

# T H E S C O T S M A G A Z I N E.

A P R I L, 1753.

## C O N T E N T S.

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An abstract of the bill, intituled, *An act for erecting several public buildings in the city of Edinburgh; and to empower the trustees therein mentioned to purchase lands for that purpose; and also for widening and enlarging the streets of the said city, and certain avenues leading thereunto.*

**W**HEREAS the city of Edinburgh, the metropolis of Scotland, is, by reason of its situation, and the steepness of the ascent, and by the narrow and confined avenues leading to the principal street thereof, rendered difficult of access; and the public hath not hitherto been possessed of proper areas, either for

erecting buildings, or opening streets, and places of resort, as well for the convenience as ornament of the said city: And whereas—[Here mention is made of our present want of the several public offices, the exchange, and the communications, afterwards mentioned in the statutory part]: And whereas the magistrates and council of Edinburgh have purchased several houses, with a view of providing the aforesaid offices and exchange, and making the aforesaid communications: And whereas several noblemen, many of the members of the college of justice, and other gentlemen, and also the most considerable of the incorporations of Edinburgh, sensible of the great benefit

nominate a clerk and book-keeper, with a yearly salary not exceeding 25 l. Sterling to both, for themselves and servants, to be proportioned as the commissioners shall judge proper; to cause their books be balanced before the expiration of the act; and in case there be any money, houses, grounds, or other effects, undisposed of, to appoint the purposes to which the same shall be applied for further improvements in or about the city, and to make over the excrescence, if any be, to the magistrates and council, for the use of the community, to be employed and disposed of according to the order of the commissioners, expressed in writing, and put upon record in the books of council and session, or the town-court books; which shall be held by the magistrates and council as the rule of their procedure.

That this act shall be in force till the third Monday in June 1765, so far as relates to the purchasing of buildings and grounds; but as to all the other powers, it shall be in force till the third Monday in June 1774, and from thence to the end of the then next session of parliament.

To the author of the SCOTS MAGAZINE.

S I R,

I Have been intending for some time past to make use of your collection, to communicate to the world a few remarks upon an essay on human liberty, contained in a late treatise, intitled, *Essays upon morality and natural religion*. While I was meditating this, I met with a letter to that author in your *Magazine* for August last [xiv. 399.], containing several observations upon that essay, and upon the very points in it which I had resolved to consider. These observations I think exceeding just; but as they are not altogether coincident with what I intended, as the subject itself will be universally acknowledged of the last importance, and as different views of an argument will strike different readers, I beg the favour of you to publish what follows, by way of appendix to what your former correspondent hath already offered.

The only thing new in that essay upon liberty, so far as I can discern, is the author's allowing that men have a natu-

ral feeling or consciousness of liberty, and are made to act as if they were free, and yet asserting that this feeling is deceitful or delusive, not correspondent to real truth; nay, that philosophy is capable of discovering this deceit, and shewing us that we act by a fatal necessity. All that he offers in support of this strange compound opinion, is an argument from analogy, That there are delusive or deceitful perceptions conveyed to us by our senses in the natural world, that the representations of objects and their qualities differ from what philosophy discovers them to be. Of this he gives one particular instance, from the objects of sight, That a surface appears smooth and uniform, whereas it is rough and uneven when examined with a microscope. He then observes in general, that it is now universally admitted, that the qualities called *secondary* which we by natural instinct attribute to matter, belong not to matter, nor exist really without us; that colour is not in the object, &c. Now, an analogical argument cannot be more effectually destroyed, than by showing the falsehood of the fact upon which it is founded. I affirm therefore, that the observation he makes, and takes for granted, is not just; but that the ideas we receive by our senses, and the persuasions we derive immediately from them, are exactly according to truth, to real truth, which certainly ought to be the same with philosophic truth.

