

A
L E T T E R

TO

ADAM SMITH, LL. D.

ON THE

LIFE, DEATH and PHILOSOPHY of his FRIEND

DAVID HUME, Esq.

By one of the People called Christians.

[George Thorne]
Ibant obscuro, tolli sub nocte, per umbram,
Perque domos Ditis vacuas, et inania regna.

VIRG.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IT is of no consequence, gentle reader, to you, any more than it is to Dr. Smith, that you should know the name of the person who now addresseth you. Your mind cannot be biassed either way by that of which you remain ignorant. The remarks in the following pages are not therefore true, or false, because I made them; but I made them because I thought them to be true. Read, consider, and determine for yourself. If you find no satisfaction, throw the book into the fire; regret (but with moderation, as becometh a philosopher) the loss of your sixpence; and take care not to lose another in the same manner. If, on the contrary, you should find satisfaction (and, it is humbly hoped, you will find a great deal) neglect not*

* The price of the first edition.

to communicate to others, what has thus been communicated to you. Speak handsomely of me, wherever you go, and introduce me to your kinsfolk and acquaintance. The enemies of Religion are awake; let not her friends sleep.

I intended a much longer work; but, like the learned editor of Mr. Hume's Life, am necessitated to "gratify," with all possible expedition, "the impatience of the public curiosity;" so eager is it to hear what they who believe in God, can possibly have to say for themselves. And if this will do the business, why should you be troubled with more? I am far from agreeing with Mr. Voltaire in all his observations. But there is one in which it is impossible to disagree with him. "I have said, and I abide by it," cries the little hero, "that the fault of most books is, their being too large." On reviewing what I have written, I really cannot see there is occasion to add another sentence.

Had I not chosen, for reasons best known to myself, thus to make my appearance in the

I would certainly have sate for my picture, and have tried to cast a look at my title page, as lively and good humored as that of Mr. Hume himself. My bookseller, indeed, told me, it would have been a much more creditable way of doing the thing; “and then, “you know, sir,” said he, “we could have “charged the other sixpence.”

N. B. *The Author of this little Tract was*

GEORGE HORNE, D. D.

Late Lord Bishop of Norwich.

A Letter, &c.

SIR,

YOU have been lately employed in embalming a philosopher; his body I believe I must say; for concerning the other part of him, neither you nor he seem to have entertained an idea, sleeping or waking: else, it surely might have claimed a little of your care and attention; and one would think the belief of the soul's existence and immortality could do no harm. if it did no good, in a theory of moral sentiments: but every gentleman understands his own business best.

Will you do an unknown correspondent the honor, sir, to accept a few plain remarks in a free and easy way, upon the curious Letter to Mr. Strahan, in which this ever-memorable operation of embalm-

ing is performed? Our Philosopher's account of his own life will likewise be considered as we go along.

Trust me, good Doctor, I am no bigot, enthusiast, or enemy to human learning—*Et ego in Arcadiâ*—I have made many a hearty meal in private, upon Cicero and Virgil, as well as Mr. Hume*. Few persons (though perhaps as Mr. Hume says, upon a like occasion, “I ought not ‘to judge on that subject’”) have a quicker relish for the productions of genius, and the beauties of composition. It is therefore as little in my intention as it is in my power, to prejudice the literary character of your friend: from some of his writings I have received great pleasure, and have ever esteemed his *History of England* to have been a noble effort of matter and motion. But when a man takes it into his head to do mischief, you must be sensible, sir, the public has always reason to lament his being a clever fellow.

* *Life*, p. 5.

I hope it will not be deemed vanity in me likewise to say, that I have in my composition a large proportion of that which our inimitable Shakespeare styles the *milk of human kindness*.

I never knew what envy or hatred was, and am ready at all times to praise, wherever I can do it in honor and conscience. David, I doubt not, was, as you affirm, a social agreeable person, of a convivial turn, told a good story, and played well at his favorite game of whist*. I know not that John the Painter did the same: but there is no absurdity in the supposition. If he did not, he might have done it—Doctor, be not offended, I mean no harm. I would only infer thus much, that I could not, on that account, bring myself absolutely to approve his odd fancy of firing all the dock yards in the kingdom.

