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FITNESSES

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WITNESSES

OF THE

RESURRECTION

OF

CHRIST,

CONSIDER'D;

In Answer to the principal Objections  
against them.

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By WILLIAM WEBSTER, M. A.

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LONDON:

Printed for JAMES LACY at the Ship in  
Fleetstreet. MDCCXXXI.

T O T H E  
R I G H T R E V E R E N D  
T H E  
L o r d B I S H O P o f O X F O R D,

As a publick Testimony of the Author's  
Veneration for his Lordship's

Great Learning, Piety, Meekness, and Affa-  
bility;

His Remarkable and Constant Zeal for  
Christianity;

His steady Adherence to the Establish'd  
Church;

His Paternal and Disinterested Affection for  
its Clergy;

For these truly Episcopal, and universally  
acknowledged Virtues,

This DISCOURSE is humbly inscrib'd,

*By his LORDSHIP's*

*Most obedient humble Servant,*

William Webster.

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# THE

# P R E F A C E.

**W**HAT I here offer to the Reader, is only part, of a discourse which I intended to publish, 'till I had read the Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ. Tho' other pamphlets appear'd at that time wherein the objections of the adversaries were very well answer'd, yet I thought that some parts of the subject were still capable of improvement; at least, that the same arguments might be placed in a new light according to the particular apprehension, or ability, of the Writer, by which means different readers might be convinced, or affected. But the above-mention'd Author writes with such a superiority of genius, that he has left no room for any new matter, and with such a peculiar felicity as to method and manner, that it seem'd as impossible to say the same things after him without injuring the argument, as to find out any thing which did not occur to his uncommon sagacity. But I shall say no more of this excellent performance, since I might as well attempt to imitate it, as to do justice to its character.

What

## P R E F A C E.

*What then could induce me to trouble the publick with any thing upon a subject so well handled, and only upon a particular part of it?*

*The season of the year obliging me to revise my papers upon the Resurrection of Christ, I found I had consider'd some of the objections against it with a different view from other writers, which gave me occasion to make some seasonable remarks, and to obviate some fundamental errors that run thro' all the modern writers on the infidel side. I can't tell whether this apology will be admitted as a reasonable one, neither am I much concern'd about it. I have very little regard to my reputation as a writer, if I can but shew the sincerity of my intentions as a Christian. I had much rather be accused of impertinence, than be suspected to want a becoming zeal for Religion. I have one thing farther to add, that if the reader should think his time lost in perusing this discourse, I have taken care, by making it very short, that he shall lose but little.*

May 1. 1731.

Temple Bar.

The

The Fitness of the

# WITNESSES

OF

## Christ's Resurrection.

**T**HE resurrection of Christ being a matter of fact so essential to the truth of *his* religion, and the foundation of *our* faith and hope, unbelievers have been particularly industrious to raise objections against it. Among other difficulties that have been started upon this important subject, it has been urged, that his appearance after his resurrection was not *publick* enough; and the witnesses, both for *number* and *quality*, not answerable to the weight which was to be laid upon their testimony. The history of Christ's resurrection informs us that, tho' he appear'd *openly*, yet he did not appear to *all the people*, to the *multitude* of the *Jews*, but only to a *select* number of persons appointed to be witnesses of it to the rest of the world. These *chosen* witnesses were the *twelve Apo-*  
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*stles* only ; for, though Christ appeared to others, as well as unto them, even to five hundred of his Disciples at one time, yet only the Apostles were appointed to bear *publick* testimony to the truth of his resurrection. It is farther urged, with regard to the *manner* of his appearance, that the witnesses were improperly chosen, in respect to their *station* and *circumstances*. The several exceptions against them may all be reduced under the three following heads, which shall be the subject of my present discourse.

The *first* objection is, That Christ did not appear in a more *publick* manner to the *multitude* of the unbelieving *Jews*, when his appearance was of such *publick* and *universal* concern to them.

2<sup>dly</sup>. Because he did not appear to the *Priests* and *Rulers*, who, it is pretended, were the persons more immediately concern'd in matters relating to their *religion*, and *government*.

