
The VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE.

No 3]

MAY 31, 1805.

[VOL. I

Acquaint thyself with God, if thou would'st taste
His works. Admitted once to his embrace,
Thou shalt perceive that thou wast blind before :
Thine eye shall be instructed ; and thine heart,
Made pure, shall relish, with divine delight,
Till then unfelt, what hands divine have wrought.

FASE.

The Editors of the VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE.

April 2d, 1804.

GENTLEMEN,

I AM often solicited by my acquaintances to write to them. My time being much occupied by different callings, I find it impossible to comply with their request in many instances. Having written many letters formerly, it occurred to me to collect as many of them as I could from my friends, and out of them to make a selection, and send them, not only to many of my acquaintances, but to many strangers, through the medium of the Magazine. Two reasons have induced me to this measure—one, from observing the eagerness with which letters written in an actual correspondence are generally read, and the other, from a humble persuasion, that they have been made a blessing to those to whom they were at first addressed.

If you judge such as I may forward from time to time, worthy the attention of your readers, it may be in my power to furnish materials to fill a page or two of your publication, for several numbers. In the mean time, my own mind will be in a measure relieved, as thinking I have substantially complied with the solicitations of my friends.

Wishing the greatest success and utility to your undertaking,

I am, with respect,
Your humble servant,

O

“Heaven gives us friends to bless the present scene,
 “Resumes them to prepare us for the next.”

I hope when you consider that you deserve to be scourged with scorpions, you will not grow impatient under the corrections of the rod, especially when it is in the hand of a kind and indulgent father who has the good of all his creatures in view; and particularly when you consider how much cause you have to be thankful for the numerous mercies you still enjoy.—Mr. M. will inform you of every thing passing here more fully than I could by letter.

I am your most sincere Friend.

Q.

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 FOR THE VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE.

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 ON INFIDELITY.

No. I.

WHEN the religion of the gospel was first preached to the world, it was “every where spoken against.” All the malignant passions of human nature, and all its most bitter, deep-rooted prejudices, were leagued in opposition to it. But notwithstanding the unwearied efforts of its enemies, it spread with astonishing rapidity through every part of the civilized world. In the cities of Greece, those schools of wit, and learning, within sixty years after the æra of Christ there, were flourishing Christian churches. In Rome, and even in the Palace of the Emperor, the name of Christ was worshiped—The monstrous superstructure of heathenish superstition, fell before the preaching of the Cross, and a purer morality was taught, a more rational worship was offered, and more correct, and enlarged views of the character of Deity were entertained. In the early ages of Christianity, the enemies of the Church were the perverse and misguided Jews, and the uninstructed Heathen. The opposition was determined, steady, and systematic. The prejudice of early education, the unrelenting spirit of religious bigotry, the interests of an artful and designing Priesthood; the learning, the subtlety, and the wit of Philosophers; the self-indulgence of a luxurious age; and the strong arm of the Roman government, were all united against eleven poor obscure Fishermen, and one Tent-maker—This was most fearful odds in-

deed. That this religion was not crushed in its infancy, and totally exterminated, is as miraculous, as that an egg-shell should not be crushed by the whole, unbroken force of a mill-stone rolling over it. But it flourished amidst the most sanguinary persecutions of its most deadly enemies. The blood and the ashes of the martyrs seemed to be prolific; and for one that went to the stake, there were hundreds, and thousands, who were ready to shed their blood, for the sake of this religion; So that, in the space of about three hundred years, the Roman empire became Christian. From this period the persecution of the Christian name abated; but still the opposition of the world to the pure doctrines of the Gospel, remained in all its force, and the Church soon became most lamentably corrupt: The Scriptures, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, were either neglected, or the plainest precepts of the Gospel were perverted, so as to countenance, or at least give indulgence to the most scandalous immoralities. While this was the case, there was no opposition to Christianity, as it was professed: A religion which coincides with the depravity of the human heart, is not likely to suffer hostilities from the world. How long this state of corruption continued—to what an enormous height it was carried—in what clouds of darkness the Church was involved, and how dark was the night, is known to every one versed in Ecclesiastical History—But at length, by the mercy and good providence of God, the dawn appeared: The reformation gave a mortal blow to the Papal Hierarchy—the human mind was unfettered from the shackles of a monstrous spiritual tyranny, and a new impulse seemed to be given to all the powers of human nature—The purity of the Gospel shone forth in mild radiance, like the moon emerging from a dark cloud. Then again, the ceaseless opposition of the world to true piety began to manifest itself, in the persecution of the professors of the reformed Churches. That depravity of heart which had marked itself under sanctimonious appearances, now threw off the disguise, and a most deadly persecution commenced against the followers of JESUS CHRIST. At that time too, some whose minds were (in some degree) illuminated by the progress of truth, but whose hearts were unreformed, revolting from the glaring errors, and the absurdities of the Romish Church, were hurried from the extreme of unconditional submission to the Papacy, and implicit faith in the doctrines of the Church, to the opposite extreme of incredulity, and scepticism. From the best information that I have been able to obtain, it was about this period that the *Deists* first made their appearance in the world. This sect was, at the begin-

