

LETTERS

TO THE

STRANGER IN READING.

BY DETECTOR,

(R. H. Gamblet)

Ὁς δὲ ταῦτα γὰρ εὗρε, ΓΕΡΩΝ, κατὰ μῦθον ἔειπεν.

His neighbour cometh, and searcheth him.

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AND SOLD BY BLACK, PARRY, AND KINGSBURY; AND
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IN READING.

1810.

*Gough Adds Berke
8^o 36.*



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Author of the following Letters to the "Stranger in Reading," considers it necessary to offer an apology to the Public, but more especially to the respectable Inhabitants of Reading, for the publication of this Work so many months after the appearance of the Stranger's book. The facts connected with the delay are simply as follows:—The Writer had but little time to appropriate to this Work till after the usual labours of the day were completed, when he was frequently very unfit to enter on a new employment; and he actually would have desisted from his intention, had he not considered himself under an obligation to proceed, in consequence of having declared, in public company, that the Stranger's Letters would be answered, which declaration he always viewed as the means of preventing a reply from

another hand, and as the occasion of an advertisement in the Reading Mercury, promising a series of Letters to the "Stranger," by "Detector." The substance of the Letters was, however, notwithstanding difficulties and hinderances, completed in March; but for reasons which it is not necessary to state, the book has been two months in passing through the press. If it should be asked why any answer at all should be given to a work which has excited so general a disapprobation as the Stranger's Letters, it is replied that, despicable as they are in some respects, they might have left an unfavourable impression on the minds of some persons respecting the character of the Inhabitants of Reading in general, and that of the professors of religion in particular. The Author is likewise convinced, that in these Letters to the Stranger he has had an opportunity of discussing many interesting subjects, of which some may communicate important information to the majority of his readers, while others in the most eminent degree are connected with the welfare of

them all.—Added to these reasons, the Stranger having presumed to place himself on very high ground, as is evident from an advertisement that appeared in the Reading Paper after this reply was announced, the Author has the vanity to believe he has dispossessed him of his eminence, and really flatters himself that the Stranger will not venture to insert any more *scurrilous* and *indecent* advertisements in a public newspaper, or to publish, as a second volume to the Letters, his promised “Collection of Reading Anecdotes.” What sort of a book this would have been, in which veracity would not have been guaranteed by the writer, I leave his readers to judge after running over the pages of the first volume, in which a *regard for truth* is positively promised.

Had the Author consulted some of his Reading friends respecting this publication, it might have received an advantage in some parts; but he was under an apprehension that alterations might have been solicited, and had he erased so as to gratify individuals, his book would have been less satisfactory

to himself, and probably less acceptable to the generality of his readers. His aim has been to speak the truth—to speak it in general with independence, and on many occasions, with seriousness.

After the manuscript was written, a copy of the Stranger's Letters was sent by the Author of the following pages to a friend, of whose judgment he entertained a very high opinion, with an intimation of his intention of publishing strictures on the work; from whom the following remarks were received:—"Really, the pamphlet, which I have scarcely skimmed, is a production which may point out some abuses and appropriate correctives, but is at the same time such a sinner against style, fact, and principle, that nothing but its local influence seems to justify the honour you intend it. Such works must perish. As for reasoning with such a writer, it can be of little use; for he proves himself (pp. 155—160.) to be an infidel of the very basest sort. Paragraphs so meanly impious are seldom scribbled. You judge, however, I presume, that you

may convince his comrades that they ought to blush for him ; and you may think that the people he so wilfully misrepresents, have a right to be heard in their own defence, and that the defence may be serviceable to some , ” — The Author afterwards sent this friend part of his manuscript, on which he was pleased to pass an opinion concluding with the following words : — “ I only regret that your pamphlet cannot circulate without reminding the Public that this living body drags a dead one after it ; without tending, in short, to make buoyant, a little longer, one of the most miserable performances that Lethe ever received , ”

READING,

June 5, 1810.

LETTERS,

&c.

LETTER I.

SIR,

I HAVE read your book entitled *The Stranger in Reading*, in which there are some things true, many exaggerated, more extremely incorrect, and not a few in a very high degree inimical to the best interests of your readers. You have undoubtedly noticed subjects which, in the opinion of every well-wisher to this highly respectable borough, call for reform, and some of which may properly fall under the cognizance of an anonymous censor. I hope, Sir, that the parties who are more particularly concerned in your animadversions, will profit by your hints, and that you will have the pleasing gratification you desire, of seeing the good effects of your remarks, in the correction of those causes of complaint which require reformation. But, Sir, while your publication contains some things which are deserving commendation, it has others of a very opposite aspect, which must necessarily incur the disapprobation, and

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excite the regret, of every man who has any real regard for the interests of the inhabitants of this town in particular, or for the welfare of others into whose hands your Letters may happen to fall. You have professed that, in making your observations on Reading and its inhabitants, you would “ nothing extenuate, nor aught set down in malice.” After perusing your pages, those of your readers who are at all acquainted with the subjects of your animadversions, will see that though you have *nothing extenuated*, yet *many things* you have *exaggerated* and *misrepresented*. How far you have attended to the latter part of this profession, in not setting down “ aught in malice,” I leave to the decision of your own conscience, and to the judgment of our readers, after they shall have perused our pages. You have likewise declared that you would make your observations with that *regard for truth*, which you are always anxious to observe. But, Sir, as your book contains so many things which stand in direct opposition to this declaration ; as it abounds in the figure which rhetoricians call *Irony*, in which the passage is to be understood in a sense directly contrary to the literal meaning ; and as you always mark these rhetorical figures in Italics, as you have the words “ *Regard for truth*,” your readers, like myself, will probably be at a loss to know whether they are to understand your assertion as a *serious* or as an *ironical* declaration. At

all events, they will immediately discover that in many things you are in a high degree incorrect and erroneous, some of which it is my intention to point out to you; and, Sir, if your work should prove to you such a source of profit as to reach a second edition, I hope you will have the candour to rectify your errors. This, however, will be a difficult task, as it will have a tendency to reduce your seven shilling volume nearly to the size of a six-penny pamphlet.

I take it for granted, Sir, that you are no *Stranger* in Reading, though you have assumed that title. Do not, however, imagine that I object to your writing under a fictitious character. For the purpose of using legitimate satire, or for pointing out abuses, as well as on some other occasions, such a method may not only be allowable, but necessary. But, Sir, neither fictitious characters nor anonymous signatures will justify any man in transgressing in the smallest degree the sacred boundaries of truth. You have not only, however, made many incorrect assertions, but you have said things of the most pernicious tendency. With some ingredients that will be palatable to many tastes, you have mingled a most dangerous poison. In a style which is not always displeasing, and which is occasionally enlivened with some strokes of wit, you have attempted to prejudice the minds of your readers against that blessed religion which alone can afford

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them peace in life, consolation in death, and happiness in eternity. Such indeed is your hostility towards the Christian religion and its credible professors, that it has led you into the most glaring inconsistency as a writer. When, as the editor, you are representing yourself as a different person from the author, in the *former* character you profess a *concern* that the Stranger has treated a certain class of religious professors with *too great severity*. But your virulent enmity towards the persons you allude to, will not suffer you for a moment to maintain your *consistency*; for you instantly fall into the same strain of bitter irony which always characterizes the manners of the Stranger when speaking of the persons who are the constant objects of his hostility. On comparing, therefore, the *editor's preface* with the *author's letters*, we instantly discover the same pen, dipped in the same gall, guided by the same hand, and directed by the same mind—a mind full of *prejudice* and *rancour* against the doctrines of revelation, and the persons of those who profess a sincere regard to it. When therefore the editor complains of the illiberality of the author, it will constrain his readers to exclaim—"Thou art the man who condemnest thyself out of thine own mouth."

It is not my intention, Sir, to make any remarks on many of the *accurate* descriptions and assertions with which the pages of your book are very abundantly *graced*. I shall leave your readers

to make their own remarks on what you have said of the four-inch pavement—of the rivers of blood flowing in the kennels of one of our streets—your filling your shoes at *every step* from the *beaux-traps* in the pavement—your accidentally carrying away half a pint of blood in your modern coat-sleeve—your frequent danger of receiving a pail-full of water on your back from passing an umbrella—your considering it as an uncommon thing to see a shoe-black without this last-mentioned conveniency, or a tailor's apprentice without boots—the story of your friend's asking to *throw a line* to catch fish in a puddle in the street—with a long *et cetera* too tedious to enumerate. Your readers, Sir, will instantly perceive that your observations on these subjects, as well as on many others, are, to imitate your favourite figure, made with the most *exact accuracy*, and with that *regard to truth* which characterizes the Letters from the Stranger in Reading. But it will not suit me to fight with your weapons. If therefore I should at any time happen to seize them for a moment, I shall quickly lay them down again to resume my own—*plain argument* and *plain truth*.

In my strictures on some of the different subjects of your work which call for animadversion, I shall not confine myself to the order in which they stand; nor is it necessary that I should offer you any reasons for adopting a different method. The substance of your fifth chapter, which is your

coup de main on the different professors of religion in the town, shall however be left to be dispatched in the last place.

You have exhibited three eccentric public characters in your work, with anecdotes of each, accompanied with their portraits. As you have made these the heroes of your story, and as they are so well known in the town in which you have made your observations, as their panegyrist, you should have been careful to have confined your remarks to fact; but your anecdote of honest John's crying *All hot* in the chapel is devoid of all truth. If you had ever heard of such a pretty story, you might easily have ascertained whether or not it had been a fact. But then, Sir, though John might have been considered as a subject of your lamentation, you could not have exhibited him likewise as a butt of your ridicule, in consequence of his having been *perverted to Methodism*; to which may be added, that you would have lost the pleasure of exciting a laugh at the expense of truth. Your account of the old man, whom you have denominated *Boots*, is incorrect in several particulars, himself being witness. But as you say you shall not vouch for the truth of the anecdotes you are about to present to the Public, of which you give this as a specimen, I shall spend no more time on this subject than merely to remark that these *pretty stories* are criterions by which the readers of the Stranger's Letters will

form their judgment of his attachment to truth on other occasions.

Let us enter upon a subject of greater importance than the anecdotes of your *public characters*.—The *Reading Dispensary* is an object on which you have employed your critical powers. After exercising your ridicule on this excellent Institution, on the physicians, the apothecaries, (who to their honour have supported it by an attendance *gratis*,) as well as on the science of medicine *in toto*, you state at length the following facts: that 2000 persons in Reading are proper objects of this charity—that 409 were relieved in the last year—and that 45 remained on the list when the accounts were settled. And what is the inference you draw from your facts? Why, that one in five had been sick, when no epidemical disorder prevailed, and when all the other classes were unusually free from disease!! What a *logical consequence*! What *profound reasoning*! Is your sophistry, Sir, the effect of design, or of ignorance? In either case indeed it will fail of producing any bad consequences to the Institution, as it will be readily discovered by all your readers who are not destitute of common sense. In pointing out your error, to prevent trouble, I shall argue with you on your own principles, though you have rated the population of the town considerably too low. You say that there are in Reading 2000 proper objects for the dispensary,

that about 400 have been relieved in the course of the year at a certain expense, and that 45 were on the list at one time. Admitting the last number as a general average, what are the legitimate consequences of this statement? That about one in five has been afflicted with sickness in the course of the year—that they have received assistance from the dispensary at the trifling expense of three shillings each—and that of these 2000 persons, on an average, a forty-fifth part, or one person out of 44 or 45, is constantly participating in the benefits of the Reading Dispensary. The friends of the institution, Sir, will thank you for this statement of facts, as they cannot desire to receive a clearer conviction of the advantage of this excellent charity. Your sophism consists in supposing that the patients who are sick in the *course of the year*, are all sick *at the same time*. When there are 400 patients at once on the dispensary books, your argument, that one in five is sick, will be valid. It cannot, however, be so previously.

The *Theatre* is another important subject on which you have offered your remarks; on the ill success of which you appear to be exercised with the most pungent affliction. What a *lamentable* thing is it, “that the sons of *Thespis* should meet with so little encouragement, from a town, the inhabitants of which might certainly benefit from their exhibitions, that they are obliged to perform almost to empty benches!” And to what causes

can this failure be attributed?—"O, to the bigotry of the Methodists, and the immoderate thirst for gain of every class of shop-keepers!"—Well, Sir, I shall here *partly* join issue with you. You attribute the comedians' want of success in Reading partly to the influence of religion, and partly to the covetousness of a certain class of inhabitants, which in many other places generally supports them. I consider their failure as owing solely to the former cause; as there certainly cannot be the least reason to libel the tradesmen of Reading with possessing a more immoderate love of money than the tradesmen of other towns where theatricals are encouraged and supported. I have the pleasure of being acquainted with some of the commercial men of Reading, who are men of liberality, and, if their conduct may be considered as a test of their principles, free from that excessively selfish principle of which you speak. If the bulk are similar to these, the tradesmen of Reading are certainly not eminently addicted to covetousness. It is, however, neither an impossible nor an improbable case, that an immoderate thirst for gain, and an immoderate partiality for the theatre, should unite in the same person. But without adducing arguments in relation to the cause of the ill success of the men for whom you so pathetically plead, it affords me pleasure to find there is no doubt of the fact you have stated. While you lament it as a matter of condolence with your

correspondent, many will rejoice in it as a subject of congratulation with those who are more intimately concerned in it—the inhabitants. For what is the stage? I reply, The nursery of vice and crime. To this you will probably retort, and exclaim—“The school of morality and virtue!” But let us proceed to argument. If the stage be the school of morality and virtue, how has it happened that the most immoral, dissolute, and vicious of mankind, have always been its firmest supporters and its warmest admirers? How comes it to pass, that those whose lives contradict almost every injunction of the decalogue, should be charmed with the beauty of virtue in the theatre? The stage, Sir, is one of the principal sources of every kind of immorality and dissipation; and as such, historians, philosophers, moralists, and legislators, in almost all ages, have entered their protest against it. You argue that theatrical exhibitions were encouraged in the republic of ancient Greece. This is partly true, and partly not so. The people certainly encouraged plays, but the legislators and philosophers frequently condemned them. When Solon saw the dramas of Thespis performed, who has been considered as the inventor of tragedy, and who used to smear the faces of his actors with lees of wine, and to carry them from village to village in a cart which served them for a stage, that wise legislator expressed his dislike by striking the ground with his stick, and exclaiming, “I am

afraid that these poetical fictions and ingenious fancies will soon have a share in our public and private affairs!" He therefore restrained them by a law, which, however, was abrogated by a succeeding magistrate. Plato likewise condemned plays, because, said he, "they raise the passions, and pervert the use of them, and are of course dangerous to morality." Again: "The diversions of the stage are dangerous to temper and sobriety: they swell anger and desire too much. Tragedy is apt to make men boisterous, and comedy, buffoons. Those passions are cherished which ought to be checked: virtue loses ground, and reason grows precarious; vice makes an insensible approach, and steals upon us in the disguise of pleasure." To the names of Solon and Plato may be added a constellation of Greek and Roman historians and moralists, who have, with one voice, condemned the stage.

But you seem to be ignorant, Sir, that arguments for plays in Christian countries cannot be deduced from the practice of the Greeks. Their tragedies are undoubtedly less exceptionable than those of the moderns; but they are not without lessons highly unfriendly to Christian morality. They inculcate pride, revenge, the love of false glory, ambition, and other passions which the religion of the Bible teaches us to mortify and subdue. You likewise seem not to know that the Greek drama was employed as an assistant

to the established mythology of the country. The Greeks were therefore consistent; for they inculcated the same lessons on the stage, which were communicated to the people in their temples. They guarded the theatre, as far as possible, from principles hostile to their religion or their morals. At least, this was the case in the purest ages of dramatic history. But what occasioned the ruin of Greece? Let us hear the testimony of a celebrated historian on the subject. "After the death of Epaminondas, the power of the commonwealth was broken. The *valour* even of the *Athenians* fell away. They began to spend the public revenue, not, as heretofore, upon fleets and armies, but upon festivals and public diversions. They frequented the *theatres* with the most celebrated actors and poets, and visited the *stage* more frequently than the camp; bestowing their praises more on good versifiers than on good generals. By these means it came to pass that, during the idle disposition of the Greeks, the sordid and obscure name of the Macedonians began to emerge; and Philip, who had been kept as a hostage for three years at Thebes, and who had been instructed in the virtues of Epaminondas and Pelopidas, laid the kingdom of Macedonia as a yoke of slavery upon the necks of Greece and Asia."*—I cannot dismiss this part of my subject without reminding you, Sir, that the fathers of the church, with

* Justin, lib. vi. cap. 9.

many divines, statesmen, and patriots, ancient and modern, have concurred in representing the stage as replete with danger. I might refer you, would time admit, to the observations of Tertullian, Augustine, and many others of the ancients. I might refer you to the practice of the church in the primitive and early ages. Her converts were required, at their baptism, to "renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world;" by which, it has been asserted, was principally meant the playhouse. I might refer you to the testimony of most wise and pious divines of every denomination in later ages. I might refer you to Archbishops Usher and Tillotson, and many others of the Established Church: to Watts, Doddridge, Barker, and Orton, among the Dissenters. Archbishop Tillotson's language is peculiarly strong and emphatical on the subject. Candid and gentle as he was, he calls the playhouse "the *Devil's chapel*, and the *school and nursery of lewdness and vice*:" and speaking of parents who take their children there, he calls them *monsters*; and adds, "I had almost said, *devils*."—I only remark, here, that, were it necessary, I could give you a long list of moralists and divines of the present age, who, with united testimony, consider the theatre as a school of dissipation, immorality, and crime.

Now, Sir, allow me to ask, Can you wonder, to use your own words, that "in this *enlightened*-town plays are received with disgust, and treated with neglect?" Can you think it strange that the

people are instructed "from the pulpit to consider them as dangerous to religion, and engines of the *tempter* to seduce them from their religious duties?" Ah, Sir, you little thought that many of the bitter *ironies* which your hatred to religion prompted you to indite, would be some of the highest compliments that you would ever have it in your power to pay the inhabitants of the town which you attempt so severely to censure. O highly-favoured Reading! proceed in thy career of discountenancing immorality and opposing vice; and in proportion to thy exertions, "thy peace shall be as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea!"

You appear, Sir, to hold the performers in these *schools of morality* in the highest estimation. The poor blind preachers of Reading, who have "cast a dimness over their own sight," *alias*, put out their own eyes, "endeavour to prevent their hearers from benefiting by the light of others," (these players,) "whose creed may be equally orthodox, though somewhat more enlightened!!! *Benefiting by the light of a player!—the orthodox creed of a player!—more enlightened than that of a Christian minister!*—I never before, Sir, knew any thing of the *light*, or of the *orthodoxy*, or of the *creed*, of a player; though I have often heard of the *character* of this class of the community, whom, for *illuminated and orthodox belief*, you rank above the preachers of the gospel.

The character of a player among the Romans was reckoned infamous; and when a Roman turned actor, he was immediately degraded. The story of the unfortunate Laberius exhibits, in a striking point of view, the odium which was attached to the profession of an actor by this people, whom you assert to have been indebted for their civilization and morality to the stage. Though a Roman knight, he was urged by Julius Cæsar, at an advanced period of life, to appear on the stage, to recite some of his own works. He consented, at length, with reluctance; but felt his character as a Roman citizen disgraced, and shewed his resentment, by warning the audience against the tyrant, by whose mandate he was obliged to appear before them. "After having lived," said he, "sixty years with honour, I left my house, this morning, a Roman knight, but shall return to it, this evening, an infamous stage-player. Alas! I have lived a day too long." Cæsar, however, restored him to the rank of knight, which he had lost by appearing on the stage; but, to his mortification, when he went to take his seat among his order, no one offered to make room for him, and even his friend Cicero said, "*Recepissem te, nisi anguste sederem.*"—A bold saying of Sobrius the tribune, to Nero the Roman emperor, equally illustrates the fact I have asserted. Being asked by the emperor, why he, who was one of his personal guards, had conspired against

him, he answered, " I loved you as much as any man, as long as you deserved to be loved ; but I began to hate you, when, after the murder of your wife and mother, you became a charioteer, a COMEDIAN, and a buffoon."—Such were the sentiments of the *Romans* respecting actors. What did the *primitive Christians* think of them? In the first ages of the church, no player could be admitted into her communion, till he had renounced his profession. Some of the ancient councils ordained that they should be excommunicated. In the English laws they were formerly denominated *rogues*, *vagabonds*, and *sturdy beggars*. But what is the reason that the profession of a player should generally be deemed so ignominious? Because all talents, however excellent, when applied to the single purpose of amusing the idle and vicious, become contemptible. Because, as actors have generally been persons of loose morals, (I do not say without any exception,) so their employment directly leads to the corruption of the heart. Because, appearing continually in an assumed character, or being employed in preparing for it, they must be in danger of losing all sense of sincerity and truth. And because, sustaining so many characters of others, at length they retain none of their own. * It is impossible

* See an able illustration of this subject in Dr. Witherspoon's *Serious Inquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage*. See also an excellent *Essay on the Stage*, by the Rev. John Styles.

to entertain respect for a player; and there is not a family of any consideration in Britain, which would not consider itself disgraced, if any of its members were to embrace this profession. What might be the feelings and sentiments of the Stranger in Reading on having a brother or a son among the *enlightened and orthodox believers* who exhibit on the stage, and who have been so highly extolled by him, I leave to the decision of his own mind; fully persuaded myself, that no man who seriously reflects on his future state of responsibility, can any longer continue to be a player.

I shall conclude this brief dissertation with a testimony and an anecdote: the former shall relate to the *stage*, and the latter to the *actor*.

Sir John Hawkins, in his life of Johnson, has a remark which strikingly illustrates what I have now advanced. "Although it is said of plays, that they teach morality, and of the stage, that it is the mirror of human life; these assertions are mere declamation, and have no foundation in truth or experience: on the contrary, a playhouse, and the regions about it, are the very hot-beds of vice. How else comes it to pass, that no sooner is a playhouse opened in any part of the kingdom, than it becomes surrounded by a halo of brothels? Of this truth, the neighbourhood of the place I am now speaking of (Goodman's Fields Theatre) has had experience; one parish alone, adjacent thereto, having, to my knowledge, expended the

sum of 1300*l.* in prosecutions, for the purpose of removing those inhabitants whom, for instruction in the science of human life, the playhouse had drawn thither."

"Shuter, whose facetious powers convulsed whole audiences with laughter, and whose companionable qualities often 'set the table in a roar,' was a miserable being. The following anecdote of him, told from the best authority, will confirm this assertion; and, I am afraid, were we acquainted with many of his profession, we should find that his case is by no means a singular one. Shuter had heard Mr. Whitefield, and trembled with apprehension, of a judgment to come; he had also frequently heard Mr. Kinsman, and sometimes visited him in London. One day, accidentally meeting him in Plymouth, after some years of separation, he embraced him with rapture, and inquired if that was the place of his residence. Mr. Kinsman replied, 'Yes, but I am just returned from London, where I have preached so often, and to such large auditories, and have been so indisposed, that Dr. Fothergill advised my immediate return to the country for change of air.'—'And I,' said Shuter, 'have been acting Sir John Falstaff so often, that I thought I should have died; and the physicians advised me to come into the country for the benefit of the air. Had you died, it would have been in serving the best of Masters; but had I, it would have been

in the service of the Devil. Oh, Sir, do you think I shall ever be called again? I certainly was once, and if Mr. Whitefield had let me come to the Lord's table with him, I never should have gone back again. My Lord E—— sent for me to-day, and I was glad I could not go. Poor things! they are unhappy, and they want Shuter to make them laugh. But oh, Sir, such a life as yours! As soon as I leave you, I shall be King Richard. This is what they call a good play, as good as some sermons. I acknowledge there are some striking and moral things in it; but after it, I shall come in again with my farce of 'A Dish of all Sorts,' and knock all that on the head. Fine reformers we!—Poor Shuter! once more thou wilt be an object of sport to the frivolous and the gay, who will now laugh at thee, not for thy drollery, but thy seriousness; and this story will be urged against thee as the weakness of a noble mind. Weakness let it be called; but, in spite of himself, man must be serious at last. And when a player awakes to sober reflection, what agony must seize upon his soul!"

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER II.

SIR,

On your remarks concerning the *literary characters* which this town has produced in past ages, I shall decline making any observations. For what is authentic, you deserve the thanks of your readers, as they may not easily find any account of the subjects of this part of your Letters, except in larger and more important compilations. On your estimation of the present state of literature in Reading, I shall offer some strictures, after previously noticing two or three other matters, in the order they stand.

After speaking of the *literati* of the borough, you take occasion to introduce *Reading School* as an object of your severe censure. Let us examine the justice and veracity of your assertions on this interesting and important theme. "It is rather surprising," say you, "that this town should have produced so few learned men, considering the advantages the inhabitants possessed, of having their children educated at the *Free Grammar-school*, formerly *free* of all costs, as its name implies." I should be sorry, Sir, to be at all incorrect in what

I have to offer on this subject, which perhaps it may not be easy to enter on, without giving offence to one or another party concerned in the institution. My pen, however, will be guided by truth, as far as it has been in my power to obtain it; but if I should undesignedly fall into any mistake, on its being pointed out, an apology shall readily be made to the learned and worthy head of the school on the one hand, or to its respectable trustees on the other. It appears to me, Sir, that you are as much a *stranger* to the character and foundation of Reading School, as you are to many other things on which you have presumed to exercise your criticising powers. The school was never *free* in the sense in which you have asserted it to have been so; nor was it instituted, as you maintain, expressly and exclusively for the benefit of the *natives* of the town. In the charter of Queen Elizabeth, it is said that "the school was founded and built by her predecessors, for educating the sons of the inhabitants, and others, in literature." This privilege is so far from being confined to *natives*, that not only all *inhabitants*, but all *other persons*, wheresoever they may live, have a right to send their sons to the school.

According to your principles, where could country gentlemen send their children for instruction? For, undoubtedly, the greater part of our public schools, at which they have generally educated them, are foundation-schools. And this has

been the case more particularly in times past, when there was less probability of these schools having deviated from their original intention, than it is at the present period, when private schools are much more frequent than they were formerly. Indeed, most other foundation-schools are still more restricted by the words of their respective founders than the Reading seminary; but not a single instance can be pointed out, in which those schools exclude all but natives of the place. And the governors or trustees of those schools knew too well their interest, and that of their neighbours, not to encourage strangers to participate in the advantages of the school, either by coming to reside, or by sending their children to board, in the town.

In this sense, the Reading, like many other foundation-schools, is *free*. The salary was intended to give respectability and permanency to the institution; but it was too small to enable the masters to teach without pay. I am informed, Sir, on authority which I believe cannot be disputed, that neither charter nor statute ever existed, to order that "the sons of the inhabitants, and others," shall be "educated in literature" *gratis*. Is it to be supposed that a person would be found to educate all the natives of this town, even in the time of Queen Elizabeth, for 10*l.* a-year? If all the natives had been educated *gratis*, would not the fact have been well known? If the privilege had been

limited to a certain number, would not the charter have determined how many? The fact is, as I believe is pretty well known, that a charge has always been made by the masters. Whatever it was originally, it was soon raised to one pound *per annum*, probably in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. What it should be at this time, let calculators on the alteration in the value* of money determine. It is true that 20*l.* *per annum* was added by Archbishop Laud to the salary; and that a house was purchased by subscription, in 1784, previous to which time, whatever became of the original house, the master was obliged to purchase or hire one for himself; but the land tax and ground rent, the poor's rates, the assessed, paving, and all other taxes, which the master is obliged to pay, probably swallow three times the value of the salary. This assertion is not made at random, as I have taken care to advance nothing in this address of which I have not either personal knowledge, or authority on which I can depend. Now, Sir, are you not *very considerate*, to expect that the corporation shall, at the next vacancy, order that none but *natives* of the town shall be admitted into the school, and, of course, all free of expense? Is it not very *reasonable* and *equitable* that future masters should teach all children born in the town, pay all the taxes of the house, and maintain their

* See Appendix, No. I.

families, upon 30*l.* *per annum*? How far the corporation may act upon your advice, time must discover. Perhaps, as the Stranger seems to be so well acquainted with the subject, and either is, or has been, at the head of some *rival establishment*, on proper application, the trustees may have no objection to *his* appointment; or at least may consent to transfer to him the next nomination, on condition of his paying all the advertisements, till, on those terms, a proper master, or indeed any master, be found to undertake the charge.

