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LETTERS TO EUGENIA;

OR,

A PRESERVATIVE

AGAINST RELIGIOUS PREJUDICES.

BY BARON D'HOLBACH,

AUTHOR OF THE SYSTEM OF NATURE, THE SOCIAL SYSTEM, GOOD SENSE, CHRISTIANITY UNVEILED, ECCE HOMO, UNIVERSAL MORALITY, RELIGIOUS CRUELTY, &c., &c., &c.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH, BY

ANTHONY C. MIDDLETON, M. D.

. . . "Arctis
Religionum animos nodis exsolvere pergo."
LUCRETII *De Rerum Natura*, lib. iv. v. 6, 7.



BOSTON:
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NAIGEON'S PREFACE.

1768.

For many years this work has been known under the title of *Letters to Eugenia*. The secretive character of those, however, into whose hands the manuscript at first fell; the singular and yet actual pleasure that is caused generally enough in the minds of all men by the exclusive possession of any object whatever; that kind of torpor, servitude, and terror in which the tyrannical power of the priests then held all minds — even those who by the superiority of their talents ought naturally to be the least disposed to bend under the odious yoke of the clergy, — all these circumstances united contributed so much to stifle in its birth, if I may so express myself, this important manuscript, that for a long time it was supposed to be lost; so much did those who possessed it keep it carefully concealed, and so constantly did they refuse to allow a copy to be taken. The manu-

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scripts, indeed, were so scarce, even in the libraries of the curious, that the late M. De Boze, whose pleasure it was to collect the rarest works belonging to every species of literature, could never succeed in acquiring a copy of the *Letters to Eugenia*, and in his time there were only three in Paris; it may have been from design, *propter metum Judæorum;** it may have been there were actually no more known.

It is not till within five or six years that MSS. of these letters have become more common; and there is reason to believe that they are now considerably multiplied, since the copy from which this edition is printed has been revised and corrected by collation with six others, that have been collected without any great difficulty. Unhappily, all these copies swarm with faults, which corrupt the sense, and comprehend many variations, but which also, to use the language of the Biblical critics, have served sometimes to discover and to fix the true reading! More often, however, they have rendered it more uncertain than it was before what one ought to be followed — a new proof of the multiplicity of copies, because the more numerous are the manuscripts of a work, the more

* *On account of fear of the Jews*, or, in other words, the intolerant clergy of the despotic government.

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they differ from each other, as any one may be fully convinced by consulting those of the *Letter of Thrasybulus to Leucippus*, and the various readings of the New Testament collected by the learned Mill, and which amount to more than thirty thousand.

However this may be, we have spared no pains to reëstablish the text in all its purity; and we venture to say, that, with the exception of four or five passages, which we found corrupted in all the manuscripts that we had an opportunity to collate, and which we have amended to the best of our ability, the edition of these letters that we now offer to the reader will probably conform almost exactly with the original manuscript of the author.

With regard to the author's name and quality we can offer nothing but conjectures. The only particulars of his life upon which there is a general agreement are, that he lived upon terms of great intimacy with the Marquis de la Fare, the Abbé de Chaulieu, the Abbé Terrasson, Fontenelle, M. de Lasseré, &c. The late MM. Du Marsais and Falconnet have often been heard to declare that these letters were composed by some one belonging to the school of Seaux. All that we can pronounce with certainty is the fact, that it is only

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necessary to read the work to be entirely convinced the author was a man of extensive knowledge, and one who had meditated profoundly concerning the matters upon which he has treated. His style is clear, simple, easy, and in which we may remark a certain urbanity, that leads us to be sure that he was not an obscure individual, nor one to whom good company and polished society were unfamiliar. But what especially distinguishes this work, and which should endear it to all good and virtuous people, is the signal honesty which pervades and characterizes it from the very beginning to the end. It is impossible to read it without conceiving the highest idea of the author's probity, whoever he may have been — without desiring to have had him for a friend, to have lived with him, and, in a word, without rendering justice to the rectitude of his intentions, even when we do not approve of his sentiments. The love of virtue, universal benevolence, respect to the laws, an inviolable attachment to the duties of morality, and, in fine, all that can contribute to render men better, is strongly recommended in these Letters. If, on the one hand, he completely overthrows the ruinous edifice of Christianity, it is to erect, on the other hand, the immovable foundations of a system of morality legitimately estab-

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lished upon the nature of man, upon his physical wants, and upon his social relations — a base infinitely better and more solid than that of religion, because sooner or later the lie is discovered, rejected, and necessarily drags with it what served to sustain it. On the contrary, the truth subsists eternally, and consolidates itself as it grows old: *Opinionum commenta delet dies, naturæ judicia confirmat.**

The motto affixed to many of the manuscript copies of these Letters proves that the worthy man to whom we owe them did not desire to be known as their author, and that it was neither the love of reputation, nor the thirst of glory, nor the ambition of being distinguished by bold opinions, which the priests, and the satellites subjected to them by ignorance, denominate *impieties*, which guided his pen. It was only the desire of doing good to his fellow-beings by enlightening them, which actuated him, and the wish to uproot, so to speak, religion itself, as being the source of all the woes which have afflicted mankind for so many ages. This is the motto of which we spoke: —

"Si j'ai raison, qu'importe à qui je suis?"
(If reason's mine, no matter who I am.)

* "Time effaces the comments of opinion, but it confirms the judgments of nature." — CICERO.

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It is a verse of Corneille, whose application is exceedingly appropriate, and which should be upon the frontispiece of all books of this nature.

We are unable to say any thing more certain concerning the person to whom our author has addressed his work. It appears, however, from many circumstances in these Letters, that she was not a supposititious marchioness, like her of the *Worlds* of M. de Fontenelle, and that they have really been written to a woman as distinguished by her rank as by her manners. Perhaps she was a lady of the school of the Temple, or of Seaux. But these details, in reality, as well as those which concern the name and the life of our author, the date of his birth, that of his death, &c., are of little importance, and could only serve to satisfy the vain curiosity of some idle readers, who avidiously collect these kind of anecdotes, who receive from them a kind of existence in the world, and who feel more satisfaction from being instructed in them than from the discovery of a truth. I know that they endeavor to justify their curiosity by saying that when a person reads a book which creates a public sensation, and with which he is himself much pleased, it is natural he should desire to know to whom a grateful homage should be addressed. In this case the desire is so much

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the more unreasonable because it cannot be satisfied; first, because when death and proscription is the penalty, there has never been and there never will be a man of letters so imprudent, and, to speak plainly, so strangely daring, as to publish, or during his life to allow a book to be printed, in which he tramples under foot temples, altars, and the statues of the gods, and where he attacks without any disguise the most consecrated religious opinions; secondly, because it is a matter of public notoriety that all the works of this character which have appeared for many years are the secret testaments of numbers of great men, obliged during their lives to conceal their light under a bushel, whose heads death has withdrawn from the fury of persecutors, and whose cold ashes, consequently, do not hear in the tomb either the importunate and denunciatory cries of the superstitious, or the just eulogiums of the friends of truth; thirdly and lastly, *because this curiosity, so unfortunately entertained, may compromise in the most cruel manner the repose, the fortune, and the liberty of the relatives and friends of the authors of these bold books!* This single consideration ought, then, to determine those hazarders of conjectures, if they have really good intentions, to wrap in the inmost

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folds of their hearts whatever suspicions they may entertain concerning the author, however true or false they may be, and to turn their inquiring spirits to a use more beneficial for both themselves and others.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

In 1819 an anonymous translation of the LETTERS TO EUGENIA was published in London by Richard Carlile. This translation in some of its parts was sufficiently complete and correct, but in others it was at absolute variance with the original work; in other parts, also, it was interlarded with matter not written by d'Holbach; and in others, large portions of the original Letters were entirely omitted, as were likewise a number of notes and the whole of the preliminary observations, with which the volume was introduced to the public by Naigeon, so long the intimate friend of both d'Holbach and Diderot. In again presenting the work in an English dress, the London translation has been made the foundation of this, but the whole has been thoroughly revised and collated with the original. The omitted portions have been translated and inserted in their proper places, and though some passages of the London work, not entirely faithful to the original, have been allowed to stand,

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yet the book, as it now appears, is essentially a new one, and is the most accurate and complete translation of the LETTERS TO EUGENIA which has ever been made into the English language.

The work at first came anonymously from the press, and the mystery of its authorship was sedulously maintained in the introductory observations of Naigeon, in consequence of the danger which then attended the issue of Infidel productions, not only in France but throughout Christendom. The book was printed in Amsterdam, at d'Holbach's own expense, by Marc-Michael Rey, a noble printer, to whom the world is greatly indebted for the inestimable aid he rendered the philosophers. But bold as he was, and then living in a country the most free of any in the world, he dared not openly send these LETTERS from his own press. They were issued in 1768, in two duodecimo volumes, without any publisher's name, and with the imprint of *London* on the title page, in order to set those persecutors at bay who were prowling for victims, and who sought to burn author, printer, and book at the same pile. The prudence of the author and printer saved *them* from this fate; but the book had hardly reached France before its sale was forbidden under penalty of fines and imprisonment, and it was condemned by an act of Parliament to be

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burnt by the public executioner in the streets of Paris, all of which particulars will be narrated in the BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR OF BARON D'HOLBACH, which I am now preparing for the press.

Of the excellence of the LETTERS TO EUGENIA, nothing need here be said. The work speaks for itself, and abounds in that eloquence peculiar to its author, and overflows with kindly sentiments of humanity, benevolence and virtue. Like d'Holbach's other works, it is distinguished by an ardent love of liberty, and an invincible hatred of despotism; by an unanswerable logic, by deep thought, and by profound ideas. The tyrant and the priest are both displayed in their true colors; but while the author shows himself inexorable as fate towards oppressive hierarchies and false ideas, he is tender as an infant to the unfortunate, to those overburdened with unreasonable impositions, to those who need consolation and guidance, and to those searching after truth. Addressed, as the LETTERS were, to a lady suffering from religious falsehoods and terrors, the object of the writer is set forth in the motto from Lucretius which he placed on the title page, and which may thus be expressed in English:—

"Reason's pure light I seek to give the mind,
And from Religion's fetters free mankind."

A. C. M.

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The name of the lady was designedly kept in secrecy, and was unknown, except to *a very few*, till some years after d'Holbach's death. We now know from the *Feuilles Posthumes* of Lequinio, who had it from Naigeon, that the *Letters* were written several years before their publication, for the instruction of a lady formerly distinguished at the French Court for her graces and virtues. They were addressed to the charming Marguerite, Marchioness de Vermandois. Her husband held the lucrative post of farmer-general to the king, and besides inherited large estates. He possessed excellent natural abilities, and his mind was strengthened and adorned by culture and letters. Had his modesty permitted him to appear as such, he would now be known as a poet of genius and merit, for he wrote some poems and plays that were much admired by all who were allowed to peruse them. He was married in 1763, on the day he completed his twenty-first year, to Marguerite Justine d'Estrades, then only nineteen years of age, and whom he saw for the first time in his life only six weeks before they became husband and wife. Like most of the matches then made among the higher classes in France, this was one of a purely mercenary character. The father of the Marquis de Vermandois, and the father of Marguerite, as a means of

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joining their estates, contracted their children without deigning to consult the wishes of the parties, and obedience or disinheritance was the only alternative. When the compact was concluded, Marguerite was taken from the convent where for five years she had lived as a boarder and scholar, and commenced her married life and her course in the fashionable world at the same time. The match was far more fortunate than such matches then generally proved to be. Marguerite's husband was passionately attached to her, and that attachment was returned. The Marquis was a friend of Baron d'Holbach, and soon after his marriage introduced his wife to him. Among all the beauties of Paris the Marchioness was one of the most lovely and fascinating. Her features were remarkably beautiful, and the bloom and clearness of her complexion were such as absolutely to render necessary the old comparison of the rose and the lily to do them justice. To these were added a voluptuous figure, agreeable manners, the graces and vivacity of wit, and the still more enduring attractions of good humor, purity, and benevolence. A female like her could not but be dear to all who enjoyed her intimacy, and a strong friendship sprang up between her and Baron d'Holbach. Greatly pleased with him at first, Marguerite was afterwards as

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greatly shocked. When their intercourse had become so familiar as to permit that frankness and freedom of conversation which prevails among intimate friends, she discovered that the Baron was an unbeliever in the Christian dogmas which she had learned at the convent, where, in consequence of her mother's death, she had been educated. She had been taught that an Infidel was a monster in all respects, and she was astounded to find unbelievers in men so agreeable in manners and person, and so profound in learning, as d'Holbach, Diderot, d'Alembert, and others. She could deny neither their goodness nor their intellectual qualities, and while she admired the individuals she shuddered at their incredulity. Especially did she mourn over Baron d'Holbach. He had a wife as charming as herself, formerly the lovely Mademoiselle d'Aïne, whose beautiful features and seductive figure presented

> "A combination, and a form, indeed,
> Where every god did seem to set his seal."

Nothing was more natural than that two such women should imbibe the deepest tenderness for each other. But alas! the Baron's wife was tainted with her husband's heresies; and yet in their home did the Marchioness see all the domestic virtues exemplified, and beheld that sweet harmony and

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unchangeable affection for which the d'Holbachs were eminently distinguished among their acquaintances, and which was remarkable from its striking contrast with the courtly and Christian habits of the day. At a loss what to do, the Marchioness consulted her confessor, and was advised to withdraw entirely from the society of the Baron and his wife, unless she was willing to sacrifice all her hopes of heaven, and to plunge headlong down to hell. Her natural good sense and love of her friends struggled with her monastic education and reverence for the priests. The conflict rendered her miserable; and unable to enjoy happiness, she retired to her husband's country seat, where she brooded over her wishes and her terrors. In this state of mind she at length wrote a touching letter to the Baron, and laid open her situation, requesting him to comfort, console, and enlighten her. Such was the origin of the book now presented in an English dress to the reader. It accomplished its purpose with the Marchioness de Vermandois, and afterwards its author concluded to publish the work, in hopes it might be equally useful to others.

The *Letters* were *written* in 1764, when d'Holbach was in the forty-second year of his age. Twelve different works he had before written and published, and all without the affix of his name. *Eleven*

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were upon mineralogy, the arts and the sciences, and *one* only upon theology. That *one* had been secretly printed in 1761, at Nancy, with the imprint of London, and was *honored* with a parliamentary statute condemning its publication and forbidding its sale or circulation. Christian hatred bestowed upon it the additional honor of causing it to be burned in the streets of Paris by the public executioner. But the prudence of the author protected his life. He attributed the book to a dead man, who had been known to entertain sceptical views. It was entitled CHRISTIANITY UNVEILED, and bore on its title page the name of BOULANGER. This was d'Holbach's first contribution to Infidel literature, and the second similar work written by him was the LETTERS TO EUGENIA. These were the preludes to more than a quarter of a hundred different productions numbering among them such books as *Good Sense*, *The System of Nature*, *Ecce Homo*, *Priests Unmasked*, &c., &c., all printed anonymously or pseudonymously at his own expense, without a possibility of pecuniary advantage, and with such extraordinary secrecy as to show that he was actuated by no desire of literary fame. It was love of truth alone that impelled d'Holbach to write. Brilliant, profound, eloquent and excellent as were his writings, attracting notice as they did from the

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civil and religious powers, commented upon as they were by such men as Voltaire and Frederick the Great, admired as they were by that class who felt and combated the evils of tyranny as well as of religion, of kings as well as of priests, — that class who almost drew their life from the books of him and his compeers, — he was never seduced from the rule he originally laid down for his literary conduct.

A very few persons he was obliged to trust in order to get his writings printed, and but for that fact Baron d'Holbach would now only be known as a gentleman of great wealth, extensive benevolence, and uncommon liberality, as a man of profound learning and agreeable colloquial powers, as the bountiful friend of men of letters, as the soother of the distressed, as the protector of the miserable, and as the affectionate husband and father. So much of him we should have known; but that he was the author of those books which roused intolerant priests and corrupt magistrates, consistories and parliaments, monarchs and philosophers, the people and their oppressors, — that he was the Archimedes that thus moved the world, — would not have been known had he not employed another philosopher, by the name of Naigeon, to carry his manuscripts to Amsterdam,

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and to direct their printing by Marc-Michel Rey. It was Naigeon who carried the manuscript of the LETTERS TO EUGENIA to Holland, together with a number of others by the same author, which also appeared during the year 1768,—an eventful year in the history of Infidel progress. The *Letters* were carefully revised by d'Holbach before they were sent to press. All the passages of a purely personal character were omitted, some new matter was incorporated, and some sentences were added purposely to keep the author and the lady he addressed in impenetrable obscurity. To raise the veil from a man of so much worth and genius, as well as to carry out his idea of doing good, is one of the reasons which have led to the present preparation and publication of this book.

A. C. M.

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LETTERS TO EUGENIA.

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LETTERS TO EUGENIA.

LETTER I.

Of the Sources of Credulity, and of the Motives which should lead to an Examination of Religion.

I am unable, Madam, to express the grievous sentiments that the perusal of your letter produced in my bosom. Did not a rigorous duty retain me where I am, you would see me flying to your succor. Is it, then, true that Eugenia is miserable? Is even she tormented with chagrin, scruples, and inquietudes? In the midst of opulence and grandeur; assured of the tenderness and esteem of a husband who adores you; enjoying at court the advantage, so rare, of being sincerely beloved by every one; surrounded by friends who render sincere homage to your talents, your knowledge, and your tastes, — how can you suffer the pains of melancholy and sorrow? Your pure and virtuous soul can surely know neither shame nor remorse. Always so far removed from the weaknesses of your sex, on what account can you blush? Agreeably occupied with your duties, refreshed with useful reading and entertaining conversation, and having within

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your reach every diversity of virtuous pleasures, how happens it that fears, distastes, and cares come to assail a heart for which every thing should procure contentment and peace? Alas! even if your letter had not confirmed it but too much, from the trouble which agitates you I should have recognized without difficulty the work of superstition. This fiend alone possesses the power of disturbing honest souls, without calming the passions of the corrupt; and when once she gains possession of a heart, she has the ability to annihilate its repose forever.

Yes, Madam, for a long time I have known the dangerous effects of religious prejudices. I was myself formerly troubled with them. Like you I have trembled under the yoke of religion; and if a careful and deliberate examination had not fully undeceived me, instead of now being in a state to console you and to reassure you against yourself, you would see me at the present moment partaking your inquietudes, and augmenting in your mind the lugubrious ideas with which I perceive you to be tormented. Thanks to Reason and Philosophy, an unruffled serenity long ago irradiated my understanding, and banished the terrors with which I was formerly agitated. What happiness for me if the peace which I enjoy should put it in my power to break the charm which yet binds you with the chains of prejudice?

Nevertheless, without your express orders, I should never have dared to point out to you a mode of

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thinking widely different from your own, nor to combat the dangerous opinions to which you have been persuaded your happiness is attached. But for your request I should have continued to enclose in my own breast opinions odious to the most part of men accustomed to see nothing except by the eyes of judges visibly interested in deceiving them. Now, however, a sacred duty obliges me to speak. Eugenia, unquiet and alarmed, wishes me to explore her heart; she needs assistance; she wishes to fix her ideas upon an object which interests her repose and her felicity. I owe her the truth. It would be a crime longer to preserve silence. Although my attachment for her did not impose the necessity of responding to her confidence, the love of truth would oblige me to make efforts to dissipate the chimeras which render her unhappy.