3<sup>dly</sup>. That he appeared only to his particular *friends* and *followers*, whose testimony cannot be so satisfactory to us as that of his *enemies* would have been.

I am not forward to dive into the secret counsels of the all-wise God, thinking it  
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more becoming our limited capacities to rest satisfied with the methods of providence, than to undertake the solution of them upon precarious conjectures; but, as far as we are concerned in these questions, we are able, upon *rational* grounds, to vindicate the *Wisdom* and *Goodness* of God; which, by his assistance, I shall now endeavour to do.

First it is objected, that Christ did not appear, after his resurrection, in a more *publick* manner, to the *multitude* of the unbelieving *Jews*, when his appearance was of such *publick* and *universal* concern to them.

This objection must be consider'd under two different respects.

- I. As it concerns the conviction of *mankind* in *general*.
- II. As it relates to the *Jews* in particular.

1<sup>st</sup>. Then I am to consider this objection in respect to the conviction of *mankind* in *general*. The objection above mentioned is founded upon this supposition, that a more *publick* appearance, to the *multitude* of the *Jews*, would have given a more convincing



evidence of the truth of his resurrection, than the testimony of a *select* number of persons, however qualified, is able to give us. But I cannot help thinking it *morally impossible* that the world in general could have had so good evidence, if Christ *had* appeared in so *publick* a manner, as we have now upon the testimony of the twelve Apostles only ; unless we suppose, what *cannot* be supposed, that *all* the people would have been converted by his appearance, and have continued stedfast in the faith. For, besides that *all* the people were not *qualified* to be witnesses of his Resurrection, *all* of them not being sufficiently acquainted with his person, which must have occasioned variety of opinions concerning the reality of it ; besides this, I say, the *Jews*, (especially the *priests* and *rulers*, who had a mighty influence upon the people) had obstinately resisted the evidence of many and extraordinary miracles, and conspired to put Christ to death only for raising *Lazarus* to life ; so that they were not likely to be converted by the Resurrection of *Christ himself*. They who had ascribed one of the greatest of his miraculous works to the operation of the *Devil*, might with equal reason have resolved

this appearance of Christ into a delusion and imposition upon their senses, by the operation of a diabolical power: At least, they had impudence enough to have denied the fact, and to have used all possible means, as well to prevent the belief of it in others, as to force them to a denial of it. Their suborning the soldiers to swear that the Disciples of Christ came *by night and stole his body out of the sepulchre while they were asleep*, shews, beyond contradiction, that they would have left no methods of corruption unattempted, and that the *people*, either for the lucre of a little money, or from the dread of persecution, would have asserted, or deny'd any thing. This then being the case, (and I think it a very clear and obvious one) what would have been the consequence? Why, that there would have been *contradictory* evidence upon record, some *affirming*, others *denying* the truth of Christ's Resurrection; nay, the very same witnesses, at different times, both *affirming* and *denying* it. Now, if Christ had appeared to such a large and mixed multitude of people, some of whom would have contradicted, not only *one another*, but *themselves*, how could we, at this distance of time, come at the true knowledge

knowledge of such a variety of characters, and other intricate circumstances, in order to judge whose testimony is the most credible, or whether the fact be, upon the whole, worthy of our belief, or not. Much less could such a contradictory testimony be equally satisfactory to us with that of a select number of witnesses, all of them competent judges of the fact, all of them agreeing in their report, all of them confirming their testimony by miracles, and at last sealing it with their blood.

But, if the testimony of others may be to us the ground of a reasonable assent to the truth of any fact (which, I presume, will not be disputed) the question will be, not whether a more *publick* manifestation of Christ to *all* the people, to the whole *multitude* of the *Jews*, would have been more satisfactory to *them*; or whether their testimony would not have been to *us* a stronger evidence of his resurrection, than the testimony of the Apostles; I say, this will *not* be the question; but whether the testimony of the Apostles, who were chosen by God to be witnesses of it to the world, be not a *sufficient* evidence of it. For, whenever God is pleased to require our  
assent