It is readily admitted that there are some foundation-schools which are *free* in another sense than that which has been noticed: that is, the inhabitants have the privilege of sending the native children, or a limited number of them, free of expense, for tuition. But as most of these schools have the salaries of the masters fixed at a certain sum of money, on a rent charge, in consequence of the constant and increasing depreciation in the value of specie, there must of necessity, in many cases, be a deviation from the original intention of the founders. I am not pleading for the neglect or abuse of these excellent and important charities, and much less to make them sinecures. So far from this, I scruple not to assert, that where the intentions of the founders have been counteracted, and masters have paid no regard to their obligations, it is incumbent on the governors to revert to the conditions of the foundation, and to

procure such engagements from the master they appoint, as equity and the change of circumstances require. If there are peculiar privileges for the natives in the Reading seminary, the corporation, as trustees, undoubtedly ought to stipulate for them in the appointment of a master; but admitting this to be a fact, if the master be dealt with in justice, these privileges must have necessarily diminished in exact proportion to the value of the salary when originally fixed, compared with what it is at the present day; except indeed that salary was originally more than an adequate recompense for the labour required. The absurdity of expecting the master of Reading grammar-school to teach *all the natives*, must appear *primò facie* to every person who considers the subject for a moment. If this were the case, he would be under an obligation to instruct at least 500 boys in the classics for 30*l.* a-year.

We have lately heard much of the plan of education adopted and recommended by the ingenious and benevolent Joseph Lancaster; but what would a Lancastrian school be in comparison of this? Here would be a doctor of divinity, whom it would be an honour to any classical seminary in Great Britain to have at its head, instructing 500 boys in the Latin and Greek classics, for a salary not amounting to a fourth part of what is generally paid to a schoolmaster for the same number of boys on Lancaster's plan. The master must of course adopt the Lancastrian mode

of teaching. This, however, would not be found quite so feasible in communicating the knowledge of Latin and Greek, as in teaching to read and spell English, and to write and practise the elements of arithmetic.

I cannot conclude my remarks on this subject without observing, that if the enemies or the friends of the Reading School are desirous of knowing its present state in respect to education, they ought to apply at the two Universities for information. Of the *accuracy* of your assertion, that natives of the town are not admitted into the school, but obliged to seek their education elsewhere, any person may form a judgment, who will make inquiry in regard to the number of the natives who have been educated under the present master. I have myself the pleasure of being personally acquainted with some who are now in the church, whose abilities and piety are too well known to need any encomium from an individual; and who, I believe, universally speak of their tutor in terms of high respect. I am also informed that there are others in the church, in the law, in physic, in the army and navy, and in trade, whose conduct is an honour not only to the town, but to society in general, to their country, to religion, and to human nature.

The next subjects of your remarks are the *Permanent Library* and the *Literary Institution*, the latter of which you condescend to call the

rival and *fellow* of the former. I should rather have thought that your comparison of the Library with the Institution would have reminded you of Tityrus's comparing his native village with Rome, and led you to apologize for comparing small things with great:

Sic canibus catulos similes, sic matribus hædos
Noram: sic parvis componere magna solebam.

The *important controversy* in relation to the claims of priority of plan and formation between these two establishments, I shall not enter on; but, as an impartial witness, I can assert that, in a public company in which I had the honour of being present, a *plan* of the Institution was communicated before the Library was *formed*. It will not be easy to discover, therefore, how the "promising prospect of success" in the latter should occasion the establishment of the former; or how "pride, jealousy, or envy, should attempt to stifle in the cradle" a creature which at this time had no existence. But you have made other mistakes in relation to the Institution, as you have on almost all other subjects. Allow me, Sir, to correct them. The sum originally proposed to be raised was 6000*l.* instead of 3000*l.* as you have stated. This fact totally overthrows all the arguments and calculations of the two pages you have devoted to the *information* of your readers, as a *literary financier*. Again, no deviation from the original

plan, in relation to the price of proprietors' shares, has ever taken place, nor is there the slightest reason to resort to any compulsory means to occasion such a deviation. By these two capital mistakes, you have rendered your whole account of the subject grossly erroneous; and, as one of the proprietors of the establishment, whose veracity is unimpeachable, expressed himself in my presence, have "made as many incorrect assertions as nearly equal the number of lines in your page."

I hope, Sir, the next time you make Reading, which you have here treated with so much ironical contempt,* the theme of your animadversions, that you will procure information in regard to the necessary facts, and not write on subjects on which you appear to be totally ignorant. If, Sir, you are a "stranger," as you profess yourself, you are altogether an unfit person to discuss many things which you have presumptuously attempted to illustrate. If you are no stranger, as *many persons* shrewdly suspect, your fellow-townsmen will not easily be persuaded that some of your representations are the effects of mere mistake.

What you call the "*elegant little poem*" written by one of the founders of the Institution, was probably not published for the purpose of ob-

* See the Stranger, page 113.

taining literary distinction. If the author, who is too well known in Reading, as a gentleman and a scholar, to need any encomiums from your pen or mine, was prompted to write and publish this little piece, from his desire to recommend the infant establishment, and afterwards, from his benevolence, to devote the profits of it to a charity which must necessarily meet the approbation of every friend to the rising generation; who, beside the Stranger in Reading, would have thought of censuring him for his conduct? I have, however, only one remark to make on this subject. If this little poem had been published to usher into notice the *Permanent Library* instead of the *Literary Institution*, little doubt can be entertained, from the manner in which the Stranger confers his censures and his praises, but that the term *elegant* would have been printed in *Roman*, instead of *Italic* characters.

In relation to the *reading* of the inhabitants of Reading, you remark that the "Bible is most read, as it doubtless ought to be;" and as you have not marked the last words in Italics, I shall take them in their plain and literal meaning, though many of your readers will undoubtedly discover, or fancy they discover, your favourite irony in the passage, particularly as you connect it with the study of Moore's Almanac. Whether or not you are sincere in the comment on your observation, I leave with yourself: the fact alone will come under

my notice. Next to the Bible, you say, is the well-known almanac just mentioned. "But as to works of science, history, or general information, few trouble themselves about them: and as to religious books, they consult none but what are written by their own sect, or in support of their own religious opinions." Let us examine your positions.

"The book most read is the Bible."—This assertion, Sir, is the highest compliment you possibly can pay to the inhabitants of Reading. If this be a fact, as I am inclined to hope it may, the people of this town, whose literature you hold in the most sovereign contempt, in this respect at least, afford a most honourable and decisive criterion of the excellence of their taste, as well as of the sincerity of their piety.

The Bible, Sir, is not only the most ancient, but infinitely the most excellent book that ever was penned—as much superior to every composition merely human, as the works of the Author of nature are to those of human art. The matter, the manner, the harmony, the effect, of the Bible, unite in illustrating the important declaration—
 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." Infidels may reject the sacred writings, sceptics may doubt their truth, and *strangers* to their important and glorious contents may speak evil of what they know not; but what other book can they mention, which will bear any comparison

with this, whether we consider the infinite importance of its doctrines, the sublimity of its language, the accomplishment of its prophecies, the excellence of its morality, or the character of its penmen? "It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. It is the sure word, whereunto we do well to take heed, as unto a light shining in a dark place."—But probably the *Stranger* in Reading holds the understanding of an *inhabitant*, in such low estimation, that his testimony on this subject will have no weight with him. Be it so, Sir; but I will produce testimony, which even *you* must admit to be unexceptionable. You have, in some part of your book, expressed astonishment that the same country should produce a *Locke* and a *Newton*, a *Methodist* and a *Moravian*. This circumstance evinces that you entertain a high opinion of the intellectual powers of the individuals whose names you have mentioned. But let us hear *their* sentiments of the Bible.

Sir Isaac Newton, the prince of philosophers, was thoroughly persuaded of the truth of revelation. He was a believer on conviction. Amidst the many books which he constantly had before him, that which he studied with the greatest application, was, the Bible. Sir Isaac was as well acquainted with the nature of moral certainty as of positive proof; and therefore he was equally satisfied of the truth of scripture as of any of those

physical discoveries which he proved by mathematical demonstration. On a certain occasion, a cotemporary philosopher, in his conversation with Sir Isaac, introduced the subject of revelation, and began to manifest some degree of scepticism; on which, the latter immediately interrupted him, in language to this purport:—"Sir, when you discourse on philosophy, I hear you with much pleasure, because you understand it; but you have now entered on a subject with which you are totally unacquainted." Mr. Locke, whom likewise you mention, was justly considered one of the greatest masters of reason. But this great logician and philosopher believed the Bible, and wrote a comment on part of it. On being asked a little before his death, "what was the shortest and surest way for a young gentleman to attain a true knowledge of the Christian religion, in the full and just extent of it," he made this memorable reply; "Let him study the holy scripture, especially the New Testament. It has God for its Author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter."

Let me now introduce to you that Colossus in literature and intellect, Dr. Samuel Johnson. He too was a believer in the Bible. He read it, and received from it the only hope he ventured to entertain of eternal salvation. Johnson always had a high respect for religion, and for those who were consistent professors of it. He used very

much to admire a saying of Mr. Howell, that “to make a man a complete Christian, he must have the works of a Papist, the words of a Puritan, and the faith of a Churchman.” A little time before his death, he said, “I have at times entertained a loathing of sin and myself, particularly when I have had the prospect of death before me; and this has not abated when my fears of death have been less; and at these times I have had such rays of hope shot into my soul, as have almost persuaded me that I am in a state of reconciliation with God.”—At other times, he attributed the foundation of all his hopes of mercy and salvation to the merits of his Redeemer.* Had Johnson been now living in Reading, and had the Stranger been made acquainted with these particulars, he would have exclaimed, “Alas, poor man, he has been perverted to Methodism!” But Johnson, Sir, was no Methodist, unless you make *Methodist* and *Christian* synonymous.

The learned Salmasius, when on his death-bed, left this testimony to the importance of studying the holy Scripture:—“I have lost a world of time! If one year more were to be added to my life, it should be spent in reading David’s Psalms and Paul’s Epistles.”

That elegant and accomplished scholar, Sir William Jones, one of the judges in the supreme

* See Sir John Hawkins’s Life of Dr. Johnson.

court of Bengal, who died a few years ago, had written these words in his Bible :—" I have regularly and attentively read these holy Scriptures, and am of opinion that this volume, independent of its divine origin, contains more sublimity and beauty, more pure morality, more important history, and finer strains of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been composed."

Were it necessary, Sir, I could give you a multiplicity of similar testimonies, from men who rank in the highest class of human beings for intellectual talent and literary acquisition, to the truth, the excellence, the value, and the blessedness, of that book, which, to their highest honour, you say, is the study of the people of Reading.

This is a subject which indeed, Sir, I cannot hastily dismiss. Has not the blessed Founder of the Christian religion—the Author of the hopes and consolations of his people—the great Prophet and Teacher of the church—has not HE given his followers a command to read the Bible, and to read it with frequency and diligence? *Search* the Scriptures, is HIS precept:—a precept which eminently deserves the special regard of all who are called after his name. The term *search*, which our blessed Lord has here condescended to use, is strikingly emphatic. According to some critics, it signifies to *trace by the foot*, as dogs trace their

game. Hence they render it by the Latin verbs *indago* and *investigo*. According to this etymology, the disciples of Christ are required to *investigate* the sacred truths of Scripture, and carefully to *trace* out their true meaning. And will not this require *reading*—nay, will it not require *frequent* reading? But other critics—(I hope, Sir, you will bear with my observations on this occasion—the subject is of the highest importance; every *inhabitant*, as well as every *stranger*, in Reading, is intimately concerned in it)—I say, other critics consider the word as borrowed from the practice of *miners*, and suppose that it implies to *dig* and to *examine*. Miners, who search for gold in the bowels of the earth, first pierce the ground to a great depth, and when they have found a vein of ore, they break and carefully sift the earth, that no part of the metal may escape. Indeed such is the trouble to procure this precious mineral, which so many human beings worship, that it has been asserted that no possessor of a gold mine ever grew rich. And what is its value to the poor slaves who labour in it? Of all employments, theirs is one of the most miserable. With immense toil, they dig, search, sift, and examine—but for what purpose? To obtain a wretched livelihood—a support merely sufficient to preserve them from perishing by hunger! And wherefore do the inhabitants of this town read the Bible so much? Why, Sir, some of them at least

search the Scriptures because they are "a light unto their feet, and a lamp unto their paths"—because they testify of that Redeemer on whom their hopes of salvation depend, and whom, "not having seen, they love"—because, under the gracious influences of that Holy Spirit by whom they were indited, they confer on them riches infinitely superior to those which are procured from a mine of gold, or of the most precious stones—they make them "*rich in faith*, and heirs of that kingdom which the blessed God has promised to them that love him."

The book most read next to the Bible, you say, is, "*Moore's Almanac*, which is to be found not only in every house in the town, but also in every one in the neighbourhood, and partakes nearly of the same degree of belief in its prognostications, as the Bible itself."—This passage, Sir, as well as many others in your Letters, marks your character in relation to veracity. Not one of your readers will believe what you have here asserted; and it is difficult to say which is most to be lamented, the profaneness, or the falsehood, of this sentence. The belief of the Bible will certainly tend to make men infidels in regard to the prognostications of an almanac; and therefore I perfectly join issue with you in your expressions of wonder, "that in the nineteenth century there should be found people who can give credit to such impostors, or believe that men, by looking

at the stars, can foretell the state of the weather throughout the year, when even the wisest of themselves cannot see what will follow in the space of the next twenty-four hours."—Your reasoning, here, Sir, is just; and many of the inhabitants of the borough of Reading, who may read your book, will consider this as one of the most sensible passages it contains. This will therefore be a most complete confutation of that grossly illiberal and incorrect assertion, which implies that *all the inhabitants of Reading and its vicinity* place nearly the same degree of belief in the prognostications of an almanac as in the Bible itself. Should there be *any* almanac-mongers among your readers, who place *any credit* in the annual prognostications, concerning the weather, imputed to Francis Moore, Physician, who has been dead for more than half a century, I hope they will profit by your remarks. *Fus est et ab hoste doceri.*—"But," say you, "their credulity does not stop here." Whose credulity? The *inhabitants of Reading* and of the *neighbourhood*, as it appears from reading the page. "Even witchcraft, which is exploded in every other enlightened town in the kingdom, is as firmly believed here by many creditable people as the gospel." You may be assured, Sir, that witchcraft is *not* believed by the people *in general* of Reading, nor by *many creditable* people among them. Should there be any individuals among them, who have any remains of a superstition

which has been a stain upon our national character, I would recommend them to read a sermon on witchcraft, lately published, by the Rev. Isaac Nicholson, of Paxton, in Huntingdonshire, in consequence of a person in that village having been criminated and treated as a witch by many of the infatuated inhabitants, for which several of them were tried at the assizes for that county last year. A belief in witchcraft, in past times, has undoubtedly been a national error; and it is well known, that not more than two centuries ago, credulity on this subject was very general, and that the laws against supposed witches were not unfrequently put in execution. As to the particular instance you mention, it was probably a lesson which eventually rectified the judgment of a few persons, who, for a short time, might be misled by appearances. There is, however, one circumstance which you ought not to have concluded your witchcraft affair without mentioning. It is a well-known fact, that the first effectual check put upon this limited and temporary delusion, was by two ministers of that description which you declare to be as ignorant as any of the lower classes of inhabitants in the borough.*—The *white-rabbit ghost* is too *childish* a story to merit any reprehension.

“ As to works of science, history, or general

* See Stranger, page 120.

information, few trouble themselves about them ; and as to religious books, they consult none but what are written by their own sects, or in support of their own religious opinions."—Here again, Sir, you are most egregiously mistaken. Beside the Literary Institution and the Permanent Library, which you have mentioned, there are several very respectable Book Societies. One consists of fourteen or sixteen members, selected from some of the principal inhabitants of the borough, clergy and laity, who expend in books about fifty pounds a year. A second consists of eighteen members, of which there are five clergymen, several dissenting ministers, and others from the professions, &c. This Society expends between thirty and forty pounds annually for books, a *great part* of which are of that description of which you say there are *none* read. There are likewise two other Societies, of nearly the same number of members, on a similar plan. You have undoubtedly underrated the present state of literature of the borough. If we are sunk into that state of literary opprobrium which you have represented, the three authors, the gentleman and the two ladies, whom you have so honourably mentioned, certainly will not have it in their power "to remove this opprobrium, and to give a lustre to their native place equal to that of any other town in these kingdoms!" I speak on this subject, free from all prejudice, and am willing to give the most ample

credit to the encomiums which others have paid to these respectable individuals, though I cannot go quite so far as to assert, with you, that one of them EXCELS OUR BEST POETS in the chastity of her style and the harmony of her verse. But if any *three* persons are destined to recover the literary honour of a town involved in such deplorable ignorance as you have attributed to Reading, they ought to be giants in intellect and in literary attainments. I have not, however, the honour of being acquainted with the writers you have mentioned, or their works, having seen no more of them than those well-written verses on the much-lamented Sir John Moore, which appear in your Letters.* The Rev. Mr. W. is the only literary gentleman you mention; and as he has now laid aside the study of chymistry for that of theology, may he employ "his great learning, indefatigable industry, and superior abilities," in defending and propagating that religion of which he is now a minister:—especially may he use his able pen in the defence of revealed religion from the attacks of infidels and deists, and in silencing and chastising such men as the Stranger in Reading, for presuming to write on subjects with which they are totally unacquainted. But, Sir, is it not very strange that you should propose to mention a few characters

* Since writing the above, I have read some of Miss M—d's poems, which are undoubtedly distinguished for harmony of verse, as well as for elegance of thought and expression.

destined to deliver the town from its literary dishonour, and then instantly introduce *two authoresses*, a *clergyman* celebrated for *botanical knowledge*, a *painter*, an *architect*, and a *warrior*,* as a list of natives of the town who “excel in the different departments of the ARTS?”—What admirable precision!—What excellent logic!

I cannot conclude this subject, without observing, that you have certainly omitted to mention some of the principal literary characters of the town, there being a few, at this period, whose names would not disgrace a list of men of learning and talent in any age, or in any place. Had you forgotten two reverend authors, Dr. V. . . . and his brother, who have published works which will remain as standard books in our schools and universities, for ages after such a composition as “The Stranger in Reading” will be consigned to Lethe? Had you forgotten a third clergyman and dignitary of the church, well known in the literary world as the author of several respectable publications, and as an editor of one of our periodical reviews?—Your readers will undoubtedly attribute the omission of some names in your professed catalogue of *literati* to *ignorance*, to *prejudice*, or to some still more *unworthy motive*.

* Nothing is here intended, *in the least respect*, derogatory to the estimation in which these individuals are held by the inhabitants of Reading, and the Public in general.

In relation to your remarks on the *Corporation of Reading*, I shall offer no animadversions. As you have expressed so much dissatisfaction with almost every other class of persons and things in the borough, the members of that respectable body will not have much reason to complain of your conduct towards them. Since therefore you have, *on the whole*, treated them with that respectful regard which should always be maintained towards them, perhaps it might be considered captious on my part to notice those occasions on which you have presumed to lay even on these gentlemen a few gentle lashes with your *censorial flagellum*. It will undoubtedly afford many of your readers pleasure, to observe that a man of your sentiments should bear testimony to their general utility. Corporations, when their functions are faithfully and impartially discharged, have been fitly compared to a river. They continue communicating good. From the perpetuity of a body corporate, it may be said of it,

“*Labitur, et labetur, in omne volubilis ævum.*”

As the adjacent fields are fertilized by the river from age to age, so these privileged institutions continue to impart to all within their precincts the various privileges and benefits with which they were at first endowed.

Your observations on the *Representatives in Parliament for the borough*, and the manner of

their election, are highly erroneous. You assert that a seat in the House of Commons does not cost a successful candidate less than four thousand pounds. On this principle, after deducting the necessary and unavoidable expenses, there must be at least 7500*l.* distributed in some mode of corruption; though you admit it to be a mode "more palatable to the stomach of the electors than direct bribery." Admitting, therefore, that there are 600 electors, on an average every one must receive 12*l.* 10*s.* either at, or after, every election, from the successful candidates. And as many of the electors receive *nothing at all*, and others only occasionally dine with their representatives, the sum must be considerably larger in relation to a great number. If you mean that a part of this expense runs in a channel totally unconnected with the electors, this could no more be considered as *indirect* than as *direct* bribery; except indeed you assert that a voter is chargeable with corruption for giving his suffrage to a candidate who exercises any acts of beneficence towards the borough or its inhabitants. Indeed, on your principles, these consequences necessarily ensue:—No elector must vote for a benefactor to the town—no member must be a benefactor; for if so, there must be immediate or oblique bribery. Hence it incontestably follows, that however munificent may have been the conduct of a friend or patron of the borough of Reading, such con-

duct must cease the moment a person of this description declares himself a candidate to represent the town in parliament. The fact is, that you expect something more than a *Utopian* election. Not only *every kind of influence* must be *annihilated*, but the candidate must be, like yourself, at least in relation to the inhabitants of Reading, a *misanthrope*.—It would be desirable indeed, if no *undue or improper* influence were used in the election of members of parliament, and if every elector and candidate were actuated by principles and motives free from all selfish and improper bias; and this, Sir, will take place in proportion as the parties are actuated by those principles against which your mind is at present filled with the most virulent malevolence—the principles of *Christianity*. Yes, when the inhabitants of this country shall in general awaken to their true interests, and live under the influence of that book, which, you say, in Reading is studied more than any other—when a constant regard to the Divine Being, and habitual benevolence to their fellow-creatures, shall be the motives of their conduct—they must necessarily become true patriots. Our electors will return their representatives, and the latter will undertake their charge, with the pure desire of benefiting their country.

As to a part of the electors annually dining with the representatives, it may be remarked, that the former lay on the latter a heavy tax, from which

they ought to be liberated; but this is not the principal objection to this indefensible custom. In some instances, it becomes an occasion of gluttony and drunkenness; in which point of view it must necessarily excite the lamentation of every friend to religion and morality. But as the impropriety of this practice has been, on a public occasion, universally admitted by the body of electors at large, and a vote unanimously passed by them for its abolition, where will an elector hereafter be found, desirous of preserving any consistency of character, that will presume to support, by his example, what he has condemned by his vote? I am happy, Sir, to join issue with you where I can; nor am I an advocate for improprieties, wherever they may be found—whether in the electors, the representatives, the corporation, the borough, societies of any kind, or individuals. But, Sir, you seem to consider the House of Commons in the same state in which it existed when a command to a borough to elect members was the most disagreeable intelligence they could receive, and when the charges of the representatives were borne by their constituents. The weight and influence of the lower house of parliament are now so increased, that if the electors return a representative of the most pure, virtuous, and patriotic principles that can be imagined or desired, it is impossible for them to do otherwise than confer on him a most valuable consideration. For is it not a

valuable consideration to every virtuous patriot, to obtain an opportunity of promoting the welfare of his country, and the interests of morality and religion? And shall such a man be charged with bribery for exercising benevolence towards his constituents, and for attending to their interests?

Your considering the subscriptions of the members to every charitable fund as a species of bribery, is most illiberal and uncharitable. The inhabitants in general of Reading and its vicinity manifest no small degree of benevolence, by subscriptions to funds of this kind; and shall Messrs. S—n and L—re be debarred from the exercise of beneficence, because they are representatives of the town? Indeed, Sir, you will not persuade many persons that this circumstance should diminish their concern to promote its interests.

Your hostility to the Literary Institution has here led you to make a most erroneous assertion—or rather, might it not be said, to fabricate a most gross falsehood. You have asserted that it has condescended to accept 240*l.* of one of the representatives, although most of the members are inimical to his interests. Nothing can be more distant from the truth. There are *many* gentlemen in the town and its vicinity, who have taken a plurality of shares: and if one of our very respectable members, in order to promote so promising and desirable an establishment as the Literary Institution, has taken eight, the other two,

and his brother five, for the same purpose; they have all in return received value to the full amount, as the shares are not yet sunk below *par*, nor is there any expectation that they will retrograde in price. Indeed, if the plan of the establishment should answer its expected end, the shares must necessarily *increase* in value. Who then, besides the "Stranger in Reading," would insinuate that a representative of the borough was guilty of bribery for promoting, by a liberality which may neither be expensive nor inconvenient, an institution which every friend to literature must judge to be of high importance to the town? Your remark that most of the members of the Literary Institution are known to be inimical to the representative who has taken eight shares, like many scores of your other assertions, is not a fact; for if it should be admitted that most of them are decidedly *friendly* to the other member, it by no means follows that they are *inimical* to the former. Indeed it is well known that many of them are not so, notwithstanding the absurd practice that has long prevailed in the borough, of the electors in general ranging themselves under the banner of *one* candidate only—a practice that has been carried to so ridiculous an extreme, that on one occasion, had not the opportune decision of the returning officer prevented, a serious debate would have taken place, in order to determine which of the *names* of the two members should

have the precedence in the return. Unless an elector judge himself obliged in conscience to support one candidate whose interest might be endangered by his giving a suffrage for a second, or unless every other candidate should act in decided hostility to his political sentiments, why should he deprive himself of his privilege, by voting for *one* representative only instead of *two*?—This dividing system, however, you seem desirous of encouraging, by charging the members of the Literary Institution, whom you denominate some of the first people in Reading, “with meanness and a sordid disposition,” because, being particularly in the interest of Mr. S—n, they did not *object* to Mr. L—’s taking shares, in their establishment. How many members there are in the Society of proprietors in the interest of either of the representatives for the borough, *exclusively*, it is not necessary to determine; but every person must be immediately convinced, that if the friends of one of them *had* objected to the other’s taking as many shares as he was disposed to do, they would have been guilty of an act of *rude illiberality, almost equal to yours* in charging them (though the principal people in Reading) with a *sordid disposition* for *not* making such an objection.

According to your sentiments, not only the representatives, or candidates, for the borough, but *every one of their families*, must desist from exercising acts of benevolence towards any of

the inhabitants of the town. Does a relation of one of the members procure situations for suitable young men in the Bank of England, and thus render an important service to the employers and the employed? This, with the *Stranger to benevolence*, is *quartering* the sons of electors on the Bank. Does the same amiable and beneficent friend to his native town, provide for other young men situations in the East or West Indies?—Does he lend money to persons in trade at low interest?—Does he assist some tradesmen in the purchase of their materials?—Does he help others in the disposal of their manufactures?—Does he distribute clothes among the poor?—Does he regale the children in the market-place with plum-cake?—Well, Sir, what follows? Because this estimable character has a relation who is one of the representatives of the borough, you stigmatize all these acts (for it is evident that you wish to be considered among the *opponents to these charities*) as “political engines contrived to deceive those who are not aware of the snare.” But, whatever may be your sentiments on such conduct, there is no doubt that the inhabitants of Reading view it with approbation; nor is there any reason to fear that a majority of the independent voters will not continue to exclaim, on the day of election, “S—n for ever!” unless indeed—(here, Sir, I am constrained to form an opinion of the electors, which stands in direct opposition to

your's)—unless indeed a S—n should act in constant hostility to the political sentiments of his constituents, or attempt to obtain the favour of a small body of the electors by means that must necessarily disoblige the majority; in which case, such, I think, are the independence and influence of a very considerable number of them, and such their freedom from corruption, that not even the benevolence of an E—d S—n would induce them to return a representative who was not a proper object of their choice. Do not, however, Sir, imagine that I have embraced the absurd and unconstitutional sentiment, that a member of parliament is under an obligation to vote on all questions *according to the instructions* of his constituents. When a body of electors have chosen their representative, they have transferred their own legislative wisdom and power into *his* hands, to be employed by him on all occasions as *he* shall think fit. It is now the member's *personal office*, “to advise his Majesty, in the great council of the nation, touching certain difficult and urgent affairs, concerning the king, and defence both of the kingdom and church of England.” Probably, Sir, you are no such “Stranger in Reading” as not to have heard a manly, eloquent, and independent speech on this subject, some time ago, by Charles Dundas, Esq. one of the members for this county, to his constituents, the freeholders. The same subject was afterwards,

with similar independence, illustrated in the same place, the Town-hall of Reading, by John Simeon, Esq. one of the members for this borough. If a member of parliament be indeed inattentive to the local and particular concerns of his constituents, or if he act in his general political conduct contrary to their sentiments, they undoubtedly have a remedy in their power, which they can apply at the next election.—May the electors of Reading use their suffrages with wisdom, discrimination, and a patriotic regard to the best interests of their country!