Concerning the *philosophical opinions* of Mr. Hume you observe†, that “men will
“no doubt, judge variously.” They

* Life, &c. p. 43.

† Life, &c. p. 59.

are certainly at liberty so to do, because the author himself did the same. Sometimes, to be sure, he esteemed them ingenious, deep, subtle, elegant, and calculated to diffuse his literary fame to the ends of the world. But at other times he judged very differently—very much so indeed. “I dine,” says he, “I play
 “ a game at backgammon, I converse and
 “ am merry with my friends; and when,
 “ after three or four hours amusement, I
 “ would return to these speculations, they
 “ appear so *cold*, so *strained*, and so
 “ *ridiculous*, that I cannot find in my heart
 “ to enter into them any farther*.”

Now sir, if you will only give me leave to judge before dinner of Mr. Hume's philosophy as he judged of it after dinner, we shall have no farther dispute upon that subject. I could indeed wish, if it were possible, to have a scheme of thought

* *Treatise of Human Nature*. I. 467. In the Postscript to this Letter, a view will be exhibited of the HUMIAN system, taken exactly as it appeared to its author at six o'clock in the evening!

which would bear contemplating at any time of the day; because, otherwise, a person must be at the expence of maintaining a brace of these metaphysical Hobby-Horses, one to mount in the morning, and the other in the afternoon.

After all, sir, friend as I am to freedom of opinion, (and no one living can be more so) I am rather sorry, methinks, that men should judge so *variously* of Mr. Hume's philosophical speculations; for since the design of them is to banish out of the world every idea of truth and comfort, salvation and immortality, a future state, and the providence, and even existence of God, it seems a pity that we cannot be all of a mind about them; though we might have formerly liked to hear the Author crack a joke over a bottle in his life time. And I could have been well pleased to have been informed by you, sir, that before his death he had ceased to number among his happy effusions, tracts of this kind and tendency—For—(let me come a little closer to you Doctor, if you please, upon

this subject—don't be under any apprehensions, my name does not begin with a B—) Are *you* sure, and can you make *us* sure, that there really exist no such things as a GOD, and a future state of rewards and punishments? If so, all is well. Let us *then* in our last hours read Lucian, and play at whist, and droll upon Charon and his boat*; let us die as foolish and insensible, as much like our brethren philosophers, the calves of the field and the asses of the desert, as we can for the life of us. But, if *such things* BE—as they most *certainly* ARE—is it right † in you, sir, to hold up to our view, as “perfectly “wise and virtuous,” the *character* and *conduct* of one, who seems to have been possessed with an incurable antipathy to all that is called Religion; and who strained every nerve to explode, suppress and extirpate the spirit of it among men, that its very name, if he could effect it, might no more be had in remembrance?

* Life, &c. p. 47, et seq. † Life, &c. p. 62.

Are we, do you imagine, to be reconciled to a character of this sort, and fall in love with it, because its owner was *good company*, and knew how to manage his cards? Low as the age is fallen, I will venture to hope, it has grace enough yet left to resent such usage as this.

You endeavor to entertain us with some *pleasant conceits* that were supposed by Mr. Hume to pass between himself and old Charon. The Philosopher tells the old gentleman, that “he had been endeavoring to open the eyes of the public,” and that he was “correcting his works for a new edition,” from which great things were to be expected; in short, “If he could but live a few years longer, (and that was the only reason why he would wish to do so) he might have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition*.”

We all know sir, what the word Superstition denotes in Mr. Hume’s vocabulary,

* Life, &c. p. 50.

and against what religion his shafts are levelled under that name. But, Doctor Smith, do you believe, or would you have us believe, that it is Charon who calls us out of the world at the appointed time? Doth not HE call us out of it, who sent us into it? Let me then, present you with a paraphrase of the Wish as addressed to him to whom it should and to whom alone with any sense and propriety it can be addressed.— Thus it runs—

“ Lord I have only one reason why
 “ I would wish to live. Suffer me so to
 “ do, I most humbly beseech thee, yet a
 “ little while, till mine eyes shall behold
 “ the success of my undertaking to over-
 “ throw, by my metaphysics, the faith
 “ which thy Son descended from heaven
 “ to plant, and to root out the knowledge
 “ and the love of thee from the earth.”