ing, far from being numerous. Their increase has, however, been rapid; but it is no difficult matter to account for this event: The principles which they held—the doctrines which they inculcated—the morality which they taught, was well suited to the temper of the human heart. To this it may be added, that a smattering in knowledge frequently enables a man to perceive the difficulties with which a subject is encumbered, but does not put it in his power to give the solution. And it is well known, that many who enlisted under the banners of infidelity, were never famous for extent of literature, or for profoundness of thought. It may also be observed that the enemies of Christianity, have been in the habit of setting up themselves for Philosophers, and men of liberal sentiments; and to ridicule religion, was an easier way to obtain the reputation of philosophy, than a course of long and laborious study. Many, therefore, who were desirous of the distinctions of learning, but who were either too stupid, or too indolent, ever to arrive at eminence in the walks of science, took the shorter road of infidelity, and came out to astonish the world at once with their wit and philosophy. As the numbers of the sect multiplied, the attention of the friends of religion was turned towards them, and as often as an attack was made, they stood forth to repel the assault, and with the shield of truth to cover their religion against the weapons of its enemies. But the Deists have never yet been shamed into silence by defeats.—Their forms of attack were perpetually varied, and though repulsed a thousand times, they have, a thousand times, renewed the attack.—Every art was tried—every effort, that human ingenuity could devise, was made, to overthrow the Kingdom of Christ.—Earth, air, and ocean, were ransacked, for the purpose of finding, in the processes of nature, something to invalidate the authority of the Scriptures.—Historians, Poets, and Philosophers, determined, if possible, to write down Christianity—Farce and Comedy attempted to laugh it out of the world—“Coarse publications” multiplied daily—Buffoonery, ribaldry, and obscenity, were resorted to, when argument failed. These efforts had a most disastrous influence on the minds of thousands.—Infidelity spread with an almost incredible rapidity. At a period not long past, the prospect, to the eye of sense, was awfully gloomy! It seemed as if all the foundations of religion were about to be upturned, and the world demoralized! Nothing but an unshaken confidence in the promises of the great head of the Church, could, in that day of alarm and contention, have supported the Christian. But this storm

was not of long continuance—It was fierce—it was violent—it raged—but it was short. “A grand experiment on human nature, convinced the world, that society could not exist—that peace and good order could not be preserved, without religion.” But though the fierceness of the storm has ceased, the “danger is not yet over.” And it will not be over, while the Devil is unbound, and men unconverted. It is necessary, therefore, that Christians be still on the watch, and that the Shepherds of the Flock of Christ guard well their folds from the ravening wolf of Infidelity. And particularly, it is necessary to fortify the minds of youth against the destructive principles of unbelievers, to make them familiarly acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity, and to instruct them in the evidences by which the truth of our Holy Religion is established. Wherefore, it appeared to me not unsuitable, that a Magazine, devoted to the important object of promoting religious knowledge, should contain some essays upon the evidences of the Christian religion, written in a popular style, and expressing clearly and forcibly, the most cogent reasons for the truth of Christianity. In addition to this design, it occurred to me, that it would not be improper to prefix to such essays, some observations upon the objections most commonly urged against our religion. If the Editors of the Magazine approve of this plan, and of the execution thus far, they may insert this as a preliminary essay. The design originated from a sincere desire to promote the interests of truth and piety—Its execution I leave to the decision of others.

P.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE HINDOOS.

[The following extract of a letter, from the Rev. John Thomas, to the Rev. Mr. Rippon, taken from the Baptist Annual Register, will doubtless be entertaining to most of our readers; as it contains a brief historical sketch of some of the customs of the Hindoos, as well as the power of the Gospel to overcome the strongest habits of men.]

THERE are four *Shasters*, or laws, among the *Hindoos*, which they call the *Vedas*; these they hold in the highest esteem, and say it is unlawful for any man to read or hear them read, except he is a *Brahman*. The *Vedas* are

THE VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE.

Vol. I.]

SEPTEMBER 1805.

[No. 5.

FROM THE ASSEMBLY'S MAGAZINE.

THE LIFE OF DOCTOR JOHN WITHERSPOON.

DOCTOR WITHERSPOON was born at Yester, a few miles from Edinburgh, on the 5th of February, 1722. His ancestry was respectable, he being lineally descended from the Rev. John Knox, "the prime instrument in spreading and establishing the reformed religion in Scotland." His father was minister of the parish of Yester, a man of exemplary piety, and eminent as a critical scholar. The education of the son was such as might be expected under the direction of such a father. He early acquired a fondness for literary pursuits, with a love for accurate investigation, and a noble simplicity, which have since characterised him in the various scenes of his life.

When very young he was sent to the public school at Haddington. Here he was distinguished for assiduity in his studies, and for possessing a quickness of perception, and correctness of judgment.

At the age of fourteen, he was removed to the university of Edinburgh, where he continued till the age of twenty-one. During this time, while attending the different professors with his companions, some of whom have since appeared in the highest stations in the literary world, his talents and judgment were always noticed, and in the Theological-Hall they were much admired. His correct taste for sacred criticism, added to an uncommon quickness and perspicuity in forming

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ON INFIDELITY.—NO. II.

“ *They who live in a glass house ought never to throw Stones* ”

IN prosecuting the design mentioned in my first number, I shall, in the first place, notice some of the objections, which are most commonly brought forward against Christianity. Not indeed with the design of returning to them a formal answer—This has already been done often enough— But with the view of retorting them upon the objectors.