assent to any matter of fact, he is not obliged to give us *all* the evidence, whereof the fact is capable, but only such a degree of evidence upon which we may build a *rational* conviction. Suppose, for instance, that any matter of fact done at any distant part of this kingdom were attested by a certain number of credible persons, would any of us think it a reasonable objection against the truth of it, that it might have been attested by a greater number, if it be already sufficiently attested? We are very ready to allow, that, in proportion to the weight and consequence of any doctrine, or fact, it seems reasonable that we should have clearer and stronger proof. In some cases, of lesser moment, *human* laws are satisfied with *one* witness, in others of a more important nature, they proceed with more caution, and require the positive evidence of *two* persons. So likewise in the business of religion, the making of a new revelation to mankind, upon which depend our *eternal life*, or *death*, we may *here* expect to meet with stronger evidence than any *temporal* concern requires. Yet this kind of reasoning must be managed with a great deal of caution, or it will lead us into infidelity. As to the point now  
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under consideration, the truth of Christ's Resurrection, it being a matter of such infinite moment, it seems reasonable that the evidence should bear *some degree of proportion* to the *importance* of the truth. But if we argue too closely from the *infinite* distance between the importance of things *temporal* and *eternal*, requiring a degree of evidence *proportionably* greater in one case, than in the other, we may require such an *irresistible* evidence as will leave no room for the exercise of humility, and a due regard to the wisdom of God in his dispensations; or, indeed, for the exercise of our faith, considered under any proper notion of it. Wherefore in all our religious enquiries let us attend principally to *this* consideration, whether the thing be highly credible *in itself*, and such as would satisfy us in affairs relating to the *present* life, without attempting to determine *exactly* what *degree* of evidence any particular truth requires. If infinite Wisdom had thought it fitting, the Resurrection of Christ might have been manifested in a *more publick* manner, and attested by a *greater* number; but if it be already sufficiently attested, it is highly unreasonable to reject a credible testimony, only because the

*goodness*

*goodness* of God might have granted us a testimony *still more* convincing, tho' his *justice* did not *oblige* him to do it, and his *wisdom* did not think it *expedient*. Thus far I have consider'd the objection, as it affects the conviction of *mankind in general*; which is a consideration more worthy the wisdom and goodness of God, than the unreasonable demands of *hardened infidels*.

2<sup>dly</sup>. As to the *Jews*, in particular, if a more extraordinary method of conviction seems requisite for the conversion of such inveterate enemies, than for others who were better disposed to believe the truth of Christ's Resurrection, This gave them no right at all to *demand* it; neither was it consistent with the settled purposes of God that they should have been convinced in such an extraordinary manner. Their obdurate temper, which arose from their own lusts and passions, was in itself highly *criminal*, deserving rather the *Divine vengeance*, than any particular marks of *favour* and *goodness*. Their slowness of heart to believe the miracles of our Saviour, and to embrace his doctrine, proceeded from their inveterate malice, and their malice was the effect only of their pride and ambition, which disdain'd

a crucified Redeemer; and of their impure and carnal affections, which were impatient of the restraint of his holy precepts. But was God obliged to have any regard to their wicked indisposition, so as to proportion the degree of evidence to the exigency of their wants, which they had *voluntarily* brought upon themselves? Or how could he do it consistently with his predictions concerning their destruction for not believing in him sooner? God had afforded them sufficient means of conviction by the many miracles which Christ had wrought among them in his life-time, for rejecting which they justly merited that judicial visitation which God determined and denounced against them. If therefore, after this, God had used any extraordinary means for their conviction, he had not only done more for them than they had any reason to expect, but he must have destroy'd his own immutable purposes, and falsified his own unerring predictions.

But 2<sup>dly</sup>, it may be objected that, tho' God was not obliged to satisfy the unreasonable demands of harden'd infidel's by manifesting the Resurrection of Christ to *all* the people of the *Jews*, yet why did he not appear to  
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the *priests* and *rulers*, who may be thought the most proper persons to be concerned in a transaction that related to their *religion* and *government*?