Here are no rhetorical figures, no hyperboles, or exaggerations. The matter is even so. I appeal, in the face of the world, fir, to yourself, and to every man, who can read and understand the

writings of Mr. Hume, whether this be not, in plain honest English, the drift of his *philosophy* as it is called; for the propagation of which alone he wished to live; and concerning which you are pleased to say coolly, “men will judge variously, every one approving or condemning these opinions, according as they happen to coincide or disagree with his own *.” Our thoughts are very naturally carried back, upon this occasion, to the author of the *first philosophy*, who likewise engaged to *open the eyes of the Public*—He did so; but the only discovery they found themselves able to make, was—that they were NAKED.

You talk much, sir, of our philosopher’s *gentleness of manners, good nature, compassion, generosity, charity*. Alas, sir, whither were they all fled, when he so often fate down, calmly and deliberately, to obliterate from the hearts of the human species, every trace of the knowledge of

* *Life, &c.* p. 59.

God and his dispensations; all faith in his kind providence, and fatherly protection; all hope of enjoying his grace and favor, here, or hereafter; all love of him, and of their brethren for his sake; all the patience under tribulation, all the comforts in time of sorrow, derived from these fruitful and perennial sources? Did a good man think himself able, by the force of metaphysic incantation, in a moment to blot the sun out of heaven, and dry up every fountain upon earth, would he attempt to do it?—Tully had but a faint glimpse of the country to which we are all travelling; yet, so pleasing was any the most imperfect and shadowy prospect into futurity, that Tully declared, no man should ravish it from him*. And surely, Tully was a philosopher, as well as Hume. O had he seen the light that shone upon Hume, he would not have

* Quod si in hoc erro; quod animos hominum immortales esse credam, libenter erro; nec mihi hunc errorem, quo delector, dum vivo, extorqueri volo. DE SENECTUTE, ad Fin.

closed his eyes against it ; had the same cup been offered to him, he would not have dashed it untasted from him !

“ Perhaps our modern sceptics are
“ ignorant, that without the belief of a
“ God, and the hope of immortality, the
“ miseries of human life would often be
“ insupportable. But can I suppose them
“ in a state of total and invincible stupidi-
“ ty, utter strangers to the human heart,
“ and to human affairs? Sure, they would
“ not thank me for such a supposition.
“ Yet this I must suppose, or I must be-
“ lieve them to be the most cruel, the most
“ perfidious, and the most profligate of
“ men. Carested by those who call them-
“ selves the great, ingrossed by the formi-
“ alities of life, intoxicated with vanity,
“ pampered with adulation, dissipated in
“ the tumult of business, or amidst the
“ vicissitudes of folly, they perhaps have
“ little need and little relish for the con-
“ solations of religion. But let them know,
“ that in the solitary scenes of life, there
“ is many an honest and tender heart

“ pining with incurable anguish, pierced
“ with the sharpest sting of disappointment,
“ bereft of friends, chilled with poverty,
“ racked with disease, scourged by the
“ oppressor, whom nothing but trust in
“ Providence and the hope of a future
“ retribution, could preserve from the
“ agonies of despair. And do they, with
“ sacrilegious hands, attempt to violate
“ this last refuge of the miserable, and to
“ rob them of the only comfort that had
“ survived the ravages of misfortune,
“ mali acend tyranny? Did it ever hap-
“ pen, that the influence of their execrable
“ tenets disturbed the tranquillity of virtu-
“ ous retirement, deepened the gloom of
“ human distress, or aggravated the hor-
“ rors of the grave? Is it possible, that
“ this may have happened in many in-
“ stances? Is it probable, that this hath
“ happened in one single instance?—Ye
“ traitors to human kind, ye murderers
“ of the human soul, how can you answer
“ for it to your own hearts! Surely, every
“ spark of your generosity is extinguished