As one of the means of influence in the return of the members, you have asserted that a “director of the Bank of England has been frequently seen decorated with a grotesque wig, a frightful mask, and the most ridiculous dress that can be conceived, presiding at a club of ODD FELLOWS.” This is denied on the part of the very worthy, valuable, and excellent person you refer to, and also of his friends: unless, therefore, you produce *authority* for your assertion, you will find it difficult to avoid the charge of *wilful falsehood*.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER III.

SIR,

In your fifth letter you profess to give an account of the different religious societies which in times past have prevailed, and which still continue to exist, in this town. In my strictures on your remarks, and in my own observations on these various societies, I shall, as far as possible, in a subsequent letter, pursue your own order. There are, however, some things that you have taken upon you to censure, which are altogether unconnected with any divisions in the Christian church, and which it may be proper previously to notice.

Allow me first, Sir, to point out the many mistakes you have made in your remarks on the Reading Society for promoting the due observance of the Lord's-day, &c. You consider this Society as formed out of the body of Methodists, or, as you explain yourself, the congregation that worships in Castle-street Chapel. Thus you begin with a direct untruth, there being five clergymen of the Church of England, the two ministers of the principal congregations of Dissenters, and a great number of individuals from the *various*

congregations in the town, who do not consider themselves as freed from the obligation of "remembering the sabbath-day, to keep it holy," members of this Society. You have therefore given the congregation in Castle-street an *exclusive* honour, to which they have neither a right nor a desire to lay claim. Many respectable and valuable characters from that body of Christians became members of this Society for the suppression of vice, while others among them, from principle, declined it. You represent the Society as a *tolerated sect*, acting *against* the members of the *Established Church*. While this is an absolute falsehood, in relation to the Society, is it not, at the same time, a libel on the Established Church and her members? For have you not here, Sir, classed *all* the sabbath-breakers in the Establishment, and considered the *tolerated sect* as the *only persons* who pay any regard to the Lord's-day? But I must check myself—you do not like the term, *Lord's-day*. You say, the Sabbatarians* affect to call Sunday the Lord's-day; and again, you assert that the Dissenters, after the Reformation, began to call it the Sabbath, and that since that, modern *sectaries* have gone a step further, calling it the Lord's-day. But have you not here libelled our

* There are no *Sabbatarians* in Reading. This is a body of Christians who observe the *seventh day*, or Saturday, as the sabbath; and who are to be found principally, if not entirely, in the Baptist denomination.

legislators, by classing them with *sectaries*? For do they not, in all their public acts, universally term Sunday *the Lord's-day*? You farther assert, that the observers of the sabbath "do not pretend to bring any proofs from Scripture in support of their system, but content themselves with quoting obsolete acts of parliament." The former part of this assertion is an untruth, as may be seen by the publications of the Society, as well as by documents which may be found in an appendix* to this work; while the latter part is a libel on the Constitution; for is it not such, to denominate laws which are constantly acted upon by our magistrates and judges, *obsolete acts of parliament*? Nay, I ask whether you have not virtually libelled our gracious sovereign himself? For you necessarily consider his proclamation as *nugatory*, or class it with *obsolete acts of parliament*; while also the ridicule which you have thrown upon the Reading Methodists for calling Sunday *the Lord's-day*, must with equal force fall upon the person of the SOVEREIGN OF BRITAIN. I quote his Majesty's own words, and leave my readers to judge.—
 "We do hereby strictly enjoin and prohibit all our loving subjects, of what degree or quality soever, from playing on the *Lord's-day* at dice, cards, or any other game whatsoever, either in public or private houses, or other place or places whatsoever; and we do hereby require and com-

* See Appendix, No. II.

mand them, and every of them, decently and reverently to attend the worship of God on *the Lord's-day*, on pain of our highest displeasure, and of being proceeded against with the utmost rigour that may be by law. And we do hereby strictly charge and command all our judges, mayors, sheriffs, justices of the peace, and all other our officers and ministers, both ecclesiastical and civil, and *all ather our subjects*, to be very vigilant and strict in the *discovery* and the *effectual prosecution* and *punishment* of *all persons* who shall be guilty of the profanation of the *Lord's-day* and to put in execution the statute made in the twenty-ninth year of the reign of the late King Charles II. intituled, An Act for the better Observation of the *Lord's-day*, commonly called Sunday. and also an act passed in the twenty-first year of our reign, intituled, An Act for preventing certain Abuses and Profanations of the *Lord's-day*, called Sunday.”

The above extracts from his Majesty's proclamation, published in the year 1787, and commanded to be read four times a-year in all our churches, is a direct refutation of your attack on the Reading Society, and all that you have asserted in opposition to it, as well as a most striking comment on your *correct* and *sage* remarks on the *Lord's-day*, &c. &c. In consequence of this proclamation, a society was formed in London, in the year 1788, called the *Proclamation Society*, for

the purpose of enforcing it; and if it be not a defence of the societies in general formed for the suppression of vice, I am totally incapable of understanding the plainest language that can be penned.

Will not many of your readers, when they see your observations on the Lord's-day, conclude that you would have made an excellent advocate for promoting the purpose of the revolutionary legislators of France, when they passed a law for abolishing the Christian sabbath, and instituting in its stead the deistical decade?

In your further remarks on the Reading Society, you assert that informations were soon laid, and the offending parties fined. This is another untruth. No party was ever fined; nor was any information ever accepted by the magistrates, or formally laid by the members of the Society. In a *quotation*, (the sense of which you have unwarrantably altered by your *Italics*,) taken from a letter written by the Committee to the attorney whose integrity you so highly commend for refusing to undertake the causes of the Society, you draw an illogical inference, and assert that the passage "evidently implies, that if, in the judgment of the Society, they should think the magistrate remiss in his duty, it would be their duty to remind him of it by a civil process." You may be assured, Sir, on the very best authority that you possibly can receive on the subject, that the

passage implied no such consequence. It was a mere expression of hope, that a magistrate of Reading would never act in a manner that would occasion such a discussion as that alluded to; without any reference to the consequences. Will you, Sir, never cease to calumniate? So far from purposing to remind the magistrate of his duty by a civil process, the Reading Society desisted from its intended operations, merely because the magistrates in general, though not without exception, discountenanced their proceedings. I speak neither by way of defending nor of blaming the Society; but merely to state truth in opposition to error. My own sentiments undoubtedly coincide with those of some others, who thought that when the magistrates manifested disapprobation towards the plan and intentions of the Society, the latter, without continuing to court the positive approbation of the former, should have continued to exercise towards their persons and office that respect which is their just due, and have brought before them their cases for judgment. On this plan the Society would not so easily have failed in their operations. Their mistake undoubtedly arose from a too earnest desire of obtaining the magistrates' positive approbation and co-operation. Could these have been procured, a desirable end would undoubtedly have been obtained; but as they could not, the path of the Society ought, in my opinion, to have been according to the direc-

tion pointed out in his Majesty's proclamation. From this statement of facts, you will see that your pretty anecdote from the arch infidel Voltaire is quite *out of place*:—indeed, *on your own conclusions*, it is altogether irrelevant. For what analogy is there between the French people judging that the Pope has no right to dethrone kings, and an Englishman thinking that if a magistrate should refuse to execute the laws of the land, he might be called to account for his misconduct in a higher court than that in which he presides himself? Are you ignorant, Sir, that no man can transgress the laws of this country with impunity? Is it not a well-known excellency in the British constitution, that the most exalted individual, next to majesty itself, is amenable to the law for misdemeanors?—But enough on this subject. Let me only add, that as the solicitor to whom the Society applied to manage their business did not think it improper to exhibit the letters that passed between himself and the Society on that occasion, there can of course be no impropriety in their more extensive publication, as an appendix* to this work. The Public will then judge for itself where the truth is to be found; and I hope, Sir, that, if ever you undertake to write on the subject again, you will be careful to *state facts* and to *use arguments*.—I conclude my ob-

* See Appendix, No. 2.

servations with remarking, that though the Reading Society for the Suppression of Vice may for the present have failed in accomplishing the important and desirable objects it had in view, it will, notwithstanding this, never become contemptible. May its opposers remember and weigh an important sentence recorded in those Scriptures which never have been, and which never can be, broken:—"Them that honour me, I will honour; but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Having made a few observations on your sentiments respecting the sabbath, allow me to notice what you have asserted in relation to *Good-Friday*.—"We are all the children of opinion, and are easily led by high-sounding words. You and I remember the time when Good-Friday was considered as a day peculiarly set apart for sports and pastimes; but of late years, one of our bishops having, at the end of nearly *eighteen* centuries after the crucifixion, discovered, for the *first time*, that it ought, on the contrary, to be kept as a day of fasting and prayer, the discovery was echoed in every quarter; the holiness of the day has since been annually recommended by the public functionaries, who must be allowed to be great proficient in the knowledge of the Scriptures, and without further investigation adopted by the nation at large." Those of your readers, Sir, who are accustomed to *observe days*, will think that you have here *out-done all your out-doings*. Who

could have imagined it possible that he could have found a person from Berwick on Tweed to the Land's End, who could have mistaken *Good-Friday* for *Shrove-Tuesday*? But this is actually the case with the Stranger in Reading. Why, Sir, you are thinking of the *pancakes*, the *cock-fighting*, *cock-throwing*, and all the other carnival enjoyments and pastimes of *Shrove-Tuesday*.— You have actually transferred these *virtuous, humane, and rational* amusements from the latter to the former-mentioned day; and then raised up a bishop in the conclusion of the eighteenth century to discover, *for the first time*, that, instead of a day of pastime, *Good-Friday* ought to be observed as a day of fasting and prayer. As you sometimes seem desirous of being considered as a *good churchman*, you cannot object to two short citations from one of the standard books of our venerable establishment.

“ The Tuesday after *Quinquagesima* Sunday is generally called *Shrove-Tuesday*, a name given it from the old Saxon words *shrive*, or *shrove*, which in that language signifies to *confess*; it being a constant custom amongst the Roman-Catholics to confess their sins on that day, in order to receive the blessed sacrament, and thereby qualify themselves for a more religious observation of the holy Lent immediately ensuing. But this, in process of time, was turned into a custom of *invitations*, and taking their leave of *flesh* and other *dainties*, and

afterwards, by degrees, into *sports* and *merriments*, which still in that church make up the whole business of the *Carnival*.

Good-Friday received its name from the blessed effects of our Saviour's sufferings, which are the ground of all our joy, and from those unspeakable good things, he hath purchased for us by his death, whereby the blessed Jesus made expiation for the sins of the whole world, and by the shedding his own blood obtained eternal redemption for us.*

"The commemoration of our Saviour's sufferings hath been kept from the very first ages of Christianity, and was always observed as a day of *the strictest fasting* and *humiliation*; not that the grief and affliction they then expressed did arise from the loss they sustained, but from a sense of the guilt of the sins of the whole world, which drew upon our blessed Redeemer that painful and shameful death of the cross."*

I am, Sir, &c.

* See *Wheatly on the Common Prayer*.

LETTER IV.

SIR,

I PROCEED to offer some animadversions on the principal topics of your fifth letter, which, in the judgment of every one who has any knowledge of the subjects you have attempted to discuss, must be considered as a compound of error, ignorance, misrepresentation, falsehood, and malevolence. You may startle, Sir, at such a charge; but a simple exhibition of the truth will substantiate it.

In attempting to offer strictures on your remarks concerning the different sects and divisions of religion which have obtained in times past, and which still continue to prevail, in this town, I am at a loss to know how to begin. Your mistakes, your misrepresentations, your sophistical arguments, and your false charges, are so uncommonly numerous, that it may safely be asserted, that in many of your pages and paragraphs they abound in a quintuple proportion to your sentences. Many particulars therefore must be omitted, and others only slightly noticed.

You first speak of the sects which subsisted in

the middle of the seventeenth century; respecting which I shall have but little to remark. Sectarianism was the fault of those times. The standard of conformity in the Establishment being dispensed with, ministers of various denominations obtained the benefices and church-livings, many of which were filled by Presbyterians and Independents. Perhaps the famous Simon Ford, vicar of St. Lawrence's, was one of the two last-mentioned denominations, while the rector of Bradfield might be some *tippling, immoral, or profane* parson, whom he chose to describe as a *blasphemer*. But I merely hazard a conjecture, without consulting any documents, or making any inquiries. At all events, if the rector of Bradfield was a *blasphemer*, the vicar of St. Lawrence's was most assuredly an *enthusiast*, or he would not have believed that the Devil was as *visibly* familiar in the rector's house as any one of the family.—But, Sir, while we lament the abuses that prevailed in the church during the Protectorate, let us not suffer our prejudices to carry us beyond the boundaries of truth. The age you refer to, produced men who were eminent luminaries in the Christian church, who would have been an honour to her at any period, who being dead yet speak, and whose works will be read and admired, and continue to instruct and edify, for ages and centuries to come.—God be praised for that host of able, faithful, orthodox, and truly evangelical ministers, which he was

pleased to raise up in this country in the seventeenth century!

“Among the sectaries of the present day,” you say, “may be numbered the *Methodists, Calvinists, Baptists, Universalists, Quakers, Sandemonians, [Sandemanians,]* and a variety of scions, under various denominations, springing out of that seminary of fanaticism—Methodism.”—This list is very incorrect, and your subsequent account of the different societies extremely erroneous. It is my intention, therefore, to give you a correct account of the various denominations which exist in the town at the present period, and to point out the numerous errors into which you have fallen concerning them. I do not, however, in all respects, intend to be an apologist for the various separatists from the Establishment; but while I shall deliver my sentiments with impartiality and independence as a decided friend to the Church of England, I hope to speak of all those who dissent from it in any manner, with that candour, respect, and Christian affection, which I am confident the great majority of them merit, and which they ought to receive from every one possessing the smallest portion of benevolence, who chooses to make them the subject of his observations.

You first begin with the Methodists; but as you are unacquainted with this denomination of Christians *in toto*, I shall first give you a brief account of the Methodists *in general*, and afterwards add

a few remarks concerning the *Methodists of Reading*.

The Methodists received their origin in the year 1729, at Oxford, from Messrs. John and Charles Wesley, and a Mr. Morgan, who used to spend evenings together to read the best book that ever had existence—the Greek Testament. Shortly they were joined by a few others; and after some time they began to visit the sick in different parts of the town, and the prisoners in the castle. In the year 1735, the celebrated George Whitfield, then in his eighteenth year, united himself to them, as the pious Hervey had previously done. They now amounted to about fourteen in number, and first had their name imposed on them from the order and regularity of their lives. The exact *method* in which they disposed of each hour, occasioned a young gentleman of Christ-church to say, “Here is a new sect of *Methodists* sprung up;” alluding to a sect of ancient physicians, who were so called because they reduced the whole healing art to a few common principles, and brought it into some method and order.—In this year, the two Wesleys, with some of their associates, embarked for Georgia, in North America, in order to preach the gospel to the Indians. After they returned, Mr. Whitfield likewise went to America. Subsequent to his return to England, the Methodists began openly to disagree in respect to doctrines. Mr. Whitfield declared his full as-

sent to the sentiments of Calvin, as explained in his book of Institutes. Mr. Wesley, on the contrary, professed the doctrines of Arminius, and had printed in favour of *universal redemption*, and *perfection*; and against *election*, which Mr. Whitfield believed to be scriptural. The difference of sentiment between these two extraordinary characters caused a separation between them and their followers, which has continued to this day. It would be uninteresting to you, Sir, for me to enter into these differences of sentiment between the founders of Methodism:—if this were the proper opportunity for stating and supporting my own opinion, I should illustrate my accordance with those who believe that the doctrines embraced by Mr. Whitfield are more consonant to the Scriptures and to the Church of England, except, perhaps, on the subject of *redemption*, with a few slight shades on one of the other five points of difference.

The founders of Methodism have certainly been eventually the occasion of an extensive separation from the Established Church. Separations in the church, abstractedly considered, are undoubtedly *evils* much to be lamented. To enter into the nature, causes, effects, and cure, of the divisions which Methodism has occasioned, would be improper at present. But let me remind you of the *good effects* which have evidently resulted from it. In the estimation of those who appear to be

the most proper judges, the Methodists were certainly the primary and principal instruments in producing a revival of religion in the last century; superior to any thing that has taken place since the Reformation. Thousands, hundreds of thousands, have by them been called from the paths of ignorance and of vice to walk in the ways of peace and holiness, or, to speak in language that perhaps you will better understand, have become enlightened and useful members of society; raised as much above their former state in the scale of usefulness, intelligence, and morality, as a serious and well-informed labourer or manufacturer in the borough of Reading ranks above the degraded Hottentot of Caffraria. Through the zeal and piety of the Methodists, the dissenting congregations have undergone a considerable change for the better; they have become more evangelical, more liberal in their sentiments towards other denominations of Christians, and their mode of preaching has been greatly improved. The influence, the example, the preaching, and the writings of the Methodists, and the controversies which they have been the occasion of producing, may undoubtedly be considered among some of the principal causes of that favourable alteration in the Established Church—a strain of preaching in the clergy in general much more evangelical than that which had previously prevailed; and on the part of many of them, a com-

plete return to the plain doctrines of the Bible, the Reformation, and the national Establishment. The Christian church has seldom produced two such men as John Wesley and George Whitfield. The latter, after crossing the Atlantic Ocean thirteen times, finished his labour and his life together on the American continent; and the day of judgment alone will discover how many souls he was made the instrument of converting from sin to holiness, and from the power of Satan unto God.—You have graced your pages, Sir, with some poetry in honour of a warrior* “who has left to mankind a NAME, at the sound of which, in every succeeding age, the heart of the patriot will throb—when tyrants shall have ceased to reign, and when the world shall have awakened to truth, to victory, and to freedom.” I shall enrich mine with an eulogy by one of the most celebrated of modern poets, on the man, who, though like Paul considered while living as “the filth and offscouring of all things,” will be revered by posterity as the principal instrument in his day employed by the hand of Omnipotence in recovering a “world lying in wickedness” to that “knowledge of God which is destined to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.”

‘LEUCONOMUS † (beneath well-sounding Greek
I slur a name a poet must not speak)
Stood pilloried on Infamy’s high stage,
And bore the pelting scorn of half an age,—

* *Sir John Moore.* † From *Lucas White*, and *Nequos a Field*.

The very butt of blander, and the blot
 For ev'ry dart that Malice ever shot!
 The man that mention'd *him* at once dismiss'd
 All mercy from his lips, and sneer'd and hiss'd:
 His crimes were such as Sodom never knew,
 And Perjury stood up to swear all true;
 His aim was mischief, and his zeal pretence,
 His speech, rebellion against common sense:
 A knave, when try'd on Honesty's plain rule,—
 And when by that of Reason, a mere fool.
 The world's best comfort was, his doom was pass'd—
 Die when he might, he must be damn'd at last!

Now, Truth, perform thine office; waft aside
 The curtain drawn by Prejudice and Pride;
 Reveal (the man is dead) to wond'ring eyes
 This more than monster, in his proper guise.

He lov'd the world that hated him: the tear
 That dropp'd upon his Bible was sincere.
 Assail'd by Scandal and the tongue of Strife,
 His only answer was,—a blameless life!
 And he that forg'd, and he that threw the dart,
 Had each a brother's int'rest in his heart!

Paul's love of Christ, and steadiness unbrib'd,
 Were copy'd close in him, and well transcrib'd.
 He followed Paul,—his zeal a kindred flame,
 His apostolic charity the same!
 Like him, cross'd cheerfully tempestuous seas,
 Forsaking country, kindred, friends, and ease;
 Like him he labour'd; and, like him, content
 To bear it, suffer'd shame where'er he went.

Blush, Calumny! and write upon his tomb,
 If honest Eulogy can spare thee room,
 Thy deep repentance of thy thousand lies,
 Which, aim'd at him, have pierc'd th' offended skies;
 And say, 'Blot out my sin, confess'd, deplor'd,
 Against thine image in thy saint, O Lord!'

But to return to the Methodists. It would answer no important purpose were I to enter far into

their history and present state: I shall therefore be as brief as possible in my remaining remarks. Mr. Wesley, who exercised a most extraordinary power among his people, objected to their opening their meeting-houses during church hours, nor would he consent that the travelling preachers should administer the sacraments. The people therefore in general continued to receive these ordinances in the Establishment, of which it was certainly *his* intention that they should continue professed members. After his death, however, the founder's plan was not satisfactory to many of the preachers and people. Divisions, therefore, were taking place, when several of their respectable preachers came forward, and by their writings, which they circulated through the connexion, paved the way for a pacification; by which it was stipulated, that in every place where a three-fold majority of the class-leaders, stewards, and trustees, desired it, the people should have preaching in church hours, and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper administered to them by their own ministers. The new plan, I believe, is now generally adopted, by which alteration, about 200,000 persons have relinquished their former professed attachment to the Establishment, are entirely separated from its bosom, and are become as regular a body of dissenters as those of any other denominations.

The *Calvinistic Methodists* are not embodied

as the Arminians are ; nor are they by any means under so orderly a discipline. They consist of separate and unconnected congregations, in which respect they are independents. In some of their chapels the Liturgy of the Church of England is used. When a minister who is a conscientious dissenter from the Establishment chooses to use the Liturgy, or any part of the Liturgy, of the national church, no valid reason whatever can be assigned why he should be prohibited or censured. Wherefore should dissenters from the Church of England be blamed for retaining and using what they may consider as her excellencies? Would there not be the same reason for holding up our own church as an object of censure for retaining much that was excellent and unobjectionable in the church from which she conscientiously separated? But the practice which prevails, in some of the congregations of this denomination, of dressing up a layman, who has not the least claim to the ministerial character, in the habiliments of a clergyman, and placing him in the desk, and sometimes at the Lord's table, to perform services, in some parts of which a deacon of the church is considered unqualified to engage, is highly reprehensible. Should any one, into whose hands these Letters may fall, judge differently from me on this subject, I would ask, Where could a clergyman, where could a minister of any denomination of dissenters, be found, who would not censure such

a practice, were he disposed to speak his sentiments without reserve? The plans of some of these congregations likewise have a tendency totally to annihilate the pastoral office. Such are some of the faults of Methodism, which, with all its peculiarities, like many other things, will probably have its day, and expire. Some of the doctrines of the Arminians are, in my opinion, too defective and antisciptural, and the order and discipline of the Calvinists are too lax and deficient, to remain in the better days of the church, when religious knowledge shall be increased, and when the visible church will again return nearer to that unity in doctrine, discipline, and worship, which prevailed in the primitive ages.

There is another class of Methodists, Calvinistic in their doctrinal sentiments, which was formed and patronised by the late pious and excellent Lady Huntingdon. These use the Liturgy of the Established Church, and, in imitation of the national clergy, wear the surplice, gown, and band; but I believe their ministers are always previously ordained, and that by far the greater part of them have studied at their college.

Thus you see, Sir, (for I wish you to be better acquainted with the subjects on which you have written,) that the Methodists are divided into three grand classes. In addition to which, you know, it is common for many persons to call those Methodists, both *clergy* and *laity* of the *Church of*

England, who embrace the doctrines of the Reformation as taught in the Thirty-nine Articles, though they do not separate from the church either in doctrine or in discipline; to which it may be added, that others give the name to every one whom they judge to have a little more religion than themselves, or indeed whom they discover to be in good earnest on the subject. There is no doubt, Sir, but you include every class above mentioned in the term *Methodists*. It is evident, however, that you are equally unacquainted with the English Methodists as you are with the Greek and Roman Dramatists. This reminds me, Sir, that, through a mistake, in my first letter, I neglected to reply to one of your assertions on the subject of the Roman theatricals, which I shall therefore take the liberty to confute here. You assert that the inhabitants of Rome, more austere than the Greeks, were indebted for a great part of their morality and civilization to theatrical exhibitions. This is a gross mistake. The Romans had arrived at the zenith of their civilization, in the proper sense of the word, before plays were introduced. Livius Andronicus was the first Roman who conceived the design of making comedies and tragedies, in imitation of the Greeks; about 514 years after the building of the city. This design was afterwards improved by Plautus, and finally received its highest perfection from the pen of Terence, who died about 600 years

after the city was founded. But you say that Rome was indebted to the theatre for a great part of her morality and civilization. Do you mean that this assertion is to be understood by the rule of reverse, or are you ignorant of the history of Rome?—Rome, Sir, was a virtuous city for many centuries, and she remained so while theatres were unknown; but after plays were introduced, to whatever cause the fact is to be ascribed, her austerity, her virtue, her morality, began to decline; and her civilization to degenerate into dissipation and luxury.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER V.

SIR,

HAVING in my last letter given some brief account of the Methodists in general, I shall now proceed to take some notice of the *Methodists of Reading*, who are the most prominent objects in the animadversions of your publication.

By the Methodists of Reading, it is evident that you intend *principally*, though not *exclusively*, the congregation worshipping in the chapel in Castle-street. But whatever this congregation may now be denominated, it is a fact well known by every one who is acquainted with their history, that they received not their origin from either of the three classes of Methodists before noticed; but from ministers of the Established Church, in all respects regular, orthodox, and conscientiously attached to its discipline as well as to its doctrines.

You are not unacquainted, Sir, that there has been for a considerable time in the Established Church an increasing body of ministers denominated *Evangelical*. Whether they have assumed this distinction, or whether it has been given them by others, it is unnecessary for me to inquire. It

is an unhappy circumstance, that the sentiments and practice of any should have rendered such a distinction as this necessary; for certainly every minister *ought* to be *evangelical*. The original commission delivered to the apostles of Christ was, to preach the *gospel*, or *evangelium*. The commission given to every minister of the national church, by the bishop, at his ordination, runs in the same words; and woe be to that minister, whoever he be, who does *not* preach the gospel. If, then, Sir, you were to inquire what is the difference between *evangelical* ministers and *others*, I would bring the distinction to one single point, and answer, The former preach "redemption through the blood of Jesus, even the forgiveness of sins," which I consider to be the special reason why the *gospel* is so denominated, literally signifying *good news*, or a *good message*. And were I to be more particular, I would say, They make the prominent and fundamental doctrines of revelation, as summed up in the articles of our church, the foundation of all their preaching. These they deliver with all plainness, fidelity, and affection. They consider man, in consequence of his fall, as involved in a state of sin, misery, and ruin. Hence they insist upon the necessity of his being born again, and made a new creature, before he can enter into the kingdom of heaven. This was the essential doctrine of revelation with which our Lord began his important discourse

with Nicodemus. They shew that there is no salvation by the law, because it requires perfect obedience, without making allowance for the least defect: and therefore that every human being to whom the gospel is offered, and who does not flee for refuge to the grace which it exhibits, must remain under the curse and condemnation of the holy law for not conforming to it. They shew, moreover, that a perfect and complete salvation is bestowed on all those that believe in Jesus Christ, through his obedience unto death, as the Redeemer of a lost world. But they always exhibit *faith* rather as an *efficacious principle*, than as a *mere notion*:—a principle that works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world. Hence they insist on the necessity of sanctification, as an indispensable branch of that salvation which they preach, constantly maintaining that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” These, Sir, are the doctrines of Scripture, and of the Established Church—these are the doctrines preached by the apostles of our Lord, and by all his true ministers in every age, as well as by those who, in the present time, are usually denominated *evangelical*. But when I speak of evangelical clergymen, let it not be imagined that I consider all others as heterodox in sentiment, or immoral in practice. I have occasionally heard orthodox sermons, as well as observed excellent conduct, from clergy-

men, who do not decidedly join the ranks of the corps to which I am here alluding.