The discerning reader will not fail to remark, in passing, that many of these *objections* should, in correctness of speech, be denominated *reproaches*. But least we should be thought very precise about terms, as they are urged for *objections*, we shall let them stand as such.

It is objected then, that there are so many different sects in Christianity ; and so many discordant opinions, all professing to be founded on the same text, that it appears as if nothing were clearly revealed ; and if nothing be clearly revealed, then this boasted revelation is of no value. This, I believe, is the objection stated in its fullest force. In reply to this, I shall for the present, forbear to urge the general agreement of Christians, in the great fundamental points of religion : I shall not insist upon the acknowledgment that all churches agree in those points which are essential to salvation, a few *nominal Christians* only excepted, who approximate very nearly to Deism.

The book of nature, exclaims the unbeliever, when he thinks himself victorious in argument, the book of nature, exclaims he triumphantly is my bible—This, we know, is no invention of impudent imposters, and designing Priests. Now the Christian says nothing against the book of nature. He knows that *The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth forth his handy work* ; and every display of the divine attributes fills his soul with pious affections. But yet he thinks that a little more is necessary to be known than can be learned from the contemplation of the works of nature. And he must be excused if from

the magnitude, the number, the distance, and the periodical revolutions of the planets &c. he cannot discover how a holy God can pardon sin. But let us see what conclusions these objectors draw from *their Bibles*. They object differences of opinion, and various sectaries to us—One might expect to find the most perfect agreement among them—Let us examine, and we shall not stoop to little matters; In these we will consent that they should differ.

I suppose that the following are the most important points in all religion—The existence and attributes of Deity—The service which he requires of man—And the state of man after death.

Now as to the first subject, there are at least, three varieties of opinion among unbelievers. Some see it written in the book of nature, as clearly as any thing can be that there is no Deity separate from the universe; that God is nothing more than the soul of the world, by whose animating influence all the processes of nature are carried on. The opinion in few words is, that the mass of mind, to speak in their own dialect, is united with the whole mass of matter, and has no separate existence.

Another opinion is, that the Deity does, indeed, exist unconnected with matter; but He is thought to be only a great first cause, which gave being, and life, and motion to all things, and then left all his works entirely to the guidance of those laws, which were originally impressed upon them; while He sits an unconcerned spectator of all events which take place, suffering every thing to go on, if I may so speak, as it pleases, without his intervention or control.

A third opinion is, that God is the creator, and governor of the world; and that all things are managed by him in infinite power, and goodness. This sect of Deists, which by the way, is by no means the most numerous, holds many very correct opinions respecting the Deity; but it is a little unfortunate for them that we know that they were originally stolen from the Bible.

As to the second point, these disciples of nature, are as far from uniformity as the christian sectaries are in any matter whatever. Those who hold that God is no more than the soul of the universe ; and those who maintain that the Deity, tho existing separately, notices nothing, and controls nothing, agree in denying that any worship is to be paid to him. Prayer, and praise, reverence, and fear, and every thing bearing the least semblance of Piety is the constant object of their ridicule: But those who admit the moral Government of God, do, indeed, acknowledge that all those services are due to him, which the laws of nature appear clearly to prescribe. This general principle, however, being admitted, there are very great differences of opinion in the interpretation of these laws. Some think that by exercising charity to our fellow men, we perform every duty which God requires of us. Others go a step farther, and acknowledge that all the duties resulting from the several relations of life, ought to be discharged, in obedience to the will of our Creator. And some few acknowledge that those duties, which have God as their immediate object, ought not to be neglected—such as prayer and praise, love, and reverence.*

As to the state of man after death, there are most violent *appugnations* of opinion. Some see “ The eternal sleep of death” written in as legible characters, in the book of nature, as it was on the tomb stones in the church yards of Paris ; and profess to have no doubt but that “ The last puff of their nostrils will blow their souls to annihilation.” Others, if you will believe their professions, are very certain that, at death, the soul is re-united with the great soul of the universe ; from which it was originally severed to animate the human body.

* I beg that it may be recollected here, that I am speaking of Deists who live in Christian countries, and who have enjoyed, in some degree, the benefit of Christian instruction.—I hope, moreover, that it will be remembered, that I speak of their theory, not their practice.

Others, again, admit that the soul has a separate existence in a future state. But, then, among those who hold this opinion, there are very important differences. Some are persuaded that the Creator is too merciful to inflict any sort of punishment upon any of his creatures, and that the whole human race will, after death, be happy. Others admit a state of future rewards and punishments—but here again they are split into varieties of sects. There is no sort of agreement as to the conditions of our happiness, nor as to the punishment to be inflicted. Some think that all will end well if we do our duty as neighbors and citizens, if we are just and kind to all. Others maintain that we must not only do this, but that we must repent of all our evil deeds, and beg God to pardon us. Others think that the good actions, and repentance, are both entirely proper, yet it is hardly safe to rely solely upon these, but that we must also take in to account the mercy of God. Here again there is a difference—but there is no end to this business. And I have stated differences enough to answer my purpose. We see then the various sects, and dissensions among Christians objected to them by men, who, on the most important subjects, are divided and sub-divided into so many varieties, that it would fatigue the patience of a stoic to enumerate them. Why may we not retort upon these objectors, “Ah! they, who live in a glass house, ought never to throw stones.”