“ for ever, if this consideration do not
“ awaken in you the keenest remorse,
“ and make you wish in bitterness of soul
“ —But I remonstrate in vain. All this
“ must have often occurred to you, and
“ been as often rejected, as utterly frivo-
“ lous. Could I enforce the present topic
“ by an appeal to your vanity, I might
“ possibly make some impression: but to
“ plead with you on the principles of
“ BENEVOLENCE, or GENEROSITY, is
“ to address you in a language ye do not,
“ or will not understand; and as to the
“ shame of being convicted of absurdity,
“ ignorance, or want of candor, ye have
“ long ago proved yourselves superior to
“ the sense of it.—But let not the lovers
“ of truth be discouraged. Atheism can-
“ not be of long continuance, nor is there
“ much danger of its becoming universal.
“ The influence of some conspicuous
“ characters hath brought it too much
“ into fashion; which, in a thoughtless
“ and profligate age, it is no difficult
“ matter to accomplish. But when men

“ have retrieved the powers of serious
“ reflection, they will find it a frightful
“ phantom; and the mind will return glad-
“ ly and eagerly to its old endearments.
“ One thing we certainly know; the
“ fashion of sceptical and metaphysical
“ systems passeth away. Those unnatural
“ productions, the vile effusion of a hard
“ and stupid heart, that mistakes its own
“ restlessness for the activity of genius,
“ and its own captiousness for sagacity of
“ understanding, may, like other monsters,
“ please awhile by their singularity; but
“ the charm is soon over; and the suc-
“ ceeding age will be astonished to hear,
“ that their fore-fathers were deluded, or
“ amused, with such fooleries.”

You, sir, have read the preceding paragraph before; but this Letter may come into the hands of many, who have not. It is the alarm bell to the admirers of Mr. Hume; and should be rung in their ears, till succeeded by the last trumpet.

And now, sir, will you give me leave to ask you a few questions? Why all this hurry

and bustle, this eagerness to gratify the pretended “impatience of the Public*,” and satisfy it, that our philosopher lived and died perfectly composed and easy? Was there, then, any suspicion in Scotland, that he might not, at times, be quite so composed and easy as he should have been? Was there any particular BOOK ever written against him, that shook his system to pieces about his ears, and reduced it to a heap of ruins, the success and eclat of which might be supposed to have hurt his mind, and to have affected his health? Was there any AUTHOR, whose *name* his friends never dared to mention before him, and warned all strangers, that were introduced to him against doing it, because he never failed, when by any accident it was done, to fly out into a transport of passion and swearing †? Was

* Preface to Life, &c.

† “I was a man of mild dispositions, of command of temper, little susceptible of enmity, and of great moderation in all my passions. Even my love of literary fame, my ruling passion, never soured my

it deemed necessary or expedient, on this account, that he should represent himself, and that you should represent him, to have been perfectly secure of the growth and increase of his philosophic reputation, as if no book had been written which had impaired it: it having been judged much easier to dissemble the fall of Dagon, than to *set him upon his stumps again?* I am a *South Briton*, and, consequently, not acquainted with what passes so far in the opposite quarter. You, sir, can inform us how these things are; and likewise, when the great work of *benovelence* and *charity*, of “temper.” *Life.* p. 32 Yet even by what is said of the Reverends and Right Reverends—Bishop *WARBURTON*. Bishop *HURD*, the *Zealots* (that is, the *Christians*) and of the resolution once taken to “change his name and settle in France.” because his writings did not meet with sufficient encouragement—by these circumstances, I say, there seems to have been something of the *irritable* in his constitution. But these are trifles. My quarrel lies not in this way, at present. I fly at nobler game. The atrocious wickedness of diffusing atheism through the land, is a subject which concerns every body.

wisdom and *virtue*, shall be crowned by the publication of a treatise designed to prove the SOUL'S MORTALITY, and another, to justify and recommend SELF MURDER; for which, who can doubt, the present and every future age will bless the name of the *gentle* and *amiable* author!

Upon the whole, Doctor, your meaning is good; but I think you will not succeed this time. You would persuade us, by the example of David Hume E^{sq}. that atheism is the only cordial for low spirits, and the proper antidote against the fear of death. But, surely, he who can reflect with complacency, on a friend thus misemploying his talents in his life, and then amusing himself with Lucian, Whist, and Charon at his death, may smile over Babylon in ruins; esteem the earth-quake which destroyed Lisbon, an agreeable occurrence; and congratulate the hardened Pharaoh on his overthrow in the Red sea. Drollery, in such circumstances, is neither more nor less than

Moody Madness, laughing wild,
Amid severest woe.