It pleased God about forty years ago to send an eminently faithful servant to one of the churches in this town—the reverend and venerable Mr. Talbot, a man whose memory is still cherished with the greatest affection by those who attended his ministry. The gospel he preached was accompanied by the sacred energy of the Holy Spirit, and hence it became the power of God to the salvation of many of his hearers. But this excellent minister soon finished his work, and was called to receive his reward. After the decease of Mr. Talbot, he was succeeded in St. Giles's church by the honourable and reverend William Bromley Cadogan, who came to the church in no small degree prejudiced against those doctrines which had been so affectionately and successfully preached by his predecessor. But Mr. Cadogan had the fear of God upon his mind, and was truly anxious to profit the people committed to his charge. He was desirous of doing the will of God; and “if any man will do his will,” said the Redeemer of the world, “he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” Never was this text more strikingly illustrated. In the space of three or four years, Mr. Cadogan preached the same doctrines with the same fidelity, zeal, earnestness, affection, and success, which had

characterized the ministry of the preceding vicar. After something more than twenty years' laborious exertions, his Master, whom he served and loved, was pleased to address him in the midst of his employment and of his usefulness—" Well done, good and faithful servant; come up hither—rest from thy labours—enter into the joy of thy Lord—thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." He obeys the call; and the large flock he was accustomed, as a provident and faithful shepherd, to lead into the pastures of evangelical doctrine, and who knew his voice and followed him, are left as sheep without a shepherd.

Allow me now, Sir, to make a few remarks on that extensive secession from the Established Church, which took place in Reading after the death of this excellent minister, by which she lost some hundreds of members, many of whom, in the judgment of the candid and unprejudiced, paid as much respect, and did as much honour, to their venerable mother, as any children she ever fostered, and who, previously to their taking this step, were reckoned among her most faithful sons.

The secession of which I am speaking ought not to be *culpably imputed* to the ministry of the two vicars of St. Giles's. It was, indeed, the *eventual* consequence of it; but the *blame* must be traced to another cause. The evangelical ministers in general are much attached to the *constitution*, as

well as to the doctrines, of the church they serve; and this was particularly the case with the reverend gentlemen of whom I am speaking. Such indeed was their attachment to the Establishment, that if while living they could have foreseen the separation of so large a body of their hearers as afterwards left the church, it would have filled them with the most pungent grief. Not that it is inferred that, in whatever degree they might have lamented such a separation, they could be supposed to have wished their congregation to have attended the walls of a church where those doctrines were not preached which they considered as essential to men's eternal felicity. If there are any ministers who believe that the "gospel is the power of God to salvation," and yet think that the ministry of the gospel may be bartered for the externals of the purest church in existence, they are influenced by a casuistry which I have hitherto been totally unable to comprehend.

But how did the congregation at St. Giles's act on the removal of their beloved pastor? They used all their influence to procure a minister of the same mind; and had they succeeded, their success would have been the means of preventing a large body of the inhabitants of Reading from quitting the pale of the national church. But alas, they failed. Their efforts for procuring a successor to the vicarage of the same sentiments with the two preceding ones being rendered abortive, they

attempted to obtain the nomination of a curate or lecturer in any one of the churches, who would preach the same doctrines which had led them out of darkness into light; but in this likewise they were foiled. In short, they were evidently considered by some as a set of misguided enthusiasts, who, having lost their deluded leaders, would soon be scattered and come to nought. Others seemed to imagine that many of them might now be led back to the sentiments they held, and to the practices they followed, when, though members externally of one of the best constituted churches, they lived without God, without Christ, and without hope, in the world. But to argue thus with men in their circumstances, would be like an attempt to persuade a blind man, who had been restored to sight by a physical operation, that he could see no more than he did before, or at least that the objects of sight were so illusively or falsely exhibited before him, that it would be much to his advantage to undergo a second operation, to reduce him to his former state. These men, Sir, could say, "Once we were blind, but now we see." Their eyes had been opened by him whose office it was to restore the blind to sight. In short, the gospel to them was not a matter of speculation: it had been made effectual to lead them to the knowledge and the love of the Redeemer. You know, Sir, their disappointment

when all their schemes were frustrated, and you are well acquainted with what followed. The chapel in Castle-street was erected, and perhaps a thousand members of the church seceded from her pale and her worship. But was their conduct reprehensible? Truly, I think not; for however attached to the Established Church, I should undoubtedly consider it my duty to quit her walls, where her fundamental doctrines, as contained in her articles, homilies, and liturgy, are not faithfully and earnestly preached from the pulpit. The Holy Spirit will sanction nothing but the *truth* with his blessing; and the *preaching of the truth* has been the grand instrument which in all ages he has made use of for the conversion of sinners and the edification of the church. Let a man who possesses the fear of God, who desires to know the truth, and to follow Christ, determine whether or not he can, *conscientiâ salva*, resign the essential doctrines of revelation for the externals of the purest church in existence. Unless an objector can assert that he ought to do this, let him not condemn those who, on some occasions, consider themselves as under the necessity of dissenting from the Establishment. Let such objectors consider the following passage from the works of a well-known learned and pious layman, who holds a high office under government, whose works delight and edify "the church of

God," and whose attachment to our constitution, in church and state, requires no testimony from any individual:—

“Much has been said of late on the subject of *schism*. But those are the worst *schismatics*, the real and most dangerous dissenters from the doctrine, and the greatest disgrace to the discipline, of the Church of England, who, while they profess to be its ministers and members, do most strenuously contradict, by evil life or heterodox principles, the fundamentals of the Christian religion, and pervert the true end and purpose for which our own, or indeed any other, Establishment was protected by secular laws. It is with a very ill grace, therefore, that ministers of this stamp complain of the increase of dissenters. For, though unity is certainly a most desirable thing, there can be no real or sincere unity without the bond of truth. This only can influence the heart into the love of God, and the life into goodness and usefulness among men. To insist therefore upon religious unity with worldly, graceless, ungodly men, is almost as strange, as an amalgamation of fire and water, or the attempt to form an indissoluble texture by a rope of sand. The true way to reduce sects and parties, is to exceed them in all zeal and duty; or as a bishop of our church once recommended to a complainant against dissenters, to ‘out-preach them, out-pray them, out-live them.’ This would

reclaim many, and prevent, under God, that much to be feared dissolution of our ecclesiastical state, which ungodly men in the church, and unprincipled men out of it, are hastening on, as fast as in them lies, and, in some instances, with a kind of wicked and malignant joy.—I say all this with the deepest concern; because I will yield to no man in zealous attachment to our constitution both of church and state.”*

Indeed, Sir, I am convinced that nine tenths of the families in this country, who are now dissenters, have become so during the last fifty years, for no other reason than the want of the unadulterated gospel in our churches. Let the ministers of the Establishment, who are inquiring into the causes of the increase of dissenters, and who are in the habit of complaining most on the subject, consider this fact. And before they cast severe and illiberal reflections on their brethren who are more zealous as well as more evangelical than themselves, let them examine the effects of their own ministry. If they have never been the instruments of leading sinners “out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God,” would it not be wise in them, before they condemn others, to inquire whether there *may* not be something essentially wrong in their own ministry?

* See a work entitled “*Choris*,” pages 117—121.

Do not imagine, Sir, that I purpose to apologize for all the plans of the congregation in Castle-street since their secession. I have no doubt but some of them are liable to serious and weighty objections; but I decline stating them here. It would undoubtedly afford the friends of the Establishment much pleasure to see the handsome and commodious chapel in Castle-street placed under episcopal jurisdiction. Let its patronage be placed in the hands of the trustees and their successors, let measures be adopted to prevent the deterioration of the vicarage of St. Mary's; let the trustees choose a minister they approve; and thus the congregation will be benefited, hundreds will be restored to the bosom of the Establishment, its friends will again be united, and that increase of dissenters, which must necessarily occur if the chapel be continued on the present plan, will be prevented. Let us look at the subject in another point of view. Let the chapel remain as a place of secession—let the gospel be excluded from all the churches—and what is the consequence? Four fifths, or perhaps nine tenths, of those inhabitants of Reading who attend *any place of worship*, will instantly become dissenters of one class or another. Your calculation then, Sir, in relation to the number of separatists, will be much more correct than it is at present.

In consequence of the rapid and constant increase of dissenters; many persons are trembling

for the fate of episcopacy. No fears however on this head torment me, as I am myself satisfied that episcopacy will remain as long as that church exists against which the gates of hell shall never prevail. Indeed so cordial a friend am I to this order of church government, that I confess myself in the number of those who would rejoice to see our bishops in this country augmented in a ten or twenty-fold proportion. The clergy of the Scotch episcopalian church are decimated for the episcopal function, and Bishop Horne thought that the most scripturally constituted church of any one that is at present in existence.

Having made these observations on the Methodists of Reading, I shall now offer a few strictures on what you have asserted concerning them.

You describe their preachers as "ignorant mechanics," and consider their preaching as *ranting*. Did you, Sir, ever attend their preaching? If not, you may be assured, without making any apology for the manner or peculiar expressions of some of the ministers who visit the chapel, that they occasionally have others who would be no disgrace to any pulpit, and *some* of whom are ranked by the general body of dissenters in the highest class of modern preachers. These are too *well known* in Reading, and in the metropolis, as well as in many other places, to have their pulpit-talents depreciated by the animadversions of a *Stranger*.

You inform your friend that "two thirds of

the inhabitants of Reading have withdrawn from the established churches." This is a very incorrect statement; and you would do well, Sir, to rectify your judgment by an *attendance* on the different places of worship. You would then find in one of our churches, on the Sabbath morning, a congregation exceeding in number that of any two dissenting places in the town; and, omitting the chapel in Castle-street, probably equal, or nearly so, to all the meeting-houses unitedly.

In speaking of the numbers that attend the chapel-worship, you have said that, "the roads on the Sunday mornings are thronged with taxed carts from the neighbouring villages, in open violation of that Sabbath which, in other respects, they affect to keep with so much sanctity."

Do you, Sir, seriously think there are ten taxed carts, which enter Reading on the Lord's-day, for the purpose of attending the nine or ten different places which are then open for public worship? It is highly probable that there are fewer than more. But you *throng the roads* with these vehicles; and say the unholy Methodists act thus in open violation of the Sabbath. Why, Sir, you are here become a more rigid *Sabbatarian*, to use the word in your own sense, than the Methodist himself. In the next page, however, you change your tone; and, as it appears by your animadversions on the Reading Society for the Suppression of Vice, you have no objection to the opening of

shops and the traffic of business, as on other days—you think there is nothing wrong in suffering droves of cattle to pass through the heart of the town on the Sabbath morning for the next day's market at Loddon Bridge—you are not displeased with the loaded wagons which are frequently passing on the public roads, in defiance of all law, human and divine—you do not complain of the many over-loaded coaches, and the thousands of persons who are profaning the Sabbath by travelling for business or pleasure!—Here, however, you probably reply to me—“ Well—but have you not understanding to discover that in the former instance they are *Methodists* who are going to public worship, and who are driving their carts for this purpose *in open violation of the Sabbath*; whereas in the latter they are all *exemplary* members of society, *adhering to the Established Church*. Cannot you discriminate?”—
 O Sir, I crave your pardon—I see, *the case is altered!*

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER VI.

SIR,

I SHALL begin this letter with the most difficult and important part of my work, that of administering reproof for your having presumptuously and awfully ridiculed some of the essential doctrines of revelation. The first which you mention, are, the *divine grace* and the *new birth*; marked in your usual *ironical* mode. But before I enter on the defence and explanation of particular passages, I shall make a few observations in general on the subject of your turning into ridicule the word of the BLESSED GOD. The Scriptures were indited by the Holy Spirit; for holy men spake as they were moved by his agency. In ridiculing the *Scriptures*, therefore, you ridicule the *Holy Spirit* who is the Author of them. Let us with seriousness open the volume of inspiration. Let us turn to the testimony it contains of one of the conversations of the Son of God. He is arguing with his opposers—with those who had attributed his wonderful and beneficent miracles to the agency of the evil spirit.—“Wherefore, I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons

of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoso speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come—he hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.”*—These tremendous declarations of our Lord have been considered as being very difficult to be understood; but they are probably less so than has been generally imagined.—The blessed Jesus, before he spake these words, had been casting out devils from some who had been possessed of these malignant spirits; and thus had he manifested his compassion towards the afflicted, exhibited a proof of his authority over devils, and afforded a demonstration of his mission from God. But the Scribes and Pharisees, instigated by malice, and blinded by prejudice, imputed his miracles to a confederacy with the Devil.—How did the compassionate Saviour of men act on this occasion? He condescended meekly to reason with them on their sin, and to warn them of their danger. He told them that all manner of blasphemies and sins might obtain forgiveness, with the exception of one only; that the blasphemy which they had *now* uttered against the *Son of man* in his present state of humiliation,

* Matth. 12. 31, 32. Mark 3. 28, 29.

might be forgiven them ; but that if they should continue to act towards the *Holy Spirit*, whom he would send after his ascension, as they had acted towards himself, they should never have forgiveness, in time or in eternity. He purposed to send the Holy Spirit to testify the truth of his mission, to enable his apostles and disciples to work miracles, to render his work, as the Redeemer, efficacious for the salvation of sinners ; and therefore if they blasphemed *Him*, and represented *Him* as an evil spirit, nothing more would be done for them, and consequently they must inevitably perish. It is the *sovereign decree of heaven*, that this sin should never be pardoned :—it is *impossible in the nature of things* that it should be so, because it is a contemptuous rejection of that salvation by which alone men can obtain forgiveness. The gracious God has provided salvation for his sinful creatures through the blood of his Son and the influences of his Spirit ; but if men despise this only method of deliverance, and account it a devilish delusion, what more can be done for them ? There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, nor any other mode of rendering that sacrifice effectual for individuals.—Do you ask, What is inferred from this comment on a text of the New Testament ? Why, Sir, it is inferred, that when men oppose religion and the sacred truths of the word of God, they come very near to a sin which the Author of Christianity and the

Judge of man has declared to be unpardonable. I would not assert that you have committed what by way of eminence is denominated "THE *sin against the Holy Ghost*," because perhaps you may have acted "in ignorance and unbelief;" but this I scruple not to aver, that if you die in the same spirit of unbelief and enmity against the Christian religion by which you were influenced when you wrote the "Stranger in Reading," futurity will convince you that it would have been better for you to have had a mill-stone tied about your neck, and to have been cast into the depth of the sea, than for you to have taken up your pen to compose the book you have published—a book which indubitably demonstrates to every believer in the New Testament, that its writer, at the period of its composition, was "in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity."—If you have not sinned the "sin unto death,"* may God grant you repentance unto life.

You have attempted to throw contempt and ridicule on the doctrine of *divine grace*. And what, Sir, is *divine grace*?—This blessed principle is that assistance and influence which the compassionate Deity bestows upon apostate man from his own free favour and sovereign mercy. By this influence, men are convinced of their sins, and led to the knowledge of the Redeemer. By this, they are restored to the service, the favour, and

* 1 John 5. 16.

the image of God—by this, they bring forth the fruits, called likewise the graces, of the Spirit; “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” By this principle they run in the way of the divine commandments, and persevere in their Christian course till they arrive at the habitations of glory.—And do you, Sir, ridicule the doctrine of *divine grace*? Unless you possess it, before you quit this mortal state, it may be said of you, as the Son of God asserted of Judas Iscariot—“It had been good for that man, if he had never been born.”—I shall reserve my observations on the *new birth* to another part, where you challenge an explanation of that scriptural phrase.—In the mean time, I subscribe myself,

Sir, your well-wisher, &c.

LETTER VII.

SIR,

IN page 138 of your book, you declare, respecting the society on which you are animadverting, (the congregation of Castle-street Chapel,) that there are some "who, having passed their youthful days in debaucheries and profligacy; are glad to find shelter in a religious society, which affords a prospect of impunity in a future state, provided they have *faith*, which they pretend is a sufficient atonement for the past, without the performance of moral duties, or the other criterions of a Christian spirit, for the time to come." —How long will you continue to vilify a body of Christians, many of whom are as exemplary for their attention to moral duties and their exercise of Christian benevolence, as any persons that can be pointed out, whether among the inhabitants of Reading, or strangers. Whatever may have been the character of some of the worshippers at the chapel in relation to "the debaucheries and profligacy of the former part of their lives," (for your assertions respecting which your readers will probably give you as much credit as they will for

many other parts of your narrative,) I inform you, Sir, that in charging them with the diabolical sentiments you have asserted they maintain, you are guilty of a most gross falsehood. Though totally unconnected with the congregation you are thus charging with things they know not of, I am sufficiently acquainted with their sentiments to avow, that out of the thousand persons you are thus wickedly *libelling*, probably not *one* can be found who holds the opinion which you have not scrupled to charge upon the whole. They maintain, Sir, that there is no other atonement for sin than that which has been made by the Son of God, to be interested in which they consider *faith* in the Saviour necessary; wherever a Saviour is proclaimed; but they strenuously assert that such a faith, when real and genuine, is necessarily connected with a life of *morality* and *holiness*. You may think me, Sir, a very unpolite opponent, to bring against you the positive and serious charges I have done; but when a man grossly defames, again and again, by the most flagrant untruths, a body of persons, many of whom rank high in the estimation of all to whom they are known for their respectability, integrity, generosity, benevolence, and piety, it would be highly improper in a Christian reprover to hesitate in making distinctions in relation to the *retort*, *courteous*, the *quip*, *modest*, the *reply*, *aburlish*, and the other shades of difference which the English theatrical bard has wittily

pointed out in the different manners of offering contradiction. With the omission of *but*s and *ifs*, I assert unequivocally that your book contains the *most gross and palpable untruths*. Nor have I any wish to be covered under an anonymous signature; and therefore as soon as the "*Stranger*" discovers himself, his "*Detector*" will no longer remain concealed. Every friend to truth, morality, and religion, must admit that you need to be *sharply reprov'd*, and *faithfully warn'd*. When I purposed, therefore, to enter the lists of controversy with you, I determin'd occasionally to use the sword of the Spirit. There is none like it; and therefore I now lay hold of it:—"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."—"All liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."

You next assert, with your usual *regard to veracity*, that they "express eagerness to receive into their body every one that offers to join them, for the purpose of swelling their annual returns."—Let me here rectify your mistake, Sir, by informing you, that the persons, with whose proceedings you seem so intimately acquainted, and whose conduct you appear to describe with so much accuracy, have been so far from making an *annual* return of their numbers, that they have never made any such return at all. For to whom should they make it? The congregations of this denomination are totally unconnected with each

other. You have presumed, Sir, to write an account of the Methodists, while you are perfectly unacquainted with your subject. You confound the Reading Methodists with the *Wesleians* or *Arminians*, of which there is no congregation, and scarcely a family, in this town. The *Wesleians* never could raise a society of any continuance in the borough of Reading: a very few individuals, therefore, who held their doctrines, are now lost among the other congregations, and have perhaps adopted different sentiments. These *Arminians*, who style *themselves* Methodists, and in fact consider themselves the *only* proper persons who ought to bear the name, undoubtedly make annual returns of their numbers, by which in this respect a more particular account can be given of them than of other denominations.

You have concluded the page on which the above strictures have been offered, with the following assertion:—"To the Methodists may be applied, with more propriety, what has been said of the Calvinists, that they profess a religion without morality, and worship a God without mercy."—Your consummate ignorance of the religious parties you are libelling, and your total inability to classify them, shall be noticed presently when we speak of the *Calvinists*. At present I remark, that the Methodists and Calvinists profess the same religion, and worship the same God. But the "father of lies" himself has never yet at-

tempted to asperse their character with a blacker charge than that which you have here imputed to them, by which you have evidently shewn whose you are, and whom you serve.—The conversations which the Saviour of the world held with the Jews are undoubtedly applicable to many characters in the present age, the Scriptures being written for general instruction. Ought not the “Stranger in Reading” to reflect on the following awful passage?—“Jesus said unto the Jews, If God were your Father, ye would love me. . . . Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there was no truth in him; when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”* It is painful to bring against you so many charges of falsehood:—why, Sir, have you written in such a way as to incur them? If you are not convinced of the error of your affirmation, that the Methodists “profess a religion without morality,” from what has already been advanced, you are now informed, that wherever there is a stated minister to attend to order and discipline, every immoral person is excluded from the Lord’s table and from their Society. To prevent them from attending public worship, is not in the power, and ought not to be in the inclination, of any Society. It is a happy circumstance, that every place of public

* John 8. 42, 44.

worship in this country is legally open to all who may choose to attend it.—To the declaration that they “worship a God without mercy,” there are some thousands of persons in Reading who, having heard their ministers preach, can offer a positive contradiction. They know that the ministers of this congregation, as well as all others who are evangelical in their sentiments, delight in exhibiting the rich and abundant *mercy* of the Deity, as displayed in the salvation of man. Many of their ministers represent the God they serve as the lovely Father of all mankind. They rejoice in displaying his character as he condescended to proclaim it himself before his servant Moses:—

“And the Lord said, I will make all my goodness to pass before thee. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in kindness* and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.”† Here all these glorious *perfections* of *Deity* are exhibited as uniting to constitute his *goodness*: and every minister who is taught of God, and who preaches his word, delights in displaying this eminent attribute of Jehovah. One of the class whom you condemn as “worshipping

* The word rendered *goodness* in this verse, signifies *exuberant kindness* or *bounty*.

† Exod. 33. 19.—34. 6, 7.

a God without mercy," lately illustrated the text just cited in the following manner:—God is *good*; and therefore he is *merciful*. But what is the *mercy* of God? It is a *display of his goodness* to those who are in *misery*. This attribute manifests his pity and tender compassion.—God is *good*; and therefore he is *gracious*. He not only shews compassion towards his sinful creatures, but likewise exercises complacency towards them. He delights to do them *good*, merely of his own favour and benevolence.—God is *good*; and therefore he is *long-suffering*:—and this is a branch of the divine goodness for which the persevering wickedness and obstinacy of man afford peculiar occasion. He is slow to anger; he delays the execution of his justice; he waits to be *gracious*; he lengthens out the offers of his mercy.—God is *good*; and therefore he is *abundant in kindness and truth*. Such is his *kindness*, that it abounds above our deserts, our expressions, and our conceptions. The springs of this bounty are always full, and the streams are always flowing. But he is abundant in *truth* as well as in kindness, and therefore he has engaged his faithfulness for the security of these blessings to the objects of his complacency.—God is *good*; and therefore he *keepeth mercy for thousands*. He has bestowed it on thousands—on millions; and he has enough for thousands—for millions more. The attribute of his mercy can never be exhausted:—it is entailed

upon thousands of generations. The mercy of Jehovah led him to make the universe, and influences him to govern it by his providence—it inclined him “so to love the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—Finally, God is *good*; and therefore he will *by no means clear the guilty*. He will not connive at the sins of men, nor forgive them without satisfaction to his justice, and vindicating the honour of his government. He will not clear the impenitently guilty at all; but, according to the denunciation of his word, will execute on them his punitive justice. Therefore as his goodness has influenced him to prepare a *glorious heaven* for all those who embrace the salvation he has manifested to mankind, so it has constrained him to make the *prison of hell*, in which to confine in chains of everlasting darkness, those obstinately rebellious and perseveringly wicked men—hypocrites, unbelievers, profane persons, blasphemers, and all other unholy characters—who must necessarily be public nuisances, and bring misery upon any society with which they may be connected.

Permit me now to ask you, Sir—Do you think that men who worship the God of the Bible, worship a *God without mercy*? Surely your pen and your heart must be at variance—your conscience, unless it be seared as with a hot iron, must condemn you! May you in time condemn yourself, lest that

merciful God of whom you have so awfully spoken should at length withhold his mercy from you. Do not forget, Sir, that he is a God of justice too, and that as such he will act towards all those who reject his mercy, offered through the Redeemer. If he enter into judgment with *you*, how can you be justified? If he should be extreme to mark what *you have done amiss*, how could you stand? —But there is mercy with him, through Christ Jesus, —May you embrace this mercy, and live for ever!

I cannot conclude these remarks, without assuring you that the Methodists and Calvinists worship a God whose “mercy is from everlasting to everlasting—higher than the heavens—and which extends over all his works.” They know that the “Stranger in Reading,” who has brought against them charges, at the very mention of which their souls revolt with horror, is not beyond the reach of the mercy of THEIR GOD; nor is there one in their number, who is what he professes to be, that would not rejoice to be convinced that the “Stranger” was a special object of that mercy which is the source of all their present joy, and the foundation of all their hopes and prospects of future happiness.

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

SIR,

IT has occasioned me some little difficulty to understand what you mean by "tempting persons to attend the evening lectures at Mr.—'s, where if they were once entered their *conviction* would soon follow, and the step from the conventicle to the meeting-house would be a matter of course." Some of your readers have supposed that you here refer to a monthly lecture delivered to young persons, at his own house, by the pious and exemplary curate of St. L—'s, previously to the period since which the more public lectures in the church have been established. They assert that there have been no other evening lectures in the town, except those at the public places of worship; which it is evident you have not here in view. It is however plain that, if this were your intention, you have involved the subject in no small degree of obscurity; which indeed is not surprising, for had you openly censured the practice of a clergyman who is so well known in Reading as the estimable person alluded to, and whose excellency of character as a Christian, and admira-

ble conduct as a minister, are too eminently conspicuous to receive any detriment from the libellous remarks of a "Stranger," you would inevitably have brought on yourself on this subject, as in a degree you have on some others, the indignation of the inhabitants in general. If you censure a clergyman for delivering lectures in his own house, you certainly blame where you ought to commend, and evidently manifest that you are one of those characters "who call evil, good; and good, evil:"—for is it not the duty of a minister of the gospel to "take heed to his ministry, to give all diligence to save himself and them that hear him, to preach the word, and to be instant in season and out of season?" A clergyman not only has liberty to teach in his *own* house; but he may likewise manifest his zeal, his piety, and his concern for the best welfare of his parishioners, by imitating the example of the apostles, and "teaching from *house to house*." Nay, he not only *may* thus act, but as he has opportunity and prospect of success, he *ought* to do so. Indeed, Sir, I can proceed further, and inform you of what perhaps you may at present be unacquainted:—A clergyman of the Established Church may deliver lectures or preach in *any place*, or at *any time*, without transgressing *any law*, civil or ecclesiastical. And in this respect he has a very great advantage, when contrasted with a dissenting minister, in relation to the law of the land; as the latter

must not only be licensed *himself*, but the *place* in which he preaches must be sanctioned in a similar manner. Every clergyman at his ordination receives a *general commission* to preach the gospel—to go out and “*seek after* Christ’s sheep that are *scattered abroad* in this wicked world, that they may be saved in Christ for ever.”* Besides this, he has an appointment to a *particular church* as a *pastor*; but this particular appointment does not *nullify* his *general commission*, nor has any law ever yet passed to restrain him from preaching the gospel *when* and *where* he has opportunity. Clergymen were never censured for what has been termed the irregular exercise of their ministry, in preaching at large, till after the rise of Methodism. It was common for many clergymen, and even bishops, to preach at St. Paul’s Cross at the time of the Reformation. It is said of *Jewell*, bishop of Salisbury, that he used sometimes to go to different parishes in his diocese with his English Testament tied to his girdle, and that being met by a person of quality near the close of his life walking on foot in the dirt, in order to go and preach to a few people, he was asked, why he should, weak as he was, expose himself thus: “Oh,” replied the good man, “it becomes a bishop to die preaching.”