But this objection has no foundation but in the impotent wishes of unbelievers, no force besides what it may chance to acquire from the positive air with which they endeavour to hide its weakness. If there be any real strength in the argument, it must arise either from the nature of the thing, that is, from the consideration of their *publick station* and *authority*, which gave them a right to demand such a *personal* appearance to them; or from some express *promise of God*, that Christ should appear *personally*, after his Resurrection, to the *priests* and *rulers*.

1. But there is no reason in the *nature of things* that obliged Providence to grant them that particular evidence; they could not claim it in right of their *publick station* and *authority*. Even in a transaction between two *independent nations*, kings do not appear in *person*, but send others in their name, with proper credentials, to act for them. But this affair, of the Resurrection of **Christ**, was a transaction between the *Sovereign* of



the world, and his *creatures*, who were all *equally* obliged to submit to his will, and not entitled to make any demands for *singular* privileges. In this case, therefore, which was a transaction between *God* and them, and not between them and their *inferiors*, there was no distinction of *governors* and *people*; they were *all*, both *rulers* and *people*, as *creatures*, upon a *level*; and *God* was not obliged to afford them, as being *governors*, any other evidence than what he thought proper for the rest of the nation, and of *mankind* in *general*. No body can pretend that the *priests* and *rulers* could not have sufficient reason to believe the Resurrection of *Christ*, without being *eye-witnesses* of it, because then there would be no rational ground for our assent to any fact unless we had seen it. This assertion, sure, is too gross to be offer'd, or admitted, by any one. But if *any* part of the *Jewish* nation, or *mankind* in *general*, might be required to believe the Resurrection of *Christ* upon the testimony of those who were *eye-witnesses* of it, why not the *priests* and *rulers*, as well as *private* persons, as well as *distant* ages and nations? They might have *sufficient* evidence, without the evidence of *sense*, and it is absurd to

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say, that they might *rationaly* demand *more* evidence than what was sufficient for a *rational conviction*.

2. And as to any express *promise of God*, that Christ should appear *personally* to the *priests* and *rulers* after his Resurrection, nothing of that kind is to be found in his *word*. God did, indeed, promise that the gospel should *first* be preached to the *Jews*. And in order to *fulfil* his promise, and predictions relating to the life and actions of Christ, *Christ* did appear *publickly* among them, in their *streets* and *market-places*; in the *synagogues*, and in the *temple*; he conversed with them, and explained the scriptures to them; he wrought various and mighty works among them, the truth of which they acknowledged, tho' they denied the Divine power by which they were wrought; but where is there any promise that the *priests* and *rulers* should be *eye-witnesses* of this particular fact? Or how was providence obliged to grant them any such favour? It has been very justly observed, by the author of the *Trial of the Witnesses*, that *Christ's* particular commission to the *Jews* ceased at his death; that they having finally rejected *him*, he took his final leave of *them*,  
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and declared that they should see him no more, and consequently that he could not appear to them without falsifying his own declarations. But *had* the claim of the *Jews* to *singular* advantages, as being the *peculiar people* of God, still subsisted in the strongest manner, this *national* prerogative did not give the *rulers* in *particular* a right to be *eye-witnesses* of any particular fact, or miracle, relating to their *religion* and *government*: Neither could any *general* promise made to the *Jewish nation* be the foundation of any such claim, because it might be fulfill'd, if the rulers, by any means whatsoever, had sufficient evidence of the truth of such facts, whether from the report of their *own senses*, or the credible *testimony* of *private* persons. Their *publick* capacity gave them no *distinction* in this case. Their *authority* over the *people* gave them no claim upon *God*, the absolute Governor of the world. This is a fact that some people were to believe upon the testimony of others, and whether the *rulers* or *private* persons were to be the *witnesses*, was matter of favour, and God was the best judge upon whom to bestow it. So that if we could *not* see any reasons why the *rulers* were disqualified to be

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be witnesses, 'twould be a sufficient answer to say, that they were *not chosen* by God, who is infinitely wise in the choice of his instruments. But we can see the plainest and the strongest reason why they were utterly *unfit* to be witnesses of *Christ's* Resurrection, because they would not have believed the truth of it, if they *had* seen him after he was risen, and then the rest of the world would have wanted a proper evidence of this important truth. And we can add farther, that if they *had* been in a disposition to receive conviction from his *personal* appearance to them, such extraordinary means of conviction could not be granted them, because by the determinate counsel, and declared purpose, of God, they were devoted to destruction for their former infidelity.