But I beg the patience of my reader a little longer. These points, which we have been noticing are the most interesting in the world. Is there a God? Is he the governor of the universe? Am I immortal? Then what will become of me after death? Here I find myself standing on the narrow isthmus of life. I know and feel that I am mortal—I his pain which now darts through my breast like a burning arrow warns me that death approaches. Perhaps I am now on the verge of the grave. And I to lie down in the sleep of eternal death? Dreadful thought—Ah no—This gloomy consolation is denied me. Conscience points out a hereafter, and thunders in my ear that God is just. What shall I do? Alas! All is perplexity and

darkness. Come now thou *Illuminatus!* thou *Philosopher!* thou *Illuminator!* Come forth now and dispel the darkness of my mind. Come thou boasting *Philanthropist!* relieve me from these perplexing doubts.—But do not mock me with uncertainty.—Do not harass me with conjectures—I need proof.—I need certainty to support my sinking soul. Go read your book of nature, and pronounce my fate—What! are there so many discordant opinions? Are these things shrouded in clouds and darkness? Why then you must be dismissed in the words of one of old, *Miserable comforters are ye all.*

In the midst of all this darkness and confusion and uncertainty, and perplexity, how comforting is it to the pious mind to have recourse to the Bible, and there find that knowledge which will make him wise to salvation; there to see the glory of God, and to enjoy the light of his countenance: there to receive those consolations which can bear up the soul amidst the severest trials of life, and even fill it with rapture in the agonies, and convulsive struggles of death; and there to be pointed to the regions of eternal rest and immortal glory. How different this from the frigid, uncomfortable, gloomy doctrines of infidelity!

In order to present the matters treated of in this number in a clear and striking point of view, it may not be amiss to draw up a recapitulatory table.

1. *The Existence, and Attributes of Deity.*

INFIDELITY.

1, Deist. I believe that there is a soul of the world, which animates all nature, and gives life and motion to all things.

2, Deist. I believe that God exists seperately from matter; and that he made all things; but as to the moral

CHRISTIANITY.

Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, Baptist, &c. We believe that there is only one living and true God, the king eternal, immortal, and invisible, self existent, independent, almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, infinitely holy, just, merciful, slow to wrath, and abund-

INFIDELITY.

CHRISTIANITY.

government of the Deity, I understand nothing of it.

3, Deist. It is my opinion, that there is a great wise and good creator and governor of the universe.

2, *What duty does God require of man ?*

1, Deist. I desire to hear nothing of this matter ; it is all superstition, and delusion and nonsense.

2, Deist. This also is my opinion.

3, Deist. I believe that God is a great and powerful Being, who ought to be revered and feared ; but as for any specific acts of worship, I see nothing of this in the Book of nature.

4, Deist. I believe that acts of worship are not unsuitable, from such creatures as we are, to the great God.

3, *What will be the state of man after death ?*

1, Deist. I expect to lie down in eternal sleep.

2, Deist, I believe that my mind will, after death, be united to the great mass of mind which animates the universe.

3, Deist. I believe that God is merciful, and I hope

dant in loving kindness to the children of men.

Christians. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might, and mind, and strength : and thy neighbor as thyself. And what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.

Christians. He that believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ, hath everlasting life ; but he that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

And we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a build-

INFIDELITY

CHRISTIANITY

that all men will be happy,
and I among the rest.

4, Deist. I hope that, if
I try to do my duty, and re-
pent of my sins, God will not
make me miserable.

I only ask that the above statements may be compared,
and let every candid man judge for himself.

P.

FOR THE VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE.

NECESSITY OF REVELATION.

THAT Reason is not a sufficient guide for man, must ap-
pear from the condition of those nations who were not favour-
ed with Revelation.

The most enlightened nations of the heathen world, prior
to the introduction of Christianity, were the most abominable
idolators! Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were the nations, a-
mong whom, human reason did its best.

Among these, philosophy, art, and science flourished—and
their great moralists Cicero, Seneca, Socrates, and Plato,
taught them all that human reason could discover, or heathen
piety enforce. Here then, if any where, Revelation would be
unnecessary, and the direction of heaven in vain.

But what was the fate of these nations? 1. They were
grossly ignorant of the true God, as appeared by their deify-
ing animals, and departed heroes—and not only worshipping
many gods, but at the same time supposed them subject to hu-
man passions, and guilty of the most enormous vices. 2. Their
religious rites were some of them shocking to reason, and
injurious to society. Witness the offering of human sacrifices.
It is said that sixteen thousand four hundred human victims
were offered up at the dedication of one Temple, among the
Mexicans. 3. Their morality was bad, and all their philoso-
phy could make it no better,—revenge was a virtue, and su-

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VOL. I.]

NOVEMBER 1805.

[No. 6.

The Rev. Mr. Kieherer's Narrative of his Mission to the Hottentots.

(Continued from page 299.)

