. Now, the interest of public instructors will be ever the same; but the prejudices of the people, having no fixed foundation, are variable, and may be altered, perverted, augmented, or diminished. It is only on this side, therefore, that instruction can have any certain hold of mankind, and it is to this every friend to truth should incline. He may have some hope of making the people more reasonable, but can have none of making their leaders more honest.

I have seen the same deceit prevail in religion as in politics, and have been much more concerned at it. The evils of government may render its subjects miserable only upon earth; but who knows how far mistakes in point of conscience may not be injurious to unhappy mortals hereafter? I have observed the world full of creeds, tenets, and modes of worship, all followed without any real belief therein; and have seen, that nothing of all these affecting either the understanding or the heart, they had but very little influence on moral conduct. I must speak to you, my Lord, on this head, without disguise. The true believer cannot accommodate himself to this grimace: He is sensible that man is an intelligent being, requiring a reasonable worship; and that he is a social being, whose system of morals should be adapted to the purposes of humanity. Let us find, in the first place,
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this worship and this morality, which would be applicable to mankind in general. If, after this, it be requisite to distinguish them into national forms, we should examine into their foundations, relations, and conveniences; and, after having determined what are the religion and morality of the man, determine what are those of the citizen. In doing this, we should be particularly careful not to imitate your good friend *M. Joli de Fleury*, who, to establish his Jansenism, would root up all natural law and moral obligation: so that, according to him, a contract between a Christian and an infidel must be void, because there is no law common to both.

Hence I saw there were two methods of examining and comparing different religions: the one relative to the truth and falsehood they contained, either with regard to the natural or supernatural facts on which they were established, or with regard to the ideas we derive from reason of the Supreme Being and the religious worship he requires of us; the other relative to their moral and temporal effects upon earth, according to the good or evil they might be of to society and to mankind. Now, we must not, in order to prevent this two-fold examination, begin by affirming, that both these things go together, and that the truest religion is also the most salutary for society; this being precisely the point in question: nor ought men to raise an outcry of impiety and atheism against those who treat this question; as it is one thing to believe, and another to examine into the effects of our belief.

It appears very certain, indeed, that if man be naturally formed for society, the truest religion

gion must be also the most social and humane: for God would certainly have us to be what he made us; and if it be true that we are naturally wicked, we should be disobedient to him in wishing to be otherwise. Add to this, that religion, considered as a kind of relation between God and man, cannot contribute to the glory of the former, but by the happiness of the latter; because the other term of the relation, which is God, is above every thing that man can do either for or against it.

This opinion, however, probable as it is, is subject to great difficulties, on account of historical facts which contradict each other. The Jews were enemies by birth to all other people; and founded their own establishment on the destruction of seven nations, according to the express orders which they received from God. Again, the Christians have had their holy wars; and war is undoubtedly destructive to mankind. All parties have persecuted and been persecuted in their turn; and persecution is undoubtedly hurtful to mankind. Many sects of them profess, and make a merit of celibacy; but celibacy is undoubtedly so hurtful to mankind, that if it were adopted universally, the whole human race must perish*. If these considerations be not
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* Chastity and continence have their use, even with regard to population; it is always good to have the command over one's self; hence a state of virginity is always respectable: but it does not thence follow, that it is good or commendable to persevere in that state during life, in contradiction to nature and the end of our being. We have generally more respect for a marriageable girl, than for a young married woman; but we have more for the mother of a family, than for an old maid: and this appears to me very reasonable. As we do not marry so soon as we are born, nor is it proper to marry very young,

sufficient to authorise us to decide concerning religion, they afford a sufficient reason for us to examine into it; and I require nothing else but permission to make this examination. I neither say nor think, that there is no good religion upon earth; but I affirm, and it is but too true, that there never has been a religion publicly established which hath not given the most cruel wounds to humanity. All parties have occasionally tormented their fellow-creatures, and offered human sacrifices to the Deity. Whatever may be the source of these contradictions, certain it is they subsist; and can it be a crime to wish their removal? Charity never thirsts after blood, nor doth the love of one's neighbour inspire us with the thoughts of massacre. In like manner, it is not zeal for the salvation of souls that is the cause of persecution; pride, arrogance, and self-love, are the cause. The more unreasonable any religion is, the more it is propagated by force: he who professes absurd tenets, cannot bear that others should see them represented in their true light. Reason in such

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a state of virginity, which all ought to support and esteem, is useful and necessary, as it is salutary and honourable; but it is so only with a view, at a proper time, to bestow its purity on that of marriage. How! will it be said, with an air of triumphant raillery, do these old bachelors pretend to preach up the obligations of matrimony? Why do not they themselves marry? Very true, why do they not indeed? It is because your absurd institutions have made a state, which is sacred and delightful in itself, so ridiculous and unhappy, that it is almost impossible to support it without being either a knave or a fool. Ye sceptres of iron, absurd laws! it is you whom we may reproach for our not having fulfilled our duties on earth: it is from us the cry of nature is heard against your barbarity. How can you presumptuously reproach us with the misery to which you have reduced us?

a case, becomes the greatest of crimes, and must at all events be suppressed, as men are ashamed to want it in the eyes of others. Thus absurdity and persecution have the same source. Mankind must be constantly terrified and intimidated. -Leave them a moment to the use of their reason, and you are undone.

On this consideration alone it appears to me an act of public good, to instruct people under such circumstances to reason on the subject of religion: for by so doing they are instructed in their moral obligations, persecution is deprived of its sting, and humanity is restored to its native rights. To this end, however, it is necessary to recur to general principles, to such as are common to all mankind; for if, when you begin to reason, you lay any stress on the authority of priests, you put a sword into the hand of fanaticism, and furnish her with the means of persecution.

Those who love peace also should never recur to the authority of books. This is the way never to come to any determination. Books have been the source of inexhaustible disputes. Take a view of the histories of nations, and you will find that such as had no books had no disputes among them. Would you subject mankind to human authority, they would all be so differently affected by it, that though every one should be possessed of the greatest sincerity and the soundest judgement, it would be impossible for them ever to agree. Never reason, therefore, on the maxims or arguments of others. Human language is not sufficiently clear and explicit: Not even God himself, should he deign to speak to us after our mode of speech, could say

any thing which would not afford us some occasion for dispute.