After reading over the paragraph which has occasioned the preceding remarks two or three

* Ordination Service.

times, I must confess, Sir, it does not appear to me that you do refer to the lectures of the laborious curate of St. L—'s; for surely you would not call his house a conventicle, nor could you imagine that the persons who had received benefit from his ministry would relinquish it for that connected with the meeting-house. It seems more probable, therefore, that by "the evening lectures, and the conventicle" of which you speak, you allude to an excellent custom, which is not unfrequently practised in many families of Reading, of having the domestic worship performed previously to the separation of their tea-parties. It is not uncommon for some of the families in this town, who make a credible profession of the religion of Jesus of Nazareth, to have at their houses company to drink tea. The numbers on these occasions may consist of ten, fifteen, twenty, or more; and they are not unseldom persons of different religious profession; as Churchmen, Methodists, and Dissenters, feel no objection to maintain this friendly communion with each other. The conversation at these visits, (for your correspondent has sometimes had the pleasure of witnessing it,) is at times highly interesting and instructive; to which he can add, that he has never known these social meetings *Schools for Scandal*. Indeed, if this *good lady* who is so fond of the tea-table, and who would doubtless be a very agreeable companion for the "Stranger in Read-

ing," were to happen to *intrude herself* where indeed she is *never invited*, she would instantly be recognized, and informed by some of the company, that, in the school in which they were instructed, they had been taught to "speak evil of no man." As, however, it would be her aim to inculcate a very different lesson, she would soon discover that her absence would be much more agreeable than her company.

But to proceed :—before the party separates, the family worship is performed. THE BOOK to which the good people of Reading, in your estimation, are so exclusively partial, is produced; and, as there is generally a clergyman or a dissenting minister present, it is placed before him. He reads a chapter, or a smaller portion; and sometimes closes the book without observation or comment, leaving the sacred text to form its own impression, and effect the important office of increasing the faith, hope, and charity, of the worshipping circle. At other times, the minister may either briefly notice the doctrines the passage affords—offer some critical remarks on the difficulties it may contain—propose some exhortations in relation to the duties it may inculcate—or finally make some observations in regard to experimental religion, which may be suggested by the verses he has read from those Scriptures, which are "profitable for instruction in righteousness;" and thus, by speaking of the fears, the hopes, the joys, and the privileges of

the Christian, the company is edified, their love to the Bible is increased, they learn that religion in all ages has been essentially the same thing, they find increasing attachment to that Saviour to whom they owe all their hopes, and whom not having seen they love, they feel a union of spirit with those whom the Scripture denominates "The excellent of the earth," and they look forward with a delightful hope of at last joining "the general assembly and church of the first-born who are written in heaven."—"Puritanism!"—Be patient, Sir, and allow me to proceed.—When the Bible is closed, they bow their knees before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The minister "speaks in prayer"—he confesses sin—implores mercy—he petitions for grace to live a godly, righteous, and sober life—he intercedes for the heads of the family, that they may be blessed with spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, that the God of providence would bless them in their basket and their store, and prosper them in all their undertakings. Their offspring are prayed for—that the children, now like olive-branches about their table, may live to be a comfort to their parents, blessings to mankind, and ornaments to the church. The servants are not forgotten—petitions are offered that they may act as the servants of Christ. Supplications are presented for the company in general—that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. The

welfare of the town is frequently remembered—that its inhabitants may live in unity, peace, and harmony—that its magistrates may “execute justice and maintain truth”—and that its religion may constantly flourish and increase. The ministers of religion are generally mentioned, and sometimes the different orders in the Establishment are particularly noticed. Intercessions for the welfare of the nation, and for the king and royal family, are seldom forgotten. Finally, the minister thanks God for all the blessings of the present life; for the means of grace and the hope of glory, and commits the company to the divine protection for the night, and for the remainder of life.—These, Sir, are the subjects of the prayer offered up to “the Father of all mercies, and God of all grace.”—“*Enthusiasm!*”—Permit me, Sir, to go on.—These Christian friends on these occasions sometimes make it evident that they are the same sort of people that Pliny describes in his letter to Trajan, when the latter requested of him an account of the *primitive Christians*—they sing *Carmina Christo*.*—“*Fanaticism!*”—It appears, likewise, that there is a similarity in these social religionists to a people described by one of the Jewish prophets—“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance

* Verses in honour to Christ—“hymns and spiritual songs.”

was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."—" *Presumption!*" —After these religious exercises, which are generally concluded in half an hour, though they may sometimes be somewhat longer, the company again converse cheerfully for a few minutes; at nine o'clock they separate, and the heads of families "return to bless their own households."—" *Methodism! Methodism!*"—It is not difficult, Sir, to brand *good* things with *bad* names. In this company you may fancy you discover *Puritanism, Enthusiasm, Fanaticism, Presumption, Methodism!*—Your correspondent sees *Religion* habited in one of her lovely garbs, and in whatever company she may be found, he recognizes her as his benefactress and his friend, his guide and his companion through the remainder of his pilgrimage; nor is he ashamed to address her,

"Tecum vivere amem, tecum obeam libens."

By the means above alluded to, you assert that "many well-meaning persons in the higher ranks are, by degrees, induced to join the Methodists, as well as many of the poorer classes, who are easily *converted*, as it is called, by the hopes of partaking of the charities founded at these places, for such as attend their meetings." That some persons, by this domestic worship, have been con-

verted to a different kind of Christianity from that which they previously professed, whether they may have quitted the denomination to which they belonged or not, is a fact, I believe, which cannot be doubted, and which, to those who have any just ideas of the nature and consequences of what the *sacred writings* term *conversion*, will demonstrate the utility of these devotional exercises better than an hundred arguments by which they might be defended by a friend to religion, as well as in opposition to as many sophisms or sneers with which they may be attacked by a "Stranger which intermeddleth not with their joys." Whether any of the poorer classes join the Methodists for the sake of partaking of the charities founded among them, shall be left to the judgment of others. That they would profess *conversion* for such a purpose, is an obloquy which few besides the Stranger in Reading would venture to charge on them without evidence. The imputation would scarcely deserve notice except in one point of view, in which, indeed, it is of importance, and especially, Sir, to yourself. Do you not perceive that your enmity to the professors of religion has led you to retort on yourself "the lie circumstantial," if not "the lie direct?" In the preceding paragraph, you say "the Methodists profess a religion without morality;" but here you charge them with "founding charities in behalf of the

poor." Now, Sir, if founding charities in behalf of the poor be in any sense a branch of *morality*, it undoubtedly follows, as a logical consequence, that whatever they may *profess*, they do not *practise* a religion altogether *without* morality.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.

LETTER IX.

SIR,

You have asserted that the success of the modern enthusiasts is not to be attributed to the negligence of the established clergy, "as the church never possessed more learned, pious, and devout pastors, than she does in the present times, nor men who took more pains in the exercise of their ministry, or set better examples of holy living to their parishioners; so much so, that it is as difficult to point out one among their number, who has deviated from the strict path of duty he is expected to follow, as a minister of the gospel; as it is to find one among their opponents, whose conduct is wholly irreproachable."*—The friends of the church will cordially rejoice in the great number of learned, pious, and devout pastors who belong to her communion, and who take pains in the exercise of their ministry, and are examples of holy living to their parishioners. May the Governor and Head of his church constantly add to their number, and increase their graces, till

* See *Stranger*, pages 140, 141.

the whole body of the clergy are, without exception, such as you have described them! But, Sir, you have here said too much: your panegyric therefore, in relation to no small number of clergymen, will have the effect of the most severe censure. For if your book should happen to be read by a person who may know a clergyman of a different character from those you have described—*if he should recollect any one who is not pious, who is not devout, who does not take great pains in the exercise of his ministry, or who does not set an example of holy living to his parishioners, the comparison of such a clergyman with a methodist or dissenting minister would be highly injurious to his official character. For, Sir, those ministers, whom you have improperly styled the opponents of the established clergy, and whom you have most impudently libelled, by asserting that it is “difficult to find any one among them whose conduct is wholly irreproachable,” must be, in some measure, what you have described the national clergy to be. The reason is evident:—for if any one of them were an opposite character to that which you have delineated, and were to manifest a want of that piety and devotion, that diligence and holiness, which you have noticed, and which are undoubtedly essential qualifications for every minister of the gospel—but more especially if he were a tippler, a sportsman, or a card-player—a frequenter of the tavern, the play-*

house, or the assembly-room—what would be the consequence? Why, Sir, neither Methodists nor Dissenters would receive such a man as this as their pastor, nor would he be suffered, were his character known, to enter any of their pulpits as an occasional preacher.

Your next charge is, that “the rude and unlettered teachers” of the Reading Methodists “are all *Anthropomorphites*.”—This is such a *hard, break-tooth*, word, that it cannot, without some difficulty, be pronounced; and I find it is necessary to have some knowledge of the Greek language in order to understand it. But as a large proportion of your readers are of course unacquainted with that tongue, and as those to whom it may be familiar may know nothing of the sect to which the word refers, I shall take the liberty of giving some short account of it.—The *Anthropomorphites* were a sect of the tenth century, so denominated from *ανθρωπος*—*man*, and *μορφη*—*shape*. In the district of Vincenza, a considerable number, not only of the illiterate vulgar, but also of the sacerdotal order, fell into the notion that the Deity was clothed with a human form, and seated like an earthly monarch upon a throne of gold; and that his angelic ministers were men arrayed in white garments, and furnished with wings to render them more expeditious in executing their sovereign’s orders. They take every thing spoken of God in scripture in a literal sense, particularly

that passage in Genesis, in which it is said that *God made man after his own image.**—You have said that the teachers of the Methodists are *all Anthropomorphites*. There are many hundred persons of veracity in Reading, who can inform you that no minister holding these sentiments has ever preached in the chapel in Castle-street; to which may be added, that probably there is not an individual belonging to any religious society in the town of Reading who is an Anthropomorphite. The occasion of this charge, Sir, it is not at all difficult to discover. It arises from your enmity to that doctrine which is the pillar and the ground of the truth—the great mystery of godliness—salvation through IMMANUEL, GOD MANIFEST IN THE FLESH. Because the ministers of the gospel preach that important and essential doctrine of revelation, the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ, you endeavour to represent them all as Anthropomorphites.—“O full of all subtlety and mischief, thou child of the Devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?”†

I close my strictures on your observations on the Methodists, with a remark on the concluding clause of the sentence in which you have described their preaching. They assert, “that all the chil-

* See Hannah Adams's View of Religions.

† Acts 13. 10.

dren of Adam are destined to *eternal misery*, unless they are regenerated; and become members of *their church*." The former part of this quotation is as plain a truth as any revealed in the word of God; for the faithful and true Witness has declared with his own mouth, that "except a man" (*τὸς—one, every one* of the human race) "be born again, he cannot see nor enter into the kingdom of God." This is one of the reasons why we baptize infants. Our practice in this respect is founded on a conviction from the express decision of the word of God, that they must possess that spiritual regeneration of which baptism is an outward sign, before they can be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. Do not, however, Sir, misunderstand me. I do not mean to assert that every person who has been baptized possesses the thing signified by baptism. On the other hand, far be it from me to affirm that every one who is unbaptized is necessarily destitute of that essential prerequisite for an entrance into heaven, and for the enjoyment of its glories—regeneration. I do not absolutely connect *salvation* with baptism; but it is undoubtedly connected in the Scriptures of truth with that which baptism represents—the *new birth*. The latter part of the sentence, in which you declare that the Methodists represent the Deity as consigning to eternal misery all persons who do not "become members of *their church*," is one of those many falsehoods which you have been assisted in

fabricating by him, "who from the beginning was a liar and a murderer."

May that Jesus, whom, like Saul the persecutor, you have wounded in his members, and "who is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and forgiveness of sins," bestow on you these invaluable mercies, without the possession of which, you will be a stranger to peace here, and to felicity hereafter.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER X.

SIR,

AFTER the *glorious* victory which you flatter yourself to have gained over the army of scarecrows, which you have taken no inconsiderable pains to make, in order to personify two thirds* of the inhabitants of Reading, you proceed to notice what you call the religious establishment of Calvinists; and here, Sir, you have again manifested that you are a complete *ignoramus* in relation to the different sects of religion that obtain in the town which you have made the object of your libellous animadversions. You are as much mistaken in your remarks on the Calvinists, as you are when you imply that two thirds of the inhabitants of Reading are of a religious denomination which does not exist in the town: for certainly you do imply this, by asserting that two thirds are *Methodists*—that they are *not Calvinists*—and that they make *annual returns* of their numbers. Now, Sir, all Methodists who are *not Calvinists* are *Arminians*—all Methodists likewise who make *annual returns* of their numbers are

* See Stranger, page 132.

Arminians. It follows therefore, on your premises, as an uncontroverted conclusion, that two thirds of the inhabitants of Reading are *Arminian Methodists*. But what is the fact? Not a family of this denomination is to be found in the borough!!

You make the Calvinists a particular sect, composed of Presbyterians and Independents. But as you are so totally unacquainted with your subject, allow me, Sir, to offer you some little information in relation to it. The name of *Calvinists* was originally given to those who embraced not merely the doctrine, but the church government and discipline established at Geneva by the learned, eloquent, pious, and venerable John Calvin, in order to distinguish them from the *Lutherans*. The two celebrated reformers, Luther and Calvin, differed in relation to church government, and in respect to the sacrament of the Lord's supper; the former maintaining the *real presence* of Christ in the elements of that ordinance, while the latter considered them merely as *signs*; but as to the five points of dispute between the Calvinists and the Arminians or Remonstrants, Luther was no less a Calvinist than Calvin himself, as may be seen by his valuable and learned comment on the epistle to the Galatians. Since the Synod of Dort, the term *Calvinists* has been chiefly applied to those who embrace his leading views of the gospel, to distinguish them from the Arminians. In the former and original sense of the term, there are now

very few Calvinists in England, the Presbyterian congregations, which are properly Calvinistic, being nearly annihilated. But though nearly extinct in England, Calvinism is the established religion of Scotland, where it was first introduced in the year 1561, by John Knox, a disciple of Calvin, and where it has remained ever since, except during the period when episcopacy was re-established, and which continued from the Restoration to the Revolution—a space of twenty-eight years. In the latter sense in which I have used the term *Calvinists*, and which is now its common acceptation, it may undoubtedly be applied to a large majority of those persons in this country who make a credible profession of religion. Indeed, with the exception of professed Arminians, Arians, Socinians, Quakers, hyper-calvinistic Antinomians, and a few other sects, the numbers of which are not extensive, the remainder of religious professors are Calvinists, with some few shades of difference. It may, however, be remarked, that many persons who in the main accord in sentiment with the Institutes of Calvin, do not like to be called after his name; because they consider the doctrines he taught not peculiar to himself, but in the general consonant with the Scriptures; and with the professed creeds of almost all Protestant churches. Their objection is undoubtedly on some accounts reasonable; but a moment's consideration must convince them that,

in treating on the doctrinal views of the different sects into which the Christian church is at present divided, it is impossible to avoid the terms in general use without constant difficulty and circumlocution. The terms *Calvinist, Arminian, &c.* I use, therefore, from necessity; and after this explanation, I trust none will be offended with them.

Let us now, Sir, return to Reading. In the first sense in which the word *Calvinists* has been explained, and which is that adopted by you, there are *no Calvinists in the town*:—in the latter, the religionists of every denomination are generally so, with the exception of a few Quakers, Sandemanians, Antinomians, and Universalists. But never was I in a place in which any profession of religion was made, in the sense in which that phrase is now generally understood, where the points in dispute between the Calvinists and Arminians were less known, or less attended to, controversially, than at Reading. According to the best of my recollection, I never yet heard the subjects of difference professedly entered into in any pulpit, either in the Establishment or among the Dissenters; nor have I been a witness of their being introduced as topics of conversation. It has been much the fashion, of late years, to dress up and exhibit *Calvinism* as a *bug-bear*. If, therefore, some of the good people of Reading were to be told they were Cal-

vinists, they would be fearfully alarmed, and probably not a few of them would be as much terrified as if they were to be accused of some heinous crime. Indeed, Sir, how should it be otherwise, if, not being acquainted with the doctrines of the Calvinists, they should happen to believe that to be true, which you say has been asserted of them—that *they worship a God without mercy, and profess a religion without morality*. But, happily for them, they understand the doctrines rather experimentally than controversially, having but little knowledge of the disputes and arguments that subsist between the Calvinists and Arminians in reference to them. Allow me, Sir, to explain the manner in which many of the religious professors in Reading would understand the five points of debate to which I allude.

In relation to *Election*, they would cordially believe this doctrine, because it is clearly revealed in the word of God. They would know their own interest in it, in the same way as the apostle Paul knew the election of the Thessalonians, because “the gospel had come to them not in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”* They would receive comfort from it, because, as it is expressed in that article of our Established Church which treats of this doctrine, it would tend “greatly to establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be en-

* 1 Thess. 1. 4, 5.

joyed through Christ, and likewise fervently to kindle their love towards God."*

In regard to the important doctrine of *Redemption*, they would admit that the death of Christ was a sufficient satisfaction and atonement for the sins of the whole world; but that, if any, to whom this plan of redemption should be proposed, should reject this satisfaction and atonement, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."† They would infer their own special interest in redemption, from their having been brought to a cordial reliance on the Redeemer's sacrifice, in connexion with his gracious promise, that he will cast out none who come unto him;‡ and by the effect which his grace had produced on their minds, they would conclude that he had "given himself for them, to redeem them from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."§

As to the doctrine of the *total depravity of man*, they would unequivocally acknowledge its truth, because they know by their own heart-felt

* See the Seventeenth of the "Articles agreed upon by the Archbishops and Bishops of both Provinces, and the whole Clergy, in the Convocation holden at London in the year 1562, for avoiding diversities of opinions, and for the stablishing of consent, touching true Religion.

† Heb. 10. 27, 28.

‡ See John 6. 37.

§ Titus 2. 14

experience, as well as by the express declarations of the word of God, that they were born in sin and shapen in iniquity. For the same reasons would they most readily confess that the human "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and that its imaginations are only evil, and that continually."* With the apostle they would lament that in them (that is, in their flesh) there dwelleth no good thing; † and if they had been raised from that spiritual death which is the state of all men by nature, to that newness of life of which they must be made partakers before they can be subjects of the kingdom of glory in a future world, or that of grace in the present, they would cordially admit that this unutterably important change had been effected by a divine power:—"Us hath he quickened, who were *dead in trespasses and sins*: wherein in time past we walked according to the course of this world among whom we all had our conversation in times past, in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were *by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*"

In respect to *effectual calling*, they would give their cordial assent to this doctrine, because they would experimentally know the difference of their present state compared with their former condition, when they lived in sin and the world; and they would instantly grant that for this change they

* Jer. 17. 9. Gen. 6. 5.

† Rom. 7. 18.

were indebted to the agency of the Holy Spirit, who, convincing them of their sins, enlightening their minds, and renewing their wills, persuaded and enabled them to receive and rely on Jesus Christ as offered to them in the gospel. None could ever persuade them that it was not he "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, who had shined into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*

In reference to the *final perseverance* of true Christians, they would believe this to be one of the doctrines of the revealed will of Deity, because the apostle Paul, writing under the influences of the Holy Spirit, expressed his confident assurance that "he who had begun a good work" in the hearts of believers, "would perform or complete it until the day of Jesus Christ"†—because the water which the Son of God gives his people will be "in them as a well of water springing up unto everlasting life"‡—because the good Shepherd "gives unto his sheep eternal life," and engages that they shall never perish, and that "none shall pluck them out of his hands"§—because "he is able to keep them from falling, and to present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy"||—and finally, because the principle which he implants in the souls of those

* 2 Cor. 4. 6.

† Phil. 1. 6.

‡ John 4. 14.

§ John 10. 28.

|| Jude 24.

who are born of the Spirit, is called by the sacred writers an *incorruptible seed*,* which *abideth* and *remaineth*.† Hence, in the view of difficulties which would otherwise appear insuperable, they are encouraged to proceed in their Christian pilgrimage, and to maintain their warfare against sin, the world, and the Devil, in the confident expectation that he who has promised, will also perform, that in all things they shall be made more than conquerors through him that loved them, and that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus their Lord.‡

The above remarks, I think, Sir, coincide with the views, the desires, and the practice, of many of the professors of religion in Reading, on what is called the five points of dispute between the Calvinists and the Arminians; and as far as this is the case, I am fully persuaded that their sentiments are *scriptural*, and in *perfect accordance* with the doctrines of the *Established Church*, admitting her Liturgy, Articles, and Homilies, to be the standard. How far they coincide with, or exhibit any shades of difference from, the doctrines illustrated and defended by the pious and learned Calvin, I leave those to determine who are acquainted with his works. But, Sir, if any

* 1 Pet. i. 23.

† 1 John 3. 9.

‡ Rom. 8. 37—39.

minister were to visit Reading, and attempt to oppose or fritter away the substance of these doctrines, many of the simple and unlettered Christians who had never heard or read any thing controversially on the subject, as well as others of a different class, would instantly exclaim—"Alas! this is *another* gospel—these are not the doctrines which we have learned from our Bible—these are not the sentiments which we have received as the food of our souls from the ministry of Talbot, Cadogan, Romaine, Newton, and a multitude of other ministers, both churchmen and dissenters!"—But I fear, Sir, I shall weary you on this subject, and therefore I quit it.

You have made another mistake in relation to the congregation of Broad-street Meeting. You affirm they are a society of Presbyterians, joined by a few families of Independents, who were unable to support a minister. What a *very fit* person are you, Sir, to write the history of the Reading Dissenters! The *very contrary* to what you have here asserted, is the fact. They are a congregation of Independents joined by a few Presbyterians, of which last denomination there is now in this town neither a society nor a family.

It is rather a singular circumstance, that of this congregation and their minister you have spoken in terms of commendation; though I think it will be accounted for without difficulty by those who read and understand your book. But allow me,

Sir, to review your praise. It must undoubtedly be gratifying and honourable to an individual or to a society, *laudari a laudato viro*; but it happens to be an unfortunate circumstance for the objects of your panegyric, that, in relation to religious subjects, and to the character of the professors of religion, the inhabitants of Reading will undoubtedly consider your *commendation* as *censure*, and your *censure* as *commendation*. It must appear evident to your readers, I think, that your hatred to religious characters rises in proportion to the degree to which their conduct is influenced by their principles; if, therefore, they should judge of your declarations by an *inverse ratio*, the Broad-street congregation will have no reason to be elated by *your* speaking well of them.

This congregation, say you, is "composed mostly of ancient families, who have been educated in the tenets of their forefathers, to which they tenaciously conform." It appears then, Sir, that you consider it an honour to a religious society, to continue in the profession of their forefathers; and, as you have elsewhere explained yourself, that "it is right" that a Papist should continue a Papist, as well as that Mahomedans and Pagans should remain *in statu quo*, because no advantage can result from their becoming Christians.* The Independents, Sir, will not feel obliged to you for this part of your panegyric. On your principles,

* See Stranger, pages 153 and 157.

they ought to have been churchmen, for their forefathers were so before they became Independents. Ought they not rather to have been Catholics?—For they were so before they became members of the Protestant Church of England. Nay, on recollection, I must correct myself once more. Ought they to have been Christians of any denomination? By no means! Surely they should have continued heathen Druidists, as their forefathers were previous to the introduction of Christianity into Britain.

You next assert, that this congregation is “under the guidance of a regular-bred clergyman, who is an honour to his profession.”—It is well known, Sir, that the excellent and valuable minister of Broad-street Meeting is an honour to his profession. In thus saying, therefore, *you have spoken the truth*; but this is the first time I ever heard he was a *regular-bred clergyman*. What sentiments will your readers, who are unacquainted with facts, form from the above representation? They will undoubtedly imagine that the Rev. Mr. D. has *graduated at Oxford or Cambridge*; that he has been *episcopally ordained*, and has subsequently *seceded from the Establishment* to become a *Presbyterian pastor*; whereas it is well known that this excellent minister has changed neither his sentiments nor his profession. Allow me, Sir, to inform you that Mr. D. finished his studies at an *Independent Academy*, that he was

ordained to an *Independent Congregation*, and that he remains to this day the pastor of an *Independent Church*.—I have not the least objection, Sir, to denominate a minister who is not of the Establishment, a *dissenting clergyman*: but I believe many of them do not like the word as appropriated exclusively to ministers,* and others, who do not object to its use, wish it to remain as the mark of distinction (as some such mark must exist) between those ministers who conform to the national church and those who dissent from it. But, Sir, if we should admit the propriety of the term in the instance under consideration, a most important consequence will necessarily follow, which must occasion a considerable alteration in the phraseology of the second edition of your Letters. Alas! alas! the “rude, unlettered, *anthropomorphitical* teachers” of the chapel congregation, must be converted into “regular-bred clergymen who are an honour to their profession;” for, Sir, probably nine tenths of the ministers who preach in the chapel have had the advantage of studying in the dissenting academies, the majority of them are pastors of churches, and not a few among them are well known by thousands of living characters to be as great an honour to their

* The English word *clergy* is from the Greek κληρος, signifying a lot, *inheritance*, or *heritage*. It was applied to Christian ministers, on the hypothesis that they were principally intended by the term as occurring in 1 Pet. 5. 3.

profession as the highly-respected minister of Broad-street Meeting.

Respecting this congregation you assert, that they are "less eager to disturb the peace of their neighbours, by the desire of making proselytes to their opinions, than those, who, having adopted new systems of belief, are induced to propagate them as a sanction for their own versatile conduct."—Ah, Sir, the Independents merit much more of *your censure* than you have judged it proper to bestow on them. They are not sunk into that state of apathy, lukewarmness, and indifference, which you seem to imagine. Whether they are zealous in making proselytes or not, I take not upon me to determine. But thus much I know,—that their minister is an occasional village-preacher—that the congregation are zealous in procuring the gospel to be preached in as many places as they possibly can, where, *in their views*, it is *not* preached in the pulpits of the Establishment—and that, in conjunction with other Dissenters, in the course of a few years past, they have actually built several meeting-houses within ten miles of Reading.—It is not correct to assert, that in circumstances of this kind this congregation of Dissenters has connected itself with the Methodists, the fact being exactly *vice versa*. The plans of the Dissenters, in relation to village-preaching and the diffusion of religious knowledge, were formed previously to the secession of

the Methodists, after which event the latter joined the former on all those subjects with which they could unite with them in relation to their common Christianity.

You conclude the paragraph I have been noticing, with an assertion too contemptible to be noticed, were it not that you have assumed the prerogative of Deity in presuming to judge the human heart. You affirm, that the Methodists, after *making use of the Dissenters to swell their annual returns*, “cherish the intention of shaking them off, whenever they shall (as they fondly hope) supersede the Established Clergy.”—“Who art thou, O man, that judgest another?—Judge not, that you be not judged; for with the same measure that you mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

After you have finished your panegyric on the Independents, the *Baptists* are made the objects of your strictures; but you have misrepresented and vilified them. Notwithstanding, however, the abusive manner in which you have treated this denomination, you think their practice in regard to baptism more consonant to the Scriptures than that adopted by other churches. Before I animadvert, therefore, on your misrepresentation of this class of separatists from the Establishment, I shall briefly shew wherein they differ from other societies of Christians on that subject from which they have assumed their name.

The Baptists, who are a very numerous, respectable, and increasing body of Dissenters in this country, maintain that the ordinance of baptism is to be administered only to adults who personally profess repentance for sin, and faith in Jesus Christ for its remission. Other denominations agree with them as far as they go; but they proceed farther. They argue that the ordinance is to be administered not only to believing adults, but likewise to the infants of such as profess faith in Christ. It would probably be as uninteresting to you, Sir, as improper for me, to enter here at large into the arguments relative to the subjects and mode of baptism. I think, however, that those who practise infant-baptism have a powerful argument in their favour, from a plain, incontrovertible, fact. Let the accounts of a Baptist missionary be read in comparison with those of another missionary who baptizes infants as well as adults, and, in my opinion, the facts stated will produce an argument that will greatly preponderate in favour of the sentiments of the latter. Allow me, Sir, to illustrate my meaning by example. In perusing the journal of David Brainerd, the laborious and successful missionary among the American Indians, I find him frequently recording the circumstance of his baptizing the believing Indians and their children. This reminds me that St. Paul baptized "Stephanas and his household"*—that when the

* 1 Cor. 1. 16.

Lord opened Lydia's heart, "she was baptized and her household"*—that the jailor of Philippi, as soon as he believed, "was baptized; he and *all his*, straightway."† But when I examine the interesting accounts of the devoted and excellent Baptist missionaries in India, I read of their baptizing *individuals* only; nor do I ever expect to see in any Baptist journal, a sentence similar to the above scriptural citations, in reference to the baptism of a believer and his *family*, or *household*.