I shall proceed then, Madam, to address you with the most complete frankness. Perhaps at the first glance my ideas may appear strange; but on examining them with still further care and attention, they will cease to shock you. Reason, good faith, and truth cannot do otherwise than exert great influence over such an intellect as yours. I appeal, therefore, from your alarmed imagination to your more tranquil judgment; I appeal from custom and prejudice to reflection and reason. Nature has given you a gentle and sensible soul, and has imparted an exquisitely lively imagination, and a certain admixture of melancholy which disposes to despondent revery. It is from this peculiar mental

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constitution that arise the woes that now afflict you. Your goodness, candor, and sincerity preclude your suspecting in others either fraud or malignity. The gentleness of your character prevents your contradicting notions that would appear revolting if you deigned to examine them. You have chosen rather to defer to the judgment of others, and to subscribe to their ideas, than to consult your own reason and rely upon your own understanding. The vivacity of your imagination causes you to embrace with avidity the dismal delineations which are presented to you; certain men, interested in agitating your mind, abuse your sensibility in order to produce alarm; they cause you to shudder at the terrible words, *death*, *judgment*, *hell*, *punishment*, and *eternity*; they lead you to turn pale at the very name of an inflexible *judge*, whose absolute decrees nothing can change; you fancy that you see around you those demons whom he has made the ministers of his vengeance upon his weak creatures; thus is your heart filled with affright; you fear that at every instant you may offend, without being aware of it, a capricious God, always threatening and always enraged. In consequence of such a state of mind, all those moments of your life which should only be productive of contentment and peace, are constantly poisoned by inquietudes, scruples, and panic terrors, from which a soul as pure as yours ought to be forever exempt. The agitation into which you are thrown by these fatal ideas suspends the exercise of your faculties; your reason is misled by a bewildered

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imagination, and you are afflicted with perplexities, with despondency, and with suspicion of yourself. In this manner you become the dupe of those men who, addressing the imagination and stifling reason, long since subjugated the universe, and have actually persuaded reasonable beings that their reason is either useless or dangerous.

Such is, Madam, the constant language of the apostles of superstition, whose design has always been, and will always continue to be, to destroy human reason in order to exercise their power with impunity over mankind. Throughout the globe the perfidious ministers of religion have been either the concealed or the declared enemies of reason, because they always see reason opposed to their views. Every where do they decry it, because they truly fear that it will destroy their empire by discovering their conspiracies and the futility of their fables. Every where upon its ruins they struggle to erect the empire of fanaticism and imagination. To attain this end with more certainty, they have unceasingly terrified mortals with hideous paintings, have astonished and seduced them by marvels and mysteries, embarrassed them by enigmas and uncertainties, surcharged them with observances and ceremonies, filled their minds with terrors and scruples, and fixed their eyes upon a future, which, far from rendering them more virtuous and happy here below, has only turned them from the path of true happiness, and destroyed it completely and forever in their bosoms.

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Such are the artifices which the ministers of religion every where employ to enslave the earth and to retain it under the yoke. The human race, in all countries, has become the prey of the priests. The priests have given the name of *religion* to systems invented by them to subjugate men, whose imagination they had seduced, whose understanding they had confounded, and whose reason they had endeavored to extinguish.

It is especially in infancy that the human mind is disposed to receive whatever impression is made upon it. Thus our priests have prudently seized upon the youth to inspire them with ideas that they could never impose upon adults. It is during the most tender and susceptible age of men that the priests have familiarized the understanding of our race with monstrous fables, with extravagant and disjointed fancies, and with ridiculous chimeras, which, by degrees, become objects that are respected and that are feared during life.

We need only open our eyes to see the unworthy means employed by *sacerdotal policy* to stifle the dawning reason of men. During their infancy they are taught tales which are ridiculous, impertinent, contradictory, and criminal, and to these they are enjoined to pay respect. They are gradually impregnated with inconceivable mysteries that are announced as sacred truths, and they are accustomed to contemplate phantoms before which they habitually tremble. In a word, measures are taken which are the best calculated to render those blind

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who do not consult their reason, and to render those base who constantly shudder whenever they recall the ideas with which their priests infected their minds at an age when they were unable to guard against such snares.

Recall to mind, Madam, the dangerous cares which were taken in the convent where you were educated, to sow in your mind the germs of those inquietudes that now afflict you. It was there that they began to speak to you of fables, prodigies, mysteries, and doctrines that you actually revere, while, if these things were announced to-day for the first time, you would regard them as ridiculous, and as entirely unworthy of attention. I have often witnessed your laughter at the simplicity with which you formerly credited those tales of sorcerers and ghosts, that, during your childhood, were related by the nuns who had charge of your education. When you entered society where for a long time such chimeras have been disbelieved, you were insensibly undeceived, and at present you blush at your former credulity. Why have you not the courage to laugh, in a similar manner, at an infinity of other chimeras with no better foundation, which torment you even yet, and which only appear more respectable, because you have not dared to examine them with your own eyes, or because you see them respected by a public who have never explored them? If my Eugenia is enlightened and reasonable upon all other topics, why does she renounce her understanding and her

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judgment whenever religion is in question? In the mean time, at this redoubtable word her soul is disturbed, her strength abandons her, her ordinary penetration is at fault, her imagination wanders, she only sees through a cloud, she is unquiet and afflicted. On the watch against reason, she dares not call that to her assistance. She persuades herself that the best course for her to take is to allow herself to follow the opinions of a multitude who never examine, and who always suffer themselves to be conducted by blind or deceitful guides.

To reëstablish peace in your mind, dear Madam, cease to despise yourself; entertain a just confidence in your own powers of mind, and feel no chagrin at finding yourself infected with a general and involuntary epidemic from which it did not depend on you to escape. The good Abbé de St. Pierre had reason when he said that *devotion was the small pox of the soul.* I will add that it is rare the disease does not leave its pits for life. Indeed, see how often the most enlightened persons persist forever in the prejudices of their infancy! These notions are so early inculcated, and so many precautions are continually taken to render them durable, that if any thing may reasonably surprise us, it is to see any one have the ability to rise superior to such influences. The most sublime geniuses are often the playthings of superstition. The heat of their imagination sometimes only serves to lead them the farther astray, and to attach them to opinions which would cause them to blush did they but

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consult their reason. Pascal constantly imagined that he saw hell yawning under his feet; Mallebranche was extravagantly credulous; Hobbes had a great terror of phantoms and demons;* and the immortal Newton wrote a ridiculous commentary on the vials and visions of the Apocalypse. In a word, every thing proves that there is nothing more difficult than to efface the notions with which we are imbued during our infancy. The most sensible persons, and those who reason with the most correctness upon every other matter, relapse into their infancy whenever religion is in question.

Thus, Madam, you need not blush for a weakness which you hold in common with almost all the world, and from which the greatest men are not always exempt. Let your courage then revive, and fear not to examine with perfect composure the phantoms which alarm you. In a matter which so greatly interests your repose, consult that enlightened reason which places you as much above the vulgar, as it elevates the human species above the other animals. Far from being suspicious of your own understanding and intellectual faculties, turn your just suspicion against those men, far less enlightened and honest than you, who, to vanquish you, only address themselves to your lively imagination; who have the cruelty to disturb the serenity of your soul; who, under the pretext of attaching you only to heaven, insist that you must

* On this subject see Bayle's *Dict. Crit.*, art. *Hobbes*, Rem. N.

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sunder the most tender and endearing ties; and in fine, who oblige you to proscribe the use of that beneficent reason whose light guides your conduct so judiciously and so safely.

Leave inquietude and remorse to those corrupt women who have cause to reproach themselves, or who have crimes to expiate. Leave superstition to those silly and ignorant females whose narrow minds are incapable of reasoning or reflection. Abandon the futile and trivial ceremonies of an objectionable devotion to those idle and peevish women, for whom, as soon as the transient reign of their personal charms is finished, there remains no rational relaxation to fill the void of their days, and who seek by slander and treachery to console themselves for the loss of pleasures which they can no longer enjoy. Resist that inclination which seems to impel you to gloomy meditation, solitude, and melancholy. Devotion is only suited to inert and listless souls, while yours is formed for action. You should pursue the course I recommend for the sake of your husband, whose happiness depends upon you; you owe it to the children, who will soon, undoubtedly, need all your care and all your instructions for the guidance of their hearts and understandings; you owe it to the friends who honor you, and who will value your society when the beauty which now adorns your person and the voluptuousness which graces your figure have yielded to the inroads of time; you owe it to the circle in which you move, and to the world which has a

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right to your example, possessing as you do virtues that are far more rare to persons of your rank than devotion. In fine, you owe happiness to yourself; for, notwithstanding the promises of religion, you will never find happiness in those agitations into which I perceive you cast by the lurid ideas of superstition. In this path you will only encounter doleful chimeras, frightful phantoms, embarrassments without end, crushing uncertainties, inexplicable enigmas, and dangerous reveries, which are only calculated to disturb your repose, to deprive you of happiness, and to render you incapable of occupying yourself with that of others. It is very difficult to make those around us happy when we are ourselves miserable and deprived of peace.

If you will even slightly make observations upon those about you, you will find abundant proofs of what I advance. The most religious persons are rarely the most amiable or the most social. Even the most sincere devotion, by subjecting those who embrace it to wearisome and crippling ceremonies, by occupying their imaginations with lugubrious and afflicting objects, by exciting their zeal, is but little calculated to give to devotees that equality of temper, that sweetness of an indulgent disposition, and that amenity of character, which constitute the greatest charms of personal intercourse. A thousand examples might be adduced to convince you that devotees who are the most occupied in superstitious observances to please God are not

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those women who succeed best in pleasing those by whom they are surrounded. If there seems to be occasionally an exception to this rule, it is on the part of those who have not all the zeal and fervor which is exacted by their religion. Devotion is either a morose and melancholy passion, or it is a violent and obstinate enthusiasm. Religion imposes an exclusive and entire regard upon its slaves. All that an acceptable Christian gives to a fellow-creature is a robbery from the Creator. A soul filled with religious fervor fears to attach itself to things of the earth, lest it should lose sight of its jealous God, who wishes to engross constant attention, who lays it down as a duty to his creatures that they should sacrifice to him their most agreeable and most innocent inclinations, and who orders that they should render themselves miserable here below, under the idea of pleasing him. In accordance with such principles, we generally see devotees executing with much fidelity the duty of tormenting themselves and disturbing the repose of others. They actually believe they acquire great merit with the Sovereign of heaven by rendering themselves perfectly useless, or even a scourge to the inhabitants of the earth.

I am aware, Madam, that devotion in you does not produce effects injurious to others; but I fear that it is only more injurious to yourself. The goodness of your heart, the sweetness of your disposition, and the beneficence which displays itself in all your conduct, are all so great that even reli-

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gion does not impel you to any dangerous excesses. Nevertheless, devotion often causes strange metamorphoses. Unquiet, agitated, miserable within yourself, it is to be feared that your temperament will change, that your disposition will become acrimonious, and that the vexatious ideas over which you have so long brooded will sooner or later produce a disastrous influence upon those who approach you. Does not experience constantly show us that religion effects changes of this kind? What are called *conversions*, what devotees regard as special acts of divine grace, are very often only lamentable revolutions by which real vices and odious qualities are substituted for amiable and useful characteristics. By a deplorable consequence of these pretended miracles of grace we frequently see sorrow succeed to enjoyment, a gloomy and unhappy state to one of innocent gayety, lassitude and chagrin to activity and hilarity, and slander, intolerance, and zeal to indulgence and gentleness; nay, what do I say? cruelty itself to humanity. In a word, superstition is a dangerous leaven, that is fitted to corrupt even the most honest hearts.

Do you not see, in fact, the excesses to which fanaticism and zeal drive the wisest and best meaning men? Princes, magistrates, and judges become inhuman and pitiless as soon as there is a question of the interests of religion. Men of the gentlest disposition, the most indulgent, and the most equitable, upon every other matter, religion transforms to

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ferocious beasts. The most feeling and compassionate persons believe themselves in conscience obliged to harden their hearts, to do violence to their better instincts, and to stifle nature, in order to show themselves cruel to those who are denounced as enemies to their own manner of thinking. Recall to your mind, Madam, the cruelties of nations and governments in alternate persecutions of Catholics or Protestants, as either happened to be in the ascendant. Can you find reason, equity, or humanity in the vexations, imprisonments, and exiles that in our days are inflicted upon the Jansenists? And these last, if ever they should attain in their turn the power requisite for persecution, would not probably treat their adversaries with more moderation or justice. Do you not daily see individuals who pique themselves upon their sensibility unblushingly express the joy they would feel at the extermination of persons to whom they believe they owe neither benevolence nor indulgence, and whose only crime is a disdain for prejudices that the vulgar regard as sacred, or that an erroneous and false policy considers useful to the state? Superstition has so greatly stifled all sense of humanity in many persons otherwise truly estimable, that they have no compunctions at sacrificing the most enlightened men of the nation because they could not be the most credulous or the most submissive to the authority of the priests.

In a word, devotion is only calculated to fill the heart with a bitter rancor, that banishes peace and

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harmony from society. In the matter of religion, every one believes himself obliged to show more or less ardor and zeal. Have I not often seen you uncertain yourself whether you ought to sigh or smile at the self-depreciation of devotees ridiculously inflamed by that religious vanity which grows out of sectarian conventionalities? You also see them participating in theological quarrels, in which, without comprehending their nature or purport, they believe themselves conscientiously obliged to mingle. I have a hundred times seen you astounded with their clamors, indignant at their animosity, scandalized at their cabals, and filled with disdain at their obstinate ignorance. Yet nothing is more natural than these outbreaks; ignorance has always been the mother of devotion. To be a devotee has always been synonymous to having an imbecile confidence in priests. It is to receive all impulsions from them; it is to think and act only according to them; it is blindly to adopt their passions and prejudices; it is faithfully to fulfil practices which their caprice imposes.

Eugenia is not formed to follow such guides. They would terminate by leading her widely astray, by dazzling her vivid imagination, by infecting her gentle and amiable disposition with a deadly poison. To master with more certainty her understanding, they would render her austere, intolerant, and vindictive. In a word, by the magical power of superstition and supernatural notions, they would succeed, perhaps, in transforming to vices

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those happy dispositions that nature has given you. Believe me, Madam, you would gain nothing by such a metamorphosis. Rather be what you really are. Extricate yourself as soon as possible from that state of incertitude and languor, from that alternative of despondency and trouble, in which you are immersed. If you will only take your reason and virtue for guides, you will soon break the fetters whose dangerous effects you have begun to feel.

Assume the courage, then, I repeat it, to examine for yourself this religion, which, far from procuring you the happiness it promised, will only prove an inexhaustible source of inquietudes and alarms, and which will deprive you, sooner or later, of those rare qualities which render you so dear to society. Your interest exacts that you should render peace to your mind. It is your duty carefully to preserve that sweetness of temper, that indulgence, and that cheerfulness, by which you are so much endeared to all those who approach you. You owe happiness to yourself, and you owe it to those who surround you. Do not, then, abandon yourself to superstitious reveries, but collect all the strength of your judgment to combat the chimeras which torment your imagination. They will disappear as soon as you have considered them with your ordinary sagacity.

Do not tell me, Madam, that your understanding is too weak to sound the depths of theology. Do not tell me, in the language of our priests, that the

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truths of religion are mysteries that we must adopt without comprehending them, and that it is necessary to adore in silence. By expressing themselves in this manner, do you not see they really proscribe and condemn the very religion to which they are so solicitous you should adhere? Whatever is supernatural is unsuited to man, and whatever is beyond his comprehension ought not to occupy his attention. To adore what we are not able to know, is to adore nothing. To believe in what we cannot conceive, is to believe in nothing. To admit without examination every thing we are directed to admit, is to be basely and stupidly credulous. To say that religion is above reason, is to recognize the fact that it was not made for reasonable beings; it is to avow that those who teach it have no more ability to fathom its depths than ourselves; it is to confess that our reverend doctors do not themselves understand the marvels with which they daily entertain us.

If the truths of religion were, as they assure us, necessary to all men, they would be clear and intelligible to all men. If the dogmas which this religion teaches were as important as it is asserted, they would not only be within the comprehension of the doctors who preach them, but of all those who hear their lessons. Is it not strange that the very persons whose profession it is to furnish themselves with religious knowledge, in order to impart it to others, should recognize their own dogmas as beyond their own understanding, and that they

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should obstinately inculcate to the people what they acknowledge they do not comprehend themselves? Should we have much confidence in a physician, who, after confessing that he was utterly ignorant of his art, should nevertheless boast of the excellence of his remedies? This, however, is the constant practice of our spiritual quacks. By a strange fatality, the most sensible people consent to be the dupes of those empirics who are perpetually obliged to avow their own profound ignorance.

But if the mysteries of religion are incomprehensible for even those who inculcate it,—if among those who profess it there is no one who knows precisely what he believes, or who can give an account of either his conduct or belief,—this is not so in regard to the difficulties with which we oppose this religion. These objections are simple, within the comprehension of all persons of ordinary ability, and capable of convincing every man who, renouncing the prejudices of his infancy, will deign to consult the good sense that nature has bestowed upon all beings of the human race.

For a long period of time, subtle theologians have, without relaxation, been occupied in warding off the attacks of the incredulous, and in repairing the breaches made in the ruinous edifice of religion by adversaries who combated under the flag of reason. In all times there have been people who felt the futility of the titles upon which the priests have arrogated the right of enslaving the understandings of men, and of subjugating and despoil-

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ing nations. Notwithstanding all the efforts of the interested and frequently hypocritical men who have taken up the defence of religion, from which they and their confederates alone are profited, these apologists have never been able to vindicate successfully their *divine* system against the attacks of incredulity. Without cessation they have replied to the objections which have been made, but never have they refuted or annihilated them. Almost in every instance the defenders of Christianity have been sustained by oppressive laws on the part of the government; and it has only been by injuries, by declamations, by punishments and persecutions, that they have replied to the allegations of reason. It is in this manner that they have apparently remained masters of the field of battle which their adversaries could not openly contest. Yet, in spite of the disadvantages of a combat so unequal, and although the partisans of religion were accoutred with every possible weapon, and could show themselves openly, in accordance with *law*, while their adversaries had no arms but those of reason, and could not appear personally but at the peril of fines, imprisonment, torture, and death, and were restricted from bringing all their arsenal into service, yet they have inflicted profound, immedicable, and incurable wounds upon superstition. Still, if we believe the mercenaries of religion, the excellence of their system makes it absolutely invulnerable to every blow which can be inflicted upon it; and they pretend they have a thousand times in a

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victorious manner answered the objections which are continually renewed against them. In spite of this great security, we see them excessively alarmed every time a new combatant presents himself, and the latter may well and successfully use the most common objections, and those which have most frequently been urged, since it is evident that up to the present moment the arguments have never been obviated or opposed with satisfactory replies. To convince you, Madam, of what I here advance, you need only compare the most simple and ordinary difficulties which good sense opposes to religion, with the pretended solutions that have been given. You will perceive that the difficulties, evident even to the capacities of a child, have never been removed by divines the most practised in dialectics. You will find in their replies only subtle distinctions, metaphysical subterfuges, unintelligible verbiage, which can never be the language of truth, and which demonstrates the embarrassment, the impotence, and the bad faith of those who are interested by their position in sustaining a desperate cause. In a word, the difficulties which have been urged against religion are clear, and within the comprehension of every one, while the answers which have been given are obscure, entangled, and far from satisfactory, even to persons most versed in such jargon, and plainly indicating that the authors of these replies do not themselves understand what they say.