Our languages are the work of men, and men are creatures of confined talents. Our languages are the work of men, and men are deceitful. Hence, as there is no truth so clearly announced but that chicanery will find it in some degree equivocal, so there is no falsehood so gross that it may not be supported by some pretended reasoning.

We will suppose, for instance, that a man should surprize us at midnight, by declaring it to be broad day; our surprize would, doubtless, be accompanied with laughter, and we should treat him with ridicule: but give him only time and means to establish a sect, and sooner or latter you would see his partisans labouring to prove that he was in the right. They would say, that when he pronounced it was day, it certainly was so in some part of the world or other; and nothing could be more true. Others again might refine upon the assertion, and maintain, that, as there are always some particles of light scattered up and down in the atmosphere, it is daylight even all night long. And thus a number of subtle casuists joining in the dispute, they would presently make you see the sun shine at midnight. This evidence, indeed, might not prevail universally; the debate degenerating, according to custom, into cruelty and bloodshed. One party would be for the explication, another against it; one would be for taking the matter in a figurative sense, and the other in a simple one. Some would say, He affirmed at midnight, that it was then day, and it was night. Others would say, He affirmed at midnight that
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it was day, and it was day. Each would tax his opponent with insincerity and obstinacy : A battle or massacre must end the dispute ; streams of blood would flow on all sides ; and if the new sect should in the end be victorious, it would be demonstrated that it is day at midnight. Such is the history of almost all the quarrels that have arisen about religion.

The innovations of most religious sectaries have been established by fanaticism, and maintained by hypocrisy : hence it is that they are so repugnant to reason and virtue. Enthusiasm never reasons ; so that, whilst its frenzy lasts, any thing goes down, nor is it very nice about articles of faith. Its method also is extremely convenient ; doctrines are so easily adopted, and morals so difficult to practise, that, taking the easiest way, they supply the want of good works by the merit of an implicit faith. But after all, fanaticism is a critical state which cannot last for ever. It hath its fits long and short, more or less frequent ; and hath its intermissions, during which indifference prevails. During these intervals, the believer comes a little to himself, and is astonished to find himself surrounded with such a heap of absurdities. But the religion is established, its forms prescribed ; laws are enacted in support of them, and transgressions are punished. Who will venture to stand up, of himself, to protest against all these, to except against the laws of his country, and deny the religion of his fathers ? It is held more prudent to submit in silence ; it is our interest to be of the opinion of those whose possessions we are to inherit. Every one acts the same farce, therefore, with his neighbours ; laughing in his

sleeve at what he affects publicly to revere. Such, my Lord, is the behaviour of the greater part of the professors of most religions, and particularly of yours; and such is my key to the inconsistency which is so remarkable between their doctrines and their practice. Their belief is all affectation, and their manners the same as their faith.

Why is it that one man is interested to take cognizance of the belief of another, or the state of that of the citizens? It is, doubtless, because it is supposed that our faith hath an influence on our morals, and that on our ideas of the life to come depends our conduct in the present. But, if this be not the case, of what consequence is our belief, or the affectation of it? The appearance of religion is no longer of any other use than to dispense with the reality.

In a state of society, every one is entitled to inform himself, whether another believes himself under any obligation to be just; the sovereign having the right to examine into the reasons on which every one founds such obligation. Add to this, that established national forms ought to be observed; this is what I have particularly insisted on. But with regard to opinions merely speculative, and that have no influence on morals, and which do not tend to the transgression of the laws; every person should be at liberty to think as he pleased, nor would any one be either entitled or interested to dictate their sentiments to others. Thus, for example, should any person, tho' invested with authority, come to ask me my opinion concerning the famous question of the hypostatical union; of which the Bible says not a word, though so many grown
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children have held councils, and so many unhappy men have suffered on that account; I should civilly desire him, after having owned I did not understand nor give myself any concern about the matter, to trouble himself about his own business; and, if he still persisted, I should take my leave of him.

This is the only principle on which any thing determinate and equitable can be deduced from disputes about religion; and without which, every one laying down on his part the thing in question, nothing is agreed on or understood; while religion, which ought to contribute to the happiness of mankind, is productive of their greatest evils.

But as religions grow old, they lose sight of the object they had first in view; they increase in subtilities, while every thing is to be understood, explained, and determined: thus the doctrine grows daily refined, and the moral practices of it as constantly decay. There is undoubtedly a wide difference between the spirit of Deuteronomy and that of the Talmud; between the spirit of the Gospel and the quarrels about the Constitution. St Thomas asks, and determines it in the affirmative, Whether articles of faith do not multiply by process of time? That is to say, The successive professors, refining upon one another, come in time to know much more than hath been said by Jesus Christ and his Apostles. St Paul ingenuously confesses, “that he saw things but as through a glass, darkly, and in part.” Our Theologues have made a much greater progress: they see every thing, know every thing: they have cleared up all the obscurities of Scripture; have determined what

appeared indeterminate; and have shewn us, with their usual modesty, that the sacred writers stood in great need of their assistance to become intelligible, and that the Holy Spirit knew not how to explain itself clearly without them.

When men have lost sight of their moral duties, to busy themselves only about the opinions and frivolous disputes of priests, a Christian is no longer asked if he believes in God, but if he be orthodox: he is required to subscribe to a set form of useless and sometimes unintelligible tenets; and when he hath so done, all is well, he is asked no further questions. Provided he doth nothing to get himself hanged, he may live almost as he pleases; his morals are nothing to the purpose, his belief is secure. When religion is come to this pass, of what use is it to society, or advantage to individuals? It serves only to stir up dissensions, troubles, and quarrels, of every kind, among them; and to set them a-cutting each others throats about the solution of ænigmas. Certainly it would be better to have no religion at all, than a religion so egregiously misapplied. Let us preserve it, if possible, from degenerating to that point; and be assured, in spite of chains and persecution, that you will do a meritorious service to mankind.