The Baptists always administer the ordinance which has been universally considered as an initiation into the Christian church, and from which their denomination is designated, by *immersion*. Their opponents, in general, do not object to this, as if it were on all occasions an *improper mode*; but they maintain that there are equal arguments at least for sprinkling or pouring water on the subject to be baptized, and that there is no passage in the New Testament which *demonstrates* that any person ever received the ordinance by dipping. They consider, therefore, that it will for ever remain an undecided point whether baptism was originally administered by *immersion*, *affusion*, or *sprinkling*—whether *one* of these modes excluded the other *two*; and, if so, *which* of them—or whether all three, were used *indifferently*.

* Acts, 16, 15.

† Ibid, 16, 33.

It is evident to every one who understands the controversy between the Baptists and their opponents, that the latter admit all that the former maintain *positively* in relation to the ordinance which is the occasion of their difference; but as they do not coincide with them in their *negative* arguments, they view the institution with greater latitude both in regard to its subjects and its mode, by baptizing infants as well as adults, and by considering the manner of the application of the water as free, variable, and undefined in the word of God.

As the Baptists consider no persons to have been baptized except those adults who have been immersed on the profession of their own faith, they re-baptize, according to the opinion of their opponents, many persons before they admit them into their churches as members of their communion. Hence they were originally called *Anabaptists*, or *Re-baptizers*; but as they disclaim the sentiment of *anabaptism*, on the principle of considering the former baptism as a *nullity*, the term is now in general discontinued, and they are denominated by that which they have assumed themselves, *Baptists*; or by that which designates their opposition to infant-baptism—*Antipædobaptists*. The former term is discriminating according to their own views; but not according to ours, as we do not consider that they have the least claim to it in distinction from ourselves.

The Baptists who hold strict communion, will not admit any person, however eminent in his profession as a Christian for his faith and holiness, to hold fellowship with them at the Lord's supper, except he have been baptized according to their views. They will admit a *Christian minister*, if he be orthodox in his sentiments, and pious in his life, into their pulpits, sit at his feet, and receive his instructions. But if after the sermon the Lord's supper were to be administered, and the preacher were to desire to commemorate with them the sufferings and death of that Saviour whom he had been setting forth as crucified before them; though they had been previously looking up to him as a Christian pastor, and receiving his message as if he had been an angel from heaven, they would now reply in language to this purport—“Sir, we are sorry that we must look on you as *unbaptized*, and that you have never yet been *initiated* into the *visible church* of Christ, and therefore we cannot admit you to a fellowship with us in the blessings exhibited by the body and blood of the Son of God!!” Thus their principles would lead them to consider a *Christian pastor* of any other denomination as much unqualified to unite with them in the highest act of Christian worship, as if he were “a *heathen man* or a *publican*.”—Some persons judge this conduct of some of the Baptists to savour of bigotry, while others think it the necessary effect of their princi-

ple in holding all others to be unbaptized except themselves.

But not such is the practice of all the Baptist societies. Many of them now admit into their churches members of communion without re-baptism, on the principle that such members believe themselves to have been already scripturally baptized. Such conduct is candid—it is catholic—it is charitable—it exhibits, in my opinion, something of the same mind and temper that were in Christ.

Thus much, Sir, I have said of the Baptists, because *you* have asserted that their practice is more consonant to the Scriptures than ours. But notwithstanding my difference of sentiment with them on one of the positive ordinances of our common religion, I can cordially give them the right hand of fellowship; and I am fully confident that many of those with whom I esteem it an honour and happiness to be acquainted, deserve to be enumerated among the truly excellent of the earth.—In what remains I shall rectify the mistakes you have made respecting this denomination of Dissenters, and confute the calumnies which you have cast on them.

You have, Sir, either through ignorance or misrepresentation, declared that the Baptists have no regular seminary for the instruction of their ministers. In refutation of this error, I take the liberty to inform you that they have several of well-known respectability.

They have a flourishing academy at Bristol, under the patronage of the *Bristol Education Society*, at the head of which is the Rev. Dr. Ryland, with two assistant tutors. This institution was established above a century ago. At a public meeting of the Society last year, the president reported that nineteen students of divinity had pursued their studies in the academy since the last annual meeting. They are now building a very commodious house for the enlargement of the seminary.

There is also a *Baptist Education Society* established in London, for the purpose of educating young men for the ministry of the gospel, by placing them, a few at a time, according as they can be received, under the care of different ministers of their own denomination, who are considered competent for such a charge.

They have likewise an academy at Bradford in Yorkshire, in a very prosperous state, under the care of the Rev. Mr. Stedman, and chiefly supported by their *Northern Education Society*.

There is another establishment belonging to this denomination, for the classical and theological instruction of students for the ministry, at Abergavenny in Wales, of which the Rev. Mr. Thomas is tutor, and which is under the patronage of one of their societies denominated the *Welsh and English Education Society*.

They have also two exhibitions for students to

be educated at one of the universities of Scotland, given them by Dr. Ward of Gresham College.

The General Baptists likewise, who in their doctrinal sentiments are Arminians, have their separate institutions for the instruction of their students for the ministry.

You have asserted that the Baptist ministers are ill-qualified to perform the sacred duties, and have evidently implied that they are illiterate and ignorant.—Pray, Sir, are you so unacquainted with the state of religion and literature in this country, as not to know that the Baptists can enumerate many learned men, who have left behind them works which will remain for ages as monuments of their literary attainments, as well as of their piety? Did you never hear of Doctors Gale, Stennett, and Gill, or of Messrs. Ryland, Booth, and other Baptist ministers eminent for learning, that easily might, if it were necessary, be enumerated? Did you never hear of any characters among them at present, who are well known as men of literature? Have you never heard that there are at this time Baptist missionaries in India, who are translating the original Scriptures into various of the modern oriental languages? Did you never hear of some now living in England, who are men distinguished for their talents, learning, and piety? Did you never hear of the name of *Hall*—the Christian champion who has so grievously lacerated the tribe of infidels, in one

of the most celebrated sermons that the English press has produced in the course of the last century?—If this *illiterate Baptist* were to undertake to chastise the Stranger in Reading for his insolence towards the denomination to which he belongs, how would he be able to withstand his attack? Why, *Man*, in such a case you would be a mere *Tom Thumb* in the hands of a giant.—Did you never hear of *Foster*, a Baptist minister, the author of those well-known Essays which are the production of his pen?—Are you unacquainted with the name of *Fuller*, the author of “Calvinism and Socinianism compared,” and several works of celebrity? Did you never hear of *Hughes*, one of the three amiable, candid, pious, and learned secretaries of the BIBLE SOCIETY?—I have myself the pleasure of being acquainted with several of the living characters I have mentioned, and I could easily add others, all of whom are too well known to have their literary reputation or ministerial characters injured by the degrading remarks of the Stranger in Reading; and it may with confidence be added, that there *have been*, and *still remain*, among Baptist ministers, men who would have been an honour to any church that has existed from the primitive times to the present period.

You are likewise under a very great mistake respecting the manner in which the Baptist churches choose their pastors. There are but very few instances in which their societies call

one of their own members to be their teacher. Many of those whom they consider as men of ability, and whom on that account they encourage to preach, are sent to the different academies, whence they are called to supply destitute congregations. And those who do not study at any of their public seminaries, being men possessing good natural talents, sterling piety, unimpeachable moral character, an experimental knowledge of the Scriptures, and promising abilities for public speaking, are invited by other churches to preside over them.

Your observation, Sir, that this denomination of Dissenters in this town is numerous, and chiefly composed of the lower classes of people, is in the general agreeable to fact. But every candid person who is at all acquainted with the Baptists, (and surely no others ought to attempt to describe them,) will readily admit that there are those among them who class among our most respectable tradesmen, and who are not only useful and valuable members of society, but pious, exemplary, and lively Christians.

Stranger, recant the calumnies you have cast on the Methodists and the Baptists. If not, henceforth when you meet a Methodist or a Baptist, hide your face in the dust!—

I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

SIR,

IN your catalogue of religious denominations, you have mentioned a society of *Universalists*; but you have not noticed them afterwards, as you have most of the others. I shall therefore supply your deficiency. The Universalists are a sect who maintain that all mankind will be finally saved, and that the scheme of revelation has this for its ultimate end. But, Sir, they will not easily persuade many persons to embrace their sentiments, and acquiesce in their arguments, who read and form their judgments on the sacred Scriptures. These words of truth expressly declare that the punishment of the finally impenitent shall be eternal. "It is better for thee to enter into life, halt or maimed, rather than having two hands, or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire.*—Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.—These shall go away into everlasting punishment.†—If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into

* Matth. 18. 8.

† Ibid 25. 41, 46.

life, maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*—And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever. †—The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men; neither in this world, nor in the world to come." ‡—No hypotheses, however in some respects plausible, can possibly be admitted to be of any weight against these and many other positive declarations of revealed truth.—The small society in Reading of this denomination have no pastor. The last minister they had, is said to have been a Universalist and an Antinomian united; and it is farther asserted, that in his conduct such fruit as might have been expected, was produced from these corrupt principles. On the defection of the pastor, the congregation determined to have no more connexion with pastors; a few families, therefore, have since continued to meet together without a minister. The same arguments which led them to dispense with the pastoral office, would have been equally valid for a rejection of Christianity, for the man was a professed *Christian* as well as a professed *minister*. This however they have not done; and how far they hold the sentiments attributed to their last minister, I presume not to determine. But if this or any other denomination of professing Christians should be injured or mis-

* Mark 9. 46. † Rev. 14. 11. ‡ Matth. 12. 31, 32.

represented by any mistakes of mine, I shall be ready to make a public acknowledgment of my error; for, Sir, whatever *mistakes* there may be in *my* book, you may rest assured there are no *lies*.

You next proceed to speak of the *Quakers*, whom, on the whole, you have treated respectfully. By your intimation, however, that they do not enter into the speculations of modern reformers, you probably think that their sentiments are favourable to Socinianism, as it is generally imagined the author of the "Sketch of Denominations"* has taken pains to prove, and that therefore they are approaching towards Deism, which indeed is a necessary consequence. If you take the doctrines of the Friends from their own standard writers, you will certainly find that they do not in the least support Socinianism. Their sentiment, however, of exalting the inward light afforded to every man above the written word of God, with some others of their opinions, has always been considered by the orthodox as erroneous. I can cordially unite with you, Sir, in adding my tribute of approbation to the morality which marks the general conduct of this denomi-

* I take this opportunity of recommending to those who wish to see a display of the different sects of Christianity, a "View of Religions, by Hannah Adams," a work far preferable to the "Sketch," which has undoubtedly acquired a popularity greatly beyond its deserts.

nation ; but in relation to the excommunication for which you censure the Society of Friends at Reading, I am too much unacquainted with the merits of the case to offer any opinion concerning it.—I cannot conclude my remarks on the paragraph you have devoted to the Quakers, without noticing again your constant and marked hostility to orthodox sentiments. You here assert that their “virtues are more advantageous to society than the boasted refinements of modern reformers, who confine their actions to speculative opinions of virtue, that must ultimately end in a dereliction of every thing that has hitherto been considered as the criterion of a true Christian.”—This passage, Sir, is a mixture of nonsense, falsehood, and error.—The men whom you erroneously style “modern reformers” do not, according to your *accurate* reasoning, confine their *actions* to speculative *opinions* of virtue. Their opinions certainly are not merely speculative ; and so far are they from ending in a dereliction of virtue, that they are the only certain and efficacious means of producing that morality which you affect so highly to esteem, as well as that “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.” Their opinions are the doctrines of the word of God—that word in reference to which the Saviour of mankind offered up this prayer for all those who should believe on him to the end of time, “Sanctify them through thy truth : thy *word* is truth.”

After speaking of the Friends, you assert there are a great many *Jews* in Reading.—When first I read your book, I began to look around to find them, and puzzled myself for some time without being able to ascertain that an individual Jew resided in the borough. But here you will probably ask me, how I could be so excessively stupid as not to discover that you did not *literally* intend Jews, but men whose practices coincided with such as are generally attributed to the people of this nation. Why, Sir, my stupidity arose from your classing a *fictitious denomination* among those *real* ones which you were professing to describe. But having discovered my mistake, I have only two remarks to make on the paragraph. In the first place, You have for once afforded some sort of testimony for Christianity, by implying that it produces better effects than *Jewism*, though you will not admit it to be at all preferable to Mahomedism or Paganism.* Secondly, You have in this passage libelled “a great many” of the inhabitants of Reading, by charging them with a very high species of dishonesty and fraud; for which, if you should be unable to substantiate your assertions by facts, you merit the most severe reprehension. Why, Sir, “as a mad-man you have been casting about fire-brands, arrows, and death,” and then exclaiming, “Am not I in sport?”—But why do I speak of your libelling *many* of the

* See Stranger, page 156.

people of the town ; for whom, among them have you *not* libelled ? After we deduct the *two thirds* of the inhabitants who are Methodists *worshipping a God without mercy, and professing a religion without morality*—the various denominations of sectaries, “ springing out of the same seminary of *fanaticism, Methodism*”—the many *Jews* resident in the town—the dozen families of *Deists*—the persons who keep a *seraglio*—the numerous descendants of the *Thick-head* family—the higher classes of a *sordid disposition*—and the poor who *profess conversion* for the sake of sharing in public charities—where—where, I ask, Sir, can a family or any individuals be found in the borough, who are not, according to your principles, either heterodox in their religion, or immoral in their lives ?—Inhabitants of Reading ! Judge yourselves of the manner in which you have been treated by this abusive *Stranger* !

The *French Emigrants* are the next religious denomination which you mention ; and here, Sir, I cordially unite with you in my belief that in these enlightened times, and particularly in Reading, there is not much danger to be apprehended from the Catholics. In exposing some of their absurdities, particularly that of their praying to the saints, you argue like a Protestant and a logician. But if you happen occasionally to stumble upon a truth, you are immediately afterwards involved in a cloud of errors. “ Every man,” say

you, "should enjoy his own religious creed without molestation; but he ought not to disturb that of others."—On this principle, Sir, no means are to be used for the removal of error; nor must the gospel ever be preached but in the presence of those who are professors of it.—"The Church of England, contented with the power she possesses, is not, like other sects, on the watch to make converts, but leaves every one to be governed by his own conscience." If you mean by this that the Church of England has no members in her communion, who are zealous for the propagation of Christianity, you are under an egregious mistake, for the proof of which it is only necessary for me to mention the *Society for promoting Christian Knowledge*, the *Missionary Society for Africa and the East*, and the *Bible Society*; two of which at least include among their members not a few of our bishops, with a great number of the dignified and other clergy.—If you mean that the Church is not anxious to make proselytes to her own communion, you afford a proof of her liberality and candour, in preferring an attempt to make men Christians, to the aim of inclosing them within her own pale. But the order of the Establishment is particularly attended to in the two first-mentioned Societies.—Your concluding argument, that a "disposition to make proselytes should be curbed, because it tends to create divisions in private families," stands in direct opposi-

tion to the reasoning of Him who is emphatically styled "the Wisdom of God." He well knew that the religion he came to establish would necessarily produce the very effect on account of which you say it ought *not* to be propagated.—"Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."*

The two digressive paragraphs which intervene between the commencement and conclusion of your account of the French Emigrants, present such a mass of folly, ignorance, absurd reasoning, falsehood, and hostility to some of the essential truths of the New Testament, as I believe is not to be equalled in the writings of the infamous Thomas Paine. The depravity of your sentiments and the imbecility of your arguments are such as must necessarily excite the surprise as well as the indignation of every friend to Christianity, who may read these two or three pages of your book. To enter upon a full and argumentative reply to 'all your positions, would be something like an attempt at cleansing the Augean stables. I must be satisfied, therefore, with citing a few of them, with the addition of a mere remark.

"The desire of proselytism is the spirit that

* Matth. 10. 34—36.

now threatens the overthrow of the British power in India."—Christianity, Sir, never yet overthrew the civil power. She clearly teaches men to submit to it, plainly pointing out the duties of the governors and of the governed. If you are unacquainted with the subject of the introduction of Christianity into India, before you presume to offer your sentiments to the Public in relation to it, you ought to examine the able productions of the friends of Christianity, in answer to the reasonings of the Barrister and the other advocates for heathenism in the late controversy on this important topic. The futility of your arguments, (if they deserve such a name,) has been demonstrated a hundred times over.

"Bibles are distributed, to introduce a new religion not called for by the people, nor sanctioned by the Deity!!!"—In the commission to "preach the gospel to every creature," where is there any direction to wait for the call of the people to whom it is to be addressed?—"The religion of the Bible is not sanctioned by the Deity!!!" If ever a sentence of blasphemy against the God of HEAVEN was penned by a mortal, this is one. To reply to it, or to reprobate it, would be insulting to the understanding of every man who believes the Bible to be the word of God.

"The Deity would not have suffered so many of his creatures to continue so long in error, if such it be, without taking some means of enlight-

ening their minds.”—“Who art thou, O man, who repliest against God,” and arraignest him at thy bar, because he does not govern the world according to thy views!

“He would have *expressly* commissioned some other people to convert them. This he has nowhere done.”—This he *has* done, as will be proved in the subsequent paragraph.

“True it is, he has said ‘Go ye, and teach all nations, &c.’ But to whom did he give this command? To the apostles at Jerusalem; *not* to barbers, tinkers, and tailors, turned preachers, of a country not known at that time but as a horde of barbarians!”—If the Son of God meant that his commission should be intended only for the apostles, as you imply, why did he say in the concluding words of it, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world?” Observe, Sir, he did not say, I am with you always, *to death, or to eternity*; for then you might have had some plea for restricting his commission to the apostles: but his language is—“to the end of the *world*.” His commission therefore includes at least all succeeding ministers, in every age and nation, to the consummation of all things. It is a warrant to them to preach the gospel to every creature, and to teach all nations, as far as they have ability and opportunity; and consequently it includes the “barbers, tinkers, and tailors,” of this country, as well as the fishermen of Galilee,

if, by the displays of his grace and the operations of his providence, the Head of the church should call any of the former classes, as he did some of the latter, to the ministry of the gospel.

But why, Sir, do you call our forefathers a "horde of barbarians?"—What if they did live under the gloomy and ferocious despotism of the Druids? What if the land was polluted with religious murders? * What if they did, like the early inhabitants of Canaan, offer up their sons and daughters unto devils? What if cruelty and superstition did once reign in this land, where humanity and benevolence have now fixed their seat?—According to your account, the gospel has never been of any advantage to the inoffensive, harmless, natives of any heathen state, and consequently the inhabitants of Britain have not been meliorated by it. Are they better men than they were previously? Are they more honest—more humane? According to your comparison of heathenism with Christianity, we must reply, No—by no means!!—And are you then, Sir, ignorant of what the gospel can effect for the nations that profess it? Do you ask what it has actually effected for this country?—It has delivered millions of our fellow-countrymen from eternal misery, and placed them among

* See Bishop Porteus's "Beneficial Effects of Christianity on the Temporal Concerns of Mankind," where the authorities for this melancholy fact are produced.

the innumerable inhabitants of heaven. These are the glorious effects of the gospel when it is made the power of God to salvation. But perhaps *you* may have your doubts on this subject. Then, Sir, allow me to mention some other effects, to doubt of which must imply the most gross and absurd *credulity*. The gospel, Sir, has brought immense good to this and other countries, leaving the eternal salvation of men out of the question. It has overturned the system of idolatry:—it has put an end to many inhuman practices and abominable debaucheries, which idolatry countenanced:—it has produced far juster notions of the Deity:—it has fixed the tone of morals by a much higher standard than that by which it was previously measured:—it has in no small measure alleviated the horrors of war:—in a very considerable degree, it has removed savage cruelty from public diversions:—it has raised the lower ranks of society, and brought the rich and poor much nearer to each other:—it has given a consequence to the female sex, to which they are strangers in all places where Christianity is not professed:—it has multiplied public charities of various kinds:—and what shall I say more?—After a long and arduous struggle, it has at length abolished the slave-trade:—and in a thousand instances it has meliorated the condition of its professors. Nor, Sir, will its career cease.—The gospel will go on from con-

quering to conquer, till it has subdued every national evil that now stands in opposition to its benign precepts, and till that period shall arrive when "the knowledge of the glory of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."—If, Sir, you were to attempt to account for the change of circumstances which has taken place in this country by any other cause than that of Christianity, you would totally fail in your proofs. The gospel, and the gospel only, has introduced all the blessings above enumerated. The navigation of this isle, therefore, never brought home so rich a freight as when it landed the preachers of the gospel on our shores; for previously to that period, the inhabitants of Britain were undoubtedly a "horde of barbarians," as destitute of spiritual knowledge, and as much degraded by superstition and cruelty, as the inhabitants of the plains of Hindostan or the islands of the South Sea. May the Redeemer's name ever resound through our cities, towns, villages, valleys, and hills; and may Britons ever give Him glory, and declare his praise! *—As for you, Sir, seeing you are so dissatisfied with Christianity, would it not be advisable that you should choose your inheritance among the harmless, inoffensive, honest, humane, Hindoos, of whom you seem to be so highly enamoured?—

You say, The apostles "did not think themselves

* Isa. 42. 10—12.

bound by a *general* order to attempt the conversion of the inhabitants of India."—They certainly did consider themselves bound to attempt the conversion of all the world, and, probably, they themselves, or some of their cotemporaries, went into all the parts of the then known world. The apostle Paul, addressing the Colossians, remarks, that the gospel had come to them "as it was in all the world," which undoubtedly implies that it had been published throughout the Roman empire. There is indeed circumstantial evidence which renders it highly probable that some of the apostles did preach in India. Towards the end of the second century, Pantænus, a philosopher of Alexandria, is said by Eusebius to have preached in India, and to have found Christians in that country. The Christians now remaining on the coast of Malabar, or some others in the peninsula, were converted at a very early period. Ecclesiastical history reports that St. Bartholomew preached there, and that at the Council of Nice, in the year 325, a Bishop from India was among the number that composed that memorable synod.—The apostle Paul himself preached the gospel "from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum." Take up your map, Sir, and follow his track: you may trace him through Syria, Phœnicia, the provinces of Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. You will find him, moreover, visiting the cities of Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, Thessalonica; Philippi, Athens,

Corinth, and Ephesus. These are the countries, and these are the cities, which witnessed the zeal and activity of the apostle Paul in propagating the gospel—a man who, according to your account, did not consider himself bound by his commission to attempt the conversion of those who lived at a distance from him!!—

Again, you argue, “What benefit would arise to the inoffensive, harmless natives of India, by their becoming Christians? Would they be better men? No! More honest or more humane? No!”—— Well, Sir, may you connect notes of admiration with the replies to your interrogatories.—Allow me, in turn, Sir, to interrogate and reply on the same subject. What are some of the practices of the Hindoos?—Parents sacrifice their children to Gunga, the river Ganges!—They hang them up in trees and baskets to be devoured by birds of prey!—Female infants, among the Rajpoot Hindoos, are destroyed by starving!—Men and women drown themselves in the Ganges, at the places reputed holy!—They often devote themselves to death by falling under the wheels of the machine which carries their gods!—Women are burned alive with their deceased husbands!—Persons supposed to be dying are immersed in the river, in consequence of which practice many necessarily die!—They swing themselves with iron hooks!—a practice which I shall describe more particularly. The person who sub-

mits to this cruel superstition, for the purpose of making atonement for sin, has two iron flesh-hooks passed through the integuments, on each side the back-bone; and being suspended by ropes attached to these hooks, he is drawn up about forty feet into the air, and there twisted round for a considerable time. Whatever he throws down of fruit, or the like, is caught up with great avidity, and counted sacred. Sometimes the skin has given way, and the person has been dashed to pieces: to prevent which, they occasionally put cloth round the middle, for the hooks to hold by with the skin. This ceremony may be seen in almost every town once a year, and has often been witnessed by Europeans!—Another practice is that of dancing with threads, canes, or bamboos, passed through their sides. The devotee passes threads through each of his sides in six places, and these threads being thirty yards long, and fixed at each end, he dances backwards and forwards as in a rope-walk!—Another custom is that of passing spits, or other instruments of iron, through the tongue or forehead!—Others fall from a height on sharp instruments!—Some are swung over a fire!—These, and other horrid ceremonies of the *harmless, inoffensive, humane* Hindoos, are often practised—they are frequently the occasion of death, and always tend to brutalize the minds of both actors and spectators.

“The religious creed of the Gentoos,” says Dr. White, “is a system of the most barbarous idolatry: they acknowledge indeed one Supreme God, yet innumerable are the subordinate deities whom they worship, and innumerable are the vices and follies which they ascribe to them. With a blindness which has ever been found inseparable from Polytheism, they adore, as the attributes of their gods, the weaknesses and passions which deform and disgrace human nature; and their worship is in many respects not unworthy of the deities who are the objects of it. The favour of beings which have no existence but in the imagination of the superstitious enthusiast, is conciliated by senseless ceremonies and unreasonable mortifications, which strike at the root of every innocent and lawful enjoyment. What indeed shall we think of a religion which supposes the expiation of sins to consist of penances, than which fancy cannot suggest any thing more rigorous and absurd, in sitting or standing whole years in one unvaried posture, in carrying the heaviest loads or dragging the most weighty chains, in exposing the naked body to the scorching sun, and in hanging with the head downwards before the fiercest fire? But it were endless to dwell on all their superstitious rites. One most cruel and inhuman custom prevails among them, by which the wife of the Gentoo is induced to burn herself on the pile which consumes her husband; a custom if

not absolutely enjoined by her religion, yet at least so far recommended by it as to render the breach of it in some cases subject to the utmost ignominy and detestation. This practice of sacrificing living objects to the manes of the dead continuing in opposition to the prohibitory orders of the Indian government, the Marquis Wellesley lately instituted an inquiry as to the probable numbers of these religious murders, with a view to make it, at some suitable period, the ground of some restrictive law. And his inquiries have established the horrid fact, that upwards of 30,000 widows are annually burnt with their husbands, besides which, numbers of women and children are every year cast into the river as offerings to the goddess Gonza. When a woman gives birth to twins, one of the infants is generally sacrificed to this goddess, in acknowledgment for her bounty." Such, Sir, is the conduct of the Hindoos, the subjects of your panegyric for their harmlessness, honesty, and humanity!—But what would Christianity do for them? Why, Sir, it would constrain them immediately to quit all the abominable practices I have enumerated, and effectually teach them "to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live godly, righteously, and soberly, in this present world."—The following anecdote related by Mr. Swartz, or one of the Malabar missionaries, will evidence the beneficial effect of Christianity in preventing those su-

perstitious cruelties they undergo in order to atone for sin.—A certain man on the Malabar coast, had inquired of various devotees and priests how he might make atonement for his sins; and at last he was directed to drive iron spikes, sufficiently blunted, through his sandals, and on these spikes he was to place his naked feet, and walk 250 coss, that is, about 480 miles. If, through loss of blood, or weakness of body, he was obliged to halt, he might wait for healing and strength. He undertook the journey, and while he halted under a large shady tree, where the gospel was sometimes preached, one of the missionaries came, and preached in his hearing from these words, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." While he was preaching, the man rose up, threw off his torturing sandals, and cried out aloud, "This is what I want;" and from that time he became a lively witness, that the blood of Jesus Christ does cleanse from all sin indeed.