If you consult the clergy, they will not fail to

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set forth the antiquity of their doctrine, which has always maintained itself, notwithstanding the continual attacks of the Heretics, the Mecreans, and the Impious generally, and also in spite of the persecutions of the Pagans. You have, Madam, too much good sense not to perceive at once that the antiquity of an opinion proves nothing in its favor. If antiquity was a proof of truth, Christianity must yield to Judaism, and that in its turn to the religion of the Egyptians and Chaldeans, or, in other words, to the idolatry which was greatly anterior to Moses. For thousands of years it was universally believed that the sun revolved round the earth, which remained immovable; and yet it is not the less true that the sun is fixed, and the earth moves around that. Besides, it is evident that the Christianity of to-day is not what it formerly was. The continual attacks that this religion has suffered from heretics, commencing with its earliest history, proves that there never could have existed any harmony between the partisans of a pretended divine system, which offended all rules of consistency and logic in its very first principles. Some parts of this celestial system were always denied by devotees who admitted other parts. If infidels have often attacked religion without apparent effect, it is because the best reasons become useless against the blindness of a superstition sustained by the public authority, or against the torrent of opinion and custom which sways the minds of most men. With regard to the persecutions

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which the church suffered on the part of the pagans, he is but slightly acquainted with the effects of fanaticism and religious obstinacy who does not perceive that tyranny is calculated to excite and extend what it persecutes most violently.

You are not formed to be the dupe of names and authorities. The defenders of the popular superstition will endeavor to overwhelm you by the multiplied testimony of many illustrious and learned men, who not only admitted the Christian religion, but who were also its most zealous supporters. They will adduce holy divines, great philosophers, powerful reasoners, fathers of the church, and learned interpreters, who have successively advocated the system. I will not contest the understanding of the learned men who are cited, which, however, was often faulty, but will content myself with repeating that frequently the greatest geniuses are not more clear sighted in matters of religion than the people themselves. They did not examine the religious opinions they taught; it may be because they regarded them as sacred, or it may be because they never went back to first principles, which they would have found altogether unsound, if they had considered them without prejudice. It may also have happened because they were interested in defending a cause with which their own position was allied. Thus their testimony is exceptionable, and their authority carries no great weight.

With regard to the interpreters and commenta-

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tors, who for so many ages have painfully toiled to elucidate the divine laws, to explain the sacred books, and to fix the dogmas of Christianity, their very labors ought to inspire us with suspicion concerning a religion which is founded upon such books and which preaches such dogmas. They prove that works emanating from the Supreme Being are obscure, unintelligible, and need human assistance in order to be understood by those to whom the Divinity wished to reveal his will. The laws of a wise God would be simple and clear. Defective laws alone need interpreters.

It is not, then, Madam, upon these interpreters that you should rely; it is upon yourself; it is your own reason that you should consult. It is *your* happiness, it is *your* repose, that is in question; and these objects are too serious to allow their decision to be delegated to any others than yourself. If religion is as important as we are assured, it undoubtedly merits the greatest attention. If it is upon this religion that depends the happiness of men both in this world and in another, there is no subject which interests us so strongly, and which consequently demands a more thorough, careful, and considerate examination. Can there be any thing, then, more strange than the conduct of the great majority of men? Entirely convinced of the necessity and importance of religion, they still never give themselves the trouble to examine it thoroughly; they follow it in a spirit of routine and from habit; they never give any reason for its

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dogmas; they revere it, they submit to it, and they groan under its weight, without ever inquiring wherefore. In fine, they rely upon others to examine it; and they whose judgment they so blindly receive are precisely those persons upon whose opinions they should look with the most suspicion. The priests arrogate the possession of judging exclusively and without appeal of a system evidently invented for their own utility. And what is the language of these priests? Visibly interested in maintaining the received opinions, they exhibit them as necessary to the public good, as useful and consoling for us all, as intimately connected with morality, as indispensable to society, and, in a word, as of the very greatest importance. After having thus prepossessed our minds, they next prohibit our examining the things so important to be known. What must be thought of such conduct? You can only conclude that they desire to deceive you, that they fear examination only because religion cannot sustain it, and that they dread reason because it is able to unveil the incalculably dangerous projects of the priesthood against the human race.

For these reasons, Madam, as I cannot too often repeat, examine for yourself; make use of your own understanding; seek the truth in the sincerity of your heart; reduce prejudice to silence; throw off the base servitude of custom; be suspicious of imagination; and with these precautions, in good faith with yourself, you can weigh with an impar-

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tial hand the various opinions concerning religion. From whatever source an opinion may come, acquiesce only in that which shall be convincing to your understanding, satisfactory to your heart, conformable to a healthy morality, and approved by virtue. Reject with disdain whatever shocks your reason, and repulse with horror those notions so criminal and injurious to morality which religion endeavors to palm off for supernatural and divine virtues.

What do I say? Amiable and wise Eugenia, examine rigorously the ideas that, by your own desire, I shall hereafter present you. Let not your confidence in me, or your deference to my weak understanding, blind you in regard to my opinions. I submit them to your judgment. Discuss them, combat them, and never give them your assent until you are convinced that in them you recognize the truth. My sentiments are neither divine oracles nor theological opinions which it is not permitted to canvass. If what I say is true, adopt my ideas. If I am deceived, point out my errors, and I am ready to recognize them and to subscribe my own condemnation. It will be very pleasant, Madam, to learn truths of you which, up to the present time, I have vainly sought in the writings of our divines. If I have at this moment any advantage over you, it is due entirely to that tranquillity which I enjoy, and of which at present you are unhappily deprived. The agitations of your mind, the inquietudes of your body, and the at-

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tacks of an exacting and ceremonious devotion, with which your soul is perplexed, prevent you, for the moment, from seeing things coolly, and hinder you from making use of your own understanding; but I have no doubt that soon your intellect, strengthened by reason against vain chimeras, will regain its natural vigor and the superiority which belongs to it. In awaiting this moment that I foresee and so much desire, I shall esteem myself extremely happy if my reflections shall contribute to render you that tranquillity of spirit so necessary to judge wisely of things, and without which there can be no true happiness.

I perceive, Madam, though rather tardily, the length of this letter; but I hope you will pardon it, as well as my frankness. They will at least prove the lively interest I take in your painful situation, the sincere desire I feel to bring it to a termination, and the strong inclination which actuates me to restore you to your accustomed serenity. Less pressing motives would never have been sufficient to make me break silence. Your own positive orders were necessary to lead me to speak of objects which, once thoroughly examined, give no uneasiness to a healthy mind. It has been a law with me never to explain myself upon the subject of religion. Experience has often convinced me that the most useless of enterprises is to seek to undeceive a prejudiced mind. I was very far from believing that I ought ever to write upon these subjects. You alone, Madam, had the power to

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conquer my indolence, and to impel me to change my resolution. Eugenia afflicted, tormented with scruples, and ready to plunge herself into gloomy austerities and superstitions, calculated to render her unamiable to others, without contributing happiness to herself, honored me with her confidence, and requested counsel of her friend. She exacted that I should speak. "It is enough," I said; "let me write for Eugenia; let me endeavor to restore the repose she has lost; let me labor with ardor for her upon whose happiness that of so many others is dependent."

Such, Madam, are the motives which induce me to take my pen in hand. In looking forward to the time when you will be undeceived, I shall dare at least to flatter myself that you will not regard me with the same eyes with which priests and devotees look upon every one who has the temerity to contradict their ideas. To believe them, every man who declares himself against religion is a bad citizen, a madman armed to justify his passions, a perturbator of the public repose, and an enemy of his fellow-citizens, that cannot be punished with too much rigor. My conduct is known to you; and the confidence with which you honor me is sufficient for my apology. It is for you alone that I write. It is to dissipate the clouds that obscure your mental horizon that I communicate reflections which, but for reasons so pressing, I should have always enclosed in my own bosom. If by chance they shall hereafter fall into other hands

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than yours, and be found of some utility, I shall felicitate myself for having contributed to the establishment of happiness by leading back to reason minds which had wandered from it, by making truth to be felt and known, and by unmasking impostures which have caused so many misfortunes upon the earth.

In a word, I submit my reasoning to your judgment, I confide fully in your discretion, and I allow myself to conclude that my ideas, after you are disabused of the vain terrors with which you are now oppressed, will fully convince you that this religion, which is exhibited to men as a concern the most important, the most true, the most interesting, and the most useful, is only a tissue of absurdities, is calculated to confound reason, to disturb the understanding, and can be advantageous to none save those who make use of it to govern the human race. I shall acknowledge myself in the wrong if I do not prove, in the clearest manner, that religion is false, useless, and dangerous, and that morality, in its stead, should occupy the spirits and animate the souls of all men.

I shall enter more particularly into the subject in my next letter. I shall go back to first principles, and in the course of this correspondence I flatter myself I shall completely demonstrate that these objects, which theology endeavors to render intricate, and to envelop with clouds, in order to make them more respectable and sacred, are not only entirely susceptible of being understood by you,

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but that they are likewise within the comprehension of every one who possesses even an ordinary share of good sense. If my frankness shall appear too undisguised, I beg you to consider, Madam, that it is necessary I should address you explicitly and clearly. I now consider it my duty to administer an energetic and prompt remedy for the malady with which I perceive you to be attacked. Besides, I venture to hope that in a short time you will feel gratified that I have shown you the truth in all its integrity and brilliancy. You will pardon me for having dissipated the unreal and yet harassing phantoms which infested your mind. But let my success be what it may, my efforts to confer tranquillity upon you will at least be evidences of the interest I take in your happiness, of my zeal to serve you, and of the respect with which I am your sincere and attached friend.

LETTER II.

Of the Ideas which Religion gives us of the Divinity

Every religion is a system of opinions and conduct founded upon the notions, true or false, that we entertain of the Divinity. To judge of the truth of any system, it is requisite to examine its principles, to see if they accord, and to satisfy

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ourselves whether all its parts lend a mutual support to each other. A religion, to be *true*, should give us *true* ideas of God; and it is by our reason alone that we are able to decide whether what theology asserts concerning this being and his attributes is true or otherwise. Truth for men is only conformity to reason; and thus the same reason which the clergy proscribe is, in the last resort, our only means of judging the system that religion proposes for our assent. That God can only be the true God who is most conformable to our reason, and the true worship can be no other than that which reason approves.

Religion is only important in accordance with the advantages it bestows upon mankind. The best religion must be that which procures its disciples the most real, the most extensive, and the most durable advantages. A false religion must necessarily bestow upon those who practise it only a false, chimerical, and transient utility. Reason must be the judge whether the benefits derived are real or imaginary. Thus, as we constantly see, it belongs to reason to decide whether a religion, a mode of worship, or a system of conduct is advantageous or injurious to the human race.

It is in accordance with these incontestable principles that I shall examine the religion of the Christians. I shall commence by analyzing the ideas which their system gives us of the Divinity, which it boasts of presenting to us in a more perfect manner than all other religions in the world.

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I shall examine whether these ideas accord with each other, whether the dogmas taught by this religion are conformable to those fundamental principles which are every where acknowledged, whether they are consonant with them, and whether the conduct which Christianity prescribes answers to the notions which itself gives us of the Divinity. I shall conclude the inquiry by investigating the advantages that the Christian religion procures the human race — advantages, according to its partisans, that infinitely surpass those which result from all the other religions of the earth.

The Christian religion, as the basis of its belief, sets forth an only God, which it defines as a pure spirit, as an eternal intelligence, as independent and immutable, who has infinite power, who is the cause of all things, who foresees all things, who fills immensity, who created from nothing the world and all it encloses, and who preserves and governs it according to the laws of his infinite wisdom, and the perfections of his infinite goodness and justice, which are all so evident in his works.

Such are the ideas that Christianity gives us of the Divinity. Let us now see whether they accord with the other notions presented to us by this religious system, and which it pretends were revealed by God himself; or, in other words, that these truths were received directly from the Deity, who concealed them from the remainder of mankind,

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and deprived them of a knowledge of his essence. Thus the Christian religion is founded upon a special revelation. And to whom was the revelation made? At first to Abraham, and then to his posterity. The God of the universe, then, the Father of all men, was only willing to be known to the descendants of a Chaldean, who for a long series of years were the exclusive possessors of the knowledge of the true God. By an effect of his special kindness, the Jewish people was for a long time the only race favored with a revelation equally necessary for all men. This was the only people which understood the relations between man and the Supreme Being. All other nations wandered in darkness, or possessed no ideas of the Sovereign of nature but such as were crude, ridiculous, or criminal.

Thus, at the very first step, do we not see that Christianity impairs the goodness and justice of its God? A revelation to a particular people only announces a partial God, who favors a portion of his children, to the prejudice of all the others; who consults only his caprice, and not real merit; who, incapable of conferring happiness upon all men, shows his tenderness solely to some individuals, who have, however, no titles upon his consideration not possessed by the others. What would you say of a father who, placed at the head of a numerous family, had no eyes but for a single one of his children, and who never allowed himself to

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be seen by any of them except that favored one? What would you say if he was displeased with the rest for not being acquainted with his features, notwithstanding he would never allow them to approach his person? Would you not accuse such a father of caprice, cruelty, folly, and a want of reason, if he visited with his anger the children whom he had himself excluded from his presence? Would you not impute to him an injustice of which none but the most brutal of our species could be guilty if he actually punished them for not having executed orders which he was never pleased to give them?

Conclude, then, with me, Madam, that the revelation of a religion to only a single tribe or nation sets forth a God neither good, impartial, nor equitable, but an unjust and capricious tyrant, who, though he may show kindness and preference to some of his creatures, at any rate acts with the greatest cruelty towards all the others. This admitted, revelation does not prove the goodness, but the caprice and partiality of the God that religion represents to us as full of sagacity, benevolence, and equity, and that it describes as the common father of all the inhabitants of the earth. If the interest and self-love of those whom he favors makes them admire the profound views of a God because he has loaded them with benefits to the prejudice of their brethren, he must appear very unjust, on the other hand, to all those who are the victims of his partiality. A hateful pride alone

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could induce a few persons to believe that they were, to the exclusion of all others, the cherished children of Providence. Blinded by their vanity, they do not perceive that it is to give the lie to universal and infinite goodness to suppose that God was capable of favoring with his preference some men or nations, to the exclusion of others. All ought to be equal in his eyes if it is true they are all equally the work of his hands.

It is, nevertheless, upon partial revelations that are founded all the religions of the world. In the same manner that every individual believes himself the most important being in the universe, every nation entertains the idea that it ought to enjoy the peculiar tenderness of the Sovereign of nature, to the exclusion of all the others. If the inhabitants of Hindostan imagine that it was for them alone that Brama spoke, the Jews and the Christians have persuaded themselves that it was only for them that the world was created, and that it is solely for them that God was revealed.

But let us suppose for a moment that God has really made himself known. How could a pure spirit render himself sensible? What form did he take? Of what material organs did he make use in order to speak? How can an infinite Being communicate with those which are finite? I may be assured that, to accommodate himself to the weakness of his creatures, he made use of the agency of some chosen men to announce his wishes to all the rest, and that he filled these agents with

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his spirit, and spoke by their mouths. But can we possibly conceive that an infinite Being could unite himself with the finite nature of man? How can I be certain that he who professes to be inspired by the Divinity does not promulgate his own reveries or impostures as the oracles of heaven? What means have I of recognizing whether God really speaks by his voice? The immediate reply will be, that God, to give weight to the declarations of those whom he has chosen to be his interpreters, endowed them with a portion of his own omnipotence, and that they wrought miracles to prove their divine mission.

I therefore inquire, What is a miracle? I am told that it is an operation contrary to the laws of nature, which God himself has fixed; to which I reply, that, according to the ideas I have formed of the divine wisdom, it appears to me impossible that an immutable God can change the wise laws which he himself has established. I thence conclude that miracles are impossible, seeing they are incompatible with our ideas of the wisdom and immutability of the Creator of the universe. Besides, these miracles would be useless to God. If he be omnipotent, can he not modify the minds of his creatures according to his own will?

To convince and to persuade them, he has only to will that they shall be convinced and persuaded. He has only to tell them things that are clear and sensible, things that may be demonstrated; and to evidence of such a kind they will not fail to give their assent. To do this, he will have no need

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either of miracles or interpreters; truth alone is sufficient to win mankind.

Supposing, nevertheless, the utility and possibility of these miracles, how shall I ascertain whether the wonderful operation which I see performed by the interpreter of the Deity be conformable or contrary to the laws of nature? Am I acquainted with all these laws? May not he who speaks to me in the name of the Lord execute by natural means, though to me unknown, those works which appear altogether extraordinary? How shall I assure myself that he does not deceive me? Does not my ignorance of the secrets and shifts of his art expose me to be the dupe of an able impostor, who might make use of the name of God to inspire me with respect, and to screen his deception? Thus his pretended miracles ought to make me suspect him, even though I were a witness of them; but how would the case stand, were these miracles said to have been performed some thousands of years before my existence? I shall be told that they were attested by a multitude of witnesses; but if I cannot trust to myself when a miracle is performing, how shall I have confidence in others, who may be either more ignorant or more stupid than myself, or who perhaps thought themselves interested in supporting by their testimony tales entirely destitute of reality?

If, on the contrary, I admit these miracles, what do they prove to me? Will they furnish me with a belief that God has made use of his omnipotence to convince me of things which are in direct oppo-

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sition to the ideas I have formed of his essence, his nature, and his divine perfections? If I be persuaded that God is immutable, a miracle will not force me to believe that he is subject to change. If I be convinced that God is just and good, a miracle will never be sufficient to persuade me that he is unjust and wicked. If I possess an idea of his wisdom, all the miracles in the world would not persuade me that God would act like a madman. Shall I be told that he would consent to perform miracles that destroy his divinity, or that are proper only to erase from the minds of men the ideas which they ought to entertain of his infinite perfections? This, however, is what would happen were God himself to perform, or to grant the power of performing, miracles in favor of a particular revelation. He would, in that case, derange the course of nature, to teach the world that he is capricious, partial, unjust, and cruel; he would make use of his omnipotence purposely to convince us that his goodness was insufficient for the welfare of his creatures; he would make a vain parade of his power, to hide his inability to convince mankind by a single act of his will. In short, he would interfere with the eternal and immutable laws of nature, to show us that he is subject to change, and to announce to mankind some important news, which they had hitherto been destitute of, notwithstanding all his goodness.