Let us suppose, that, wearied out with such destructive quarrels, mankind should assemble to put an end to them, and agree about a religion adapted to the different peoples upon earth. Every one would begin, undoubtedly, by proposing his own as the only true, rational, and demonstrable religion, as the only one agreeable to God and useful to man: but his proofs would by no

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means confirm his persuasions, at least in the opinion of other sects. Each party would have no voice but its own. It is no less certain that all the others would unite against it. In this manner the deliberation might go round, one proposing, and all the rest rejecting; this would never be the way to come to an agreement. It is to be conceived, therefore, that after much time lost in such puerile altercations, men of sense would seek the means of conciliation. To this end, they would begin by banishing all professed divines from the assembly; nor would it be difficult for them to see how indispensable this preliminary step would be. This good work being done, they would say to the rest, Till you can agree upon some one principle, it is impossible you should ever understand each other; and it is an argument by which no person ever was convinced, to say you are in the wrong because I am in the right. You say, this is right, because it is agreeable to God; but this is precisely the very thing in question. If we knew what religion was most agreeable to him, there would be no farther dispute between us. You say that is right, because it is useful to mankind. This is quite another thing. Men may judge of this particular. Let us take this utility, therefore, as our guide; and proceed to establish those doctrines which are most conducive to it. We may thus hope to come as near the truth as it is possible: for it is to be presumed, that, whatever is most useful to his creatures, must be most agreeable to the Creator.

“ Let us see, then, if there be any natural affinity between us; if there be any thing held in common by us all. Ye Jews, what think you
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of the origin of mankind? We think they are all the offspring of one common father. And you Christians, what is your opinion on this subject? The same as that of the Jews. And you Turks, what say you? We think the same as the Jews and Christians.—Very well, so far is good; as men are all brothers, they ought undoubtedly to love each other as such.

“ But of whom, say you, did our common father receive his being? for he certainly did not make himself.—Of the Creator of heaven and earth. Jews, Turks, and Christians, all agree in this: here is another great point gained. Again, of man, the work of this Creator, is he a simple or compound being? Is he formed of one substance, or of many? Answer, ye Christians! He is composed of two substances, the one mortal, and the other immortal.—And you Turks! We think the same.—And you Jews! We had formerly but confused ideas of this matter, as may be seen by the expressions of the sacred writings; but we have been since enlightened, and at present are of the same opinion as the Christians.”

In proceeding thus, by way of interrogatories, on divine providence, the life to come, and other matters essential to the peace of society and the good of mankind; and having obtained almost uniform answers from every one; the querists would say to them, (By the way, it is to be remembered that the Priests are banished the assembly,) “ Wherefore, my friends, do you thus torment yourselves? You appear to be all agreed as to those points which are of consequence for you to know; and though you may differ in sentiment as to other matters, I see very
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little inconvenience. Draw up a few articles of an universal religion, which may be called, if you will, the Humane and Social Creed, and which every person living in society may be obliged to receive. And if any one should speak or write against it, he should be banished from society as an enemy to its fundamental laws. As to those matters on which you are not all agreed, form of your particular creeds so many national religions, and profess them in sincerity and truth; but do not go on tormenting yourselves in order to make other nations receive them, as you may rest assured God Almighty doth not require this at your hands. For it is as unjust to insist on subjecting others to your opinions as to your laws; missionaries appearing to me to be just as wise as conquerors.

“ In pursuing each your different doctrines, however, cease to imagine them so fully demonstrated, that those who do not look upon them in that light are insincere. Cease to believe, that all those who examine your proofs and reject their evidence, are for that reason obstinate infidels, whose incredulity is criminal. Cease to think, that reason, a regard for truth, and sincerity, are confined to yourselves. Do what we will, we are always induced to treat those as enemies, whom we accuse of wilfully resisting the force of evidence. We may lament their error, but we hate their obstinacy. Give the preference to your own reasons, if you will; but always remember that such as are not converted by them, may also have theirs.

“ Honour, in general, all the founders of your respective modes of worship. Let every one pay the reverence which he conceives due to that
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of his own; but let him not despise those of others. They might be men of great genius and great virtues; and these are always respectable. They have declared themselves messengers from God; this might be, might or might not; it is a subject which the generality of mankind cannot judge of, in an uniform and consistent manner, the proofs of it not being equally adapted to the comprehension of all. But, though this be the case, they should not be hastily treated as impostors. Who knows how far continual meditations on the Deity, or the enthusiasm of virtue, may have disturbed, in their sublime imaginations, the mean and regular order of their common ideas? A too great elevation of mind sometimes turns the brain, and things are no longer seen in their ordinary light. Socrates himself imagined he had a familiar; but no one hath dared, on that account, to accuse him of being a knave. Shall we treat the founders of a whole people, the benefactors of nations, with less regard than a particular individual?

“In a word, let there be no more disputes among you, about the preference due to your several religions. They are all good when they are established by law, and contain what is essential to your happiness. The form or mode of worship, is the police of religions, and not its essence, and it belongs to the sovereign of every country to regulate it.”

I have thought, my Lord, that a person, who should reason thus, would not be therefore a blasphemer or impious; but that the conciliatory expedient he might thus propose, would be just, rational, and useful to mankind. I did not think, also, that it would prevent his having

a particular religion or mode of worship, any more than other people, or his being as sincerely attached to it. A true believer, knowing that an infidel is also a man, and probably an honest one, may, without a crime, interest himself in his fate. He may justly prevent the introduction of any foreign mode of worship in his country: but let him not consign to damnation all those who think differently from himself; for whoever pronounces so rash a judgement, becomes a professed enemy to the whole human race. I am constantly told, that civil toleration should be admitted, but not a theological: for my part, I am of a contrary opinion; and believe that a good moral man, be his religion what it will, may be saved. But I do not for that reason think it lawful to introduce foreign modes of worship in any country, without the permission of its sovereign: For tho' it may not be directly to disobey God, it is to disobey the laws; and disobedience to the laws is disobedience to God.