WHEN we first entered upon our work, we labored to convince our hearers by arguments addressed to their understandings, but our endeavors in this way had little success. They continually raised objections and difficulties. We then resorted to another method; we insisted chiefly on the dying love of Christ, in the most simple and affectionate manner; we represented him as the all-sufficient friend of lost and helpless sinners; tenderly inviting them to come to him that they might be saved; and intreating them to give the fair trial of experience to our doctrine, by praying to Jesus. Since we adopted this method, the Lord has been pleased to make the word effectual to many souls. From time to time our hearers, who were before impenetrable, came to us, and with tears in their eyes, declared that they perceived, more and more, the truth and excellency of the gospel which we preached, finding it to be the power of God to their salvation. This was particularly the case of the tame Hottentots who occasionally heard us. About Christmas, 1799, several farmers from a distance, came to partake with us, according to the Dutch custom, of the Lord's Supper. Some of them had been awakened under the preaching of the Rev. Mr. Vofs, at Rodezand, but now came to our settlement, because it was nearer. The provisions they brought us were very seasonable and we spent several days with them in the most agreeable manner.

My garden now began to assume a flourishing aspect, and promised soon to enable me to supply at least twenty guests

antly drawn from their physical order. This particular view of the subject merits, and, to give it its full force, would require a more extensive elucidation. But, that I might not encumber your Magazine, I have chosen to represent it with all the conciseness which I thought in any way consistent with perspicuity. It ought to carry with it the greater conviction to the objectors, since they equally subject the natural and the moral world to the laws of necessity, so that the ordinary and natural motives of human conduct must be those also, which are certain and necessary. S.

FOR THE VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE.

ON INFIDELITY, NO. III:

Incredulus, Odi. Hor.

ANOTHER objection, frequently made by the enemies of Christianity, is, that the Bible contains so many strange stories; so many mysteries, incomprehensible doctrines, that no man, who exercises his reason, can believe it to be the word of God. And we very often hear Christians termed credulous, superstitious fools, fanatics, enthusiasts, and many other coarse indelicate names, which it is needless to mention, as I by no means design to expose Unbelievers, by collecting into one disgusting groupe all the railing accusations, and bitter words which have been spoken against the followers of Jesus.

It would be easy to show that this objection is invalid; and that the greatest sceptics that ever lived, have believed a thousand things as much above their comprehension as the most mysterious points in Christianity. Indeed the fact is, that every man, every day that he lives, without the least hesitation, believes things, that he cannot comprehend. There is no need of inducing particulars here; every man's observation will suggest instances enough. Should any one, however,

doubt the truth of what is asserted, let him recollect what he always has believed respecting the production of plants; the nourishment of his own body by food, or any of the most common processes of nature and he will at once perceive, that he is perpetually surrounded with mystery. And if these things be so, the objection will appear to be without force; unless it is pretended, that in all the works of God we are to expect mysterious, incomprehensible points; but that in a revelation from Him, every thing is to be perfectly on a level with our narrow capacities. But it is not my intention to urge this answer to the objection. This would be only repeating what has often been said before. What I mean to show, is, that Infidels in respect to religion, are at least as credulous as those whom they are daily in the practice of ridiculing for their credulity.

It may be remarked here, that men are frequently imposed upon by names. Unbelievers have stiled themselves philosophers; and multitudes have allowed the title; they have ridiculed Christians for their easy faith, and many have supposed that no man could be a Christian, without being an easy credulous fool. But let us examine this point a little. He is a real philosopher, who on every subject proportions his assent to the evidence: he is credulous, who believes without sufficient evidence. He understands the right use of reason, who balances difficulties on every side, and chooses the least; he is either unfair, or ignorant who rejects at once without examination, whatever carries the appearance of difficulty. With these observations before us, let us examine what right unbelievers have to assume to themselves, the title of *men of reason, and philosophy*; and reproach Christians with superstition, and credulity, and I know not what.

I shall in the first place notice those who stand highest in the ranks of Scepticism: those I mean, who profess to believe that there is no God. Now these men either believe that the world existed from eternity; or else, that it sprung up by chance. He who supposes the first, believes the absurdity of an infinite succession of finite beings. He who admits the second, must

believe that an effect can be produced without an adequate cause, or in fact, that an effect is produced by nothing at all. Now whether this is proportioning assent to evidence, I leave every man to judge. In the same way, let it be determined whether a man who can believe in this way, has any right to laugh at the Christian for his credulity.

The account given by Moses of the creation of the world, and the chronology of the same author, has been a copious subject for the exercise of infidel wit, with one voice it has been rejected, and this, as is pretended, for want of evidence. But let us hear what these scrupulous philosophers say on this subject. And let one speak for all. A very great philosopher, and unbeliever, who cannot believe what Moses wrote, is persuaded that a great many years ago—nobody knows when—by some volcano in the sun, this earth was thrown out, boiling like lava from a burning mountain, and some how or other—nobody knows how—was set in motion round the sun; and after a very long lapse of years—nobody knows how long—having gradually become cool, it was covered with vegetable mould, after which, trees, and all kinds of plants, and finally men, sprouted up from the soil. Now this is all mighty fine and philosophical; and men who receive it are philosophers of course. But we, who see evidences of the truth of the Mosaic history in the state of the world, in the history of past ages, in the reasonableness of his account, and in many other things, are credulous fools. I could mention several other curious, and laughable fables, which these same philosophers have invented on this subject, did I not fear that this would give too ludicrous an air to my paper, and I rather apprehend too, that the simple unlettered Christian, credulous as he is, would hardly be persuaded that grave men, and philosophers, doubting, hesitating, scrupulous, unbelieving philosophers, can believe such strange stories.