Thus, under whatever point of view we regard revelation, by whatever miracles we may suppose it attested, it will always be in contradiction to the

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ideas we have of the Deity. They will show us that he acts in an unjust and an arbitrary manner, consulting only his own whims in the favors he bestows, and continually changing his conduct; that he was unable to communicate all at once to mankind the knowledge necessary to their existence, and to give them that degree of perfection of which their natures were susceptible. Hence, Madam, you may see that the supposition of a revelation can never be reconciled with the infinite goodness, justice, omnipotence, and immutability of the Sovereign of the universe.

They will not fail to tell you that the Creator of all things, the independent Monarch of nature is the master of his favors; that he owes nothing to his creatures; that he can dispose of them as he pleases, without any injustice, and without their having any right of complaint; that man is incapable of sounding the profundity of his decrees; and that his justice is not the justice of men. But all these answers, which divines have continually in their mouths, serve only to accelerate the destruction of those sublime ideas which they have given us of the Deity. The result appears to be, that God conducts himself according to the maxims of a fantastic sovereign, who, satisfied in having rewarded some of his favorites, thinks himself justified in neglecting the rest of his subjects, and to leave them groaning in the most deplorable misery.

You must acknowledge, Madam, it is not on such a model that we can form a powerful, equitable,

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and beneficent God, whose omnipotence ought to enable him to procure happiness to all his subjects, without fear of exhausting the treasures of his goodness.

If we are told that divine justice bears no resemblance to the justice of men, I reply, that in this case we are not authorized to say that God is *just;* seeing that by justice it is not possible for us to conceive any thing except a similar quality to that called justice by the beings of our own species. If divine justice bears no resemblance to human justice, — if, on the contrary, this justice resembles what we call injustice, — then all our ideas confound themselves, and we know not either what we mean or what we say when we affirm that God is just. According to human ideas, (which are, however, the only ones that men are possessed of,) justice will always exclude caprice and partiality; and never can we prevent ourselves from regarding as iniquitous and vicious a sovereign who, being both able and willing to occupy himself with the happiness of his subjects, should plunge the greatest number of them into misfortune, and reserve his kindness for those to whom his whims have given the preference.

With respect to telling us that *God owes nothing to his creatures*, such an atrocious principle is destructive of every idea of justice and goodness, and tends visibly to sap the foundation of all religion. A God that is just and good owes happiness to every being to whom he has given exist-

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ence; he ceases to be just and good if he produce them only to render them miserable; and he would be destitute of both wisdom and reason were he to give them birth only to be the victims of his caprice. What should we think of a father bringing children into the world for the sole purpose of putting their eyes out and tormenting them at his ease?

On the other hand, all religions are entirely founded upon the reciprocal engagements which are supposed to exist between God and his creatures. If God owes nothing to the latter, if he is not under an obligation to fulfil his engagements to them when they have fulfilled theirs to him, of what use is religion? What motives can men have to offer their homage and worship to the Divinity? Why should they feel much desire to love or serve a master who can absolve himself of all duty towards those who entered his service with an expectation of the recompense promised under such circumstances?

It is easy to see that the destructive ideas of divine justice which are inculcated are only founded upon a fatal prejudice prevalent among the generality of men, leading them to suppose that unlimited power must inevitably exempt its possessor from an accordance with the laws of equity; that force can confer the right of committing bad actions; and that no one could properly demand an account of his conduct of a man sufficiently powerful to carry out all his caprices. These ideas are evidently borrowed from the conduct of tyrants,

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who no sooner find themselves possessed of absolute power than they cease to recognize any other rules than their own fantasies, and imagine that justice has no claims upon potentates like them.

It is upon this frightful model that theologians have formed that God whom they, notwithstanding, assert to be a just being, while, if the conduct they attribute to him was true, we should be constrained to regard him as the most unjust of tyrants, as the most partial of fathers, as the most fantastic of princes, and, in a word, as a being the most to be feared and the least worthy of love that the imagination could devise. We are informed that the God who created all men has been unwilling to be known except to a very small number of them, and that while this favored portion exclusively enjoyed the benefits of his kindness, all the others were objects of his anger, and were only created by him to be left in blindness for the very purpose of punishing them in the most cruel manner. We see these pernicious characteristics of the Divinity penetrating the entire economy of the Christian religion; we find them in the books which are pretended to be inspired, and we discover them in the dogmas of predestination and grace. In a word, every thing in religion announces a despotic God, whom his disciples vainly attempt to represent to us as just, while all that they declare of him only proves his injustice, his tyrannical caprices, his extravagances, so frequently cruel, and his partiality, so pernicious to the greater portion of the human race.

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When we exclaim against conduct which, in the eyes of all reasonable men, must appear so excessively capricious, it is expected that our mouths will be closed by the assertion that God is omnipotent, that it is for him to determine how he will bestow benefits, and that he is under no obligations to any of his creatures. His apologists end by endeavoring to intimidate us with the frightful and iniquitous punishments that he reserves for those who are so audacious as to murmur.

It is easy to perceive the futility of these arguments. Power, I do contend, can never confer the right of violating equity. Let a sovereign be as powerful as he may, he is not on that account less blamable when in rewards and punishments he follows only his caprice. It is true, we may fear him, we may flatter him, we may pay him servile homage; but never shall we love him sincerely; never shall we serve him faithfully; never shall we look up to him as the model of justice and goodness. If those who receive his kindness believe him to be just and good, those who are the objects of his folly and rigor cannot prevent themselves from detesting his monstrous iniquity in their hearts.

If we be told that we are only as worms of earth relatively to God, or that we are only like a vase in the hands of a potter, I reply in this case, that there can neither be connection nor moral duty between the creature and his Creator; and I shall hence conclude that religion is useless, seeing that a

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worm of earth can owe nothing to a man who crushes it, and that the vase can owe nothing to the potter that has formed it. In the supposition that man is only a worm or an earthen vessel in the eyes of the Deity, he would be incapable either of serving him, glorifying him, honoring him, or offending him. We are, however, continually told that man is capable of merit and demerit in the sight of his God, whom he is ordered to love, serve, and worship. We are likewise assured that it was man alone whom the Deity had in view in all his works; that it is for him alone the universe was created; for him alone that the course of nature was so often deranged; and, in short, it was with a view of being honored, cherished, and glorified by man that God has revealed himself to us. According to the principles of the Christian religion, God does not cease, for a single instant, his occupations for man, this *worm of earth*, this *earthen vessel*, which he has formed. Nay, more: man is sufficiently powerful to influence the honor, the felicity, and the glory of his God; it rests with man to please him or to irritate him, to deserve his favor or his hatred, to appease him or to kindle his wrath.

Do you not perceive, Madam, the striking contradictions of those principles which, nevertheless, form the basis of all revealed religions? Indeed, we cannot find one of them that is not erected on the reciprocal influence between God and man, and between man and God. Our own species,

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which are annihilated (if I may use the expression) every time that it becomes necessary to whitewash the Deity from some reproachful stain of injustice and partiality, — these miserable beings, to whom it is pretended that God owes nothing, and who, we are assured, are unnecessary to him for his own felicity, — the human race, which is nothing in his eyes, becomes all at once the principal performer on the stage of nature. We find that mankind are necessary to support the glory of their Creator; we see them become the sole objects of his care; we behold in them the power to gladden or afflict him; we see them meriting his favor and provoking his wrath. According to these contradictory notions concerning the God of the universe, the source of all felicity, is he not really the most wretched of beings? We behold him perpetually exposed to the insults of men, who offend him by their thoughts, their words, their actions, and their neglect of duty. They incommode him, they irritate him, by the capriciousness of their minds, by their actions, their desires, and even by their ignorance. If we admit those Christian principles which suppose that the greater portion of the human race excites the fury of the Eternal, and that very few of them live in a manner conformable to his views, will it not necessarily result therefrom, that in the immense crowd of beings whom God has created for his glory, only a very small number of them glorify and please him; while all the rest are occupied in vexing him, exciting his wrath, troubling

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his felicity, deranging the order that he loves, frustrating his designs, and forcing him to change his immutable intentions?

You are, undoubtedly, surprised at the contradictions to be encountered at the very first step we take in examining this religion; and I take upon myself to predict that your embarrassment will increase as you proceed therein. If you coolly examine the ideas presented to us in the revelation common both to Jews and Christians, and contained in the books which they tell us are *sacred*, you will find that the Deity who speaks is always in contradiction with himself; that he becomes his own destroyer, and is perpetually occupied in undoing what he has just done, and in repairing his own workmanship, to which, in the first instance, he was incapable of giving that degree of perfection he wished it to possess. He is never satisfied with his own works, and cannot, in spite of his omnipotence, bring the human race to the point of perfection he intended. The books containing the revelation, on which Christianity is founded, every where display to us a God of goodness in the commission of wickedness; an omnipotent God, whose projects unceasingly miscarry; an immutable God, changing his maxims and his conduct; an omniscient God, continually deceived unawares; a resolute God, yet repenting of his most important actions; a God of wisdom, whose arrangements never attain success. He is a great God, who occupies himself with the most puerile trifles; an

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all-sufficient God, yet subject to jealousy; a powerful God, yet suspicious, vindictive, and cruel; and a just God, yet permitting and prescribing the most atrocious iniquities. In a word, he is a perfect God, yet displaying at the same time such imperfections and vices that the most despicable of men would blush to resemble him.

Behold, Madam, the God whom this religion orders you to adore *in spirit and in truth*. I reserve for another letter an analysis of the holy books which you are taught to respect as the oracles of heaven. I now perceive for the first time that I have perhaps made too long a dissertation; and I doubt not you have already perceived that a system built on a basis possessing so little solidity as that of the God whom his devotees raise with one hand and destroy with the other, can have no stability attached to it, and can only be regarded as a long tissue of errors and contradictions. I am, &c.

LETTER III.

An Examination of the Holy Scriptures, of the Nature of the Christian Religion, and of the Proofs upon which Christianity is founded.

You have seen, Madam, in my preceding letter, the incompatible and contradictory ideas which this

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religion gives us of the Deity. You will have seen that the revelation which is announced to us, instead of being the offspring of his goodness and tenderness for the human race, is really only a proof of injustice and partiality, of which a God who is equally just and good would be entirely incapable. Let us now examine whether the ideas suggested to us by these books, containing the divine oracles, are more rational, more consistent, or more conformable to the divine perfections. Let us see whether the statements related in the Bible, whether the commands prescribed to us in the name of God himself, are really worthy of God, and display to us the characters of infinite wisdom, goodness, power, and justice.

These inspired books go back to the origin of the world. Moses, the confidant, the interpreter, the historian of the Deity, makes us (if we may use such an expression) witnesses of the formation of the universe. He tells us that the Eternal, tired of his inaction, one fine day took it into his head to create a world that was necessary to his glory. To effect this, he forms matter out of nothing; a pure spirit produces a substance which has no affinity to himself; although this God fills all space with his immensity, yet still he found room enough in it to admit the universe, as well as all the material bodies contained therein.

These, at least, are the ideas which divines wish us to form respecting the creation, if such a thing were possible as that of possessing a clear idea of a

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pure spirit producing matter. But this discussion is throwing us into metaphysical researches, which I wish to avoid. It will be sufficient to you that you may console yourself for not being able to comprehend it, seeing that the most profound thinkers, who talk about the creation or the eduction of the world from nothing, have no ideas on the subject more precise than those which you form to yourself. As soon, Madam, as you take the trouble to reflect thereon, you will find that divines, instead of explaining things, have done nothing but invent words, in order to render them dubious, and to confound all our natural conceptions.

I will not, however, tire you by a fastidious display of the blunders which fill the narrative of Moses, which they announce to us as being dictated by the Deity. If we read it with a little attention, we shall perceive in every page philosophical and astronomical errors, unpardonable in an inspired author, and such as we should consider ridiculous in any man, who, in the most superficial manner, should have studied and contemplated nature.

You will find, for example, light created before the sun, although this star is visibly the source of light which communicates itself to our globe. You will find the evening and the morning established before the formation of this same sun, whose presence alone produces day, whose absence produces night, and whose different aspects constitute morning and evening. You will there find that the

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moon is spoken of as a body possessing its own light, in a similar manner as the sun possesses it, although this planet is a dark body, and receives its light from the sun. These ignorant blunders are sufficient to show you that the Deity who revealed himself to Moses was quite unacquainted with the nature of those substances which he had created out of nothing, and that you at present possess more information respecting them than was once possessed by the Creator of the world.

I am not ignorant that our divines have an answer always ready to those difficulties which would attack their divine science, and place their knowledge far below that of Galileo, Descartes, Newton, and even below that of young people who have scarcely studied the first elements of natural philosophy. They will tell us that God, in order to render himself intelligible to the savage and ignorant Jews, spoke in conformity to their imperfect notions, in the false and incorrect language of the vulgar. We must not be imposed upon by this solution, which our doctors regard as triumphant, and which they so frequently employ when it becomes necessary to justify the Bible against the ignorance and vulgarities contained therein. We answer them, that a God who knows every thing, and can perform every thing, might by a single word have rectified the false notions of the people he wished to enlighten, and enabled them to know the nature of bodies more perfectly than the most able men who have since appeared. If it be replied that revelation is

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not intended to render men learned, but to make them pious, I answer that revelation was not sent to establish false notions; that it would be unworthy of God to borrow the language of falsehood and ignorance; that the knowledge of nature, so far from being an injury to piety, is, by the avowal of divines, the most proper study to display the greatness of God. They tell us that religion would be unmovable, were it conformable to true knowledge; that we should have no objections to make to the recital of Moses, nor to the philosophy of the Holy Scriptures, if we found nothing but what was continually confirmed by experience, astronomy, and the demonstrations of geometry.

To maintain a contrary opinion, and to say that God is pleased in confounding the knowledge of men and in rendering it useless, is to pretend that he is pleased with making us ignorant and changeable, and that he condemns the progress of the human mind, although we ought to suppose him the author of it. To pretend that God was obliged in the Scriptures to conform himself to the language of men, is to pretend that he withdrew his assistance from those he wished to enlighten, and that he was unable of rendering them susceptible of comprehending the language of truth. This is an observation not to be lost sight of in the examination of revelation, where we find in each page that God expresses himself in a manner quite unworthy of the Deity. Could not an omnipotent God, instead of degrading himself, instead of con-

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descending to speak the language of ignorance, so far enlighten them as to make them understand a language more true, more noble, and more conformable to the ideas which are given us of the Deity? An experienced master by degrees enables his scholars to understand what he wishes to teach them, and a God ought to be able to communicate to them immediately all the knowledge he intended to give them.

However, according to Genesis, God, after creating the world, produced man from the dust of the earth. In the mean while we are assured that he created him *in his own image;* but what was the image of God? How could man, who is at least partly material, represent a pure spirit, which excludes all matter?

How could his imperfect mind be formed on the model of a mind possessing all perfection, like that which we suppose in the Creator of the universe? What resemblance, what proportion, what affinity could there be between a finite mind united to a body, and the infinite spirit of the Creator? These, doubtless, are great difficulties; hitherto it has been thought impossible to decide them; and they will probably for a long time employ the minds of those who strive to understand the incomprehensible meaning of a book which God provided for our instruction.

But why did God create man? Because he wished to people the universe with intelligent beings, who would render him homage, who should

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witness his wonders, who should glorify him, who should meditate and contemplate his works, and merit his favors by their submission to his laws.

Here we behold man becoming necessary to the dignity of his God, who without him would live without being glorified, who would receive no homage, and who would be the melancholy Sovereign of an empire without subjects — a condition not suited to his vanity. I think it useless to remark to you what little conformity we find between those ideas and such as are given us of a self-sufficient being, who, without the assistance of any other, is supremely happy. All the characters in which the Bible portrays the Deity are always borrowed from man, or from a proud monarch; and we every where find that instead of having made man after his own image, it is man that has always made God after the image of himself, that has conferred on him his own way of thinking, his own virtues, and his own vices.

But did this man whom the Deity has created for his glory faithfully fulfil the wishes of his Creator? This subject that he has just acquired — will he be obedient? will he render homage to his power? will he execute his will? He has done nothing of the kind. Scarcely is he created when he becomes rebellious to the orders of his Sovereign; he eats a forbidden fruit which God has placed in his way in order to tempt him, and by this act draws the divine wrath not only on himself, but on all his posterity. Thus it is that he annihilates at

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one blow the great projects of the Omnipotent, who had no sooner made man for his glory than he becomes offended with that conduct which he ought to have foreseen.

Here he finds himself obliged to change his projects with regard to mankind; he becomes their enemy, and condemns them and the whole of the race (who had not yet the power of sinning) to innumerable penalties, to cruel calamities, and to death! What do I say? To punishments which death itself shall not terminate! Thus God, who wished to be glorified, is not glorified; he seems to have created man only to offend him, that he might afterwards punish the offender.

In this recital, which is founded on the Bible, can you recognize, Madam, an omnipotent God, whose orders are always accomplished, and whose projects are all necessarily executed? In a God who tempts us, or who permits us to be tempted, do you behold a being of beneficence and sincerity? In a God who punishes the being he has tempted, or subjected to temptation, do you perceive any equity? In a God who extends his vengeance even to those who have not sinned, do you behold any shadow of justice? In a God who is irritated at what he knew must necessarily happen, can you imagine any foresight? In the rigorous punishments by which this God is destined to avenge himself of his feeble creatures, both in this world and the next, can you perceive the least appearance of goodness?

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It is, however, this history, or rather this fable, on which is founded the whole edifice of the Christian religion.

If the first man had not been disobedient, the human race had not been the object of the divine wrath, and would have had no need of a Redeemer. If this God, who knows all things, foresees all things, and possesses all power, had prevented or foreseen the fault of Adam, it would not have been necessary for God to sacrifice his own innocent Son to appease his fury. Mankind, for whom he created the universe, would then have been always happy; they would not have incurred the displeasure of that Deity who demanded their adoration. In a word, if this apple had not been imprudently eaten by Adam and his spouse, mankind would not have suffered so much misery, man would have enjoyed without interruption the immortal happiness to which God had destined him, and the views of Providence towards his creatures would not have been frustrated.

It would be useless to make reflections on notions so whimsical, so contrary to the wisdom, the power, and the justice of the Deity. It is doing quite enough to compare the different objects which the Bible presents to us, to perceive their inutility, absurdities, and contradictions. We there see, continually, a wise God conducting himself like a madman. He defeats his own projects that he may afterwards repair them, repents of what he has done, acts as if he had foreseen nothing, and

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is forced to permit proceedings which his omnipotence could not prevent. In the writings revealed by this God, he appears occupied only in blackening his own character, degrading himself, vilifying himself, even in the eyes of men whom he would excite to worship him and pay him homage; overturning and confounding the minds of those whom he had designed to enlighten. What has just been said might suffice to undeceive us with respect to a book which would pass better as being intended to destroy the idea of a Deity, than as one containing the oracles dictated and revealed by him. Nothing but a heap of absurdities could possibly result from principles so false and irrational; nevertheless, let us take another glance at the principal objects which this divine work continually offers to our consideration. Let us pass on to the Deluge. The holy books tell us, that in spite of the will of the Almighty, the whole human race, who had already been punished by infirmities, accidents, and death, continued to give themselves up to the most unaccountable depravity. God becomes irritated, and repents having created them. Doubtless he could not have foreseen this depravity; yet, rather than change the wicked disposition of their hearts, which he holds in his own hands, he performs the most surprising, the most impossible of miracles. He at once drowns all the inhabitants, with the exception of some favorites, whom he destines to re-people the earth with a chosen race, that will render themselves more agreeable to their God.