But see the unreasonableness and perverseness of these gainsayers! They are continually calling out *priestcraft, priestcraft*, and yet are objecting against the methods of establishing Christianity, because they were not enforced by the weight of *authority*, which would have given a much juster occasion for the suspicion of *fraud*. The witnesses were *private*, and *mean*, and *obscure* persons, too *inconsiderable* to be employ'd in an affair  
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of such moment: Men of *education*, it seems, and *learning*, and *dignity*, and *power*, were much fitter for the purpose. But who sees not that the Apostles were the less likely to *intend* a fraud, and the less able to *execute* it, by reason of the meanness of their education, and the obscurity of their characters; their ignorance of the world, and the arts of address; their poverty and want of power?

3. But 'tis farther objected against the witnesses of *Christ's* Resurrection, that they were his particular *friends*, strongly attached to his cause, and affectionate to his person, for which reason they should have been excepted as *partial* and *prejudiced* persons; but that if the witnesses had been taken out of the number of his *enemies*, whose prejudices and passions ran strong against him, *their* testimony would have had the more weight, because *they* could not be suspected to believe the truth of his Resurrection but upon the clearest evidence, or to testify it but upon the strongest conviction.

I have already observed, that the only proper question in respect to *this* and *all other* religious truths, is, whether we have *sufficient* evidence, and therefore in answer to

this objection we need not enquire whether *Christ's enemies*, or *friends*, were the fittest persons to be witnesses of his Resurrection, or whose testimony would be *most satisfactory* to the rest of mankind, but whether the testimony of the *chosen* witnesses be *credible in itself*; yet it may not be improper to observe, that unless the persons appointed to be witnesses had frequently seen Christ, and intimately conversed with him in his *lifetime*, as well as *after his Resurrection*, they would have been, in *that respect*, less qualified than his *particular friends*, to testify the truth of the fact, because they would have been less competent judges of the reality of it; and if we suppose Christ to have appear'd, after he was risen, to such of his *enemies* as had been thus conversant with him, they must have been witnesses of his *other* miracles. Now, if they were proof against the force of so many, and such great miracles, what reason is there (as I remark'd under a former head of this discourse) to imagine that they would have been converted upon his appearance to them after his Resurrection, without such an *over-ruling* influence as would have destroy'd their *free will*: so that if these *objectors* had been in the direction of this important affair, they

in their *abundant* wisdom, would have chosen such witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ as were either incompetent judges of its reality, or not at all likely to believe it themselves: Very fit persons these to set in council with *Omniscience*, and prescribe to their *Maker* in the government of the world! The more we examine into the dispensations of God, the more reason we shall have, not only to acknowledge his *Justice*, but to adore his *Wisdom*, and to be thankful for his *Goodness*. But to quarrel with the evidence for the truth of Christ's Resurrection because it is not exactly such as we could wish it to be, or wantonly imagine that it ought to be: To object against the witnesses because there were not *more* of them, because they were *private* persons, not the *rulers*, because they were chosen from among Christ's *followers* and *friends*, not such as were before *unbelievers* and *enemies*; all this is not *argument*, but *presumption*; not *reasoning*, but *rebelliousness against God*. No matter what their *number* was, provided it was *sufficient*; no matter *who*, or *what* they were, provided they were *competent judges* of the fact, and *faithful relators* of it. If we indulge our fancy in imagining what *sort* of evidence we should have liked best, and object against it