But let us proceed, and we shall find farther proofs of the wonderful credulity of unbelievers. There are Christians now in the world; and it is as firmly established as any histori-

cal fact can be, that the author of this sect lived about eighteen hundred years ago in the land of Judea; and suffered death under the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate. And yet a late writer* against Christianity pretends, that originally this system was nothing more than the worship of the sun under the name of Chris-en! I know not whether any have received this notion: it however is probable that they have: and they would have Christians to believe it too. Indeed they must excuse us. We cannot be so credulous. Tacitus, an ancient enemy of our religion, is much more worthy of credit. "Auctor no-
 " minis ejus, (says he, speaking of Christians) Christus, qui
 " Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum,
 " supplicis affectus erat—Christ the author of this sect, who,
 " in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death by the procurator
 " Pontius Pilate." But it is needless to produce proofs of this point: let us proceed. It is certain too that Christ left but few disciples upon the earth; and, that they were the instruments of spreading this religion through the civilized world, in the space of three centuries. Here arises a very important question for solution. By what means this religion was thus rapidly spread through the world? The Christian thinks that nothing but the interposing power of God could have brought about this event; the Unbeliever attributes it to priestcraft, to fraud, and to various other causes. Let us examine this matter a little. If any adequate cause, but the interposition of Heaven, can be assigned, then I will admit that Christians are as credulous as they are represented; but if not, I think that we ought to hear no more of the easy faith of the disciples of Christ. Before we proceed to this examination, I beg leave to make a remark, which, perhaps, may appear paradoxical. It is this, that the most credulous are not always the easiest to be convinced, Thus for the sake of example, those, who by philosophers, and generally, and scornfully enough too, denominated the Vulgar, and who are pro-

* Volney.

verbially credulous, so strongly believe that the earth is at rest in the center of the universe, and that the Sun and Stars revolve round it, that no reasoning of the philosopher, however cogent, can convince them of the error. A thousand instances of this kind might be adduced. One more only shall be brought forward, not taken from subjects of philosophy, but from common life. There are now in this country multitudes of people who put as much confidence in what are called *signs*, as ever a superstitious heathen did in his *omens*: such, for instance, as stumbling when one is going out of doors, having salt spilt towards one when at table, being crossed in the road by certain kinds of animals. And all the reasoning in the world will never convince them that this is mere folly. Now the true cause of this I imagine is not the want of capacity to understand the reasoning in either case, for it is very obvious; but the contrary opinion is so strongly impressed on their minds, that it entirely excludes the truth, and it may be said *that through excessive credulity they will not believe*. In the same way I apprehend that multitudes have in some way or other, they scarcely know how, taken up the notion that Christianity is a strange mysterious unaccountable thing, entirely repugnant to all reason and philosophy; and this opinion so strongly possesses them, that the most cogent arguments are entirely without effect, and they may be said to be infidels, through excessive credulity. Under the influence of this temper they will swallow as great absurdities as were ever imputed to Christianity by its most inveterate enemies. Let us proceed now to the examination of the question before us; only remarking farther, that whatever may be thought of the observations just made, or of their application, this will not effect the point before us.

The principal instruments in the first propagation of the Christian religion were the apostles of Jesus Christ. These, according to their own account were unlearned and ignorant men; and would therefore be looked on with contempt, by the proud self important doctors of their own nation, and by

The haughty philosophers of Greece and Rome : They taught the religion of a man who had been crucified ; which was matter of great offence to Jew and Gentile. Among their own countrymen they had to encounter an attachment to the Jewish religion, rendered inveterate by the force of education and habit. Among the Gentiles they were set in opposition to the monstrous mass of polytheism, established by law, and supported by the arm of an intolerant magistracy, and by the unyielding prescriptions of custom, and by the inflexibility of religious bigotry. They were opposed to a religion, which, in its daily ceremonies encouraged, or at least permitted unbounded gratifications of the appetites ; and whose most hallowed mysteries gave opportunities for assignation and intrigue. In addition to this there were in every town of Italy, of Greece, of Asia Minor, of Egypt, and indeed of most parts of the Roman empire, men of learning and acuteness termed philosophers. These were considered the public instructors of mankind. And when the apostles of Christianity came forward, assuming the same office, and teaching the weakness of human nature, the insignificance of their philosophic dogmas and the folly of their wisdom ; their pride was deeply wounded, and they were inflamed with the keenest malignity against these humble fishermen. And still farther, these humble preachers boldly declaimed against the vices of that most dissolute and profligate age ; and taught the necessity of repentance of mortification and self-denial, and of a holy life. They did not, however, hold out the idea that this consisted in occasional flights of enthusiasm, in great horrors, and succeeding raptures ; but in the diligent and faithful discharge of all the duties resulting from all the relations of life. We see then a religion to be demolished, which was supported by the potent arm of civil authority, by the mighty power of custom, by the deadly bitterness and obstinacy of religious bigotry ; by the art and cunning of a priesthood, as knavish, and as powerful as Christian priests have ever been represented ; by all the wit, and learning, and acuteness of philosophers in short by all orders and ranks, and conditions in life. And in the room of this there was to

be established a religion teaching these mysterious doctrines so offensive to modern infidels ; inculcating a pure morality, denouncing eternal destruction against the impenitent perpetrators of iniquity ; and offering life, and the favor of Heaven only to the pure in heart. Now he who can believe that in such a combination of circumstances, such men, preaching such doctrines, could establish Christianity on the ruins of heathenism by their unassisted powers, may forever hold his peace respecting the credulity of Christians. He who can believe this can believe that any effect, however great can be produced by any cause however inadequate. He that believes this, can believe the story about the earth being tossed out of the sun by a volcanic eruption—or any thing at all.