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But does the Almighty succeed in this new project? The chosen race, saved from the waters of the deluge, on the wreck of the earth's destruction, begin again to offend the Sovereign of nature, abandon themselves to new crimes, give themselves up to idolatry, and forgetting the recent effects of celestial vengeance, seem intent only on provoking heaven by their wickedness. In order to provide a remedy, God chooses for his favorite the idolater Abraham. To him he discovers himself; he orders him to renounce the worship of his fathers, and embrace a new religion. To guarantee this covenant, the Sovereign of nature prescribes a melancholy, ridiculous, and whimsical ceremony, to the observance of which a God of wisdom attaches his favors. The posterity of this chosen man are consequently to enjoy, for everlasting, the greatest advantages; they will always be the most partial objects of tenderness, with the Almighty; they will be happier than all other nations, whom the Deity will abandon to occupy himself only for them.

These solemn promises, however, have not prevented the race of Abraham from becoming the slaves of a vile nation, that was detested by the Eternal; his dear friends experienced the most cruel treatment on the part of the Egyptians. God could not guarantee them from the misfortune that had befallen them; but in order to free them again, he raised up to them a liberator, a chief, who performed the most astonishing miracles. At the voice of Moses all nature is confounded; God

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employs him to declare his will; yet he who could create and annihilate the world could not subdue Pharaoh. The obstinacy of this prince defeats, in ten successive trials, the divine omnipotence, of which Moses is the depositary. After having vainly attempted to overcome a monarch whose heart God had been pleased to harden, God has recourse to the most ordinary method of rescuing his people; he tells them to run off, after having first counselled them to rob the Egyptians. The fugitives are pursued; but God, who protects these robbers, orders the sea to swallow up the miserable people who had the temerity to run after their property.

The Deity would, doubtless, have reason to be satisfied with the conduct of a people that he had just delivered by such a great number of miracles. Alas! neither Moses nor the Almighty could succeed in persuading this obstinate people to abandon the false gods of that country where they had been so miserable; they preferred them to the living God who had just saved them. All the miracles which the Eternal was daily performing in favor of Israel could not overcome their stubbornness, which was still more inconceivable and wonderful than the greatest miracles. These wonders, which are now extolled as convincing proofs of the divine mission of Moses, were by the confession of this same Moses, who has himself transmitted us the accounts, incapable of convincing the people who were witnesses of them, and never

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produced the good effects which the Deity proposed to himself in performing them.

The credulity, the obstinacy, the continual depravity of the Jews, Madam, are the most indubitable proofs of the falsity of the miracles of Moses, as well as those of all his successors, to whom the Scriptures attribute a supernatural power. If, in the face of these facts, it be pretended that these miracles are attested, we shall be compelled, at least, to agree that, according to the Bible account, they have been entirely useless, that the Deity has been constantly baffled in all his projects, and that he could never make of the Hebrews a people submissive to his will.

We find, however, God continues obstinately employed to render his people worthy of him; he does not lose sight of them for a moment; he sacrifices whole nations to them, and sanctions their rapine, violence, treason, murder, and usurpation. In a word, he permits them to do any thing to obtain his ends. He is continually sending them chiefs, prophets, and wonderful men, who try in vain to bring them to their duty. The whole history of the Old Testament displays nothing but the vain efforts of God to vanquish the obstinacy of his people. To succeed in this, he employs kindnesses, miracles, and severity. Sometimes he delivers up to them whole nations, to be hated, pillaged, and exterminated; at other times he permits these same nations to exercise over his favorite people the greatest of cruelties. He delivers

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them into the hands of their enemies, who are likewise the enemies of God himself. Idolatrous nations become masters of the Jews, who are left to feel the insults, the contempt, and the most unheard-of severities, and are sometimes compelled to sacrifice to idols, and to violate the law of their God. The race of Abraham becomes the prey of impious nations. The Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans make them successively undergo the most cruel treatment and suffer the most bloody outrages, and God even permits his temple to be polluted in order to punish the Jews.

To terminate, at length, the troubles of his cherished people, the pure Spirit that created the universe sends his own Son. It is said that he had already been announced by his prophets, though this was certainly done in a manner admirably adapted to prevent his being known on his arrival. This Son of God becomes a man through his kindness for the Jews, whom he came to liberate, to enlighten, and to render the most happy of mortals. Being clothed with divine omnipotence, he performs the most astonishing miracles, which do not, however, convince the Jews. He can do every thing but convert them. Instead of converting and liberating the Jews, he is himself compelled, notwithstanding all his miracles, to undergo the most infamous of punishments, and to terminate his life like a common malefactor. God is condemned to death by the people he came to save. The Eternal hardened and blinded those among whom he sent

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his own Son; he did not foresee that this Son would be rejected. What do I say? He managed matters in such a way as not to be recognized, and took such steps that his favorite people derived no benefit from the coming of the Messiah. In a word, the Deity seems to have taken the greatest care that his projects, so favorable to the Jews, should be nullified and rendered unprofitable!

When we expostulate against a conduct so strange and so unworthy of the Deity, we are told it was necessary for every thing to take place in such a manner, for the accomplishment of prophecies which had announced that the Messiah should be disowned, rejected, and put to death. But why did God, who knows all, and who foresaw the fate of his dear Son, form the project of sending him among the Jews, to whom he must have known that his mission would be useless? Would it not have been easier neither to announce him nor send him? Would it not have been more conformable to divine omnipotence to spare himself the trouble of so many miracles, so many prophecies, so much useless labor, so much wrath, and so many sufferings to his own Son, by giving at once to the human race that degree of perfection he intended for them?

We are told it was necessary that the Deity should have a victim; that to repair the fault of the first man, no expedient would be sufficient but the death of another God; that the only God of the

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universe could not be appeased but by the blood of his own Son. I reply, in the first place, that God had only to prevent the first man from committing a fault; that this would have spared him much chagrin and sorrow, and saved the life of his dear Son. I reply, likewise, that man is incapable of offending God unless God either permitted it or consented to it. I shall not examine how it is possible for God to have a Son, who, being as much a God as himself, can be subject to death. I reply, also, that it is impossible to perceive such a grave fault and sin in taking an apple, and that we can find very little proportion between the crime committed against the Deity by eating an apple and his Son's death.

I know well enough I shall be told that these are all mysteries; but I, in my turn, shall reply, that mysteries are imposing words, imagined by men who know not how to get themselves out of the labyrinth into which their false reasonings and senseless principles have once plunged them.

Be this as it may, we are assured that the Messiah, or the deliverer of the Jews, had been clearly predicted and described by the prophecies contained in the Old Testament. In this case, I demand why the Jews have disowned this wonderful man, this God whom God sent to them. They answer me, that the incredulity of the Jews was likewise predicted, and that divers inspired writers had announced the death of the Son of God. To which I reply, that a sensible God ought not to

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have sent him under such circumstances, that an omnipotent God ought to have adopted measures more efficacious and certain to bring his people into the way in which he wished them to go. If he wished not to convert and liberate the Jews, it was quite useless to send his Son among them, and thereby expose him to a death that was both certain and foreseen.

They will not fail to tell me, that in the end the divine patience became tired of the excesses of the Jews; that the immutable God, who had sworn an eternal alliance with the race of Abraham, wished at length to break the treaty, which he had, however, assured them should last forever. It is pretended that God had determined to reject the Hebrew nation, in order to adopt the Gentiles, whom he had hated and despised nearly four thousand years. I reply, that this discourse is very little conformable to the ideas we ought to have of a God who *changes not*, whose mercy is *infinite*, and whose goodness is *inexhaustible*. I shall tell them, that in this case the Messiah announced by the Jewish prophets was destined for the Jews, and that he ought to have been their liberator, instead of destroying their worship and their religion. If it be possible to unravel any thing in these obscure, enigmatical, and symbolical oracles of the prophets of Judea, as we find them in the Bible, — if there be any means of guessing the meaning of the obscure riddles, which have been decorated with the pompous name of prophecies, we shall perceive

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that the inspired writers, when they are in a good humor, always promised the Jews a man that will redress their grievances, restore the kingdom of Judah, and not one that should destroy the religion of Moses. If it were for the Gentiles that the Messiah should come, he is no longer the Messiah promised to the Jews and announced by their prophets. If Jesus be the Messiah of the Jews, he could not be the destroyer of their nation.

Should I be told that Jesus himself declared that he came to fulfil the law of Moses, and not to abolish it, I ask why Christians do not observe the law of the Jews?

Thus, in whatever light we regard Jesus Christ, we perceive that he could not be the man whom the prophets have predicted, since it is evident that he came only to destroy the religion of the Jews, which, though instituted by God himself, had nevertheless become disagreeable to him. If this inconstant God, who was wearied with the worship of the Jews, had at length repented of his injustice towards the Gentiles, it was to them that he ought to have sent his Son. By acting in this way he would at least have saved his old friends from a frightful *deicide*, which he forced them to commit, because they were not able to recognize the God he sent amongst them. Besides, the Jews were very pardonable in not acknowledging their expected Messiah in an artisan of Galilee, who was destitute of all the characteristics which the prophets had related, and during whose lifetime

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his fellow-citizens were neither liberated nor happy.

We are told that he performed miracles. He healed the sick, caused the lame to walk, gave sight to the blind, and raised the dead. At length he accomplished his own resurrection. It might be so believed; yet he has visibly failed in that miracle for which alone he came upon earth. He was never able either to persuade or to convert the Jews, who witnessed all the daily wonders that he performed. Notwithstanding those prodigies, they placed him ignominiously on the cross. In spite of his divine power, he was incapable of escaping punishment. He wished to die, to render the Jews culpable, and to have the pleasure of rising again the third day, in order to confound the ingratitude and obstinacy of his fellow-citizens. What is the result? Did his fellow-citizens concede to this great miracle, and have they at length acknowledged him? Far from it; they never saw him. The Son of God, who arose from the dead in secrecy, showed himself only to his adherents. They alone pretend to have conversed with him; they alone have furnished us with the particulars of his life and miracles; and yet by such suspicious testimony they wish to convince us of the divinity of his mission eighteen hundred years after the event, although he could not convince his contemporaries, the Jews.

We are then told that many Jews have been converted to Jesus Christ; that after his death

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many others were converted; that the witnesses of the life and miracles of the Son of God have sealed their testimony with their blood; that men will not die to attest falsehood; that by a visible effect of the divine power, the people of a great part of the earth have adopted Christianity, and still persist in the belief of this divine religion.

In all this I perceive nothing like a miracle. I see nothing but what is conformable to the ordinary progress of the human mind. An enthusiast, a dexterous impostor, a crafty juggler, can easily find adherents in a stupid, ignorant, and superstitious populace. These followers, captivated by counsels, or seduced by promises, consent to quit a painful and laborious life, to follow a man who gives them to understand that he will make them *fishers of men;* that is to say, he will enable them to subsist by his cunning tricks, at the expense of the multitude who are always credulous. The juggler, with the assistance of his remedies, can perform cures which seem miraculous to ignorant spectators. These simple creatures immediately regard him as a supernatural being. He adopts this opinion himself, and confirms the high notions which his partisans have formed respecting him. He feels himself interested in maintaining this opinion among his sectaries, and finds out the secret of exciting their enthusiasm. To accomplish this point, our empiric becomes a preacher; he makes use of riddles, obscure sentences, and parables to the multitude, that always admire what they do not understand.

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To render himself more agreeable to the people, he declaims among poor, ignorant, foolish men, against the rich, the great, the learned; but above all, against the *priests*, who in all ages have been *avaricious*, *imperious*, *uncharitable*, and *burdensome* to the people. If these discourses be eagerly received among the vulgar, who are always morose, envious, and jealous, they displease all those who see themselves the objects of the invective and satire of the popular preacher.

They consequently wish to check his progress, they lay snares for him, they seek to surprise him in a fault, in order that they may unmask him and have their revenge. By dint of imposture, he outwits them; yet, in consequence of his miracles and illusions, he at length discovers himself. He is then seized and punished, and none of his adherents abide by him, except a few idiots, that nothing can undeceive; none but partisans, accustomed to lead with him a life of idleness; none but dexterous knaves, who wish to continue their impositions on the public, by deceptions similar to those of their old master, by obscure, unconnected, confused, and fanatical harangues, and by declamations against *magistrates* and *priests*. These, who have the power in their own hands, finish by persecuting them, imprisoning them, flogging them, chastising them, and putting them to death. Poor wretches, habituated to poverty, undergo all these sufferings with a fortitude which we frequently meet with in malefactors. In some we find their courage fortified by the zeal

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of fanaticism. This fortitude surprises, agitates, excites pity, and irritates the spectators against those who torment men whose constancy makes them looked upon as being innocent, who, it is supposed, may possibly be right, and for whom compassion likewise interests itself. It is thus that enthusiasm is propagated, and that persecution always augments the number of the partisans of those who are persecuted.

I shall leave to you, Madam, the trouble of applying the history of our juggler, and his adherents, to that of the founder, the apostles, and the martyrs of the Christian religion.

With whatever art they have written the life of Jesus Christ, which we hold only from his apostles, or their disciples, it furnishes a sufficiency of materials on which to found our conjectures. I shall only observe to you, that the Jewish nation was remarkable for its credulity; that the companions of Jesus were chosen from among the dregs of the people; that Jesus always gave a preference to the populace, with whom he wished, undoubtedly, to form a rampart against the *priests;* and that, at last, Jesus was seized immediately after the most splendid of his miracles. We see him put to death immediately after the resurrection of Lazarus, which, even according to the gospel account, bears the most evident characters of fraud, which are visible to every one who examines it without prejudice.

I imagine, Madam, that what I have just stated will suffice to show you what opinion you ought

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to entertain respecting the founder of Christianity and his first sectaries. These have been either dupes or fanatics, who permitted themselves to be seduced by deceptions, and by discourses conformable to their desires, or by dexterous impostors, who knew how to make the best of the tricks of their old master, to whom they have become such able successors. In this way did they establish a religion which enabled them to live at the people's expense, and which still maintains in abundance those we pay, at such a high rate, for transmitting from father to son the fables, visions, and wonders which were born and nursed in Judea. The propagation of the Christian faith, and the constancy of their martyrs, have nothing surprising in them. The people flock after all those that show them wonders, and receive without reasoning on it every thing that is told them. They transmit to their children the tales they have heard related, and by degrees these opinions are adopted by kings, by the great, and even by the learned.

As for the martyrs, their constancy has nothing supernatural in it. The first Christians, as well as all new sectaries, were treated, by the Jews and pagans, as disturbers of the public peace. They were already sufficiently intoxicated with the fanaticism with which their religion inspired them, and were persuaded that God held himself in readiness to crown them, and to receive them into his eternal dwelling. In a word, seeing the heavens opened, and being convinced that the end of the world

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was approaching, it is not surprising that they had courage to set punishment at defiance, to endure it with constancy, and to despise death. To these motives, founded on their religious opinions, many others were added, which are always of such a nature as to operate strongly upon the minds of men. Those who, as Christians, were imprisoned and ill-treated on account of their faith, were visited, consoled, encouraged, honored, and loaded with kindnesses by their brethren, who took care of and succored them during their detention, and who almost adored them after their death. Those, on the other hand, who displayed weakness, were despised and detested, and when they gave way to repentance, they were compelled to undergo a rigorous penitence, which lasted as long as they lived. Thus were the most powerful motives united to inspire the martyrs with courage; and this courage has nothing more supernatural about it than that which determines us daily to encounter the most perilous dangers, through the fear of dishonoring ourselves in the eyes of our fellow-citizens. Cowardice would expose us to infamy all the rest of our days. There is nothing miraculous in the constancy of a man to whom an offer is made, on the one hand, of eternal happiness and the highest honors, and who, on the other hand, sees himself menaced with hatred, contempt, and the most lasting regret.

You perceive, then, Madam, that nothing can be easier than to overthrow the proofs by which

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Christian doctors establish the revelation which they pretend is so well authenticated. Miracles, martyrs, and prophecies prove nothing.

Were all the wonders true that are related in the Old and New Testament, they would afford no proof in favor of divine omnipotence, but, on the contrary, would prove the inability under which the Deity has continually labored, of convincing mankind of the truths he wished to announce to them. On the other hand, supposing these miracles to have produced all the effects which the Deity had a right to expect from them, we have no longer any reason to believe them, except on the tradition and recitals of others, which are often suspicious, faulty, and exaggerated. The miracles of Moses are attested only by Moses, or by Jewish writers interested in making them believed by the people they wished to govern. The miracles of Jesus are attested only by his disciples, who sought to obtain adherents, in relating to a credulous people prodigies to which they pretended to have been witnesses, or which some of them, perhaps, believed they had really seen. All those who deceive mankind are not always cheats; they are frequently deceived by those who are knaves in reality. Besides, I believe I have sufficiently proved, that miracles are repugnant to the essence of an immutable God, as well as to his wisdom, which will not permit him to alter the wise laws he has himself established. In short, miracles are useless, since those related in Scripture have not produced the effects which God expected from them.

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The proof of the Christian religion taken from prophecy has no better foundation. Whoever will examine without prejudice these oracles pretended to be divine will find only an ambiguous, unintelligible, absurd, and unconnected jargon, entirely unworthy of a God who intended to display his prescience, and to instruct his people with regard to future events. There does not exist in the Holy Scriptures a single prophecy sufficiently precise to be literally applied to Jesus Christ. To convince yourself of this truth, ask the most learned of our doctors which are the formal prophecies wherein they have the happiness to discover the Messiah. You will then perceive that it is only by the aid of forced explanations, figures, parables, and mystical interpretations, by which they are enabled to bring forward any thing sensible and applicable to the *god-made-man* whom they tell us to adore. It would seem as if the Deity had made predictions only that we might understand nothing about them.

In these equivocal oracles, whose meaning it is impossible to penetrate, we find nothing but the language of intoxication, fanaticism, and delirium. When we fancy we have found something intelligible, it is easy to perceive that the prophets intended to speak of events that took place in their own age, or of personages who had preceded them. It is thus that our doctors apply gratuitously to Christ prophecies or rather narratives of what happened respecting David, Solomon, Cyrus, &c.

We imagine we see the chastisement of the

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Jewish people announced in recitals where it is evident the only matter in question was the Babylonish captivity. In this event, so long prior to Jesus Christ, they have imagined finding a prediction of the dispersion of the Jews, supposed to be a visible punishment for their *deicide*, and which they now wish to pass off as an indubitable proof of the truth of Christianity.