If, indeed, to make the natives of India proselytes to Christianity were nothing more than to teach "the Mussulmans to eat pork, or the disciples of Vishnou, for the gratification of their appetites, to eat every description of flesh," or even to make them such Christians as the Stranger in Reading, who, if he be not a "wolf in sheep's clothing," (a deist under the name of a Christian,) is undoubtedly, to use an

expressive solecism which occurs in the writings of the late pious Bishop Wilson, "a Christian without Christianity"—I say, if this were all that might be expected in proselyting the Mahometans or Pagans to Christianity, so far should I be from commending a missionary for travelling ten thousand miles for the purpose, that I would not myself quit one room for another, to accomplish it.—But you represent the advocates for the spread of Christianity as believing, that by "becoming Christians, these heathens will ensure their future happiness in a world to come." It is an undoubted truth, that they are fully persuaded that this will actually be the happy consequence, in relation to all those of them who shall be *justified by faith*, experience the *new birth*, and *put off the old man*. The advocates for the propagation of the gospel fully believe the epistles of St. Paul, and therefore they must possess a firm conviction that all Pagans, Jews, and Mahometans; are in a state similar to that in which the apostle described the Ephesians to be previously to their conversion. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our

flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath even as others."* In this passage the apostle evidently includes both Jews and Gentiles, and the whole body of the Christian church, as considered in themselves, before that "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved them, even when dead in sin, had quickened them together with Christ."† But he afterwards thus addresses, in particular, the converts made from among the heathen; "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called the Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."‡ They had been, in their external situation, under vastly greater disadvantages, and at a much farther distance from God and salvation, than the Jews. "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who were sometime far off, are made nigh by the blood of Jesus." And it is evident that a similar difference subsists, at this day, between professed Christians and those who have not the external means of grace and salvation.§

* Ephes. 2. 1—3. † Ver. 4, 5. ‡ Ver. 11, 12.

§ See an able and argumentative sermon on this subject, preached before the Society for Missions to Africa and the East, by the Rev. Thomas Scott.

Can you wonder, Sir, that the disciples of Jesus should attempt the conversion of the heathen, when they believe that the *civilization of the world* and the *salvation of men* in a very eminent degree keep pace with the *progress of the gospel*? Can you be surprised that Christians have ever considered it their duty to propagate their religion in unenlightened regions? Their conduct does indeed appear wonderful and surprising to you, if a judgment may be formed from that pathetic apostrophe in which you call on your "good, honest, and well-meaning countrymen," to desist from their attempts. Permit me, Sir, to follow your example in the use of this rhetorical figure. —Go on, my brethren, in your glorious career! Look up to the Author of the gospel, and to the Giver of every good and perfect gift, for success in proportion to your exertions! And confidently expect that your labours will be beneficial to yourselves, and productive of the most important blessings to the favoured objects of your benevolence!

You have asserted, in your fatrago of errors, that the scriptural phrases *justification by faith*, *the new birth*, *putting off the old man*, are inexplicable and unintelligible. Allow me, Sir, to convince you of the contrary, by a brief exposition.

Justification by faith is a doctrine clearly revealed, and frequently alluded to, in the New

Testament; we know, therefore, that it is a doctrine according to truth and godliness. Justification is an act flowing from the mercy and grace of the Deity, by which he pardons the transgressions of believers, and accepts them as though they were righteous. It will formally be pronounced upon them at the day of judgment, though they doubtless become subjects of it in the present world, as it is positively asserted respecting them, that there is no condemnation to them, and that, being justified by faith, they have peace with God through the Redeemer. From what I have asserted, you will see that justification is something more than forgiveness of sins; for in common language, to *receive* a pardon, and to be justified, are very different things. When a man is pardoned, it supposes that he has broken the law, but that the law is dispensed with, and the threatened punishment is not executed. But when he is justified, it supposes that he has a righteousness equal to the demands of the law, and therefore that he may be acquitted on the principle of justice.— Now the Scripture declares that all mankind will be summoned to the bar of God, when every individual of the human race will either be justified or condemned. Two methods of justification are spoken of in the Scripture, the first of which is by the law. God has given a law to all mankind—a law which enjoins duty and forbids transgression. There have been various dispensations and

publications of this law, which in different degrees have pointed out its extent and perfection. This law requires perfect and perpetual obedience; every duty it enjoins must be performed. It makes no allowance for defects—it gives no place for repentance. How then can any be saved? None by the law, according to the repeated declarations of Scripture. But it not only cannot save—it moreover positively condemns. Its language is, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them.”* Hence you see the reason why the law is called “the ministration of death.” It is because it delivers over to eternal death every one who transgresses it. Such are the nature and the sanction of the moral law.—But are we then to sink into despair? No, blessed be God, he has provided another method of justification. He sent his eternal and only-begotten Son into the world, to fulfil the precepts of the law which we had broken, and to endure the penalties which we had incurred; “He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;” and thus, as it is expressed by the pen of a prophet, “he brought in an everlasting righteousness.” It is through his obedience unto death, therefore, that any one of the human race can be justified at the tribunal of the divine justice. But in order to be *justified* by Christ, it

* Gal. 3. 10.

is necessary that we *believe* on him for the purpose; and this faith in the Saviour implies, that we cordially credit this method of salvation, revealed to us in Scripture, through his obedience and death—that we approve of it as the plan which God has devised—and that we actually trust in the Saviour to be saved in his way. When we thus believe, we are justified by faith; and this faith will produce the effects attributed to it in the word of God—love and obedience. This, Sir, is the way of salvation—on this foundation I build all my own hopes—here I venture my soul, with all its eternal interests.—Stranger, this plan of salvation is revealed to you in the Scriptures, and it is here briefly explained. Embrace it, and you shall be saved with everlasting salvation. Reject it—but consider the consequence—if you should, as sure as you will stand at the bar of God, you will be condemned, or the Bible is not a true book.

The new birth you have attempted to ridicule in two places in your Letters. But what is it, Sir? It is the doctrine with which the Redeemer of mankind commenced one of the most important conversations that ever was held upon this earthly globe. The new birth, Sir, is not a doctrine that we are to reject as an insignificant notion—the peculiarity of any sect or party of religionists. The thing itself is not to be considered as the attainment of a few extraordinary men; but

it is essential to the salvation of every human being. The *phrase* "to be born again" is undoubtedly *figurative*; but the *thing* it represents is *real*. As by our birth into this world we partake of human nature, so by our undergoing that change which is designated by the new birth, we are made partakers of a divine or spiritual nature, and become the subjects of a transformation, scripturally denominated a *new creation*. The whole man is renewed. Is the understanding, in relation to divine things, naturally dark? By regeneration it is illuminated. Is the will stubborn, perverse, and depraved? By regeneration it is brought into a cheerful subjection to the divine mind, as revealed in the Scriptures. Are the affections impure? By regeneration they are renovated and sanctified. In short, "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature,"* or a *new creation*, as the word also signifies. He has new views of himself—of the law—of the gospel—of God—of the Saviour—of death—of judgment—of eternity.—In fine, "Old things are passed away, and all things are become new."—But who is the *Author* of this change?—So great, so noble, and so divine, is the renovation, that none but the Spirit of God can accomplish it. Hence in the New Testament it is always ascribed to the divine power; "Except a man be born of the *Spirit*, he cannot see the kingdom of God."† "Of his own will he begat us, that we

* 2 Cor. 5. 17.

† John 3. 3.

should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures."*
 —What are the *evidences* of it? Faith in the Redeemer; love to God and man; victory over the world; and universal holiness of life.—Stranger, you have cast contempt on a doctrine, an experimental acquaintance with which is necessary to your salvation. If you live and die without becoming a subject of it, it is impossible that you can either see or enter into the kingdom of God.

The next scriptural phrase which you have made the subject of your contemptuous ridicule, is, the command of God by the apostle to *put off the old man*, or, as you have yourself expressed it, in words nearly synonymous, *the man of sin*. Let us read the whole of the beautiful passage as it is recorded by the pen of the inspired writer. "But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."—The truth as it is in Jesus, of which the apostle has been speaking, taught these Ephesians, and teaches all who are the subjects of true Christianity, that they must put off, in respect of their whole former

* James 1. 18.

conversation and behaviour, the *old man*, or that sinful nature, which they derived from fallen Adam, and which is corrupt in all its principles and affections. The outward conduct resulting from this corrupt nature must be cast off at once as a filthy garment; and the inward desires themselves must be denied, crucified, and mortified, till they are wholly abolished.—The Ephesians had also been taught according to the truth in Jesus, that they must continually be renewed more and more in the inward judgment, temper, and affections of their souls, by the power of divine graces, into the humble, spiritual, holy, and affectionate mind of Christ: that so they might put on the new man, and that their habitual conduct might be conformed to his example, and evince that they were new created after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness—the *holiness of truth*, even that holiness which springs from a real belief of the truth as it is in Jesus, consists in uprightness towards God and man, and produces genuine peace and satisfaction.—These lessons they had been taught by the apostle, and by Christ himself, if they were true Christians.—The corrupt conversation, including doubtless the *bad habits* of the heathen, is distinguished from the “old man,” or the depraved nature, whence all these evils sprang. The *root* would still remain, after the converts had “put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man;” and this

would render watchfulness and diligence needful to the end, even till "the body of sin was abolished." If the "old man" signify only *bad habits*, as some explain it, how did it come to pass that these bad habits have always been so general, not to say, universal; while good habits have been exceedingly rare? We never read of bad habits, in any degree, among holy angels; nor would they have been heard of among men, if we had not apostatized from God, and become dead in sin, and "by nature children of wrath."—The state of the unconverted Gentiles is indeed here particularly adverted to: yet it is most certain, that the nature of the unregenerate (nay, their practice also, except in respect of gross idolatry, and some of its abominable appendages) is similar, even in those who are called Christians.*

I am, Sir, &c.

* See the note on the passage in Scott's Bible.

LETTER XII.

SIR,

IN your catalogue of religious denominations existing in Reading, you have noticed the *Sandemanians*, of which I believe there is a small society who have a meeting-house in London-street; but, as in the case of the Universalists, you have not honoured them with any subsequent notice. The Sandemanians are a sect which originated in Scotland, in 1728. They were first denominated *Glassites*, from their founder, Mr. John Glass, but have since received the name by which they are now distinguished, from Robert Sandeman, who published a series of letters to Mr. Hervey, as strictures on his *Theron and Aspasio*. The Sandemanians consider *faith* as a mere *assent to the truth*, independent of any of its effects, and deny the agency of the Holy Spirit in its production. They consider an examination in relation to the fruits of belief, as tending to establish a personal righteousness upon frames, feelings, and acts of faith. The members of this sect, though strict in some points of discipline, are very lax on other subjects. They do not appear to lay much stress on the observance

of the sabbath, on which day they generally dine together in the interval between the morning and afternoon services. They allow of public and private diversions, so far as they are not connected with circumstances sinful in themselves. Mr. Sandeman, in his letters before mentioned, which is one of their standard-books, pleads in favour of theatrical amusements; and it is said that an attendance on them is very common among his followers. Whether the Reading Sandemanians act exactly on these principles I presume not to determine, being altogether unacquainted with them; on which account I add nothing to these general remarks.*

You have implied that there are several other religious societies in the borough, besides those you have specifically noticed. There are, Sir, only *two* remaining congregations, which, on the plan of your Letters, certainly ought to have been particularly noticed, as their numbers are not small. The one is a second society of Independents, who have a meeting-house in Minster-street, and profess exactly the same sentiments with the congregation in Broad-street, which you mistook for Presbyterians. This body of Dissenters was formed of a secession from the Chapel-congregation, the Baptists, and the old Independents; but principally from the first.

* See Fuller's Letters on the subject, just published.

The other congregation I allude to, are *Antinomians*. This sect derive their name from the Greek terms *anti*—*against*, and *nomos*—*law*, as being *against* the *moral law*, not merely as a means of obtaining life and salvation, which is undoubtedly the doctrine of Scripture, and the sentiment of all the orthodox; but likewise as a *rule of conduct to believers*. The Antinomians had their origin in the sixteenth century. While the champion of Protestantism, Luther, was employed in censuring and refuting the Popish doctors, who mixed the law and gospel together, and represented eternal happiness as the fruit of legal obedience, a new teacher arose, whose name was *John Agricola*, a native of Isleben, and an eminent doctor in the Lutheran church. This man appears to have been the first who publicly advanced Antinomian sentiments, which drew upon him the animadversions of the great reformer, who wrote against him with a degree of acrimony peculiar to his character when attacking his opponents, and first styled him and his followers *Antinomians*. The members of this sect disown personal and progressive sanctification—hold it inconsistent for a believer to pray for the forgiveness of sins—maintain that God is not displeased with a believer on account of his sin, nor pleased with him on account of his obedience; that he is neither the worse for the one nor the better for the other—that sin does the believer no hurt, and that righteousness does him no good—

that repentance and confession of sin are not necessary to forgiveness—with many other sentiments equally absurd and unscriptural.—Antinomianism may, however, be reduced to one point. Those persons who hold the sentiment that the *moral law is not a rule of life* for believers, are properly Antinomians, agreeably to the meaning of the word. It is, however, necessary that I should here make a distinction. It is admitted that some well-meaning persons have embraced the sentiments of Antinomianism, who are, nevertheless, far from being *immoral* in their *practice*. But notwithstanding this, the *doctrines* of Antinomianism, in my opinion, cannot be reprobated in terms too severe. For if ever any sentiments were propagated, which merit to be stigmatized as *doctrines of the Devil*, I think it is eminently the case with these. It seems scarcely necessary to add, that every person who lives in the habitual, wilful, and presumptuous transgression of the divine law, is an Antinomian in practice, though he may not hold the sentiments on which I have judged it necessary to place so decided a mark of reprobation.

Having endeavoured, Sir, to rectify your misrepresentations of the different sects into which the professors of Christianity in this town are divided, I cannot conclude these remarks without expressing my concern at the existence of some of them, nor have I any doubt but that among

the various religionists abounding in Reading, there are some who ought to be numbered among heretics and schismatics. But let me explain what I mean by heresy and schism. By the former is implied a faction under some leader, or leaders, holding doctrines different from those authorized by the New Testament. By schisms are intended unnecessary and unchristian dissensions and divisions. Far from me be the thought of imagining, with some, that conscientious separatists from the national church are either heretics or schismatics! Such a sentiment would undoubtedly manifest not only a total want of candour and Christian charity, but also the grossest ignorance of the nature and present state of the Christian church. The church, in its primitive days, was undoubtedly considerably different from what it is at present. Though consisting of separate congregations or churches, its unity as a whole was much more evident and striking than it has been for many ages past. It appears to me to have been much more properly *one* than at present; and a few shades of difference in sentiment, and much less a defect in not coming to the full standard of orthodoxy, were not considered as a cause for separation from that unity of profession which then generally prevailed. Though there might be many congregations in a city or town, the church was nevertheless but one. While, as it appears to

me, there were different pastors and teaching presbyters over the various congregations, there was one who, by way of eminence, was especially THE BISHOP, though all the pastors and presbyters were sometimes in a general way denominated *overseers* or *bishops*. When a member was excommunicated from any congregation, as in the case of the offending Corinthian, he was excluded not only from a *particular congregation*, but from the *whole church*. But the church has been long in a more divided state than it was at the period to which I am referring; though it probably will not remain thus at the period in which great grace will again rest upon all her members. It would, however, in the present age, be an evidence of the greatest arrogance, in any particular church now in existence, whether that of Rome, of England, or of Scotland—whether the Lutheran, the Calvinist churches, or any class of dissenters from them, to arrogate to themselves exclusively the title of THE CHURCH.—I have not offered these remarks to infer that the sins of heresy and schism are blotted out of the New Testament, nor have I any intention of excluding *all* the religionists of Reading from the charge.

Nearly at the conclusion of the letter which has offered so much occasion for animadversion, you speak of the *Deists*, of whom you say there are not above a dozen families in the town. You profess that “it is hardly creditable [credible]

there should be any, had we not daily instances of this melancholy *truth*." A person, Sir, of common understanding, who might dip into your book, would immediately perceive that you intend this passage as an example of your favourite *irony*, even though you had given no particular information on the subject; but fearing lest any of your readers should be so dull as not to apprehend your meaning, you have marked the words "*feeble reason*," "*truth*," and "*imputed*," in *Italics*, and closed the whole with a note of admiration; by which you evidently declare, in your style of writing, that throughout the whole passage you mean the exact contrary to what you assert. I cannot, Sir, but consider this, notwithstanding your occasional profession of respect for the Established Church, as an indication that you class yourself among the Deists; and, viewing the paragraph as the production of *your* pen, I look upon it as manifesting an enmity to Christianity equal to any thing that appears in the writings of *Voltaire*, *Shaftesbury*, or *Paine*.

In describing the religious denominations of Reading, you have professed to "give a faithful picture of the place and its inhabitants;" but your sketch, Sir, does not retain the usual resemblance preserved in a caricature. It is altogether a misrepresentation. You have described the bulk of the inhabitants as Methodists, not only destitute of common sense and of common honesty, but

professing a religion which does not include morality in its system. You have not, however, substantiated your charges, which are merely unfounded assertions, without the least appearance of evidence or of proof. But let us endeavour to bring this negative charge of the want of morality, which you lay upon the Methodists, to some determining test. And in order to avoid circumlocution, I shall use the term *Methodist*, in the sense in which I have no doubt you desire it should be used, as including all those persons who manifest *concern* on the infinitely important subject of religion.

In what respects, Sir, do the Methodists evidence their want of morality by their disregard of the Deity?—Are they more profane than others? Are they noticed for their cursing, swearing, and taking the name of God in vain?—As I occasionally walk through the streets of Reading, my ears are not unfrequently assailed with oaths, curses, or profanations of the divine names. But I always know that these offenders are *not* Methodists, because the latter profess to have the fear of God upon their minds; while the man, whether he be a king or a beggar, who will habitually curse, swear, or irreverently use the names of the glorious I AM, manifests to every witness that he neither *has*, nor *professes* to have, any *fear* or *love* of the Deity.—Do the Methodists discover their disregard of God by their profanation of *that day*

which he has set apart to be kept holy?—Nay, Sir, according to your own account, they observe it by an *excessive preciseness*, except that some of them occasionally *violate* it by driving their taxed carts to a place of worship.

Allow me likewise to ask in what respects the Methodists evidence their want of morality in relation to their fellow-creatures? Are there more adulterers, fornicators, drunkards, thieves, or covetous persons, among them, than among others who make no profession of religion?—I leave you, Sir, to answer this question according to the dictates of your own conscience. I must, however, do you the justice to say, that you have not brought any charges of this nature against them, subsequently to their professing methodism. The persons in Reading who keep a *seraglio*, and the *covetous, Jewish, tradesmen*, are specifically distinguished by you from the Methodists. In short, after the general charge, already noticed, nothing is particularly specified against them, either as a society or as individuals, except that some of them who live in the country, and who consequently are *not* included among the *inhabitants* of Reading, *drive their taxed carts* to public worship.

Suffer me again to inquire, Sir, Do the Methodists shew their want of morality by withholding their benevolence from public charities? Let the subscriptions to these be examined, and the result,

I am persuaded, will evince that they are not particularly defective in this species of beneficence. —This concluding inquiry leads me to another subject, which I hope, Sir, will be the last that I shall undertake to discuss. If the higher classes of the inhabitants of Reading be *sordid*, the tradesmen *covetous*, and the Methodists *regardless of morality*, how comes it to pass that Reading can boast of so many charitable institutions supported by voluntary contribution?—If, Stranger, you were to visit all the towns in the United Kingdom, perhaps you would find but few, if any, which, in proportion to the wealth and population of their inhabitants, exceed the borough you have so egregiously libelled on the subject on which I am now entering. Permit me, Sir, to refer to a few of those charities which are at present supported by voluntary contribution, omitting those which owe their existence and maintenance to endowments.

With pleasure I first notice the *Dispensary*, which you have attempted to vilify. A sum of three hundred pounds nearly; if a judgment may be formed from the last report, is annually subscribed and collected for this charity, for the purpose of administering advice and medicine to the poor, in addition to thirty guineas arising from subscriptions and donations, that have been funded since its commencement, which has been only a few years. Sermons are occasionally preached in all the dissenting places of worship, as well as the

churches, in behalf of this charity; and it is well known that in the congregations of the former, as well as of the latter, the collections are liberal.

Every friend of the rising generation must view with approbation the institution of the *Green School*, in Broad-street, where twenty-one girls (seven from each parish) are boarded, educated, and clothed. This excellent charity was instituted and conducted under the especial patronage of the late Dr. Sturges, vicar of St. Mary's, assisted by the honourable and reverend Mr. Cadogan, and some other clergymen and other beneficent characters of the town. It is now continued under the particular care and inspection of the liberal and learned Mr. Nares, the present incumbent of St. Mary's, with the ministers of the other churches. About a hundred and twenty pounds are annually subscribed for the support of this charity, in addition to some endowments which have been funded, and a collection arising from a sermon preached in rotation at the three different churches on St. Thomas's day, amounting in general to forty-five or fifty pounds.

There is *another school* in Friar-place, instituted and conducted by the honourable Mrs. Cadogan, where thirty-two girls are educated, and partly clothed. The expenses of this school are defrayed by voluntary subscriptions and donations amounting to sixty guineas per annum, (nearly,) and the profit of a repository for fancy-work, which is

always amply supplied by the beneficent ladies of the town.

Another school, on a plan similar to the foregoing, for educating and clothing twenty girls, has been instituted and conducted under the patronage of the ladies of the Independent congregation in Broad-street. The expenses of this school, amounting to sixty guineas annually, are met by voluntary subscriptions and donations from the congregation.

A school has lately been instituted in the borough on the plan recommended by the benevolent and ingenious *Joseph Lancaster*, for the instruction of a large number of the children of the lower classes, of both sexes. The land is purchased for the erecting of a suitable building, and an annual subscription of nearly a hundred and twenty guineas has been raised for the purpose of conducting a temporary school, till the plan of a seminary on a larger scale shall be completed.

In addition to the above-mentioned day-schools, *Sunday-schools* have been instituted at the three churches, at the chapel, and at the principal dissenting meetings; at all of which the children are not only instructed, but occasionally clothed through the munificence of Edward Simeon, Esq. I have not made particular inquiries in relation to the expenses of these different schools; but I have authority to say, that the annual collection

at the Chapel, for the Sunday-schools which attend that place of worship, has generally amounted to from thirty to sixty pounds.

But the beneficence of the inhabitants of Reading is not confined to the support of schools. *Several societies* have been formed for the purpose of exercising united benevolence to the poor in various ways.—One of these, denominated the “Sick Man’s Visitor,” instituted during the lifetime of the reverend and honourable Mr. Cadogan, and cordially patronised by him, appoints three or four of its members for the purpose of visiting the sick poor, to administer consolation to them in their affliction, and, as far as their means will admit, to assist them in their temporal necessities. This society expends seventy pounds per annum, raised by voluntary subscriptions, in this truly useful and charitable mode of exercising beneficence.

A similar society, consisting of ladies only, denominated the Penny Club, from the circumstance of the members’ subscribing weekly one penny each, has existed for a few years past. Three of the ladies are appointed every month or six weeks, as visitors of the sick poor; and the sum of seventy-five pounds was distributed last year by this benevolent society: a circumstance which exhibits a striking testimony that much good may often be accomplished by the union and proper application

of means which, when viewed separately, appear to be so inefficient as to be considered by some as almost contemptible.

The last charity of this nature I shall notice, though by no means the least in the extent of its application of temporal comfort to the necessities of the poor, is the Ladies' Society for administering to the comfort of poor women at the season of their *accouchement*. A sum of not less than a hundred and twenty pounds is now annually subscribed. Upwards of a hundred women are supplied with a loan of linen during the month of their confinement, besides a comfortable supply of apparel for their children, which they are not expected to return except in case of the infant's death. This Society was instituted in the year 1802, by the minister's wife, and some of the other ladies of the Chapel congregation. The annual subscriptions at its commencement amounted to fifty pounds, since which they have gradually augmented to the sum above mentioned, the ladies of the town in general having united to support this very useful charity. The quarterly meeting is still held at the Chapel, which is attended by many of the subscribers, as well as by the women with their infants who have received the benefit of the Society in the preceding quarter. A minister is generally present, by whom an address is offered to the women on the interesting occasion, when they receive from the treasurer of

the Society one shilling each, in addition to former benefactions.

I cannot conclude these remarks on the beneficence of the inhabitants of Reading, without noticing their exertions for the spread of that benevolent religion they profess.

A Society was formed last year as an auxiliary to the British and Foreign Bible Society, at the commencement of which nearly six hundred pounds were collected in subscriptions and benefactions: and the annual amount is expected to be very large, though of course not equal to the first collections. I offer no comments on the Bible Society, under the full persuasion that no comment can possibly do justice to its inestimable utility.

A Society has been for some years in existence, denominated the United Evangelical Itinerant Society, the members of which consist of some of the principal persons of the Chapel, Independent, and Baptist congregations, in union with some members of the dissenting congregations of Maidenhead and Henley, for the purpose of diffusing evangelical truth in the villages respectively contiguous to these towns. The Reading subscriptions to this Society exceed a hundred pounds a-year: besides which, there are subscriptions for the same purpose in other channels, amounting at least to an equal sum with the one just mentioned.

Collections are occasionally made at the different dissenting places of worship for the Missionary

Society, which generally do honour to the liberality of the respective congregations. That at the Chapel usually amounts to fifty pounds.—A sermon was some time ago preached at St. Lawrence's church for the benefit of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, which produced the sum of fifty pounds.

A Penny Society, so denominated for a reason before mentioned, has lately been formed for the purpose of aiding the London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews, the subscriptions of which have produced in this first year between thirty and forty pounds.

In addition to the many public charities already mentioned, the most liberal collections are frequently made on incidental occasions. I have not unfrequently known upwards of fifty pounds, and on some occasions more than a hundred, to be collected, in the course of a few days, among the inhabitants of this town, for the spread of religion, the promotion of a charity, or the relief of domestic or personal distress. I could also here relate some singular instances of *individual beneficence*, which would probably be equally *surprising* to you and *honourable* to the persons who have exercised it; but you must discover, Sir, that there would be an obvious impropriety in mentioning these. I cannot, however, forbear noticing, that these acts, in the principal instances to which I allude, have proceeded from persons

of that class which you assert profess a religion without morality.

I have now, Sir, completed my strictures on your Letters. What effect they may have upon your mind, I know not; but it is my earnest desire that it may be a beneficial one. I am persuaded that you cannot read the letters I have addressed to you, without being convinced that you have most egregiously libelled the inhabitants of Reading in general, but more especially those who make a credible profession of Christianity.

On reading my pages, Sir, you may at first sight imagine that I have occasionally treated you with too great severity; if, however, you reflect on the subject, there can be no doubt that your own conscience will bear testimony to the propriety of the general sentiment maintained by those who have read the Letters from the Stranger in Reading—that the writer of these Letters, whether he be a Stranger or an Inhabitant, merits the most severe reprehension. Still, I beg to assure you, Sir, that, whoever you are, I owe you no personal malevolence—I should rejoice in your welfare; and to see you under the influence of that Christian benevolence to which the readers of your book must infer you are at present a “Stranger” indeed, would afford your opponent the most cordial pleasure.—I cannot conclude without reminding you that your anonymous at-

tack on the professors of religion in Reading is a most contemptible and feeble attack on Christianity itself. But, Sir, your weapons will recoil upon yourself. Every persevering opposer to the religion of Jesus of Nazareth must sooner or later perish. "Whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." The cause of the Son of God must prosper; and "peace on earth, and good-will towards men," will follow in exact proportion to its success. May the whole earth soon be filled with his glory! Amen.

I am, Sir,

Your cordial well-wisher,

DETECTOR.

APPENDIX.

No. I.

A PHILOSOPHICAL dissertation on the comparative value of money, with the causes that have produced it, in relation to its use in procuring the necessaries of life, would be a very difficult and complicate work. Some of the principal causes of such a variation as the worth of specie has undergone, must be sought in the augmented difficulty of procuring the necessaries of life in consequence of increased population, in the heavy expenses of the state, in the real depreciation of the precious metals from the constant addition made to them, and in the artificial depreciation of the coins by the operation of paper-currency. But fully to understand the effects of these combined causes, with all the circumstances connected with them, would probably exceed the comprehension of human intellect. Perhaps the best mode of obtaining the most exact view of the comparative value of money, in relation to its general and practical uses, would be to examine

for how much a quarter of wheat might be purchased in those years which were not remarkable either for their scarcity or fertility. But it is not my intention here to offer any remarks on the value of the precious metals, or of our national currency, in comparison of what has been their worth in past ages.