Let us consider first the secondary qualities of matter in general. These, he says, it is now universally admitted belong not to matter, though we by natural instinct attribute them to it. Whether this hath been hitherto universally admitted in any sense that is serviceable to his hypothesis, I have some doubt; but if it has, I intend to be the first exception, and absolutely refuse to admit any such thing. For what is it we by natural instinct attribute to matter? It must be, as I apprehend, one of these two things; either the very sensations we feel, or some quality corresponding to them, that is to say, a capacity, power, or aptness to produce these sensations in us. That the first of these are not in matter, I con-

self; but neither does any man, not even the most ignorant, attribute them to it. And the other, *viz.* a power of producing such sensations in us, unquestionably is in matter. The imperfection of our knowledge of the nature of objects, together with the imperfection of our language, which last arises from the former, has introduced some confusion into this matter; but when we examine accurately, we shall find, that it amounts to no more than this, that external objects are capable of raising a variety of sensations in us, expressive of, and correspondent to each of which, we give the object an epithet. I touch a table, and feel it resist my hand; this I call *hardness*. I taste honey; and because it excites an agreeable sensation, I call it *sweet*. In the same manner arise all the epithets or secondary qualities of objects; as, *hot, cold; hard, soft; dry, moist; sweet, sour, &c.* Nor if the most ignorant person in the world were strictly examined as to what he means by his expressions, would he appear to have been led by his senses into any belief but this, that particular objects have a power of exciting certain sensations in him and others which it is manifest that they have. There cannot be a more proper illustration of this matter, than the assertion with which novices in philosophy usually astonish their country-friends when they return from the university, with the issue of the dispute. A young student affirms, There is no heat in the fire. When this is boldly contradicted, he asks, If the fire feels any thing like what we feel when we are warmed or burnt? It is immediately acknowledged not. Upon this he supposes he hath obtained a victory. But whoever only reflects a little, will find, that the affirmation was idle and absurd, arising from ignorance, not from knowledge; and that the opinion of the vulgar upon this subject is agreeable to truth: nor could it be better expressed, but by a circumlocution, which would be an inconvenience in language. Let therefore any man only determine clearly what he means by the secondary qualities of matter, and it can be easily shown, either that they are in matter, or

that our senses do not lead us to ascribe them to it.

Let us next consider the particular instance given by this author. A surface appears smooth and uniform, which when examined with a microscope is full of ridges and hollows. Upon this, which may serve as a sample of all the instances that can be given, I observe, *first*, That the report of our senses, either of sight or touch, in this case, (for he does not tell us whether he means one or both, though I suppose it is chiefly the former), is in no other respect deceitful, or contrary to truth, but as they do not discover to us all that is possible to be known of any object, or that might be discovered by senses more delicately framed. We ought to distinguish between the testimony of our senses, and the opinions we may form upon, or the conclusions we may draw from what they represent. It is sufficient that the testimony of our senses be according to truth so far as they go, though they neither make us perfect in knowledge concerning their objects, nor even secure us from error. A surface may have no hollows in it discoverable by our eyes, nor any roughness to offend our touch; but if we conclude that there are no hollows in it that can be discovered by the finest possible sense, it is only our own false inference, and no testimony of our senses at all. It is evident, that there are many different degrees of smoothness, the least perfect of which is often termed smooth, even when there remains a consciousness that it may be polished to a yet greater degree. So that our judging a surface smooth and uniform, doth not so much as include in it a persuasion that there are not small hollows in it which we cannot discern. How would a parallel observation be received in the case of any other sense? Suppose three persons were together, and one of them should hear a noise at a distance, which the other two cannot perceive; will any man say, that the sense of hearing in these is false or deceitful, because in the other it is quicker? Or, to make it exactly parallel to the case of the microscope, suppose a machine were formed (as there have been some) proper for collecting

lecting and communicating sound; when this is applied to the ear, a man will hear sounds from a much greater distance than without it; but is it common sense to say, that for this reason his sense of hearing is deceitful? Deceit or delusion takes place only when something contrary to truth is put in its room, not when truth is concealed where there is no obligation to discover it. It might with equal propriety be said, that our senses are deceitful, because they do not discover to us every object in nature, and because of these objects every single sense doth not discover to us every single quality. I shall only add upon this observation, that if the instance given by this author be admitted as a proper example of the deceitfulness of sense, I will undertake, for every instance that he can give me of a true perception, to give him five thousand that are false; nay, I am confident, not one instance can be produced at all that is not liable to the same or a like objection: and if so, what becomes of his own essay upon the certainty of our senses, and indeed of his whole essays, every one of which turns upon a feeling as its hinge?