It is not, then, astonishing that the ancient and modern Jews do not see in the prophets what our doctors teach us, and what they themselves imagine they have seen. Jesus himself has not been more happy in his predictions than his predecessors. In the gospel he announces to his disciples in the most formal manner the destruction of the world and the last judgment, as events that were at hand, and which must take place before the existing generation had passed away. Yet the world still endures, and appears in no danger of finishing. It is true, our doctors pretend that, in the prediction of Jesus Christ, he spoke of the ruin of Jerusalem by Vespasian and Titus; but none but those who have not read the gospel would submit to such a change, or satisfy themselves with such an evasion. Besides, in adopting it we must confess at least that the Son of God himself was unable to prophesy with greater precision than his obscure predecessors.

Indeed, at every page of these sacred books, which we are assured were inspired by God himself, this God seems to have made a revelation only to conceal himself. He does not speak but to be

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misunderstood. He announces his oracles in such a way only that we can neither comprehend them nor make any application of them. He performs miracles only to make unbelievers. He manifests himself to mankind only to stupefy their judgment and bewilder the reason he has bestowed on them. The Bible continually represents God to us as a seducer, an enticer, a suspicious tyrant, who knows not what kind of conduct to observe with respect to his subjects; who amuses himself by laying snares for his creatures, and who tries them that he may have the pleasure of inflicting a punishment for yielding to his temptations. This God is occupied only in building to destroy, in demolishing to rebuild. Like a child disgusted with its playthings, he is continually undoing what he has done, and breaking what was the object of his desires. We find no foresight, no constancy, no consistency in his conduct; no connection, no clearness in his discourses. When he performs any thing, he sometimes approves what he has done, and at other times repents of it. He irritates and vexes himself with what he has permitted to be done, and, in spite of his infinite power, he suffers man to offend him, and consents to let Satan, his creature, derange all his projects. In a word, the revelations of the Christians and Jews seem to have been imagined only to render uncertain and to annihilate the qualities attributed to the Deity, and which are declared to constitute his essence. The whole Scripture, the entire system of the Christian

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religion, appears to be founded only on the incapability of God, who was unable to render the human race as wise, as good, and as happy as he wished them. The death of his innocent Son, who was immolated to his vengeance, is entirely useless for the most numerous portion of the earth's inhabitants; almost the whole human race, in spite of the continual efforts of the Deity, continue to offend him, to frustrate his designs, resist his will, and to persevere in their wickedness.

It is on notions so fatal, so contradictory, and so unworthy of a God who is just, wise, and good, of a God that is rational, independent, immutable, and omnipotent, on whom the Christian religion is founded, and which religion is said to be established forever by God, who, nevertheless, became disgusted with the religion of the Jews, with whom he had made and sworn an eternal covenant.

Time must prove whether God be more constant and faithful in fulfilling his engagements with the Christians than he has been to fulfil those he made with Abraham and his posterity. I confess, Madam, that his past conduct alarms me as to what he may finally perform. If he himself acknowledged by the mouth of Ezekiel that the laws he had given to the Jews *were not good*, he may very possibly, some day or other, find fault with those which he has given to Christians.

Our priests themselves seem to partake of my suspicions, and to fear that God will be wearied of that protection which he has so long granted to

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his church. The inquietudes which they evince, the efforts which they make to hinder the civilization of the world, the persecutions which they raise against all those who contradict them, seem to prove that they mistrust the promises of Jesus Christ, and that they are not certainly convinced of the eternal durability of a religion which does not appear to them divine, but because it gives them the right to command like gods over their fellow-citizens. They would undoubtedly consider the destruction of their empire a very grievous thing; but yet if the sovereigns of the earth and their people should once grow weary of the sacerdotal yoke, we may be sure the Sovereign of heaven would not require a longer time to become equally disgusted.

However this may be, Madam, I venture to hope the perusal of this letter will fully undeceive you of a blind veneration for books which are called *divine*, although they appear as if invented to degrade and destroy the God who is asserted to be their author. My first letter, I feel confident, enabled you to perceive that the dogmas established by these same books, or subsequently fabricated to justify the ideas thus given of God, are not less contrary to all notions of a Deity infinitely perfect. A system which in the outset is based upon false principles can never become any thing else than a mass of falsehoods. I am, &c.

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LETTER IV.

Of the fundamental Dogmas of the Christian Religion.

You are aware, Madam, that our theological doctors pretend these revealed books, which I summarily examined in my preceding letter, do not include a single word that was not inspired by the Spirit of God. What I have already said to you is sufficient to show that in setting out with this supposition, the Divinity has formed a work the most shapeless, imperfect, contradictory, and unintelligible which ever existed; a work, in a word, of which any man of sense would blush with shame to be the author. If any prophecy hath verified itself for the Christians, it is that of Isaiah, which saith, "Hearing ye shall hear, but shall not understand." But in this case we reply that it was sufficiently useless to speak not to be comprehended; to reveal *that* which cannot be comprehended is to reveal *nothing*.

We need not, then, be surprised if the Christians, notwithstanding the revelation of which they assure us they have been the favorites, have no precise ideas either of the Divinity, or of his will, or the way in which his oracles are to be interpreted. The book from which they should be able to do so serves only to confound the simplest notions, to throw them into the greatest incertitude, and create eternal disputations. If it was the project of the

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Divinity, it would, without doubt, be attended with perfect success. The teachers of Christianity never agree on the manner in which they are to understand the truths that God has given himself the trouble to reveal; all the efforts which they have employed to this time have not yet been capable of making any thing clear, and the dogmas which they have successively invented have been insufficient to justify to the understanding of one man of good sense the conduct of an infinitely perfect Being.

Hence, many among them, perceiving the inconveniences which would result from the reading of the holy books, have carefully kept them out of the hands of the vulgar and illiterate; for they plainly foresaw that if they were read by such they would necessarily bring on themselves reproach, since it would never fail that every honest man of good sense would discover in those books only a crowd of absurdities. Thus the oracles of God are not even made for those for whom they are addressed; it is requisite to be initiated in the mysteries of a priesthood, to have the privilege of discerning in the holy writings the light which the Divinity destined to all his dear children. But are the theologians themselves able to make plain the difficulties which the sacred books present in every page? By meditating on the mysteries which they contain, have they given us ideas more plain of the intentions of the Divinity? No; without doubt they explain one mystery by citing another; they scatter

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new obscurities on previous obscurities; rarely do they agree among themselves; and when by chance their opinions coincide, *we* are not more enlightened, nor is our judgment more convinced; on the other hand, our reason is the more confounded.

If they do agree on some point, it is only to tell us that human reason, of which God is the author, is depraved; but what is the purport of this coincidence in their opinions, if it be not to tax the Deity with imbecility, injustice, and malignity? For why should God, in creating a reasonable being, not have given him an understanding which nothing could corrupt? They reply to us by saying "that the reason of man is necessarily limited; that perfection could not be the portion of a *creature;* that the designs of God are not like those of man." But, in this case, why should the Divinity be offended by the necessary imperfections which he discovers in his creatures? How can a just God require that our mind must admit what it was not made to comprehend? Can he who is above our reason be understood by us, whose reason is so limited? If God be infinite, how can a finite creature reason respecting him? If the mysteries and hidden designs of the Divinity are of such a nature as not to be comprehended by man, what good can we derive from their investigation? Had God designed that we should occupy our thoughts with his purposes, would he not have given us an understanding proportionate to the things he wished us to penetrate?

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You see, then, Madam, that in depressing our reason, in supposing it corrupted, our priests, at the same time, annihilate even the necessity of religion, which cannot be either useful or important to us, if above our comprehension. They do more in supposing human reason depraved; they accuse God of injustice, in requiring that our reason should conceive what cannot be conceived. They accuse him of imbecility in not rendering this reason more perfect. In a word, in degrading man they degrade God, and rob him of those attributes which compose his essence. Would you call him a just and good parent, who, wishing that his children should walk by an obscure route, filled with difficulties, would only give them for their conduct a light too weak to find their way, and to avoid the continual dangers by which they are surrounded? Should you consider that the father had adequately provided for their security by giving them in writing unintelligible instructions, which they could not decipher by the weak light he had given them?

Our spiritual directors will not fail to tell us that the corruption of reason and the weakness of the human understanding are the consequences of sin. But why has man become sinful? How has the good God permitted his dear children, for whom he created the universe, and of whom he exacts obedience, to offend him, and thereby extinguish, or, at least, weaken the light he had given them? On the other hand, the reason of Adam ought to be, without doubt, completely perfect before his fall.

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In this case, why did it not prevent that fall and its consequences? Was the reason of Adam corrupted even beforehand by incurring the wrath of his God? Was it depraved before he had done any thing to deprave it?

To justify this strange conduct of Providence, to clear him from passing as the author of sin, to save him the ridicule of being the cause or the accomplice of offences which he did against himself, the theologians have imagined a *being* subordinate to the divine power. It is the secondary being they make the author of all the evil which is committed in the universe. In the impossibility of reconciling the continual disorders of which the world is the theatre with the purposes of a Deity replete with goodness, the Creator and Preserver of the universe, who delights in order, and who seeks only the happiness of his creatures, they have trumped up a destructive genius, imbued with wickedness, who conspires to render men miserable, and to overthrow the beneficent views of the Eternal. This bad and perverse being they call *Satan*, the *Devil*, the *Evil One;* and we see him play a great game in all the religions of the world, the founders of which have found in the impotence of Deity the sources of both good and evil. By the aid of this imaginary being they have been enabled to resolve all their difficulties; yet they could not foresee that this invention, which went to annihilate or abridge the power of Deity, was a system filled with palpable contradictions, and that

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if the Devil were really the author of sin, it would be he, in all justice, who ought to undergo all its punishment.

If God is the author of all, it is he who created the Devil; if the Devil is wicked, if he strives to counteract the projects of the Divinity, it is the Divinity who has allowed the overthrow of his projects, or who has not had sufficient authority to prevent the Devil from exercising his power. If God had wished that the Devil should not have existed, the Devil would not have existed. God could annihilate him at one word, or, at least, God could change his disposition if injurious to us, and contrary to the projects of a beneficent Providence. Since, then, the Devil does exist, and does such marvellous things as are attributed to him, we are compelled to conclude that the Divinity has found it good that he should exist and agitate, as he does, all his works by a perpetual interruption and perversion of his designs.

Thus, Madam, the invention of the Devil does not remedy the evil; on the contrary, it but entangles the priests more and more. By placing to Satan's account all the evil which he commits in the world, they exculpate the Deity of nothing; all the power with which they have supposed the Devil invested is taken from that assigned to the Divinity; and you know very well that according to the notions of the Christian religion, the Devil has more adherents than God himself; they are always stirring their fellow-creatures up to revolt

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against God; without ceasing, in despite of God, Satan leads them into perdition, except one man only, who refused to follow him, and who found grace in the eyes of the Lord. You are not ignorant that the millions that follow the standard of Beelzebub are to be plunged with him into eternal misery.

But then has Satan himself incurred the disgrace of the All-powerful? By what forfeit has he merited becoming the eternal object of the anger of that God who created him? The Christian religion will explain all. It informs us that the Devil was in his origin an angel; that is to say, a pure spirit, full of perfections, created by the Divinity to occupy a distinguishing situation in the celestial court, destined, like the other ministers of the Eternal, to receive his orders, and to enjoy perpetual blessedness. But he lost himself through ambition; his pride blinded him, and he dared to revolt against his Creator; he engaged other spirits, as pure as himself, in the same senseless enterprise; in consequence of his rashness, he was hurled headlong out of heaven, his miserable adherents were involved in his fall, and, having been hardened by the divine pleasure in their foolish dispositions, they have no other occupation assigned them in the universe than to tempt mankind, and endeavor to augment the number of the enemies of God, and the victims of his wrath.

It is by the assistance of this fable that the Christian doctors perceive the fall of Adam, pre-

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pared by the Almighty himself anterior to the creation of the world. Was it necessary that the Divinity should entertain a great desire that man might sin, since he would thereby have an opportunity of providing the means of making him sinful? In effect, it was the Devil who, in process of time, covered with the skin of a serpent, solicited the mother of the human race to disobey God, and involve her husband in her rebellion. But the difficulty is not removed by these inventions. If Satan, in the time he was an angel, lived in innocence, and merited the good will of his Maker, how came God to suffer him to entertain ideas of pride, ambition, and rebellion? How came this angel of light so blind as not to see the folly of such an enterprise? Did he not know that his Creator was all-powerful? Who was it that tempted Satan? What reason had the Divinity for selecting him to be the object of his fury, the destroyer of his projects, the enemy of his power? If pride be a sin, if the idea itself of rebellion is the greatest of crimes, *sin was, then, anterior to sin*, and Lucifer offended God, even in his state of purity; for, in fine, a being pure, innocent, agreeable to his God, who had all the perfections of which a creature could be susceptible, ought to be exempt from ambition, pride, and folly. We ought, also, to say as much for our first parent, who, notwithstanding his wisdom, his innocence, and the knowledge infused into him by God himself, could not prevent himself from falling into the temptation of a demon.

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Hence, in every shift, the priests invariably make God the author of sin. It was God who tempted Lucifer before the creation of the world; Lucifer, in his turn, became the tempter of man and the cause of all the evil our race suffers. It appears, therefore, that God created both angels and men to give them an opportunity of sinning.

It is easy to perceive the absurdity of this system, to save which the theologians have invented another still more absurd, that it might become the foundation of all their religious revelations, and by means of which they idly imagine they can fully justify the divine providence. The system of truth supposes the *free will* of man — that he is his own master, capable of doing good or ill, and of directing his own plans. At the words *free will*, I already perceive, Madam, that you tremble, and doubtless anticipate a metaphysical dissertation. Rest assured of the contrary; for I flatter myself that the question will be simplified and rendered clear, I shall not merely say for you, but for all your sex who are not resolved to be wilfully blind.

To say that man is a free agent is to detract from the power of the Supreme Being; it is to pretend that God is not the master of his own will; it is to advance that a weak creature can, when it pleases him, revolt against his Creator, derange his projects, disturb the order which he loves, render his labors useless, afflict him with chagrin, cause him sorrow, act with effect against him, and arouse his anger and his passions. Thus,

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at the first glance, you perceive that this principle gives rise to a crowd of absurdities. If God is the friend of order, every thing performed by his creatures would necessarily conduce to the maintenance of this order, because otherwise the divine will would fail to have its effect. If God has plans, they must of necessity be always executed; if man can afflict his God, man is the master of this God's happiness, and the league he has formed with the Devil is potent enough to thwart the plans of the Divinity. In a word, if man is free to sin, God is no longer Omnipotent.

In reply, we are told that God, without detriment to his Omnipotence, might make man a free agent, and that this liberty is a benefit by which God places man in a situation where he may merit the heavenly bounty; but, on the other hand, this liberty likewise exposes him to encounter God's hatred, to offend him, and to be overwhelmed by infinite sufferings. From this I conclude that this liberty is *not* a benefit, and that it evidently is inconsistent with divine goodness. This goodness would be more real if men had always sufficient resolution to do what is pleasing to God, conformably to order, and conducive to the happiness of their fellow-creatures. If men, in virtue of their liberty, do things contrary to the will of God, God, who is supposed to have the prescience of foreseeing all, ought to have taken measures to prevent men from abusing their liberty; if he foresaw they would sin, he ought to have given them the means

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of avoiding it; if he could not prevent them from doing ill, he has consented to the ill they have done; if he has consented, he should not be offended; if he is offended, or if he punish them for the evil they have done with his permission, he is unjust and cruel; if he suffer them to rush on to their destruction, he is bound afterwards to take them to himself; and he cannot with reason find fault with them for the abuse of their liberty, in being deceived or seduced by the objects which he himself had placed in their way to seduce them, to tempt them, and to determine their wills to do evil.*

What would you say of a father who should give to his children, in the infancy of age, and when they were without experience, the liberty of satisfying their disordered appetites, till they should convince themselves of their evil tendency? Would not such a parent be in the right to feel uneasy at the abuse which they should make of their liberty which he had given them? Would it not be accounted malice in this parent, who should have foreseen what was to happen, not to have furnished his children with the capacity of directing their own conduct so as to avoid the evils they might be assailed with? Would it not show in him the height of madness were he to punish them for the evil which he had done, and the chagrin which

* See what Bayle says, *Dict. Crit.*, art. *Origène*, Rem. E., art. *Pauliciens*, Rem. E., F., M., and tom. iij. of the *Réponses aux Questions d'un Provincial.*

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they occasioned him? Would it not be to himself that we should ascribe the sottishness and wickedness of his children?

You see, then, the points of view under which this system of men's free will shows us the Deity. This free will becomes a present the most dangerous, since it puts man in the condition of doing evil that is truly frightful. We may thence conclude that this system, far from justifying God, makes him capable of malice, imprudence, and injustice. But this is to overturn all our ideas of a being perfectly, nay, infinitely wise and good, consenting to punish his creatures for sins which he gave them the power of committing, or, which is the same, suffering the Devil to inspire them with evil. All the subtilties of theology have really only a tendency to destroy the very notions itself inculcates concerning the Divinity. This theology is evidently the tub of the Danaides.

It is a fact, however, that our theologians have imagined expedients to support their ruinous suppositions. You have often heard mention made of *predestination* and *grace* — terrible words, which constantly excite disputes among us, for which reason would be forced to blush if Christians did not make it a duty to renounce reason, and which contests are attended with consequences very dangerous to society. But let not this surprise you; these false and obscure principles have even among the theologians produced dissensions; and their quarrels would be indifferent if they did not

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attach more importance to them than they really deserve.

But to proceed. The system of predestination supposes that God, in his eternal secrets, has resolved that some men should be elected, and, being thus his favorites, receive special grace. By this grace they are supposed to be made agreeable to God, and meet for eternal happiness. But then an infinite number of others are destined to perdition, and receive not the grace necessary to eternal salvation. These contradictory and opposite propositions make it pretty evident that the system is absurd. It makes God, a being infinitely perfect and good, a partial tyrant, who has created a vast number of human beings to be the sport of his caprice and the victims of his vengeance. It supposes that God will punish his creatures for not having received that grace which he did not deign to give them; it presents this God to us under traits so revolting that the theologians are forced to avow that the whole is a profound mystery, into which the human mind cannot penetrate. But if man is not made to lift his inquisitive eye on this frightful mystery, that is to say, on this astonishing absurdity, which our teachers have idly endeavored to square to their views of Deity, or to reconcile the atrocious injustice of their God with his infinite goodness, by what right do they wish us to adore this mystery which they would compel us to believe, and to subscribe to an opinion that saps the divine goodness to its very foundation?

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How do they reason upon a dogma, and quarrel with acrimony about a system of which even themselves can comprehend nothing?

The more you examine religion, the more occasion you will have to be convinced that those things which our divines call *mysteries* are nothing else but the difficulties with which they are themselves embarrassed, when they are unable to avoid the absurdities into which their own false principles necessarily involve them. Nevertheless, this word is not enough to impose upon us; the reverend doctors do not themselves understand the things about which they incessantly speak. They invent words from an inability to explain things, and they give the name of *mysteries* to what they comprehend no better than ourselves.

All the religions in the world are founded upon predestination, and all the pretended revelations among men, as has been already pointed out to you, inculcate this odious dogma, which makes Providence an unjust mother-in-law, who shows a blind preference for some of her children to the prejudice of all the others. They make God a tyrant, who punishes the inevitable faults to which he has impelled them, or into which he has allowed them to be seduced. This dogma, which served as the foundation of Paganism, is now the grand pivot of the Christian religion, whose God should excite no less hatred than the most wicked divinities of idolatrous people. With such notions, is it not astonishing that this God should appear, to

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those who meditate on his attributes, an object sufficiently terrible to agitate the imagination, and to lead some to indulge in dangerous follies?