With regard to such religions as are once established or tolerated in any country, I conceive it is both cruel and unjust to suppress them by violence, and that the sovereign is his own enemy who injures the religious sectaries of his country. There is a wide difference between embracing a new religion, and professing that in which we are born and bred: it is the first only that can in any shape be criminal. One ought neither to establish a diversity of religions, nor suppress those which are once established: for a son cannot be to blame in adopting the religion of his father. All the arguments in behalf of public tranquillity make against the ad-
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vocate for persecution. Religion never causes any troubles in a state, unless when the prevailing party would oppress the weak, or when the weaker party, being of a persecuting spirit, cannot live in peace with any other. But no lawful worship, that is to say, a worship comprehending any thing of the essence of religion, the professors of which require of course nothing but peace and toleration, ever gave rise to rebellions or civil wars; unless when it was forced to act in its own defence, and repel its persecutors. Never did the Protestants, for instance, take up arms in France, unless when they have been persecuted. Had they been permitted, they would have been contented to live in peace and quiet. I must frankly confess, indeed, that the reformed religion had at first no right of establishment in France contrary to the laws. But when transmitted from fathers to children, it became that of a considerable part of the French nation, and the Prince had solemnly treated with this party in the edict of Nantz: that edict became an inviolable contract, which could not be annulled without the joint consent of both parties: so that, ever since that time, the profession of the protestant religion is, in my opinion, lawful in France.

Indeed, were it not so, the subject should surely be left at liberty to chuse the alternative of leaving the kingdom with his effects, or of remaining, on condition of his conforming to the established religion. But to compel them to stay, and yet refuse to tolerate them; to insist on their existence and annihilation at the same time; to deprive them of the common
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I may venture to observe, however, that it might be political to deprive the *French* Protestants of their chiefs: but the government should have stopped there. Political maxims have their applications and distinctions. In order to prevent dissensions, which there is no longer any just reason to fear, the government hath deprived itself of very considerable resources of which it stood in great need. What hurt can a party do, in such a kingdom as *France*, which hath neither great men nor nobility at their head? Examine into all your preceding wars, called *religious*, and you will find them to have taken their rise at court and amidst the cabals of the great. When the intrigues of the cabinet had embroiled public affairs, the chiefs excited the people in the

VOL. X,

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name of the Lord. But what intrigues, what cabals, can be formed by a parcel of tradesmen and peasants? By what means can they form a party, in a country that contains nothing but servants and masters, and in which equality of condition is either unknown or looked upon with dishonour? A tradesman proposing to raise troops might be listened to in *England*, but would set every body a-laughing in *France**.

If I were a King—No—a Minister—still less; but if I were a man in power in *France*, I should say, Every one among us is ambitious of posts, of employments; every one is for purchasing the power to do ill; *Paris* and the court swallow up every thing. Let us leave these poor people to fill up the void of the Provinces; but let them be tradesmen and always tradesmen, labourers and always labourers. Not being able to emerge from their situation, they will make the most of it. They will supply the place of our people, in those conditions of life which we all aspire to get out of; they will make commerce and agriculture flourish, which we abandon; they will furnish out our luxury; they will labour, and we shall reap the fruits of it.

If this project would not be more equitable than those which are now pursued, it would at least

* The only situation in which a people, thus destitute of chiefs, will take up arms, is that of despair, to which being reduced by their persecutors, they have no other choice than in the manner of their destruction. In which case, the world beholds with astonishment the power which a contemptible party may deduce from their despair; a circumstance which persecutors never have calculated beforehand. And yet these wars have occasioned so much bloodshed, that they ought seriously to think of the consequence before they render them inevitable.

least be more humane, and undoubtedly more useful. It is less the tyranny and ambition of the great, than their prejudices and confined views, which are so injurious to the common people of all nations.

I will conclude what I have to say on this subject, by transcribing a short discourse which bears some relation to it.

A Paris of Suratte having secretly married a Turkish woman, was discovered, seized, and, having refused to embrace Mahometanism, was condemned to death. Before he went to execution, he addressed his judge in the following manner :

“ Will you, then, take away my life? For what crime is it you punish me? I have rather transgressed my own law than yours: My law speaks to the heart, and is without cruelty; my crime hath been punished by the censure of my brethren. But what have I done to you deserving of death? I have behaved to you as if you were of my family, and have chosen a sister from among you. I have left her to her own faith, and for her own interest she hath respected mine. Confining myself willingly to her alone, I have honoured her as the instrument of that worship which the author of my being requires, and have by her means paid that tribute which every man owes to his species. Love bestowed her on me, and virtue hath endeared her to me; she hath not lived in a state of servitude, but hath entirely possessed the heart of her husband; my fault hath made her no less happy than myself. To expiate so venial a crime, however, you would have had me turn liar and impostor; you would have compelled

me to profess your sentiments, without respecting or believing them : as if the violator of our laws deserved to be subjected to yours, you have offered to my choice perjury or death ; and I have chosen the latter, for I will not deceive you. I die, then, since it must be so ; but I die worthy to revive and reanimate the body of another just man. I die a martyr to my religion, without fear of changing it after death for yours. May I come again to the Mahometans to teach them to become humane, merciful, and just ! For serving the same God as we do, as there are not two Gods, you are blinded by your zeal to torment his servants, and are only sanguinary and cruel because you are inconsistent.

“ You are mere children, that in your play are capable only of doing mischief to mankind. You imagine yourselves wise, and you know nothing of God. Can your new-fangled tenets be agreeable to him, who exists and hath been adored from all eternity ? How can such a modern people speak of the religions established before them ? Our rites are as old as the stars in the firmament : The first rays of the sun lighted and received the homage of our forefathers. The great Zerdust beheld the infancy of the world ; he foretold and described the order of the universe : And yet you, ye men of yesterday, you would set yourselves up to be our prophets. Twenty ages before Mahomet, before the birth of Ishmael or his father, the Magi were of ancient standing. Our sacred books had given law to Asia and the world, while three great empires had successively flourished and passed away under our ancestors, before yours had existence.

“ Such

“ Such, ye prejudiced mortals, is the difference between you and us. You call yourselves believers, and you live like barbarians. Your institutions, your laws, your religion, nay even your virtues, serve only to vex and debase human nature. The duties you prescribe are all gloomy and painful. Such are your fastings, self-denial, stripes, mutilations, and seclusion; ye know not how to lay yourselves under any obligations but such as are attended with affliction and restraint. You make men hate life, and the means of their preservation; your women are without men, your lands without cultivation; you devour the brute creation, and massacre the human; you delight in blood and cruelty, and by means of the twofold yoke of fanaticism and despotic power impose customs that are destructive to our species and shocking to nature.