FOR THE VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE.

A DISCUSSION OF SOME POINTS RELATIVE
TO INFANT BAPTISM.

NO. I.

Some difficulties which result from the opinion that Infant-baptism is not an Apostolical practice.

THAT, which can be used with as much propriety, and success, on one side of a dispute, as the other, deserves not the name of an argument, and ought to be discarded from both. Of this kind, are confident assertions, the insinuation of improper motives and defect of understanding, and every species of invective. A positive, dogmatical air, may influence the weak and ignorant, but will have no weight with the candid inquirer after truth. With such, a writer, or speaker cannot injure himself more, than by affirming things to be evident and certain, which remain in doubt and obscurity. It is very common for those who oppose infant baptism, to assert, that nothing but prejudice, and interested motives, can prevent any one from seeing, and acknowledging, that they are right.— This appears to me to evince, not only a want of candor, but

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THE
VIRGINIA
RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE,

FOR THE YEAR

1806.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE SYNOD OF
VIRGINIA, BY THE EDITORS.

VOLUME II.

LEXINGTON:

PRINTED BY SAMUEL WALKUP.

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1806.

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THE VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE

VOL. II.]

JANUARY, 1806.

[No. 1.

BIOGRAPHY.

JOHN BLAIR SMITH was born in Lancaster county, in the state of Pennsylvania, on the 12th of June, 1756. His father, the Rev. Dr. Robert Smith, was pastor of a presbyterian church in Pequa of that county, and much esteemed on account of his uniform piety, his correct ministerial conduct, and his theological and classical acquirements. John was the fourth of six sons, all of whom, excepting the youngest who died in childhood, acquired the rudiments of literature under the immediate care and tuition of their father in an academy which he had established with a view to their education, as well as to the public utility. In very early life he exhibited marks of mental energy, and of intelligence uncommonly prompt; and was particularly distinguished by an ingenuous habit of speech and behaviour, a warmth of heart, and pointed purpose in his juvenile pursuits. These appearances did not escape the seasonable notice of his interesting and anxious parents; and on these, as properly qualified and directed, they fondly raised very pleasing and sanguine hopes of his future usefulness and honor. In consequence, he became an object of much early parental attention, and of many pious parental prayers. Nor was it long before those prayers were favoured with signal intimations of a gracious acceptance. When he was about fourteen years of age, it pleased God, by a remarkable effusion of heavenly influence, to excite amongst the youth of that academy, a very serious and deep attention to the important concerns of religion and their souls. Of that influ-

more lively gratitude to the giver of all good, than the wealthy sinner ever felt, when his table was loaded with the luxuries of life. Taught by thy gospel, thy saints *'have taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance. They have chosen rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, having a respect to the recompence of the reward.'* Their experience hath taught them that *'thy word is profitable,' for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.'* May Christians be more thankful for the inestimable advantages derived from Revelation; and may sinners beware that they receive not the grace of God, in vain. S.



FOR THE VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE.



ON INFIDELITY, NO. IV.

I MUST beg leave to dwell on the subject of the last number a little while longer. We have seen some instances of the credulity of unbelievers. It may be useful to adduce a few more.

When the christian system was first presented to the world, every nation, of which we have any knowledge, the jews excepted, were polytheists and idolaters. This was certainly the case with the refined and learned people of Greece and Rome. And notwithstanding the subtilty and the wisdom of their celebrated sages, still they continued in gross darkness, worshipping their fabled deities with superstitions the most ridiculous, with rites the most absurd, and ceremonies the most abominable that can be conceived. So that the very temples of the gods became the abodes of the most infamous licentiousness. But when the gospel was made known unto

men, this monstrous mass of idolatry, and superstition, and wickedness tumbled in ruins, and men worshipped the One living and eternal God, who is over all blessed forever. This certainly was no trifling matter; and without doubt the gospel of Christ Jesus deserves great regard, inasmuch as it has given to man more correct and exalted notions of the character of Deity than had ever been entertained before. But more has been done than this. We are taught in the holy Scriptures a purer, and more perfect morality than ever had been before inculcated. The heathen philosophers, indeed, gave many very excellent precepts. But it may be remarked that whatever in their several systems is truly excellent coincides with the christian morality; and that whatever is defective, is a departure from it. And whoever examines with impartiality, will find that they are universally lame, and defective. They are imperfect both as to precept and motive. They are imperfect as to precept, because, in the first place, they go only to the regulation of the external conduct, without attempting to correct that, which is the source of all evil, the temper of the heart. In the second place there was an omission of some duties, which appear entirely suited to the condition of human nature, and which, when duly attended to, contribute greatly to the peace of society, such, for example, are humility, and love to our enemies. The truth is, that the moralists of antiquity generally assumed, in their systems some point as the chief good of man, on which they insisted, to the exclusion of many things of no small importance.