The dogma of another life serves also to exculpate the Deity from these apparent injustices or aberrations, with which he might naturally be accused. It is pretended that it has pleased him to distinguish his friends on earth, seeing he has amply provided for their future happiness in an abode prepared for their souls. But, as I believe I have already hinted, these proofs that God makes some good, and leaves others wicked, either evince injustice on his part, at least temporary, or they contradict his omnipotence. If God can do all things, if he is privy to all the thoughts and actions of men, what need has he of any proofs? If he has resolved to give them grace necessary to save them, has he not assured them they will not perish? If he is unjust and cruel, this God is not immutable, and belies his character; at least for a time he derogates from the perfections which we should expect to find in him. What would you think of a king, who, during a particular time, would discover to his favorites traits the most frightful, in order that they might incur his disgrace, and who should afterwards insist on their believing him a very good and amiable man, to obtain his favor again? Would not such a prince be pronounced wicked, fanciful, and tyrannical? Nevertheless, this supposed prince might be pardoned by some, if for his own interest, and the better to assure

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himself of the attachment of his friends, he might give them some smiles of his favor. It is not so with God, who knows all, who can do all, who has nothing to fear from the dispositions of his creatures. From all these reasonings, we may see that the Deity, whom the priests have conjured up, plays a great game, very ridiculous, very unjust, on the supposition that he tries his servants, and that he allows them to suffer in this world, to prepare them for another. The theologians have not failed to discover motives in this conduct of God which they can as readily justify; but these pretended motives are borrowed from the omnipotence of this being, by his absolute power over his creatures, to whom he is not obliged to render an account of his actions; but especially in this theology, which professes to justify God, do we not see it make him a despot and tyrant more hateful than any of his creatures? I am, &c.

LETTER V.

Of the Immortality of the Soul, and of the Dogma of another Life.

We have now, Madam, come to the examination of the dogma of a future life, in which it is supposed that the Divinity, after causing men to pass through the temptations, the trials, and the diffi-

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culties of this life, for the purpose of satisfying himself whether they are worthy of his love or his hatred, will bestow the recompenses or inflict the chastisements which they deserved. This dogma, which is one of the capital points of the Christian religion, is founded on a great many hypotheses or suppositions, which we have already glanced at, and which we have shown to be absurd and incompatible with the notions which the same religion gives us of the Deity. In effect, it supposes us capable of offending or pleasing the Author of Nature, of influencing his humor, or exciting his passions; afflicting, tormenting, resisting, and thwarting the plans of Deity. It supposes, moreover, the free-will of man — a system which we have seen incompatible with the goodness, justice, and omnipotence of the Deity. It supposes, further, that God has occasion of proving his creatures, and making them, if I may so speak, pass a novitiate to know what they are worth when he shall square accounts with them. It supposes in God, who has created men for happiness only, the inability to put, by one grand effort, all men in the road, whence they may infallibly arrive at permanent felicity. It supposes that man will survive himself, or that the same being, after death, will continue to think, to feel, and act as he did in this life. In a word, it supposes the immortality of the soul — an opinion unknown to the Jewish lawgiver, who is totally silent on this topic to the people to whom God had manifested himself; an opinion which even in the time

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of Jesus Christ one sect at Jerusalem admitted, while another sect rejected; an opinion about which the Messiah, who came to instruct them, deigned to fix the ideas of those who might deceive themselves in this respect; an opinion which appears to have been engendered in Egypt, or in India, anterior to the Jewish religion, but which was unknown among the Hebrews till they took occasion to instruct themselves in the Pagan philosophy of the Greeks, and doctrines of Plato.

Whatever might be the origin of this doctrine, it was eagerly adopted by the Christians, who judged it very convenient to their system of religion, all the parts of which are founded on the marvellous, and which made it a crime to admit any truths agreeable to reason and common sense. Thus, without going back to the inventors of this inconceivable dogma, let us examine dispassionately what this opinion really is; let us endeavor to penetrate to the principles on which it is supported; let us adopt it, if we shall find it an idea conformable to reason; let us reject it, if it shall appear destitute of proof, and at variance with common sense, even though it had been received as an established truth in all antiquity, though it may have been adopted by many millions of mankind.

Those who maintain the opinion of the soul's immortality, regard it — that is, the soul — as a being distinct from the body, as a substance, or essence, totally different from the corporeal frame, and they designate it by the name of *spirit*. If we ask them

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what a spirit is, they tell us it is not matter; and if we ask them what they understand by that which is not matter, which is the only thing of which we cannot form an idea, they tell us it is a spirit. In general, it is easy to see that men the most savage, as well as the most subtle thinkers, make use of the word *spirit* to designate all the causes of which they cannot form clear notions; hence the word spirit hath been used to designate a being of which none can form any idea.

Notwithstanding, the divines pretend that this unknown being, entirely different from the body, of a substance which has nothing conformable with itself, is, nevertheless, capable of setting the body in motion; and this, doubtless, is a mystery very inconceivable. We have noticed the alliance between this spiritual substance and the material body, whose functions it regulates. As the divines have supposed that matter could neither think, nor will, nor perceive, they have believed that it might conceive much better those operations attributed to a being of which they had ideas less clear than they can form of matter. In consequence, they have imagined many gratuitous suppositions to explain the union of the soul with the body. In fine, in the impossibility of overcoming the insurmountable barriers which oppose them, the priests have made man twofold, by supposing that he contains something distinct from himself; they have cut through all difficulties by saying that this union is a great mystery, which man cannot understand;

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and they have everlasting recourse to the omnipotence of God, to his supreme will, to the miracles which he has always wrought; and those last are never-failing, final resources, which the theologians reserve for every case wherein they can find no other mode of escaping gracefully from the argument of their adversaries.

You see, then, to what we reduce all the jargon of the metaphysicians, all the profound reveries which for so many ages have been so industriously hawked about in defence of the soul of man; an immaterial substance, of which no living being can form an idea; a spirit, that is to say, a being totally different from any thing we know. All the theological verbiage ends here, by telling us, in a round of pompous terms, — fooleries that impose on the ignorant, — that we do not know what essence the soul is of; but we call it a spirit because of its nature, and because we feel ourselves agitated by some unknown agent; we cannot comprehend the mechanism of the soul; yet can we feel ourselves moved, as it were, by an effect of the power of God, whose essence is far removed from ours, and more concealed from us than the human soul itself. By the aid of this language, from which you cannot possibly learn any thing, you will be as wise, Madam, as all the theologians in the world.

If you would desire to form ideas the most precise of yourself, banish from you the prejudices of a vain theology, which only consists in repeating words without attaching any new ideas to them,

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and which are insufficient to distinguish the soul from the body, which appear only capable of multiplying beings without reason, of rendering more incomprehensible and more obscure, notions less distinct than we already have of ourselves. These notions should be at least the most simple and the most exact, if we consult our nature, experience, and reason. They prove that man knows nothing but by his material sensible organs, that he sees only by his eyes, that he feels by his touch, that he hears by his ears; and that when either of these organs is actually deranged, or has been previously wanting, or imperfect, man can have none of the ideas that organ is capable of furnishing him with, — neither thoughts, memory, reflection, judgment, desire, nor will. Experience shows us that corporeal and material beings are alone capable of being moved and acted upon, and that without those organs we have enumerated the soul thinks not, feels not, wills not, nor is moved. Every thing shows us that the soul undergoes always the same vicissitudes as the body; it grows to maturity, gains strength, becomes weak, and puts on old age, like the body; in fine, every thing we can understand of it goes to prove that it perishes with the body. It is indeed folly to pretend that man will feel when he has no organs appropriate for that sentiment; that he will see and hear without eyes or ears; that he will have ideas without having senses to receive impressions from physical objects, or to give rise to perceptions in his understanding;

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in fine, that he will enjoy or suffer when he has no longer either nerves or sensibility.

Thus every thing conspires to prove that the soul is the same thing as the body, viewed relatively to some of its functions, which are more obscure than others. Every thing serves to convince us that without the body the soul is nothing, and that all the operations which are attributed to the soul cannot be exercised any longer when the body is destroyed. Our body is a machine, which, so long as we live, is susceptible of producing the effects which have been designated under different names, one from another; sentiment is one of these effects, thought is another, reflection a third. This last passes sometimes by other names, and our brain appears to be the seat of all our organs; it is that which is the most susceptible. This organic machine, once destroyed or deranged, is no longer capable of producing the same effects, or of exercising the same functions. It is with our body as it is with a watch which indicates the hours, and which goes not if the spring or a pinion be broken.

Cease, Eugenia, cease to torment yourself about the fate which shall attend you when death will have separated you from all that is dear on earth. After the dissolution of this life, the soul shall cease to exist; those devouring flames with which you have been threatened by the priests will have no effect upon the soul, which can neither be susceptible then of pleasures nor pains, of agreeable or sorrowful ideas, of lively or doleful reflections.

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It is only by means of the bodily organs that we feel, think, and are merry or sad, happy or miserable; this body once reduced to dust, we will have neither perceptions nor sensations, and, by consequence, neither memory nor ideas; the dispersed particles will no longer have the same qualities they possessed when united; nor will they any longer conspire to produce the same effects. In a word, the body being destroyed, the soul, which is merely a result of all the parts of the body in action, will cease to be what it is; it will be reduced to nothing with the life's breath.

Our teachers pretend to understand the soul well; they profess to be able to distinguish it from the body; in short, they can do nothing without it; and therefore, to keep up the farce, they have been compelled to admit the ridiculous dogma of the Persians, known by the name of the *resurrection*. This system supposes that the particles of the body which have been scattered at death will be collected at the last day, to be replaced in their primitive condition. But that this strange phenomenon may take place, it is necessary that the particles of our destroyed bodies, of which some have been converted into earth, others have passed into plants, others into animals, some of one species, others of another, even of our own; it is requisite, I say, that these particles, of which some have been mixed with the waters of the deep, others have been carried on the wings of the wind, and which have successively belonged to many

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different men, should be reunited to reproduce the individual to whom they formerly belonged. If you cannot get over this impossibility, the theologians will explain it to you by saying, very briefly, "Ah! it is a profound mystery, which we cannot comprehend." They will inform you that the resurrection is a miracle, a supernatural effect, which is to result from the divine power. It is thus they overcome all the difficulties which the good sense of a few opposes to their rhapsodies.

If, perchance, Madam, you do not wish to remain content with these sublime reasons, against which your good sense will naturally revolt, the clergy will endeavor to seduce your imagination by vague pictures of the ineffable delights which will be enjoyed in Paradise by the souls and bodies of those who have adopted their reveries; they will aver that you cannot refuse to believe them upon their mere word without encountering the eternal indignation of a God of pity; and they will attempt to alarm your fancy by frightful delineations of the cruel torments which a God of goodness has prepared for the greater number of his creatures.

But if you consider the thing coolly, you will perceive the futility of their flattering promises and of their puny threatenings, which are uttered merely to catch the unwary. You may easily discover that if it could be true that man shall survive himself, God, in recompensing him, would only recompense himself for the grace which he had granted; and when he punished him, he punished him for

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not receiving the grace which he had hardened him against receiving. This line of conduct, so cruel and barbarous, appears equally unworthy of a wise God as it is of a being perfectly good.

If your mind, proof against the terrors with which the Christian religion penetrates its sectaries, is capable of contemplating these frightful circumstances, which it is imagined will accompany the carefully-invented punishments which God has destined for the victims of his vengeance, you will find that they are impossible, and totally incompatible with the ideas which they themselves have put forth of the Divinity. In a word, you will perceive that the chastisements of another life are but a crowd of chimeras, invented to disturb human reason, to subjugate it beneath the feet of imposture, to annihilate forever the repose of slaves whom the priesthood would inthrall and retain under its yoke.

In short, Eugenia, the priests would make you believe that these torments will be horrible,—a thing which accords not with our ideas of God's goodness; they tell you they will be eternal,—a thing which accords not with our ideas of the justice of God, who, one would very naturally suppose, will proportion chastisements to faults, and who, by consequence, will not punish without end the beings whose actions are bounded by time. They tell us that the offences against God are infinite, and, by consequence, that the Divinity, without doing violence to his justice, may avenge

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himself as God, that is to say, avenge himself to infinity. In this case I shall say that this God is not good; that he is vindictive, a character which always announces fear and weakness. In fine, I shall say that among the imperfect beings who compose the human species, there is not, perhaps, a single one who, without some advantage to himself, without personal fear, in a word, without folly, would consent to punish everlastingly the wretch who might have the misfortune to offend him, but who no longer had either the ability or the inclination to commit another offence. Caligula found, at least, some little amusement to forsake for a time the cares of government, and enjoy the spectacle of punishment which he inflicted on those unfortunate men whom he had an interest in destroying. But what advantage can it be to God to heap on the damned everlasting torments? Will this amuse him? Will their frightful punishments correct their faults? Can these examples of the divine severity be of any service to those on earth, who witness not their friends in hell? Will it not be the most astonishing of all the miracles of Deity to make the bodies of the damned invulnerable, to resist, through the ceaseless ages of eternity, the frightful torments destined for them?

You see, then, Madam, that the ideas which the priests give us of hell make of God a being infinitely more insensible, more wicked and cruel than the most barbarous of men. They add to all this that it will be the Devil and the apostate angels,

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that is to say, the enemies of God, whom he will employ as the ministers of his implacable vengeance. These wicked spirits, then, will execute the commands which this severe judge will pronounce against men at the last judgment. For you must know, Madam, that a God who knows all will at some future time take an account of what he already knows. So, then, not content with judging men at death, he will assemble the whole human race with great pomp at the last or general judgment, in which he will confirm his sentence in the view of the whole human race, assembled to receive their doom. Thus on the wreck of the world will he pronounce a definitive judgment, from which there will be no appeal.

But, in attending this memorable judgment, what will become of the souls of men, separated from their bodies, which have not yet been resuscitated? The souls of the just will go directly to enjoy the blessings of Paradise; but what is to become of the immense crowd of souls imbued with faults or crimes, and on whom the infallible parsons, who are so well instructed in what is passing in another world, cannot speak with certainty as to their fate? According to some of these wiseacres, God will place the souls of such as are not wholly displeasing to him in a place of punishment, where, by rigorous torments, they shall have the merit of expiating the faults with which they may stand chargeable at death. According to this fine system, so profitable to our spiritual guides,

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God has found it the most simple method to build a fiery furnace for the special purpose of tormenting a certain proportion of souls who have not been sufficiently purified at death to enter Paradise, but who, after leaving them some years united with the body, and giving them time necessary to arrive at that amendment of life by which they may become partakers of the supreme felicity of heaven, ordains that they shall expiate their offences in torment. It is on this ridiculous notion that our priests have bottomed the doctrine of *purgatory*, which every good Catholic is obliged to believe for the benefit of the priests, who reserve to themselves, as is very reasonable, the power of compelling by their prayers a just and immutable God to relax in his sternness, and liberate the captive souls, which he had only condemned to undergo this purgation in order that they might be made meet for the joys of Paradise.

With respect to the Protestants, who are, as every one knows, heretics and impious, you will observe that they pretend not to those lucrative views of the Roman doctors. On the contrary, they think that, at the instant of death, every man is irrevocably judged; that he goes directly to glory or into a place of punishment, to suffer the award of evil by the enduring of punishments for which God had eternally prepared both the sufferer and his torments! Even before the reunion of soul and body at the final judgment, they fancy that the soul of the wicked (which, on the principle

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of all souls being *spirits*, must be the same in essence as the soul of the elect,) will, though deprived of those organs by which it felt, and thought, and acted, be capable of undergoing the agency or action of a fire! It is true that some Protestant theologians tell us that the fire of hell is a spiritual fire, and, by consequence, very different from the material fire vomited out of Vesuvius, and Ætna, and Hecla. Nor ought we to doubt that these informed doctors of the Protestant faith know very well what they say, and that they have as precise and clear ideas of a spiritual fire as they have of the ineffable joys of Paradise, which may be as spiritual as the punishment of the damned in hell.

Such are, Madam, in a few words, the absurdities, not less revolting than ridiculous, which the dogmas of a future life and of the immortality of the soul have engendered in the minds of men. Such are the phantoms which have been invented and propagated, to seduce and alarm mortals, to excite their hopes and their fears; such the illusions that so powerfully operate on weak and feeling beings. But as melancholy ideas have more effect upon the imagination than those which are agreeable, the priests have always insisted more forcibly on what men have to fear on the part of a terrible God than on what they have to hope from the mercy of a forgiving Deity, full of goodness. Princes the most wicked are infinitely more respected than those who are famed for indulgence and humanity. The priests have had the art to

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throw us into uncertainty and mistrust by the two-fold character which they have given the Divinity. If they promise us salvation, they tell us that we must work it out for ourselves, "with fear and trembling." It is thus that they have contrived to inspire the minds of the most honest men with dismay and doubt, repeating without ceasing that time only must disclose who are worthy of the divine love, or who are to be the objects of the divine wrath. Terror has been and always will be the most certain means of corrupting and enslaving the mind of man.

They will tell us, doubtless, that the terrors which religion inspires are salutary terrors; that the dogma of another life is a bridle sufficiently powerful to prevent the commission of crimes and restrain men within the path of duty. To undeceive one's self of this maxim, so often thundered in our ears, and so generally adopted on the authority of the priests, we have only to open our eyes. Nevertheless, we see some Christians thoroughly persuaded of another life, who, notwithstanding, conduct themselves as if they had nothing to fear on the part of a God of vengeance, nor any thing to hope from a God of mercy. When any of these are engaged in some great project, at all times they are tempted by some strong passion or by some bad habit, they shut their eyes on another life, they see not the enraged judge, they suffer themselves to sin, and when it is committed, they comfort themselves by saying, that God is good.

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Besides, they console themselves by the same contradictory religion which shows them also this same God, whom it represents so susceptible of wrath, as full of mercy, bestowing his grace on all those who are sensible of their evils and repent. In a word, I see none whom the fears of hell will restrain when passion or interest solicit obedience. The very priests who make so many efforts to convince us of their dogmas too often evince more wickedness of conduct than we find in those who have never heard one word about another life. Those who from infancy have been taught these terrifying lessons are neither less debauched, nor less proud, nor less passionate, nor less unjust, nor less avaricious than others who have lived and died ignorant of Christian purgatory and Paradise. In fine, the dogma of another life has little or no influence on them; it annihilates none of their passions; it is a bridle merely with some few timid souls, who, without its knowledge, would never have the hardihood to be guilty of any great excesses. This dogma is very fit to disturb the quiet of some honest, timorous persons, and the credulous, whose imagination it inflames, without ever staying the hand of great rogues, without imposing on them more than the decency of civilization and a specious morality of life, restrained chiefly by the coercion of public laws.