“ As to us, we are men of peace; we neither do, nor wish, ill to anything that breathes, not even to our tyrants themselves: We give them, without reluctance, the fruits of our labour, contented to be useful to them, and to discharge our own duty. Our numerous herds still cover your pastures; the trees we planted afford you fruit and shade; your lands, which we cultivate, supply you with nourishment by our means; a simple and harmless people increase and multiply under your oppression, and draw from the bosom of our common mother that plenty and abundance which you could not have procured for yourselves. The sun, which lights us at labour, is a witness of our patience and your injustice: when it rises, it finds us constantly employed in well-doing; and when it sets

it attends us home to our families, there to prepare ourselves for new labour.

“ The truth is known only to God. If, notwithstanding all this, therefore, we are deceived in our religion, it is hardly to be believed that we shall be condemned to Hell ; we, who are employed only in doing good upon earth ; and that you should be of the number of the elect and chosen of God, who do nothing but ill. But, supposing we are really in an error, you ought to shew it some respect, for your own advantage. Our piety makes you fat, and yours makes you lean ; thus we repair the mischiefs which are done you by a destructive religion. Believe me, you had better let us enjoy our own opinions, which are so useful to you ; there being just reason to fear, that if we should adopt yours, it would prove the greatest evil that could happen to you.”

I have thus endeavoured, my Lord, to give you an idea of that spirit in which the Savoyard's creed was written, and of those considerations which induced me to publish it. On which, I now take the liberty to ask you, in what respect can you call his doctrines blasphemous, impious, or abominable ? and what you find in it so scandalous and pernicious to mankind ? I ask the same of those who have charged me with publishing what I ought to have kept secret, and with the intention of disturbing the public peace and good order of society ; a vague and impertinent imputation, with which those, who reflect least on what is useful or hurtful, excite the credulous public against a well meaning author. To recal people to the true faith which they have thrown aside, is this to teach them to

believe

believe nothing? To advise every one to submit to the laws of their country, is this to disturb the peace and good order of society? Do I write against all religious worship, by exhorting every people to abide by the established modes of their country? Do we deprive a man of what he has, by advising him not to change it? Is the paying a respect to every religion, making a mock of all religions? In a word, is it so essential to the professors of each, to hate one another, that, if that hate be removed, religion itself is abolished?

Yet this is what the people are told by those who are in power, when the public odium is to be excited against the advocate for truth. So now, ye cruel persecutors, your arrets, your mandates, and your journals, exasperate and abuse the public on my account. On the credit of your clamours the world conceives me a monster of wickedness: Your clamours, however, will, sooner or latter, subside, and my writings will remain to your shame. The more moderate Christians will search them, with astonishment, for those horrid sentiments you pretend to find there, and will only see the morals of their divine Master mixed with lessons of peace, concord, and charity. May they learn thence to be more just than their fathers! May the virtues they gather from thence avenge me one day of your maledictions!

With regard to such objections as relate to the particular sects into which the world is divided, would I could give them sufficient force to make every one less opiniated of his own, and less an enemy to others; to induce every one to be indulgent and candid, from the natural and striking consideration, that if he had been
born

born in a different country, or among a different sect, he would have infallibly taken that for error which he now takes for truth, and that for truth which he now takes for error! It is of so much consequence to mankind to regard less the opinions which serve to divide, than those which unite them! On the contrary, by neglecting what they approve in common, they are embittered against each other on account of their particular sentiments; sticking most for those opinions which seem the most unreasonable, while every one supplies with confidence that authority which reason refuses. Thus, while we are all agreed at the bottom about every thing which is truly interesting, and of which we take little notice, we spend our lives in disputation, in quarrelling, and in persecuting each other, on account of those things we understand the least, and which it is least necessary for us to understand. Decisions after decisions are made to no purpose, and their contradictions palliated in vain by an unintelligible jargon; we find every day new questions to resolve, and new subjects to quarrel about; because every doctrine hath infinite branches, and because every body, full of the importance of his petty refinement, believes that to be essential which is not so, and neglects what really is so. Hence, if any one proposes objections which they cannot resolve, which, on account of the perplexity of their doctrines, becomes every day more easy to do, they are as fretful as children; and because they are more attached to their party than to the truth, and have more pride than sincerity, the less they are able to prove, the less are they disposed to pardon any doubt.

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My own history may serve to shew, better than any other, the judgment we ought to form of our modern Christians; but as this would say more of them than is credible, it may perhaps one day give rise to an opinion directly opposite: that which is now the opprobrium of my contemporaries may be their glory; when the well-meaning reader of my work shall cry out, in the simplicity of his heart, “What heavenly times must those have been when such a book as this was burnt as impious, and its author persecuted as a malefactor! Doubtless, the productions of that age must have breathed the most sublime devotion, the whole earth must have been covered with saints!”

But other books will likewise remain. It will be known, for example, that the same age produced a panegyrist on the feast of St Bartholomew, a Frenchman, and, as it may well be believed, an Ecclesiastic, without exciting either Parliament or Prelate against him. Then indeed, by comparing the morals of the two books, and the crimes of their respective authors, the language of the world might be changed, and a different conclusion drawn.

Those are abominable doctrines which excite people to injustice, to murder, and fanaticism. For what can be more abominable than to reduce violence and injustice to a system, and to deduce them from the mercy of God? I shall abstain here from drawing a parallel that may displease you. So far, however, your Lordship will agree with me, that if France had professed the religion of the Savoyard Priest, a religion so pure and simple, inculcating the fear of God and the love of man, your fields would not have
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so often been dyed with blood ; a people so gay and agreeable would not have astonished the rest of mankind with their cruelties in so many massacres and persecutions, from the time of the inquisition of Tholouse * to the feast of St Bartholomew ; the Counsellor Du Bourg would not have been gibbeted for having given his opinion in favour of the Protestants ; the inhabitants of Merindol and the Cabrieres had not been put to death by an arret of the Parliament of Aix ; nor in our own times the unhappy Calas been put to the torture and expired on the wheel, for a crime of which he could not be guilty. But we shall now return, my Lord, to your censures, and the reasons on which you found them. It is always men, says the Curate, who tell us the word of God, and who tell us it also in unknown tongues. On the contrary, we often stand in great need of God to ascertain the word of men ; it is, at least, certain he might have given us his own word, instead of making use of such suspected instruments. The Curate complains that so much human testimony is requisite to ascertain the divine word : *How many men are there, says he, between God and me !*

To this you reply : “ To justify this complaint, my dear brethren, we ought to be able
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* It is true that St Dominic, a Spanish saint, bore a considerable part in this inquisition. This saint, according to a writer of his order, had so much charity in preaching against the Albigenses, as to unite himself to certain devout persons, who, being zealous for the faith, took care to extirpate those heretics by the material sword, who could not be subdued by the sword of the spirit.—This kind of charity little resembles that of our good Curate, and was indeed differently rewarded. The professors of the one are persecuted, while those of the other are canonized.

to affirm that a revelation must be false, when it is not made to every individual; we ought to be able to say, that God cannot require us to believe any thing he has said, unless he had particularly addressed himself to us."