But there was also a defect in the motives suggested for the enforcement of their precepts. They could indeed talk finely of honour, and reputation; they could talk finely about the beauty of virtue: but these fine spun speculations are to the uncurbed, impetuous passions of men, what a mound of sand is to the swollen mountain torrent. Directly contrary to this is the morality of the gospel. Its precepts strike at the very principles of vice. *'The axe is laid at the root.'* It re-

quires us to suppress the very first risings of evil desire, to root up the very foundations of iniquity; to purify the heart, to make the tree good, and then the fruit shall be good also. And farther still; its precepts extend to every relation of life; not a case can occur, but that it is not by a command, or a prohibition. In the gospel moreover are presented to us the strongest possible motives to the right discharge of duty. Here, it is true, are no incitements to honour, no provocatives to ambition, no compromises with the weakness of human nature. But you must live as under the immediate inspection of God; you must be what you ought to be or eternal destruction is the consequence. Here is no subterfuge for hypocrisy, no cloak for the ingenuity of vice to hide itself under; but every thing is before the face of Heaven. On the other hand, to him who is faithful unto death, and who by a patient continuance in well-doing seeks for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life is secured on the veracity of a God. Here then as motives, to a pious holy life, is proposed the favor of God, and the happiness of Heaven, and as the terror of evil doers, the wrath of God, and the horrors of everlasting despair are set before them. Where else can such motives be found to persuade men to pursue good, and avoid evil?

In addition to all this, there is presented to us in the character of Jesus Christ a pattern of perfection, which we are called upon to imitate. Here I choose to use the words of the eloquent unbeliever Rousseau. "I will confess to you farther, " that the majesty of the Scripture 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, com- " pared with the Scripture! 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 con- " tains should be himself a mere man? Do we find that he as- " sumed the air of an enthusiast or ambitious sectary? What " sweetness, what purity in his manners! what an affecting

“ gracefulness in his delivery ! what sublimity in his manners !
 “ what profound wisdom in his discourses ! what presence of
 “ mind ! 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 die without weakness,
 “ and without ostentation ? Shall we suppose the Evangelical
 “ history a mere fiction ? Indeed, my friend, it bears not
 “ the marks of fiction. On the contrary, the history of So-
 “ crates, which no body presumes to doubt, is not so well at-
 “ tested as that of Jesus Christ. The Jewish authors were in-
 “ capable of the diction, and strangers to the morality con-
 “ tained in the gospels ; the marks of whose truth are so striking
 “ and invincible, that the inventor would be a more astonish-
 “ ing character than the hero.” I am here anticipated in the
 conclusion which I intended to draw ; but I will just add, that
 it may now be recollected what accounts unbelievers have in
 all ages given of the Apostles of Christ, or what accounts
 they have given of themselves ; and he who can believe that
 such men by their own unassisted powers, could give such views
 of the character of Deity, deliver such precepts of moral
 conduct, suggest such motives for their enforcement, or pro-
 pose for imitation such an example of perfection as the cha-
 racter of Jesus, has a great deal more faith, (if it were of the
 right kind) than would make him a christian.

But upon the supposition that the whole gospel scheme is a
 gross imposture, a mere fabrication, yet there is still in it
 something very extraordinary. That twelve obscure illiterate
 Jews should undertake to contrive a scheme to impose upon
 the world ; that they should lay the plan and foresee all the
 difficulties in the way so as to avoid them ; that they should
 go forth into various nations telling the same story, and keep-
 ing the appearance of consistency amidst all the infinite va-
 riety of occurrences they met with ; that in all the exami-
 nations and counter-examinations before the civil magistrate,
 they still should never contradict each other ; that unallured by

rewards and unterrified by death in all its most dreadful forms they should never confess the imposture; in short that they should have laid the plan with such wonderful ingenuity and foresight, and have persevered in it with such inflexible resolution as to have succeeded in their scheme; that they should have imposed not only on ignorant barbarians, but on the most learned, the most acute and ingenious people, on people whom even the enlightened moderns revere for their genius and learning; that on such as these, an imposture should be imposed, and so rivetted, as to continue to this day; that it should still continue among the most enlightened nations of the world, while the ignorant and barbarous have long ago rejected it; and that now, such was the astonishing reach of thought in these men, that even now many of the most learned, most acute, most profound, and sagacious men, should be imposed upon, so as firmly to believe this imposture, and build their best hopes, and rest their souls salvation upon it: and still farther, that they should defend it against the attacks of infidels, and find in the very imposture itself, arguments which have perpetually puzzled and confounded them; that obscure illiterate fishermen should contrive a scheme of imposture which has completely imposed upon such men, as Bacon and Boyle and Newton and Locke and Campbell and Reid and Jones, is I think, as extraordinary as any thing we read of in the history of the world; and he who believes this—I will not pretend to say what he would not believe.

And what is not a little strange too, is, that this imposture, which has established itself against the opposition of the world, which has thus imposed upon the wisest, the best, the most illustrious men in the world, that this, should be so gross and silly, that a child could detect it; that it should be such a clumsy story, that none but an easy credulous fool could believe it, I will leave it to any man's reason, if this be not strange, passing strange! wonderful and passing wonderful! For my own part, christian as I am, *Incredulus Odi*, I hate such incredible stories, and rest myself on the plain simple truths of christianity.