Would we know the baneful and pestilential influences of false philosophy on the human heart; we need only contemplate them in this most deplorable instance of Mr. Hume.

These sayings, sir, may appear harsh; but they are salutary. And if departed spirits have any knowledge of what is passing upon earth—that person will be regarded by your friend as rendering him the truest services, who, by energy of expression, and warmth of exhortation, shall most contribute to prevent his writings from producing those effects upon mankind, which he no longer wishes they should produce. Let no man deceive himself, or be deceived by others. It is the voice of eternal TRUTH, which crieth aloud, and saith to you, sir, and to me, and to all the world—*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him* *.

* John iii. 36.

By way of contrast to the behaviour of Mr. Hume, at the close of a life passed *without GOD in the world*, permit me, sir, to lay before yourself, and the public, the last sentiments of the truly learned, judicious, and admirable Hooker, who had spent *his* days in the service of his Maker and Redeemer.

After this manner, therefore, spake the author of the *Ecclesiastical Polity*, immediately before he expired—

“ I have lived to see, that this world
“ is made up of perturbations; and I have
“ been long preparing to leave it, and
“ gathering comfort for the dreadful hour
“ of making my account with GOD, which
“ I now apprehend to be near. And
“ though I have, by his grace, loved him
“ in my youth, and feared him in mine
“ age, and labored to have a conscience
“ void of offence towards him, and to-
“ wards all men; yet, if thou, Lord!
“ shouldest be extreme to mark what I
“ have done amiss, who can abide it?
“ And therefore, where I have failed,

“ Lord! shew mercy to me ; for I plead
“ not my righteousness, but the forgive-
“ nefs of my unrighteousness, through
“ His merits who died to purchase pardon
“ for penitent sinners. And since I owe
“ thee a death, Lord! let it not be terri-
“ ble, and then take thine own time ; I
“ submit to it. Let not mine, O Lord,
“ but thy will be done!—God hath heard
“ my daily petitions ; for I am at peace
“ with all men, and he is at peace with
“ me. From such blessed assurance I feel
“ that inward joy, which this world can
“ neither give, nor take from me. My
“ conscience beareth me this witness ; and
“ this witness makes the thoughts of death
“ joyful. I could wish to live to do the
“ church more service ; but cannot hope
“ it ; for my days are past, as a shadow
“ that returns not.”

His worthy Biographer adds—“ More
“ he would have spoken, but his spirits
“ failed him ; and, after a short conflict
“ between nature and death, a quiet sigh
“ put a period to his last breath ; and so,

“ he fell asleep——and now he seems to
“ rest like Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom.
“ Let me here draw his curtain, till, with
“ the most glorious company of the patri-
“ archs and apostles, and the most noble
“ army of martyrs and confessors, this
“ most learned, most humble, most holy
“ man shall also awake to receive an
“ eternal tranquillity, and with it a greater
“ degree of glory than common christians
“ shall be made partakers of.”

Doctor Smith, when the hour of his departure hence shall arrive, will copy the example of the BELIEVER or the INFIDEL, as it liketh him best. I must freely own, I have no opinion of that reader’s *head*, or *heart*, who will not exclaim, as I find myself obliged to do—

*Let ME die the death of the righteous,
and let MY last end be like his!*

I am, Sir,

Your very sincere

Well-wisher, and

Humble Servant,

One of the People called CHRISTIANS.

POSTSCRIPT.

AS it is possible, fir, nay probable, that this little tract, because it is a little one, may be perused by many, who have not leisure or inclination to go through large volumes, and yet wish to know what Mr. Hume's philosophical system is; I shall here subjoin a short, but comprehensive summary of the doctrines which compose it, drawn up, some few years ago, by a learned gentleman, for his amusement, with proper references to those parts of our philosopher's works, where such doctrines were to be found. And though I never heard the compiler had the thanks of Mr. Hume for so doing, yet neither could I ever find, that he or his friends disputed the fidelity and accuracy with which it was done*.

* See Dr. Beattie's *Essay on Truth*, Part II. Ch. I. Sect. I. and Part III. Ch. II.

*A Summary of Mr. HUME's Doctrines,
Metaphysical and Moral.*

OF THE SOUL.