On the contrary, however, this complaint is justifiable only by admitting the truth of revelation. For if you suppose it false, what complaint have you a right to make against the means God hath made use of, when he hath confessedly made use of none? Ought he to account to you for all the abuses of an impostor? When you permit yourselves to be duped, it is your fault, and not his. But if God, doubtless at liberty to use his own means, hath given the preference to those which require on our part so much erudition and such profound investigation, is the Curate to blame to wish, "That, being always reduced to the necessity of examining, comparing, and verifying the evidence, God had deigned to have saved him all that trouble?" should he have served him with a less willing heart?

Your minor, my Lord, is so admirable, that I shall transcribe it verbatim. I am indeed fond of making use of your own words; this is my greatest partiality. "But is there not an infinite number of facts even prior to that of the Christian revelation, of which it would be absurd to doubt? Now by what means do we acquire the knowledge of these facts but by human testimony? By what other means did our author himself become acquainted with Sparta, with Athens, and with Rome, on whose laws, manners, and heroes, he lavishes such extravagant encomiums? What a number of men between
him

him and even the historians that transmitted to him an account of those events !”

If the subject were less serious, or had I less respect for your Lordship, this manner of reasoning would furnish me with an opportunity of diverting my readers ; but God forbid that I should forget what is due to the subject I am treating, or to the persons whom I address. At the hazard, therefore, of being flat and insipid in my reply, I shall content myself with barely pointing out your error.

You will please to consider, then, that it is perfectly consistent with the order of things, that human facts should be attested by human witnesses. They cannot be confirmed by any other means ; for how should I know that Sparta and Rome ever existed, unless by means of contemporary authors ? Now between me and authors, who lived so far distant from me, there must necessarily be intermediate communicants : But where is the necessity of any such between God and me ? and wherefore at least such as lived at so great a distance of place and time, that they must stand in need of so many others ? Is it simple or natural that God should have made choice of Moses to speak to John-James Rousseau ?

Add to this, that no one is obliged, under pain of damnation, to believe that Rome or Sparta have existed ; nor is any one consigned to eternal flames for having doubted it. Every fact, of which we are not eye-witnesses, must gain credit with us from the moral evidence of its truth, and all moral evidence is capable of a greater or less degree of certitude. Can I believe, therefore, that divine justice will cast me for ever into hell, merely for not determining exactly

exactly the point at which such evidence becomes irrefragable?

There is not an historical fact in the world more fully attested than that of the Vampires. It is confirmed by regular information, certificates of Notaries, Surgeons, Vicars, and Magistrates. And yet, with all this, who believes in the Vampires? And shall we be all damned for not believing? However well attested, even in the opinion of the incredulous Cicero, are many of the prodigies related by Livy, I cannot help regarding them as so many fables, and certainly am not the only person who doth so. My constant experience, as well as that of mankind in general, is much more convincing in this respect than the testimony of individuals. If Sparta and Rome were in themselves prodigies, they were prodigies of the moral kind; so that we should be like the Laplanders, who fix the natural stature of man at four foot, if we should circumscribe the human mind within the standard of those little souls which exist in modern times.

You will please to remember, my Lord, that I go on to examine your arguments in themselves, without defending those you have controverted. After this necessary intimation, I will take the liberty to make another supposition on your method of argumentation.

I will suppose that an inhabitant of St James's street should address himself to the Archbishop of Paris, in the following manner: "I know, my Lord, that you neither believe in the beatification of St John de Paris, nor in the miracles which it pleased God to work openly on his tomb in the sight of the most enlightened and

numerous multitude. I think it my duty, therefore, to assure you, that I myself saw that Saint in person rise up from the place where his bones were deposited."

To this, we will suppose, he adds a detail of those particular circumstances which would be most striking to the spectator of such a fact. I am persuaded, that, on receiving this piece of information, you would begin your reply by inquiring into the situation and sentiments of the informant; concerning his confessor, and other matters of that kind: and when you had comprehended, both by his manner and discourse, that he was a poor mechanick, who could not produce his certificate of confession, you would be confirmed in the opinion of his being a Janfenist. In which case, you would doubtless answer him in a tone of raillery: "Ay, ay, my friend, you are a convulsionary, and have seen the resurrection of the Abbe Paris? It is not at all surprising in you, who have seen so many other miracles."

In reply to this, I go on to suppose he persists in the truth of his relation. He will tell you, that he was not alone when he saw this miracle; that there were two or three persons with him who saw the same thing; and that others, to whom he had spoken of it, assured him also they themselves had seen the same. On this, you would ask him if all these witnesses were Janfenists too? "Yes, my Lord, they were; but this is no matter; they are sufficient in number, of irreproachable manners, of great good sense, and in every respect unexceptionable; the proof is complete, and nothing is wanting to our declaration to ascertain the veracity of the fact."

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Some less charitable Bishops might send for a commissary, and consign the honest man, who had been honoured with this extraordinary vision, to the hospital for lunatics. But you, my Lord, more humane, without being more credulous, would content yourself, after giving him a serious reprimand, to dismiss him thus: "I know that two or three witnesses, of good morals and common sense, are sufficient to attest the life or death of a man; but I know not how many are requisite to confirm the resurrection of a Jansenist. Go then, my friend, and till I know this, endeavour to rectify and compose your brain. I dispense with your fasting; and here is something to buy you a good dinner."