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it only because we think it might have been stronger, and more satisfactory; this objection will hold equally *against any degree* of evidence that is not absolutely *irresistible*, and subverts *all* religion, *natural*, as well as *revealed*, because it destroys the very notion of a state of *trial* and *probation*, and takes away the foundation of *rewards* and *punishments*; because, upon this principle, we never can be obliged to *believe* any religious truth 'till it is impossible for us to *disbelieve* it. This is the unavoidable consequence of such objections, and it is the avow'd opinion of some of our celebrated *modern reasoners*. I shall instance in one who seems to be so much admired and extolled, that we may well suppose him to speak their sentiments. Mr. *Chubb*, in his *previous question*, speaking about *speculative doctrines*, says, “ that God will either so  
 “ clearly deliver such points, as that there  
 “ shall be no place for error, or else he will  
 “ excuse all errors which may arise from  
 “ them, it being most absurd to suppose,  
 “ that a wise and good Being should give  
 “ a revelation in a way in which it is *liable*  
 “ *to be misunderstood*, and then be displeas'd  
 “ with his creatures if they *mistake* his  
 “ meaning of it, seeing such errors are not,  
 “ in the nature of the thing, a proper foun-



“ dation for resentment.” This is a proposition that could not drop *hastily* from a writer, but must be the result of *cool* and *deliberate* thought ; and he lays it down gravely as a fundamental point. Now if all errors in *speculative doctrines* be innocent because they are not so *clearly* revealed as to leave *no room* for mistake, then all error in respect to the truth of *revelation in general* must be equally innocent, unless the evidence be *so clear* and *strong* as to exclude all *possibility of being mistaken*, which is the very principle into which all the abovemention’d objections against the Resurrection of Christ must finally be resolved.

But if this argument be conclusive, it renders all errors in *Morality*, as well as in *speculative* points, innocent, and subverts the foundation of *rewards* and *punishments*, because it destroys the notion of a state of *trial* and *probation*, which supposes *room* for *error* and *sin*. See the parallel between the two propositions.

*It is absurd and ridiculous in God to be DISPLEASED with us for ERRING, if he has made us LIABLE to error.*

*It is absurd and ridiculous in God to be DISPLEASED with us for SINNING, if he has made us LIABLE to sin.*

Of

Of the same kind, and equally destructive, is another popular maxim, which is this ; that all *necessary* articles of faith should be so *plain* and *obvious* that the most *illiterate* person without any pains and difficulty, without any instruction or assistance, may understand them. As nothing can be believed without such a degree of evidence as *forces* the assent, so That evidence must appear without the trouble of any search or enquiry ; from whence it follows, that we cannot be obliged to give our assent to any truth but what is *self-evident*, and offers itself *casually* to the mind, without any *attention*. For, if we may be obliged to use *any* means of information and conviction, we may be obliged to use *all* the means within our power ; and if we cannot be obliged to the use of *all possible* means, 'tis impossible that we can be obliged to the use of *any*. The reasoning is conclusive both backward, and forward. What makes us *accountable* beings is, our *free Will* ; if then we may be accountable at all, we may be accountable for *every* thing within our power ; whatever we have a *capacity* of doing, God may *oblige* us to do, and *punish* us for the neglect of it. There is as much reason why we may be required to apply to *others* for their instruction in order

der to understand any religious doctrine, as to apply ourselves to the knowledge of it at all; to enquire and search into the evidence for the truth of any *particular* doctrine of revelation, as of *revelation in general*; of *revelation*, and its *particular* doctrines, as of the truths of *natural religion* and *moral* duties. There is no possibility of maintaining their position without destroying the very notion of *probation*, which implies a power of *doing*, or *neglecting* our duty. Therefore all these questions must at last resolve into this *single one*, *Is it consistent with the known attributes of the Divine nature to put us into a state of trial?* They must answer in the *negative*, or else give up their notions about *irresistible evidence*, and the *plainness* of all *necessary points*. *Reasonable* evidence, and *proper* means of knowledge, is all that can be demanded by accountable creatures. This is what the adversaries know, and mean; as appears more plainly from their way of *proving* their positions. They argue from the *Goodness* of God. The *stronger*, say they, the evidence for truth, and the more easily we discover and apprehend That evidence, the greater is the *Goodness* of God in granting us such evidence, and a *good Being* will shew *all possible Goodness* to his creatures. But this