But, *sally*, What if I should say, that this negative mistake (and this is the most that it can be called) of our senses, which philosophy pretends to discover, is at bottom false philosophy; that the representation of objects to a natural and microscopic eye are equally true, and that the one ought not to be called even a correction of, or more perfect than the other? For if it be true, as is now commonly asserted, that matter is divisible *in infinitum*, then the greatness or littleness of finite objects is wholly comparative or relative. What appears to us small, not only may, but must appear, to a creature of smaller and finer organs, very great; and what our senses do not perceive at all, is to us as nothing, and justly so considered. Nor are our senses, in point of veracity, so to speak, bound to discover to us any thing about it. Yet, even in this last case, we ought not to reckon it any proof that a thing doth not exist, that it is not the object of our senses. It is evident in fact, that

we are judges only of relative, not of absolute greatness or littleness; or rather, to speak more properly, greatness and littleness are relative expressions, that must vary in their meaning according to the different circumstances of the persons and things about which they are used: and we have reason to believe, that this is, according to the real truth of things, absolutely necessary in created natures; and that it could not have been ordered otherwise even by the almighty Creator, because it implies a contradiction.

But, in the *third* place, let it be observed, That there is a peculiarity in the sense of sight, that makes it liable to some ambiguity. We do indeed ordinarily make use of sight to pass some judgment upon the magnitude, distance, and figure of bodies; but it is at least very disputable, whether these be the proper objects of sight, or only of touch. It is the opinion of many, that light and colour only are the proper objects of sight; that it is by experience we learn to make any other use of it; and that the judgments we form by it, of the bulk, situation, and figure of bodies, are only general and indistinct, serving for common purposes, but by no means accurate and exact. If this is the case, it is no wonder that we are apt to fall into mistakes upon this subject, and to blame our senses as deceitful when we ourselves only are in fault. I shall not enter into the proofs of this opinion; it is sufficient for my purpose, that it is a probable opinion, and serves to account for any ambiguity we may apprehend in the testimony of the sense of sight. And it is no small argument both for the probability and use of this opinion, that almost all the particular instances that are usually given of the deceitfulness of sense, are taken from the objects of sight, or are of a mixt nature, and derive all their perplexity from this sense. We never hear of a deceitful sound, a deceitful smell, or a deceitful taste; but only, that the objects we see, are not in all respects the same as we may imagine them upon the first inspection. A square tower at a distance appears to be round; the body of the sun seems to have but two feet diameter; objects in the same line,

though at different distances, appear to be contiguous: what does this imply, more than that an accurate discovery of the bulk, figure, and distance of bodies, cannot, and was never intended to be made by sight alone? It is very probable, from the manner in which children view objects at first, that they appear to them all in a plain, or rather that the image makes a sensible impression on the retina of the eye, that it is by experience they learn to place them at different distances, and by the connection of ideas that they have an immediate perception of the distance when the image strikes them. Perhaps it may be objected, That colour, which is allowed to be the proper object of sight, and of sight alone, is not in the object, and yet is supposed in it. I answer, It is as much in the object as other secondary qualities are. The object hath not our sensation, but a power to produce it; and there is a real difference in the object to make it of a different colour, *viz.* a peculiar disposition of its parts to reflect only rays of such or such a kind. Upon the whole, it is nothing else, but the very excellence of the sense of sight, or its great serviceableness to us in more respects than its immediate office, that gives occasion or any plausibility to its being charged with delusion.