This, my Lord, is nearly what you would say to him, and what every other sensible man would say in the same case. Hence I conclude, as well from your Lordship, as from every other man of sense, that the moral proofs, sufficient to ascertain the facts which are in the order of possibilities, are not sufficient to ascertain facts of a different order, or those which are supernatural: On which I leave you to judge of the justice of your comparison. And yet, the following is the exulting inference you bring forth against me: "The scepticism of our author, therefore, with regard to this particular, is evidently founded on nothing but the interests of his own infidelity."

If my infidelity, my Lord, should ever procure me a bishoprick worth an hundred thousand livres per annum, you might then talk of the interests of my infidelity.

I proceed to transcribe your remarks; taking the liberty only of restoring, when necessary,

those passages of my book which you have omitted.

“What if a man (says he a little further) should come and harangue us in the following manner: *I come, ye mortals, to announce to you the will of the Most High; acknowledge in my voice, that of him who sent me. I command the sun to move backwards, the stars to change their places, the mountains to disappear, the waves to remain fixed on high, and the earth to wear a different aspect.* Who would not, at the sight of such miracles, immediately attribute them to the Author of nature?”—“Who would not think, my dear brethren, that a writer, who speaks in this manner, wanted only to be a witness to a miracle to become a Christian?—You might have said still more, my Lord, as I do not even stand in need of miracles to be a Christian.

“But hear what he says farther; “The most important examination, after all, remains to be made into the truth of the doctrine delivered; for as those who say that God is pleased to work these miracles, pretend that the devil sometimes imitates them, we are no nearer than before, though such miracles should be ever so well attested. As the magicians of Pharaoh worked the same miracles, even in the presence of Moses, as he himself performed by the express command of God; why might not they, in his absence, pretend, on the same proofs, to the same authority? Thus, after proving the truth of the doctrine by the miracle, you are reduced to prove the truth of the miracle by the doctrine, lest the works of the devil should be mistaken for those of God. What is to be done in this case? There is but one step to be taken;
and

and that is to recur to reason, and leave miracles to themselves: better indeed had it been never to have had recourse to them *”

This is as much as to say, continues your Lordship, shew me a miracle and I will believe. Yes, my Lord, it is as much as to say, Shew me a miracle, and I will believe in miracles. And again, Yet when you have shewn me a miracle, I will not believe. Yes, my Lord, it is saying, agreeable to the precept of Moses, that though a miracle be shewn me, I will not therefore believe in any absurd or unreasonable doctrine it may be calculated to support. I should sooner believe in the power of magic, than acknowledge the voice of God in such injunctions as contradict my reason.

I have said that the plainest arguments of common sense might in this particular be obscured and perplexed by subtle distinctions: This is also one of my predictions; of which the following passage is the accomplishment.

“ When a doctrine is acknowledged to be divine, and to be founded on the truth of positive revelation, we make use of it indeed to judge of miracles; that is, to reject the pretended prodigies which impostors may set up against such doctrine. When the point in question is an entire new doctrine, which is said to be dictated by the spirit of God, miracles are produced as proofs of it; that is to say, the person who assumes the character of a missionary from the Most High, confirms his mission and the doctrines he

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preaches

* I have been obliged here, after his Lordship's example, to confound the text and the notes. The reader may consult both by turning to Emilius, vol. ii. p. 196, &c.

Preaches by miracles, which are the testimony of God himself. Thus the doctrine and the miracles are made use of respectively, according to the different points of view in which they are placed, in the study or illustration of religion. But in this there is no abuse of argument, ridiculous sophistry, or absurd reasoning in a circle."

Of this I leave the reader to judge. For my part, I shall not add a syllable. I have sometimes replied to your arguments by others of my own; but shall here leave you to be answered by yourself.

Where then, my good brethren, is that philosophical candour and sincerity of which this writer makes so great a boast?

In answer to this question, my Lord, I can only reply, that I never piqued myself on any philosophical sincerity, for I know of no such thing. Nay, I cannot say much in favour even of Christian sincerity, while the professed Christians of our own times take it so ill that we do not suppress every objection they are not able to remove. But for pure candour and simple sincerity, I may boldly ask, whether yours or mine be more evident in the case before us?

The farther I advance, the more interesting is the subject between us; I must therefore continue to transcribe your mandate: in a discussion of so much importance I should not omit even a single word.

Will it be believed, that, after having taken the greatest pains to invalidate the human testimony of the Christian revelation, the same author should pay it the most solemn and positive deference imaginable?

There would, doubtless, be a reason for it; as

I hold every doctrine to be revealed, in which I acknowledge the traces of the divine Spirit. It is requisite only to render your expression less equivocal. If, by saying a deference to *it*, you mean to the Christian revelation, you are in the right; but if you mean to the human testimony of it, you are certainly wrong. But be this as it will, I appeal to your testimony against those who pretend that I reject all revelation; as if to confess that a doctrine is attended with difficulties insuperable by the human understanding, is to reject it; and as if the not admitting it upon human testimony were to reject it, when there are other equivalent or superior proofs, on account of which that may be well dispensed with.

To convince you of this strange inconsistency, and at the same time to serve for your edification, my dear brethren, I shall cite the passage wherein he hath done this in the plainest terms. "I will confess to you, says he, that the majesty of the scriptures strikes me with admiration; as the purity of the gospel hath its influence on my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers with all their pomp of diction: How mean, how contemptible are they, compared with the scriptures! Is it possible that a book, at once so simple and sublime, should be merely the work of man? Is it possible that the sacred Personage, whose history it contains, should be himself a mere man? Do we find that he assumed the tone of an enthusiast or ambitious sectary? What sweetness, what purity in his manners! What an affecting gracefulness in his delivery! What sublimity in his maxims! What profound wisdom in his discourses! What presence of mind,
what

what subtilty, what truth, in his replies! How great the command over his passions! Where is the man, where the philosopher, who could so live and so die, without weakness and without ostentation? * When Plato described his imaginary good man loaded with all the shame of guilt, yet meriting the highest rewards of virtue, he describes exactly the character of Jesus Christ: The resemblance was so striking, that all the Fathers perceived it.