That the soul of man is not the same this moment, that it was the last; that we know not what it is; that it is not one, but many things; and that it is nothing at all.

That in this soul is the agency of all the causes that operate throughout the sensible creation; and yet that in this soul there is neither power nor agency, nor any idea of either.

That matter and motion may often be regarded as the cause of thought.

OF THE UNIVERSE.

That the external world does not exist, or at least, that its existence may reasonably be doubted.

That the universe exists in the mind, and that the mind does not exist.

That the universe is nothing but a heap of perceptions, without a substance.

That though a man could bring himself to believe, yea, and have reason to believe, that every thing in the universe proceeds from some cause; yet it would be unreasonable for him to believe that the universe itself proceeds from a cause.

OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.

That the perfection of human knowledge is to doubt.

That we ought to doubt of every thing, yea, of our doubts themselves; and therefore, the utmost that philosophy can do, is to give us a doubtful solution of doubtful doubts*.

That the human understanding, acting alone, does entirely subvert itself, and

* The fourth section of Mr. Hume's *Essays on the Human Understanding*, is called *Sceptical doubts concerning the operations of the human understanding*; and the fifth section bears this title, *Sceptical Solution of those doubts*.

prove by argument, that by argument nothing can be proved.

That man, in all his perceptions, actions, and volitions, is a mere passive machine, and has no separate existence of his own; being entirely made up of other things, of the existence of which he is by no means certain; and yet, that the nature of all things depends so much upon man, that two and two could not be equal to four, nor fire produce heat, nor the sun light, without an act of the human understanding.

OF GOD.

That it is unreasonable to believe God to be infinitely wise and good, while there is any evil or disorder in the universe.

That we have no good reason to think the universe proceeds from a cause.

That as the existence of the external world is questionable, we are at a loss to find arguments by which we may prove the existence of the Supreme Being, or any of his attributes.

That when we speak of Power, as an attribute of any being, God himself not excepted, we use words without meaning.

That we can form no idea of power, nor of any being endued with power, *much less* of one endued with infinite power; and that we can never have reason to believe that any object, or quality of any object exists, of which we can form an idea *.

OF THE MORALITY OF HUMAN ACTIONS.

That every human action is necessary, and could not have been different from what it is.

That moral, intellectual, and corporeal virtues are nearly of the same kind—In other words, that to want honesty, and

* The poor prodigal *Gentile*. in the parable, was hardly reduced to feed upon such HUSKS as these. How good and how joyful a thing must it be, for one that has been so reduced, to return to the house of his heavenly Father, where *there is bread enough and to spare*—to know the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST, whom he hath sent!

to want understanding, and to want a leg, are equally the objects of moral disapprobation.

That adultery must be practised, if men would obtain all the advantages of life; that, if generally practised, it would in time cease to be scandalous; and that, if practised secretly and frequently, it would by degrees come to be thought no crime at all*.

Lastly, as the soul of man, according to Mr. Hume, becomes every moment a different being, “or rather no being at all,” the consequence must be, that the crimes, “if nothing can be a crime,” committed by him at one time, cannot be imputable to him at another †.

* “The same may be said of murder, burglary, kidnapping, perjury, or any other modification of matter, to which fancy has attached the notion of crime.

“Had the Doctor advanced this argument as a persuasive to the acquirement of virtue, he would have done something.”

† “My *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* is of all my writings, historical, philoso-

I believe, Doctor Smith, the reader is now fully prepared to enter into the spirit of your concluding sentence, which therefore shall be mine.

“ I have always considered Mr. Hume,
 “ both in his life-time, and since his death,
 “ as approaching as nearly to the idea of
 “ A PERFECTLY WISE AND VIRTUOUS
 “ MAN, as perhaps the nature of human
 “ frailty will permit *.”

“ phical, or literary, incomparably the best.” *Life*,
 p. 16.

* “ On David Hume’s principles, then, he who
 “ finds himself in a state of the greatest uncertainty
 “ has the greatest reason to be satisfied; for then he
 “ is nearest the truth: consequently, David Hume’s
 “ best writings may be his worst, and vice versa:
 “ but folly and wisdom are judges equally good,
 “ where neither the evidences nor the pleaders are
 “ dependable.”

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