Thus I hope it is evident, that there is no foundation for asserting, that there are any deceitful or delusive perceptions conveyed to us by our senses in the natural world; and therefore no ground from thence to infer, that any thing analogous to it is to be found in the moral world. I now proceed to consider an objection which this author supposes may be made to his opinion, and the solution he gives of it. The objection is, If the deceitful feeling of liberty be given us to act upon, why destroy its effect, by discovering its falsehood, and letting us see we are under the power of necessity? He answers, by continuing his analogy, That as after we have discovered by philosophy, that several appearances of nature are only useful illusions, and that our sensible ideas do not correspond to philosophic truth, this does not affect the philosopher himself in ordinary action; as

little will our opinions about liberty and necessity affect our conduct. This assertion I take to be still more wonderful than the former, and is very surprising from one of this author's penetration. Perhaps I may be mistaken, but after the most exact inquiry of which I am capable, I take it to be absolutely false in both its branches, and withal most clearly false in the first branch, from whence the other is inferred. So far is it from being true, that philosophers continue to act upon appearances after they have discovered a truth contrary to them, which is the only case in point, that both philosophers and every other man act in all cases according to what they believe to be true, let appearances be what they will; and this so uniformly, that I am not able to conceive a case that may serve as an exception, unless perhaps the single instance of speech, that a philosopher says the sun and stars rise, &c. though he believes the earth to go round. But with what propriety can this be called acting? It is only making use of terms to convey a meaning, which these words do as well as any other; and I dare say, that if any philosopher thought, that his saying the sun rises, would be constructed as a denying the earth's motion, he would never again make use of that phrase. Speaking according to appearances, when we both believe and act upon the contrary truth, is not peculiar to philosophers, but common to all men. An equestrian statue is often called *a man upon horseback*; but no man in his senses ever thinks of maintaining a conversation with the rider, or borrowing his horse to perform a journey. Let it be observed, that when I here suppose it a possible case, that appearances may be contrary to truth, I do not destroy the reasoning in the former part of this letter. For though the representations we have from our senses of any object be according to strict truth, yet an additional discovery concerning it may so alter the idea upon the whole, as to make it essentially different as a motive of action. How many hundred instances may be given from ordinary life, showing that no man acts upon appearances when any truth is discovered by

experience

experience that has an opposite effect? Suppose I see a fruit-tree at a distance from me, the branches of which appear to be so near the ground that I can easily reach them; this may probably induce me to go to it for the fruit: but if upon trial I find that the distance deceived me, and that I cannot reach them, the very same appearance will never persuade me to repeat the experiment. Suppose by my position that the sun or moon appears to be contiguous with the top of a turret; notwithstanding this sensible appearance, so long as I know that they are really at an immense distance, it will never come in my mind to ascend the turret in order to touch these heavenly bodies. It is needless to give many instances of this kind, of which every one will suggest enough to himself; I shall only observe, in opposition to this author, that the truths we discover concerning any object by experience or information, instead of having no effect, ordinarily join themselves so closely to the sensible idea, as to be ever afterwards inseparable, and not only enlarge, but in some cases quite alter the idea itself from its first nature, and so the whole system of action in consequence of it. For example: When an ignorant unsuspecting person first sees a rattlesnake, or some other noxious animal, its curious and beautiful form will probably excite his admiration, and make him fond to look upon or touch it; but when he knows its nature thoroughly, the very same beautiful form will never be seen but with abhorrence. We may take an example of the same thing from our own species. There are to be found both men and women, the beauty and comeliness of whose persons make them admired and loved when first seen, but their tempers and dispositions are such, that all who know them perfectly, see them with disgust, and come to have an aversion at their very features, through the close connection of the idea of their character with that of their persons. These indeed are not philosophical discoveries; but they are truths, truths distinct from the sensible representations of objects; and their efficacy, as that of all

other truths, on practice, depends upon their being really believed, and not upon the manner of our arriving at the knowledge of them. I have also chosen them on purpose, that the argument from them might be clear; because many discoveries purely philosophical, make no manner of alteration in the object, or the idea of it, and so cannot have any effect upon our actions. After we know all about the nature or cause of colour that the latest observations can teach us, the effect and use of colour is absolutely the same, and every man acts equally agreeably to philosophy as to apparent truth. But, on the other hand, are not all the mathematical discoveries that can be applied to practice, applied to it in fact? And we may rest assured, that whatever philosophy discovers to us of any object, different from the sensible appearance, that would have had an effect if it had been part of the sensible appearance, has as infallible an influence, provided it be believed, as if it had been felt.