The present depreciated state of our currency is a subject much more easily comprehended, though but little understood by the bulk of the people of England; but as it is a topic of great national importance, which undoubtedly ought to be understood, I shall take the liberty of offering a few thoughts on it, in connexion with the national debt, and the means of discharging that debt by a sum devoted for the purpose at compound interest.

I do not purpose to make any observations here on the depreciation of gold in comparison with other articles of necessity and commerce; but to compare *gold as a metal, with gold as the current coin of the state*; for in these two senses this highly-esteemed mineral now bears a very different value.

An ounce of gold in coin is worth 3*l.* 17*s.* 10½*d.* that is, it is actually coined into that sum; but an ounce of gold as a precious metal, is worth 4*l.* 10*s.* of our depreciated currency, and will actually yield that sum either in the English or Foreign market. But how is it possible that *gold in coin*

should be of *less* value than it was previously to its being put into that form. The *metal* is not depreciated, and therefore the *guinea* cannot in reality be of *less worth* than another piece of *gold* of the same weight. Indeed, for the obvious reasons of the labour that is bestowed on it, and of its having the stamp of authority on its surface to make it legal tender for all purchasable commodities, *it ought*, according to the common order of causes and effects, to be of rather higher value in its *coined* than in its *uncoined* state. What then is the *cause* of the depreciation of the *guinea* when compared with the *gold* it contains? It is simply in consequence of being ranked with the depreciated state of our currency. But whence arises this depreciation of *money*, or what is commonly denominated *the currency* of the state? Solely from the super-abundance of that *artificial medium* of currency—*Bank Notes*.—Let the following circumstances be considered, and this position must appear, to all those who are capable of judging on the subject, to be founded in truth.

Gold and *silver* are denominated *precious metals*, from their natural excellence and scarcity. They possess a worth which is independent of their being employed as *coin*, and which indeed is the *occasion* of their being thus employed. These metals will be divided among civilized nations in proportion to their commerce and wealth; and, while thus divided, they will every

where possess nearly the same value: but if any artificial means be made use of to occasion them to be diffused in a different manner, such a measure can be only *temporary*. It would be like an attempt to dam up a body of running water, which will, in time, inevitably break down its barriers, and return to its natural course.—The currency of one country cannot be much more valuable than that of another, for any considerable length of time. If, however, any country make use of artificial means to increase its currency, the excess will be exported till the proportion be again restored; but as the *substitutes* for the *precious metals*, or the *artificial currency*, possess no *intrinsic* value, the *coins* only, or the *metals* of which they are composed, will be subjected to the exportation.—The currency of any country is increased by its banks; but while a national bank, the notes of which are legal tender throughout the country, is obliged to pay its own notes *in specie*, no bad consequences can ensue. The exportation of gold and silver in any form may be left to the judgment and speculation of individuals. The interest of individuals, and that of the state, on commercial subjects, must harmonize:—indeed, so far as wealth is concerned, they cannot possibly be at variance. All that a national bank has to observe, is, not to push out its notes when they are rapidly returned for payment; which circumstance would demonstrate

that they were beginning to be of less value than the precious metals, in consequence of superabundance. While the Bank keeps within these bounds, it answers the most valuable purposes of commerce, and possesses a general utility which is incalculable. Country banks might be left to themselves:—they would have their peculiar advantages, and would in no respects be injurious, except to one another, while they were obliged to pay in specie, or in notes of the national bank, which would of course be equal to specie. They would, however, probably decrease, paradoxical as it may appear *primâ facie*, in exact proportion as the paper of the Bank of England diminished. As a collateral argument for this position, I appeal to the fact of their having increased in proportion to the augmentation of the notes issued from the national bank.—But while the necessity, the importance, and the utility of a national bank are maintained in the most unequivocal manner, it must nevertheless be argued, that as soon as its notes become excessive, the currency is necessarily depreciated; and although public credit may be perfectly good, yet the coin sinking in worth with the notes below its intrinsic worth as a metal, it will necessarily be exported, except so far as it is prevented by being hoarded. This excess of bank-notes now exists, the consequence of which is, that the currency is exported, and that it will necessarily continue to be so, in spite of all efforts

or laws to prevent it, while the cause remains. But it happens, that the only part of the currency which can be used for this purpose, is the *gold*. Bank-notes are not exportable articles; and the silver coin is so depreciated by wear and counterfeit coinage, that from these circumstances it is of *less* worth than its artificial value arising from the state of our currency. The removal of the gold is an increasing evil, and it must of necessity, as such, make a constant progression, till its cause be removed.—The parliament of England, by vesting in the Bank-directors the power which they now possess, have enabled them to fix a *maximum* on the price of gold; and this they have actually, though inadvertently, done. They have lowered the currency more than fifteen and a half per cent, by the super-abundance of their notes:—a hundred pounds in gold coin will now yield 115*l.* 11*s.* 4½*d.* for its value as precious metal, and a hundred guineas will yield 121*l.* 6*s.* 11½*d.* One guinea is now worth 1*l.* 4*s.* 3*d.* of our currency, and ought to pass for that sum, in order to prevent its exportation. An ounce of gold metal now sells for 4*l.* 10*s.* of the current money, whether it be paid in bank-notes, or gold or silver coin. An ounce of gold, therefore, is worth 12*s.* 1½*d.* more as metal than it is as the current coin of the kingdom. This is occasioned by our issuing too large a quantity of paper currency, by which the nominal value of the gold is changed,

It has all the evils of a *maximum* attending it. It is the same thing as if a law were passed to determine that what is actually worth 4*l.* 10*s.* should sell for 3*l.* 17*s.* 10½*d.*; and it is well known that if such a law as this were to be passed in relation to the price of wheat, or any of the necessary articles of life, famine must speedily be the consequence. It is an absolute impossibility that the value of gold can be altered by any body of men, or by any nation. The notes, therefore, must again be brought to the standard of the gold, by diminishing their number, and the impracticable attempt of bringing the gold to the standard of the notes must be relinquished, or, as it appears to me, the evil will gradually increase, till the most destructive and irremediable consequences ensue.—The Bank-directors, as proprietors of bank-stock, obtain some advantages from the present system; but many of them probably sustain superior losses, as monied men, from the depreciation of that article in which their property principally consists.—In short, to me it appears almost as evident as a mathematical demonstration, that this country must be brought into a completely ruinous state, in relation to its finances and its property, unless the Restriction Act be repealed.—The effect of such a repeal, *if* it could be accomplished, would be to raise the value of money fifteen and a half per cent; that is, what is a hundred pounds now, would immediately be

worth 115*l.* 11*s.* 4½*d.* By this alteration, all the necessaries of life would sink in price in the same proportion in which the value of money had been raised; the poor clergy whose livings consist in fixed sums paid out of the tithes, would be benefited more than by any act of parliament that has yet passed for their relief; the persons who possess property in the national funds, would again be raised in some degree towards the state from which they have sunk, in consequence of depreciated currency; and many other important advantages would ensue. It must, however, be confessed, that, in consequence of the pernicious system which has long been pursued respecting our national currency, difficulties of no small magnitude would attend that alteration, which men who understand the subject judge to be absolutely necessary. One of these would be, that the national debt, a considerable part of which having been contracted in the depreciated currency, must be paid, unless provision were made to the contrary, in the proper standard of the precious metals. In short, whatever persons may assert who are determined to close their eyes against the admission of the light of truth, in relation to the subject on which I have judged it necessary to give my sentiments, this country is involved in a serious dilemma. May He who giveth men counsel, direct our financiers and patriots to the most suitable means of extricating us from our difficulties!

There is, in my opinion, no hope of the salvation of the country, but that which arises from the special care and kind providence of that almighty and gracious Being by whom nations, as well as individuals, are preserved in existence !

The national debt, amounting at present to 784 millions sterling, at the commencement of the present reign was only 200 millions, considered at that period a most enormous sum. It has been asserted by a sensible and pious writer, who probably views our national situation through a too flattering medium, that the national debt at present is, in fact, but little more than it was at that time, as the value of money is depreciated in a three-fold proportion, so that 600 millions does not, in reality, exceed what was then 200 only. This is most fallacious reasoning, as it does not take into view the causes or the actual state of our present currency. It moreover implies, that our circulating medium will continue depreciated in comparison with other nations, in the same degree as at present; an hypothesis which politicians who understand the subject begin to consider as impossible. *Bank notes* are merely *promissory* notes for the payment of specie. This is a fact which ought always to remain on our minds, in our speculations on the national debt. Few persons have any adequate ideas of the immensity of its present amount. Were it possible to discharge the debt of this nation as it exists at present, in *specie*,

and that three-fourths of the sum were to be paid in gold coin, three-sixteenths in silver, and the remaining sixteenth in copper, the bulk of metal required for the purpose would astonish all who had not calculated on the subject. If this money was to be carried in wagons loaded with two tons each, the number of wagons requisite for the gold would be 2809, those for the silver, 10584, and those for the copper, 109375; making a total of 122768 wagons! and if it were to be imagined farther, that these wagons were to be employed in carrying this sum of money, allowing the space of thirty yards for each vehicle and team of horses, 48 miles would be the space containing the wagons laden with gold, 180 miles would be the length of the train of those carrying the silver, and 1864 miles that of those with the copper; forming unitedly a train of 2092 miles, about three times the length of England and Scotland united!

Immense as the national debt is at present, it does not follow, as a *necessary consequence*, that national ruin will be the ultimate effect of it, if public credit should be maintained, and the debt does not proceed to such an extent as to crush the country by the amount of taxes necessary to discharge its interest.—The plan adopted by Mr. Pitt, to liquidate the debt by a sum of money placed out at compound interest, as a sinking fund, was undoubtedly the wisest which possibly could be adopted. The effect of compound interest is such

as to exceed the belief of every person who is not acquainted with its nature and effects. If the sum of one penny had been placed out at simple interest at the birth of Christ, it would have amounted at the conclusion of the present year, (1810,) at five per cent, to $7s. 6\frac{1}{2}d.$; that is, it would have produced another penny every twenty years, or five pence every century. But compound interest doubles itself in geometrical progression in the space of every fourteen years and a quarter. Had the same sum of one penny been placed out at compound interest at the same rate, the sum required to pay it at the end of the year 1810, would be a mass of gold more than two hundred and forty million times larger than the globe of the earth. This may seem an incredible assertion; but I scruple not to maintain its truth. In 1810 years, there are 147 periods of $14\frac{1}{4}$ years, at the end of each of which the original sum of one penny is to be doubled in geometrical progression:—that is, at the conclusion of the first period, it produces two-pence; at the termination of the second, four-pence; of the third, eight-pence, &c.—The earth contains nearly 40000,000000,000000,000000 (that is, forty thousand trillions) of cubic feet. Twenty guineas will lay in a cubic inch, or about 3500 in a cubic foot. Let the Arithmetician calculate on these principles, and he will find the above statement to be just.

The principles of compound interest are not

like some things which are true in theory, but absolutely impracticable in reality.* Its effects soon begin to operate. If one million of money were placed out at compound interest, it would pay the national debt in less than 138 years—two millions would accomplish it in 123 years—four millions in 109 years—eight millions in 94—ten millions in 90—sixteen millions in 80—twenty in 76—and forty millions in 62 years.

On the whole, I cannot conclude these observations without adding, that this country, though not in a *desperate*, is in a most *deplorable*, situation. What our doom may be, no man can know.

* The assertion of the celebrated ARCHIMEDES strikingly elucidates this remark. Confident of the vast powers of mechanics, he exclaimed, Δός πῦ γῶ, καὶ τὸν κόσμον κινήσω, "Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the earth." Let us examine this assertion, on the supposition that a proper place, and materials of sufficient strength, could be procured. It is a well-known axiom in mechanics, that what is *gained in power* is *lost in time*. On this principle, and considering the earth to measure as has been stated above, and that every cubic foot of earth weighs one hundred pounds—admitting further, that ARCHIMEDES could pull his lever with a power equal to two hundred pounds, and that he could move it no less than a hundred yards in a second of time—it would still follow, as a mathematical conclusion, that it would require between four and five hundred millions of years to raise the earth a hair's breadth, on the supposition that there are four hundred hair's breadths in the space of one inch. Hence we see that things sometimes *plausible in theory* are absolutely *impossible in fact*, and that the powers of man are confined within narrow limits, and more suited to his actual state in the present world, than to his boundless imagination.

It is, however, evident that, notwithstanding our religious and moral advantages, *sin* still reigns through the nation; and this is the greatest enemy to the body politic. It will destroy it without an executioner. While it manifests itself in corruption, injustice, treachery, and a hundred other evils, it destroys, at the same time, public spirit, the love of our country, and all those other virtues which are the ornament, the strength, and the defence, of a nation.—May repentance and moral reformation take place, and these will naturally tend to remove the internal principles of decay, and to implant and cherish the opposite principles of vigour and life.—The present is not a time for following the example of the Stranger in Reading, in condemning and opposing the professors of religion. The truly religious of every denomination are the best security of the nation. While true patriots, therefore, are looking for national reform, on all those subjects which are universally admitted to stand in need of reform, let them not forget that they ought to reform themselves in every thing that requires personal reformation. A patriot ought to be regular, honest, generous, compassionate, sober, and virtuous—how can he be a patriot except he be a good neighbour, a good relation, a good friend, and a good citizen?—May such be the character of our patriots in general! May such be the character

of the patriots of Reading in particular! Thus may it be hoped that national success and national welfare will return. Thus may it be expected that peace and prosperity will revisit the shores of our beloved country.

No. II.

A SUB-COMMITTEE of the Society formed in Reading for promoting the observance of the Lord's-day, having been appointed to wait on a solicitor to act for them, he promised to give them his answer in writing. Accordingly, a letter was sent to the Committee a few days afterwards, stating reasons for declining this appointment. A copy of this letter being exhibited in the office, and spoken of by the opponents of the Society as containing arguments against its propriety and legality, which could not easily be answered, an answer was sent by the Committee some time afterwards, to obviate any impressions which the letter alluded to might have made on the persons who might have been influenced by its contents. To this a reply was returned by the solicitor,

stating that *his* letter had *not* been *answered*.—
 As this correspondence was used for the purpose
 of prejudicing the inhabitants of Reading against
 the Society, and as the Society is not yet dis-
 solved, copies of the letters that passed on the
 occasion, are here given, that the Public may
 judge for itself where the *arguments* are to be
 found.

GENTLEMEN,

HAVING deliberately considered the ap-
 plication you made to me on behalf of the Society
 for the Suppression of Vice in this town and
 neighbourhood, I am sorry to inform you that
 I must decline the honour you intended me. I
 am well acquainted with many of the members of
 your Society, who, for real worth and excellence,
 are second to none—but the best of men may
 err.—A society formed for the purpose of sup-
 pressing vice by *example* and *persuasion*, must at
 all times be praise-worthy; but a society unau-
 thorized by, and unknown to, the laws of the land,
 established for the purpose of over-awing the civil
 magistrate, and of producing moral virtue by the
 torture and pains of penal statutes, is a society to
 which I cannot honourably and conscientiously
 lend my aid.—It is not for me to speak of the ex-
 tent and force of the moral law, as explained by
 the conduct of our Saviour, or as publicly ac-

knowledged or tacitly admitted by the practice of all Christian nations—No—These are matters I shall leave to the casuist and the divine. It is sufficient for me, if I am firmly persuaded (as I certainly am) that the *conduct* of the Society has in it the seeds of its own destruction—that it will be a *felo de se*—that a body of gentlemen united together to promote the morality of the Lord's-day by vigilance unequalled, not in self-examination, but in *labouring* on the Sabbath-day to find out the faults of others, to parade the streets, watch the doors, and even intrude themselves into the houses of their neighbours in quest of the irregularities of their lives, and, in many instances, to produce and increase vice, by exciting evil passions and lasting resentment—and all this, to get moral principles and pure and pious motives *forced* into them by the scourge of a penal statute—I say, such a Society is not altogether what its name imports.—Thus did not the Lord of the day—and thus, in my opinion, you ought not to persevere in doing. You will occasion more evils than you will prevent, and, in the end, you may have good reasons to regret that the Society was ever established.

I beg to express my acknowledgments to you for your consideration of me, and to assure you that nothing but the deepest conviction of the rectitude of my own opinion could have prevented

my doing as you wished.—I trust that my private opinions and public conduct will at all times agree. With sentiments of the highest consideration and regard,

I am, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient servant,

BROAD-STREET,

Nov. 23, 1808.

To the Committee of the Society for the Suppression of Vice.

SIR,

THE Committee of the Society for promoting the due observance of the Lord's-day, &c. received your letter, in which you have declined affording the Society your assistance as their solicitor, and acknowledge themselves sensible of the honour you have done them by your expressions of personal consideration and respect.

Though your letter, Sir, expresses a decided hostility to the Society and its proceedings, the Committee at first declined sending you any reply, judging your arguments to be so fallacious and sophistical as not to merit refutation. But, having understood that a copy of your epistle has been exhibited to others, they have changed their opinion, and judge it expedient to send you an answer, in order to counteract those pernicious sentiments which your letter contains, and which

it is calculated to engender on the minds of such as may not have sufficient penetration to discover the errors with which it is replete.

The Committee, Sir, are not a little surprised that a person of your acknowledged penetration should, on the one hand, have so far mistaken the nature and proceedings of the Society, as it appears from this letter you do; and that, on the other hand, you should have opposed it with arguments altogether imbecile and untenable.

You say that "a society formed for the suppression of vice by *example* and *persuasion*, must at all times be praise-worthy." Thus, Sir, you confer no small degree of praise on the Reading Society, whose views and conduct you are attempting to depreciate; for these are the chief weapons which they purpose to use; and it may be added, they are the only ones which they hitherto *have* used, or which they *desire* to use in future. Have they not pledged themselves in print, that "Prosecutions shall not take place, but in cases of persevering obstinacy on the part of the offender?"

You observe, in the next place, that the Society is "unauthorized by, and unknown to, the laws of the land." But what sentiments, Sir, do you intend to convey by this declaration?—Do you mean, that the Society is *illegal*?—Or, do you mean that all other societies *are* authorized by the law?—Or, finally, do you mean that no societies *ought to exist* except they are thus au-

thorized?—Surely by the phrase, “unauthorized by law,” one of these three things must be implied, unless it be intended merely to puzzle and mislead. But let us examine them separately. Do you imply, Sir, that the Society is illegal?—Such a sentiment is contrary to the highest law authorities. We refer you to the evidence on this subject, offered in the “Considerations addressed to the Inhabitants of Reading;” and take the liberty to acquaint you, if you hitherto have been ignorant of the fact, that the two Societies instituted in London in 1788 and 1802, have been assisted and countenanced by the highest criminal court in the kingdom. Societies of this kind were first formed in the reign of King William and Queen Mary, (a period in which British freedom never shone more brightly,) and they have existed to a greater or less extent ever since. Would it not then be strange, passing strange, that these societies should continue for upwards of a century, before they were discovered to be illegal?—But do you mean, when you say this Society is “unauthorized,” that all other societies are *positively authorized*, by the laws of the land?—A moment’s reflection, Sir, must convince you that this is contrary to fact. You are yourself an evidence that this is *not* the case, as Secretary to a Society for prosecuting Felons. That Society is equally “unauthorized by, and unknown to, the laws of the land,” as the Reading Society for pro-

meting the Observance of the Lord's-day, &c. In this respect, they stand exactly on the same ground, and not an argument can be advanced against the latter which will not equally apply to the former. But who would argue so illogically, as to infer unfavourable conclusions respecting the Society for the Prosecution of Felons, because it possesses no positive authority from the laws of the land? Surely, Sir, an argument *ad hominem* must here be sufficient. You stand in the same situation as the members of the Society you condemn as unauthorized by law. The societies differ only in the objects they have in view. These in both are laudable; but the Committee cannot but add, that they consider those of one, in some respects, as much superior to those of the other, as the general welfare of the community is to the security of the property of an individual. But, finally, do you infer that no societies ought to exist, except they are first formally authorized by the legislature? Alas, Sir, should such a period ever arrive in Britain, her patriots, instead of rejoicing in the constitutional freedom of their country, will then be found reflecting on *farmen tates*, and exclaiming, "*Euit Libertas!*"

In your charge, that the Society is established "for the purpose of over-awing the civil magistrate," you are totally mistaken. The Society disclaims it. They would readily aid the magistrate with their exertions, were the magistrate

disposed to receive their assistance. But where he is not, they act as totally unconnected with him, and can merely bring their cases before him for judgment. How a magistrate can be *overruled*, appears to the Committee as a paradox. The magistrate can do no more than execute the statutes of the law, and this he is *bound* to do by his oath, and by the law of the land. How far a magistrate might neglect, or refuse to fulfil, his duty, without its being proper to oblige him to answer in a superior court of judicature, is a question which the Reading Society hope they shall never have occasion to discuss.

As to the obligation of the moral law, the Committee of the Reading Society are convinced that it still continues, and ever will continue, in its fullest extent and force, upon all individuals, and all nations, to whom it is promulgated; and they consider the precept, "Thou shalt not suffer sin upon thy neighbour," as perfectly harmonizing with, and necessarily arising from, the requirements of this law, the sum of which, in relation to our fellow-creatures, is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The moral law is as unchangeable as its Author. But if, Sir, you refer to the *moral obligation of the Sabbath only*, in addition to the general answer already given, it may be proper to remark, that the Lord of the Sabbath, to whose conduct you refer, in his arguments with the Jews, opposed only their cor-

rupt glosses and superstitions, in relation to the observance of the day. He taught them that it was perfectly consistent with the divine law, to perform acts of mercy and love on the Sabbath-day. These were evidently good—the observance of them was no profanation of the Sabbath—they were ornamental to piety and religion. Can it be supposed, Sir, that Jesus Christ, who claimed the title of Lord of the Sabbath, and who thus evidently shewed that he had a right to make such alterations in the circumstances of observing this holy day of rest as became him, the great Law-giver—can it be supposed, we ask, that Jesus Christ would so frequently have discussed this subject with the Jews, and shewn what works were lawful on the Sabbath-day, without allowing of any other exceptions, if the institution, for the substance of it, had not been intended to be continued in full force under the Christian dispensation?—You may be assured, Sir, as the members of the Reading Society are, that the Sabbath-breakers of the present day are not acting on the supposition, that the Founder of the Christian religion has destroyed the moral obligation of this sacred portion of our time.

There is nothing in the Reading Society that will impel it to *suicide*. It has had, Sir, and still has, no small number of respectable relations, not one of which, as far as the Committee have heard, has ever been driven to such an act of desperation.

That it carries in itself the seeds of its own destruction, requires evidence not easily produced. But if by *destruction*, you mean merely *dissolution*, this implies no more than that it is human; for all human institutions are liable to decay, from causes which it is not necessary here to enumerate. But whatsoever may be its end, the Committee trust that, like many of its kindred societies, before it dies, it will live honourably, and serve its generation according to the will of God.

In relation to the charge of the Society *labouring* on the Sabbath, it certainly comes with a bad grace from a person maintaining the sentiments contained in your letter, and it seems almost unnecessary to attempt a serious answer. But as the Committee are willing to give a reason of their conduct to every inquirer, they reply, that what you call their *labour*, they consider as a work both of charity and necessity, and that the sum of it in any individual does not amount to what was permitted to the Jew under his dispensation, in which external regulations and ceremonial observances were often united with the precepts of moral obligation—they refer to the Sabbath-day's journey.

The Committee deny having "intruded themselves into the houses of their neighbours, in quest of irregularities." "There are no such things done as you say." (Neh. 6. 8.) This erroneous charge probably arose from one or two of the members' adopting the very plan which you, Sir,

have recommended—waiting on a neighbour to try what influence *persuasion* would have on his mind.

Should the conduct of the Society in any instance “increase vice, by exciting evil passions, or promoting resentment,” they can only say, that it belongs to them to pursue duty, and leave consequences.—The same argument might be adduced for an attempt (with reverence be it spoken) to abolish the holy law of the Deity; for this produces the same effects on the minds of the wicked and unregenerate.

In reply to your last objection, where you speak of “*forcing* morality by the scourge of penal statutes,” the Committee desire to remind you, that your argument equally opposes magistracy itself. All human laws are meant as a system of force. “The law was not made for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient.” Magistracy is intended to operate on the *fears* of men; and magistrates are ordained expressly to be “a *terror* to evil doers.” They are “revengers, to execute *wrath* upon those who do evil.”—The question therefore is, Are penal statutes salutary and necessary in any cases? The Society judges, with British legislators, that they are. By whom, then, are they to be executed? By the magistrate, undoubtedly, as the proper and as the only instrument, appointed by God and man.—But how is the magistrate to become acquainted with the

facts? In three ways only. *First*, By his personal observation.—*Secondly*, By the vigilance of his officers.—*Thirdly*, By general information. It is evident, on the most superficial consideration, that the two first modes are insufficient to produce the desired effect. Information is necessary, therefore, to give spirit and effect to all penal laws. But does the Reading Society then consist, as has been asserted, of a club of *informers*? The Committee will answer this question in the words of two eminent writers on the subject. “The character of an informer is to *injure others for his own benefit*. But what is the *injury* done to those who are reclaimed from vice by the discipline of the humane laws of the land? What is the *benefit* derived to any individual, abstracted from the delightful consciousness of discharging a Christian duty?” (Bishop of Landaff.)—“To confound all who bring offenders to punishment, in the odium attached to the name of *informers*, is to make ourselves the dupes of a mere vulgar abuse of language, in a manner which is disgraceful to any man having the slightest pretensions to sense or education; and worthy only of those who wish to provide for the impunity of the vicious, by injuriously stigmatizing virtuous and meritorious members of the community;—without laws, society cannot subsist; and without information against offenders, laws are but a dead letter. The most enlightened legislatures, therefore, have not scrupled

pled to invite such informers, even by the hope of pecuniary reward. This is indeed but a sordid motive to action, yet may produce much good to the Public; nor ought the character of an informer to be esteemed odious, unless his informations be *deceitful*, as well as in some degree interested: that is, unless they go to enforce obsolete or oppressive laws, when the offence is trivial, and the penalty perhaps severe. And how little this description is likely to suit the informations laid by a Society for the Suppression of Vice, is well said by the above-mentioned learned prelate." (Rev. John Scott.)—"The benefit such a society derives from their informations, abstracted from the consciousness of doing good, is expense, trouble, anxiety, obloquy, contempt, odium, &c." (Bishop of Landaff.)

Signed by order, and in behalf, of the Committee of the Society formed at Reading for the promoting the due Observance of the Lord's-day, &c.

READING, DEC. 24, 1808.

Secretary.

To Mr. _____, Attorney-at-law, Reading.

Reading, Dec. 26, 1808.

GENTLEMEN,

YOUR laboured epistle of the twenty-fourth instant, in answer to my letter of the twenty-third ult. was duly received.—When I saw Mr. — the day after my letter was sent to you, I was promised an answer. It appears, however, that the combined talents of the Committee were not employed for *me*, but for the few *weak minds* to whom you refer. I shall therefore not fail to commit it to their perusal. I assured Mr. — that although I was averse to literary warfare, yet I should feel real pleasure in making an apology, if there should be occasion; but no reason of that sort has been afforded me. I have only to lament that so unworthy an individual has employed so much of your time to so little purpose. Having been long accustomed to distinguish between men and things, religion and force, I shall continue to entertain a high personal regard for many of the members of your Society, and remain,

Gentlemen,

Your most obedient servant,

*To the Committee of the Society
for the better Observance of the
Lord's-day, &c.*

THE END.

ERRATA.

Page 8, line 10, for " a forty-fifth part, &c." read " forty-five persons, which is rather more than one out of forty-four, are constantly, &c."

Page 9, line 19, for " principle," read " disposition."

Page 71, line 21, after " ministerial character," add, " and who has never received ordination in any way."

Page 133, line 2, for " with which," read " in which."

Page 147, line 19, 20, for " Mahommedism," read " Mohammedism," " Mahometanism," or " Mahomedism."

Page 185, line 8, for " comfort," read " relief."

11, after " subscribed," add, " for this purpose."

Page 201, line 27, for " 3500," read " 35000."

Page 203, line 4, for " It," read " This."

In the Advertisement,

Page 5, line 15, for " I leave his readers to," read " his readers may."