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way of arguing is inconsistent with a state of *trial* ; for would not any of us think it *better* with regard to our *own particular happiness*, that God should have put it *out of our power* to make ourselves *miserable* ? And if it would have been an act of *greater Goodness* ; according to them, a *good Being* must have done it. It will prove farther, that the attribute of *Goodness* obliged God to create us as *perfect*, and *happy*, as a creature can be ; in short, to communicate *all possible* perfection and happiness to as *many* beings as *Omnipotence* could create, and to create them all *eternal* ; so that there ought not to be any *difference* between them, either in point of *duration* or *perfection*, which is contrary to what every man knows to be fact. Wild and extravagant as these consequences are, they must follow necessarily if we reason from the attribute of *Goodness*, separately taken ; we shall have but a *partial* and *imperfect* notion of it without *wisdom* to *direct* and *regulate*. We cannot argue from what would be good to a *particular* being, Good consider'd *abstractly* and *independently* of *other* beings, to what is *absolutely good upon the whole* of things ; which nothing can judge of but *unlimited* knowledge and wisdom, because nothing but *Omniscience* can see at

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one view *all possible relations* of things, and the *fitnesses* arising from them. But this is fully explain'd and proved in a piece lately publish'd by Mr. *Law*, in answer to *Christianity as Old as the Creation*.

The consideration of these groundless objections against Christianity naturally suggests to us the wisdom of guarding against the *captious* temper, the prevailing inclination of the age to start *difficulties* upon all questions. If we give way to this *itch* of *speculating*, and *objecting*, like an humour of the body that infects the whole mass of blood, 'twill gradually infect the mind with a *sceptical* disposition that never fails of leading men into infidelity. However well grounded the truths of religion are, we may, through pride and other evil dispositions, find room to cavil and object. It is impossible in the nature of things but that there will be *difficulties*, unless our understandings were *infinite*; and while we are subject to *passions* and *prejudices*, men will *make* difficulties where there really are none. We are made liable to error, that there may be room for *virtue*, and the *reward* of it; *finite* and *imperfect*, that we may be *humble* and *modest*. An honest heart and a teachable disposition are the best preservatives against error, not only as they  
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have the assurance of God's Grace to direct us, but as they put us into the fittest disposition for the reception of truth. A strong understanding, if it relies too much on its own strength, soon begets a *self-sufficiency* that is the most fruitful source of error, the common parent of *infidelity*. *Self-love* betrays men into this *pride* of the understanding. From an inclination to make themselves as *considerable* as they can, they flatter themselves into a persuasion that their *natural faculties* are a *sufficient guide*, without any *farther* help from their Maker. *Revelation* consequently is *false*, because it is *needless*. From *Deism* to *Atheism* the progress is natural, and the way short. And if we observe the *manner* and *style* of their writings we shall see the marks of this *pride* and *self-conceit*; the utmost contempt of *other* people's understanding, and confidence in their *own*; as if the *rest* of the world were *wholly* ignorant, and *they* ignorant of *nothing*; at least *capable* of understanding any thing that they apply themselves to. They talk of the awful and tremendous attributes of the Divine Nature, and the methods of God's government with a vast deal more *familiarity* than would be thought decent if they were speaking of a *minister of state*, and the measures of his con-

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duct. They are as forward to make objections against the wisdom of the *creation*, and of *Providence*, as if they themselves could have made, or govern'd the world better. From one man to another of a *superior* understanding and station their language would be thought, by all sensible people, the highest *ill manners* and *impudence*; how then shall we use words significant enough to express the insolence, and madness, and folly of those who presume to use such freedom towards the *supreme Being*, whose nature is incomprehensible; and whose ways are past finding out? We shall discover a better understanding, and more judgment by *distrust*, than by *confidence*; by *modesty*, than *presumption*; because most suitable to the *nature* and *order* of things. It is a thing fit and proper that an *imperfect* and *limited* understanding should look upon itself as *fallible*, and that a fallible Being should always be in a ready disposition to hearken with great humility to the *unerring* dictates and conduct of *Omniscience*. A just sense of God and ourselves, awful sentiments of *his* excellency and perfection, and a low and mean opinion of the weakness and defects of *human nature*, this would be the most convincing answer to all the cavils of *infidelity*.

F I N I S.