Thus there is no reason from this analogical argument to conclude, that the belief of the doctrine of necessity would have no effect upon our conduct; on the contrary, as the supposition of it makes so great a difference in the nature of our actions, there is all imaginable reason to think that it must have a very remarkable influence. But is it not strange, that there should be any dispute upon this subject at all, since experience seems plainly to testify that it has an influence in fact? How many persons in the world do we hear justify themselves in their crimes, and excuse their folly, by alledging the impulse of inevitable necessity? An abuse of the doctrine of predestination as constraining their choice, is the constant refuge of our common people, and is perhaps of all other considerations that which most effectually hardens them in wickedness. Is it not a known instance in history, that even K. William III. derived his uncommon bravery, in a great measure, from an unshaken belief of the doctrine of fate, and an application of it to practice? He believed, that the time of his death was unalterably fixed; and thence inferred,

that he was as safe in the heat of an engagement as in any other place. Nay, besides particular persons, we are much abused in history, if almost the whole people of the Turkish empire do not act upon the same principle in the most interesting cases. We are assured, they go without scruple into the houses where the plague is, believing that if it be ordained for them, they cannot escape it; and if otherwise, they cannot be infected. This is usually supposed to be the reason why the plague makes such terrible havoc among them; and we were lately told, as a piece of very great news, that they are now beginning to relax a little of their rigorous adherence to these maxims. When these facts are so well known, with what shew of reason can any man affirm, that the belief of the doctrine of necessity can have no influence upon practice? Perhaps it may be said, that the two last mentioned examples relate to the necessity of events, and not the necessity of actions. But by what arguments can it be shewn, that the belief of the necessity of events has an influence upon practice, and that of the necessity of actions none at all? Of the two, the last should rather have the greatest effect. Besides, both in truth, and in the opinion of most people, they are inseparably connected, and the one is included in the other. I shall also venture (though perhaps it may be improper, and of little force) to add, that if any credit will be given to my assertion, I know several persons upon whom the belief of the doctrine of necessity has a very remarkable effect, and very unfavourable to their virtue, as it sets their consciences quite at ease, even by their own confession. And not a few apprehend, that it has had an effect upon some of the writers on this subject, and made them at least think, that what other mortals term *sin*, is neither more blamable nor more dangerous than *error*. It must be confessed, that the influence of this doctrine is not equal upon all who pretend to believe it, nor upon the same persons at all times. The plain reason of which is, that their natural consciousness of liberty is sometimes too strong for their philosophic opinion, and

makes their faith to waver. But whoever firmly believes it to be true, and keeps it constantly in his eye, cannot possibly act upon another plan. To conclude this long letter, I hope this author is a man of virtuous dispositions, and means no harm to the cause of virtue; but I have met with very few who think that this essay has contributed anything to its support [xiii. 185-].

I am, &c.

J. W.

To JOHN WILKES, of Aylesbury, Esq;

My dearest Mr Wilkes,

YOUR letter of December 12. alarmed me, by hearing you had got such a dangerous fall off your horse. Moderate exercise is good, but dangerous exercise, such as riding a fiery horse, is not commendable; and if you would oblige Mrs WILKES, if you would oblige all your friends, and all good men, who conceive great hopes from you, you will be more cautious for the future. We had a terrible instance in the newspapers lately of a man spoke wonderfully well of, who got his death by such a fall.—As to altering any thing in the address to you before the *Appendix*, I durst not do it without your participation, unless you had suggested something you would have had changed; and by this time I suppose it is published: if not, I beg you cause change any thing you think proper. I wrote to Mr Millar, after presenting some copies to gentlemen in London, to send down five copies of it to Lord Blantyre at Edinburgh, to be given to particular friends there, and I wish you would speak to him of it.—As to the state of my disease, unless I would make suppositions contrary to all probability I have no reasonable hopes of recovery: the swelling which began at my legs being now got up to my belly and head. I am a trouble to all about me, especially to my poor wife, who has the life of a slave night and day, in helping me to take care of a diseased carcase. Yet I may linger on a while, as I can still walk a little through the room, and divert myself now and then with reading, nay and writing down my remarks on what I read. But I can with sincerity assure you