“ What prepossession, what blindness must it be, to compare the son of Sophroniscus to the Son of Mary? What an infinite disproportion there is between them! Socrates, dying without pain or ignominy, easily supported his character to the last; and if his death, however easy, had not crowned his life, it might have been doubted whether Socrates, with all his wisdom, was any thing more than a vain sophist. He invented, it is said, the theory of morals. Others, however, had before put them in practice; he had only to say, therefore, what they had done, and reduce their examples to precept. Aristides had been *just* before Socrates defined *justice*; Leonidas had given up his life for his country, before Socrates declared patriotism to be a duty; the Spartans were a sober people before Socrates recommended sobriety; before he had even defined virtue, Greece abounded in virtuous men. But where could Jesus learn, among his compatriots, that

* I have thought proper, as I came along, to fill up the breaks made by the archbishop; not only to supply those omissions which he may have made with an insidious design, but also every other, as the want of connection frequently weakens the passage, and as my enemies are very solicitous to suppress every thing I have said in favour of religion.

that pure and sublime morality, of which he only hath given us both precept and example. The greatest wisdom was made known amidst the most bigotted fanaticism, and the simplicity of the most heroic virtues did honour to the vilest people on earth. The death of Socrates, peaceably philosophising with his friends, appears the most agreeable that could be wished for; that of Jesus expiring in the midst of agonizing pains, abused, insulted, and cursed by a whole nation, is the most horrible that could be feared. Socrates, in receiving the cup of poison, blessed indeed the weeping executioner who administered it; but Jesus, in the midst of excruciating tortures, prayed for his merciless tormentors. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God. Shall we suppose the Evangelic History a mere fiction? Indeed, my friend, it bears not the marks of fiction; on the contrary, the history of Socrates, which nobody presumes to doubt, is not so well attested as that of Jesus Christ. Such a supposition, in fact, only shifts the difficulty, without obviating it: It is more inconceivable that a number of persons should agree to write such a history, than that one only should furnish the subject of it. The Jewish authors were incapable of the diction, and strangers to the morality contained in the gospel; the marks of whose truth are so striking and inimitable, that the inventor would be a more astonishing character than the hero *." *It would be difficult, my dear brethren, to express a more explicit homage to the authenticity of the Gospel. I am obliged*

* Emilius, vol. ii. p. 215, &c.

bliged to you, my Lord, for this concession, as you are by so far less unjust than my other enemies. *And yet, say you, the author acknowledges it only in consequence of human testimony.* Here, my Lord, you are mistaken; I acknowledge such authenticity in consequence of the gospel itself, and that sublimity which I find in it, abstracted from any moral evidence. I do not want any assurance that a gospel exists, when I am myself in possession of it. *It is always men that report what other men have reported,* and nothing more: they do not report the existence of a gospel; this I see with my own eyes; and should the whole world maintain that there is no such thing, I should be firmly convinced the whole world was mistaken. *What a number of men between God and him!* Not one. The gospel itself determines this point, and this is in my own hands. By what means soever it came there, and by whomsoever written, I acknowledge in it the dictates of the Divine Spirit. This is as immediately present as possible; there are no human witnesses between this evidence, and my own heart; the sense in which human testimony intervenes, regarding the history of this sacred book, its authors, the time when it was written, &c. all which points enter into those critical discussions in which moral evidence universally is admitted. Such is the reply of the Savoyard Curate.

Nothing can be more evident, you say, than that the writer here contradicts himself, and is confuted on his own principles. Your Lordship is welcome to enjoy my confusion.—*How strangely infatuated therefore is the author to add,*
 “ And yet, with all this, the same gospel a-
 bounds

bounds with incredible relations, with circumstances repugnant to reason, and which it is impossible for a man of sense either to conceive or admit! What is to be done amidst all these contradictions? Be modest and circumspect: regard in silence * what cannot be either disproved or comprehended, and humble thyself before the Supreme Being, who only knows the truth. Such is the involuntary scepticism in which I remain." *But can this scepticism, my dear brethren, be indeed involuntary, when he refuses to admit the doctrines of a book, which, by his own confession, cannot be the work of man? when this book bears the marks of truth, so striking, so great, and so inimitable, that the inventor would be more astonishing than the hero of it? Surely we may here safely say, that iniquity hath belied itself.*

You charge me with iniquity, my Lord, without a reason; and often impute to me falsehood, of which you gave no example. You will please
to

* In order that mankind should impose on themselves this respectful silence, it is requisite that somebody should give them for once the reasons for so doing. He, who is sensible of these reasons, may give them; but those who censure others without giving them, may as well be silent. To address the public boldly and with frankness, is the right of every man, and even his duty on subjects of utility: But it is not right for one individual publicly to censure another; this is attributing to himself too great a superiority of virtue and abilities. It is for this reason I have never taken upon me to criticise or reprimand any one. I have told the age indeed some harsh truths; and I have not been severe on individuals; but when I have occasionally controverted or mentioned the writings of others, I have always spoken of living authors with the utmost tenderness and circumspection. The public is witness of the return they have made me. Indeed, all those gentlemen, who are so very forward and ambitious to teach me humility, appear to find this advice much easier to give than to take.

to observe, I take a contrary method with you.

The scepticism of the Curate is involuntary, for the very reason you give that it is not so. He would have rejected the gospel indeed, for the reasons before given, if supported only by those feeble authorities you would give it, and if that Divine Spirit which breathes in its morals and doctrines did not give it all that authority which human testimony must ever want in a matter of this kind.

He admits, therefore, of this sacred book, with all the admirable things it contains, and which the human understanding may comprehend: *But as to those incredible things which are repugnant to reason, and which it is impossible for a man of sense either to conceive or admit,* he regards them in silence without comprehending or rejecting them, and humbles himself before that Great Being who only knows the truth. Such is his scepticism; and this scepticism must needs be involuntary, since it is founded on irrefragable proofs both on one side and the other, which force the understanding to remain in suspense. This scepticism is that of every rational and sincere Christian, who is desirous of knowing the things of heaven only so far as he can comprehend them, of knowing those only which are of importance to his moral practice; rejecting, with the apostle, all foolish and uninstruc-tive questions, which serve to engender strife.

You suppose me to reject revelation, in order to adopt natural religion; now I have not, in the first place, rejected revelation. After this, *you accuse me of not even admitting natural religion, or at least of not acknowledging the necessity of it.* And your only proof of it is in the following