In short, to sum all up in one thought, I behold a religion gloomy and formidable to make impressions very lively, very deep, and very dangerous on

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a mind such as yours, although it makes but very momentary impressions on the minds of such as are hardened in crime, or whose dissipation destroys constantly the effects of its threats. More lively affected than others by your principles, you have been but too often and too seriously occupied for your happiness by gloomy and harassing objects, which have powerfully affected your sensible imagination, though the same phantoms that have pursued you have been altogether banished from the mind of those who have had neither your virtues, your understanding, nor your sensibility.

According to his principles, a Christian must always live in fear; he can never know with certainty whether he pleases or displeases God; the least movement of pride or of covetousness, the least desire, will suffice to merit the divine anger, and lose in one moment the fruits of years of devotion. It is not surprising that, with these frightful principles before them, many Christians should endeavor to find in solitude employment for their lugubrious reflections, where they may avoid the occasions that solicit them to do wrong, and embrace such means as are most likely, according to their notions of the likelihood of the thing, to expiate the faults which they fancy might incur the eternal vengeance of God.

Thus the dark notions of a future life leave those only in peace who think slightly upon it; and they are very disconsolate to all those whose temperament determines them to contemplate it. They

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are but the atrocious ideas, however, which the priests study to give us of the Deity, and by which they have compelled so many worthy people to throw themselves into the arms of incredulity. If some libertines, incapable of reasoning, abjure a religion troublesome to their passions, or which abridges their pleasures, there are very many who have maturely examined it, that have been disgusted with it, because they could not consent to live in the fears it engendered, nor to nourish the despair it created. They have then abjured this religion, fit only to fill the soul with inquietudes, that they might find in the bosom of reason the repose which it insures to good sense.

Times of the greatest crimes are always times of the greatest ignorance. It is in these times, or usually so, that the greatest noise is made about religion. Men then follow mechanically, and without examination, the tenets which their priests impose on them, without ever diving to the bottom of their doctrines. In proportion as mankind become enlightened, great crimes become more rare, the manners of men are more polished, the sciences are cultivated, and the religion which they have coolly and carefully examined loses sensibly its credit. It is thus that we see so many incredulous people in the bosom of society become more agreeable and complacent now than formerly, when it depended on the caprice of a priest to involve them in troubles, and to invite the people to crimes in the hope of thereby meriting heaven.

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Religion is consoling only to those who have no embarrassment about it; the indefinite and vague recompense which it promises, without giving ideas of it, is made to deceive those who make no reflections on the impatient, variable, false, and cruel character which this religion gives of its God. But how can it make any promises on the part of a God whom it represents as a tempter, a seducer — who appears, moreover, to take pleasure in laying the most dangerous snares for his weak creatures? How can it reckon on the favors of a God full of caprice, who it alternately informs us is replete with tenderness or with hatred? By what right does it hold out to us the rewards of a despotic and tyrannical God, who does or does not choose men for happiness, and who consults only his own fantasy to destine some of his creatures to bliss and others to perdition? Nothing, doubtless, but the blindest enthusiasm could induce mortals to place confidence in such a God as the priests have feigned; it is to folly alone we must attribute the love some well-meaning people profess to the God of the parsons; it is matchless extravagance alone that could prevail on men to reckon on the unknown rewards which are promised them by this religion, at the same time that it assures us that God is the author of grace, but that we have no right to expect any thing from him.

In a word, Madam, the notions of another life, far from consoling, are fit only to imbitter all the sweets of the present life. After the sad and

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gloomy ideas which Christianity, always at variance with itself, presents us with of its God, it then affirms, that we are much more likely to incur his terrible chastisements, than possessed of power by which we may merit ineffable rewards; and it proceeds to inform us, that God will give grace to whomsoever he pleases, yet it remains with themselves whether they escape damnation; and a life the most spotless cannot warrant them to presume that they are worthy of his favor. In good truth, would not total annihilation be preferable to such beings, rather than falling into the hands of a Deity so hard-hearted? Would not every man of sense prefer the idea of complete annihilation to that of a future existence, in order to be the sport of the eternal caprice of a Deity, so cruel as to damn and torment, without end, the unfortunate beings whom he created so weak, that he might punish them for faults inseparable from their nature? If God is good, as we are assured, notwithstanding the cruelties of which the priests suppose him capable, is it not more consonant to all our ideas of a being perfectly good, to believe that he did not create them to sport with them in a state of eternal damnation, which they had not the power of choosing, or of rejecting and shunning? Has not God treated the beasts of the field more favorably than he has treated man, since he has exempted them from sin, and by consequence has not exposed them to suffer an eternal unhappiness?

The dogma of the immortality of the soul, or of

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a future life, presents nothing consoling in the Christian religion. On the contrary, it is calculated expressly to fill the heart of the Christian, following out his principles, with bitterness and continual alarm. I appeal to yourself, Madam, whether these sublime notions have any thing consoling in them? Whenever this uncertain idea has presented itself to your mind, has it not filled you with a cold and secret horror? Has the consciousness of a life so virtuous and so spotless as yours, secured you against those fears which are inspired by the idea of a being jealous, severe, capricious, whose eternal disgrace the least fault is sure of incurring, and in whose eyes the smallest weakness, or freedom the most involuntary, is sufficient to cancel years of strict observance of all the rules of religion?

I know very well what you will advance to support yourself in your prejudices. The ministers of religion possess the secret of tempering the alarms which they have the art to excite. They strive to inspire confidence in those minds which they discover accessible to fear. They balance, thus, one passion against another. They hold in suspense the minds of their slaves, in the apprehension that too much confidence would only render them less pliable, or that despair would force them to throw off the yoke. To persons terribly frightened about their state after death, they speak only of the hopes which we may entertain of the goodness of God. To those who have too much confidence, they

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preach up the terrors of the Lord, and the judgments of a severe God. By this chicanery they contrive to subject or retain under their yoke all those who are weak enough to be led by the contradictory doctrines of these blind guides.

They tell you, besides, that the sentiment of the immortality of the soul is inherent in man; that the soul is consumed by boundless desires, and that since there is nothing on this earth capable of satisfying it, these are indubitable proofs that it is destined to subsist eternally. In a word, that as we naturally desire to exist always, we may naturally conclude that we shall always exist. But what think you, Madam, of such reasonings? To what do they lead? Do we desire the continuation of this existence, because it may be blessed and happy, or because we know not what may become of us? But we cannot desire a miserable existence, or, at least, one in which it is more than probable we may be miserable rather than happy. If, as the Christian religion so often repeats, the number of the elect is very small, and salvation very difficult, the number of the reprobate very great, and damnation very easily obtained, who is he who would desire to exist always with so evident a risk of being eternally damned? Would it not have been better for us not to have been born, than to have been compelled against our nature to play a game so fraught with peril? Does not annihilation itself present to us an idea preferable to that of an existence which may very easily lead us to

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eternal tortures? Suffer me, Madam, to appeal to yourself. If, before you had come into this world, you had had your choice of being born, or of not seeing the light of this fair sun, and you could have been made to comprehend, but for one moment, the hundred thousandth part of the risks you run to be eternally unhappy, would you not have determined never to enjoy life?

It is an easy matter, then, to perceive the proofs on which the priests pretend to found this dogma of the immortality of the soul and a future life. The desire which we might have of it could only be founded on the hope of enjoying eternal happiness. But does religion give us this assurance? Yes, say the clergy, if you submit faithfully to the rules it prescribes. But to conform one's self to these rules, is it not necessary to have grace from Heaven? And, are we then sure we shall obtain that grace, or if we do, merit Heaven? Do the priests not repeat to us, without ceasing, that God is the author of grace, and that he only gives it to a small number of the elect? Do they not daily tell us that, except one man, who rendered himself worthy of this eternal happiness, there are millions going the high road to damnation? This being admitted, every Christian, who reasons, would be a fool to desire a future existence which he has so many motives to fear, or to reckon on a happiness which every thing conspires to show him is as uncertain, as difficult to be obtained, as it is unequivocally dependent on the fantasies of a capricious

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Deity, who sports with the misfortunes of his creatures.

Under every point of view in which we regard the dogma of the soul's immortality, we are compelled to consider it as a chimera invented by men who have realized their wishes, or who have not been able to justify Providence from the transitory injustices of this world. This dogma was received with avidity, because it flattered the desires, and especially the vanity of man, who arrogated to himself a superiority above all the beings that enjoy existence, and which he would pass by and reduce to mere clay; who believed himself the favorite of God, without ever taxing his attention with this other fact — that God makes him every instant experience vicissitudes, calamities, and trials, as all sentient natures experience; that God made him, in fine, to undergo death, or dissolution, which is an invariable law that all that exists must find verified. This haughty creature, who fancies himself a privileged being, alone agreeable to his Maker, does not perceive that there are stages in his life when his existence is more uncertain and much more weak than that of the other animals, or even of some inanimate things. Man is unwilling to admit that he possesses not the strength of the lion, nor the swiftness of the stag, nor the durability of an oak, nor the solidity of marble or metal. He believes himself the greatest favorite, the most sublime, the most noble; he believes himself superior to all other animals

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because he possesses the faculties of thinking, judging, and reasoning. But his thoughts only render him more wretched than all the animals whom he supposes deprived of this faculty, or who, at least, he believes, do not enjoy it in the same degree with himself. Do not the faculties of thinking, of remembering, of foresight, too often render him unhappy by the very idea of the past, the present, and the future? Do not his passions drive him to excesses unknown to the other animals? Are his judgments always reasonable and wise? Is reason so largely developed in the great mass of men that the priests should interdict its use as dangerous? Are mankind sufficiently advanced in knowledge to be able to overcome the prejudices and chimeras which render them unhappy during the greatest part of their lives? In fine, have the beasts some species of religious impressions, which inspire continual terrors in their breast, making them look upon some awful event, which imbitters their softest pleasures, which enjoins them to torment themselves, and which threatens them with eternal damnation? No!

In truth, Madam, if you weigh in an equitable balance the pretended advantages of man above the other animals, you will soon see how evanescent is this fictitious superiority which he has arrogated to himself. We find that all the productions of nature are submitted to the same laws; that all beings are only born to die; they produce their like to destroy themselves; that all sentient

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beings are compelled to undergo pleasures and pains; they appear and they disappear; they are and they cease to be; they evince under one form that they will quit it to produce another. Such are the continual vicissitudes to which every thing that exists is evidently subjected, and from which man is not exempt, any more than the other beings and productions that he appropriates to his use as *lord of the creation.* Even our globe itself undergoes change; the seas change their place; the mountains are gathered in heaps or levelled into plains; every thing that breathes is destroyed at last, and man alone pretends to an eternal duration.

It is unnecessary to tell me that we degrade man when we compare him with the beasts, deprived of souls and intelligence; this is no levelling doctrine, but one which places him exactly where nature places him, but from which his puerile vanity has unfortunately driven him. All beings are equals; under various and different forms they act differently; they are governed in their appetites and passions by laws which are invariably the same for all of the same species; every thing which is composed of parts will be dissolved; every thing which has life must part with it at death; all men are equally compelled to submit to this fate; they are equal at death, although during life their power, their talents, and especially their virtues, establish a marked difference, which, though real, is only momentary. What will they be after death? They will be exactly what they were ten years before they were born.

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Banish, then, Eugenia, from your mind forever the terrors which death has hitherto filled you with. It is for the wretched a safe haven against the misfortunes of this life. If it appears a cruel alternative to those who enjoy the good things of this world, why do they not console themselves with the idea of what they do actually enjoy? Let them call reason to their aid; it will calm the inquietudes of their imagination, but too greatly alarmed; it will disperse the clouds which religion spreads over their minds; it will teach them that this death, so terrible in apprehension, is really nothing, and that it will neither be accompanied with remembrance of past pleasures nor of sorrow now no more.

Live, then, happy and tranquil, amiable Eugenia! Preserve carefully an existence so interesting and so necessary to all those with whom you live. Allow not your health to be injured, nor trouble your quiet with melancholy ideas. Without being teased by the prospect of an event which has no right to disturb your repose, cultivate virtue, which has always been your favorite, so necessary to your internal peace, and which has rendered you so dear to all those who have the happiness of being your friends. Let your rank, your credit, your riches, your talents be employed to make others happy, to support the oppressed, to succor the unfortunate, to dry up the tears of those whom you may have an opportunity of comforting! Let your mind be occupied about such agreeable and profitable em-

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ployments as are likely to please you! Call in the aid of your reason to dissipate the phantoms which alarm you, to efface the prejudices which you have imbibed in early life! In a word, comfort yourself, and remember that in practising virtue, as you do, you cannot become an object of hatred to God, who, if he has reserved in eternity rigorous punishments for the social virtues, will be the strangest, the most cruel, and the most insensible of beings!

You demand of me, perhaps, "In destroying the idea of another world, what is to become of the remorse, those chastisements so useful to mankind, and so well calculated to restrain them within the bounds of propriety?" I reply, that remorse will always subsist as long as we shall be capable of feeling its pangs, even when we cease to fear the distant and uncertain vengeance of the Divinity. In the commission of crimes, in allowing one's self to be the sport of passion, in injuring our species, in refusing to do them good, in stifling pity, every man whose reason is not totally deranged perceives clearly that he will render himself odious to others, that he ought to fear their enmity. He will blush, then, if he thinks he has rendered himself hateful and detestable in their eyes. He knows the continual need he has of their esteem and assistance. Experience proves to him that vices the most concealed are injurious to himself. He lives in perpetual fear lest some mishap should unfold his weaknesses and secret faults. It is from all these ideas that we are to look for regret and remorse,

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even in those who do not believe in the chimeras of another world. With regard to those whose reason is deranged, those who are enervated by their passions, or perhaps linked to vice by the chains of habit, even with the prospect of hell open before them, they will neither live less vicious nor less wicked. An avenging God will never inflict on any man such a total want of reason as may make him regardless of public opinion, trample decency under foot, brave the laws, and expose himself to derision and human chastisements. Every man of sense easily understands that in this world the esteem and affection of others are necessary for his happiness, and that life is but a burden to those who by their vices injure themselves, and render themselves reprehensible in the eyes of society.

The true means, Madam, of living happy in this world is to do good to your fellow-creatures; to labor for the happiness of your species is to have virtue, and with virtue we can peaceably and without remorse approach the term which nature has fixed equally for all beings — a term that your youth causes you now to see only at a distance — a term that you ought not to accelerate by your fears — a term, in fine, that the cares and desires of all those who know you will seek to put off till, full of days and contented with the part you have played in the scene of the world, you shall yourself desire to gently reënter the bosom of nature.

I am, &c.

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LETTER VI.

Of the Mysteries, Sacraments, and Religious Ceremonies of Christianity.

The reflections, Madam, which I have already offered you in these letters ought, I conceive, to have sufficed to undeceive you, in a great measure, of the lugubrious and afflicting notions with which you have been inspired by religious prejudices. However, to fulfil the task which you have imposed on me, and to assist you in freeing yourself from the unfavorable ideas you may have imbibed from a system replete with irrelevancies and contradictions, I shall continue to examine the strange mysteries with which Christianity is garnished. They are founded on ideas so odd and so contrary to reason, that if from infancy we had not been familiarized with them, we should blush at our species in having for one instant believed and adopted them.

The Christians, scarcely content with the crowd of enigmas with which the books of the Jews are filled, have besides fancied they must add to them a great many incomprehensible mysteries, for which they have the most profound veneration. Their impenetrable obscurity appears to be a sufficient motive among them for adding these. Their priests, encouraged by their credulity, which nothing can outdo, seem to be studious to multiply the articles of their faith, and the number of inconceivable objects which they have said must be

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received with submission, and adored even if not understood.

The first of these mysteries is the *Trinity*, which supposes that one God, self-existent, who is a pure spirit, is, nevertheless, composed of three Divinities, which have obtained the names of *persons*. These three Gods, who are designated under the respective names of the *Father*, the *Son*, and the *Holy Ghost*, are, nevertheless, but one God only. These three persons are equal in power, in wisdom, in perfections; yet the second is subordinate to the first, in consequence of which he was compelled to become a man, and be the victim of the wrath of his Father. This is what the priests call the mystery of the *incarnation*. Notwithstanding his innocence, his perfection, his purity, the Son of God became the object of the vengeance of a just God, who is the same as the Son in question, but who would not consent to appease himself but by the death of his own Son, who is a portion of himself. The Son of God, not content with becoming man, died without having sinned, for the salvation of men who had sinned. God preferred to the punishment of imperfect beings, whom he did not choose to amend, the punishment of his only Son, full of divine perfections. The death of God became necessary to reclaim the human kind from the slavery of Satan, who without that would not have quitted his prey, and who has been found sufficiently powerful against the Omnipotent to oblige him to sacrifice his Son. This is what the priests

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designate by the name of the mystery of *redemption.*

It is assuredly sufficient to expose such opinions to demonstrate their absurdity. It is evident, if there exists only a single God, there cannot be three. We may, it is true, contemplate the Deity after the manner of Plato, who, before the birth of Christianity, exhibited him under three different points of view, that is to say, as all-wise, as all-powerful, as full of reason, and as infinite in goodness; but it was verily the excess of delirium to personify these three divine qualities, or transform them into real beings. We can readily imagine these moral attributes to be united in the same God, but it is egregious folly to fashion them into three different Gods; nor will it remedy this metaphysical polytheism to assert that these three are one. Besides, this revery never entered the head of the Hebrew legislator. The Eternal, in revealing himself to Moses, did not announce himself as triple. There is not one syllable in the Old Testament about this Trinity, although a notion so *bizarre*, so marvellous, and so little consonant with our ideas of a divine being, deserved to have been formally announced, especially as it is the foundation and corner stone of the Christian religion, which was from all eternity an object of the divine solicitude, and on the establishment of which, if we may credit our sapient priests, God seems to have entertained serious thoughts long before the creation of the world.

Nevertheless, the second person, or the second

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God of the Trinity, is revealed in flesh; the Son of God is made man. But how could the pure Spirit who presides over the universe beget a son? How could this son, who before his incarnation was only a pure spirit, combine that ethereal essence with a material body, and envelop himself with it? How could the divine nature amalgamate itself with the imperfect nature of man, and how could an immense and infinite being, as the Deity is represented, be formed in the womb of a virgin? After what manner could a pure spirit fecundate this favorite virgin? Did the Son of God enjoy in the womb of his mother the faculties of omnipotence, or was he like other children during his infancy,—weak, liable to infirmities, sickness, and intellectual imbecility, so conspicuous in the years of childhood; and if so, what, during this period, became of the divine wisdom and power? In fine, how could God suffer and die? How could a just God consent that a God exempt from all sin should endure the chastisements which are due to sinners? Why did he not appease himself without immolating a victim so precious and so innocent? What would you think of that sovereign who, in the event of his subjects rebelling against him, should forgive them all, or a select number of them, by putting to death his only and beloved son, who had not rebelled?

The priests tell us that it was out of tenderness for the human kind that God wished to accomplish this sacrifice. But I still ask if it would not have been more simple, more conformable to all

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our ideas of Deity, for God to pardon the iniquities of the human race, or to have prevented them committing transgressions, by placing them in a condition in which, by their own will, they should never have sinned? According to the entire system of the Christian religion, it is evident that God did only create the world to have an opportunity of immolating his Son for the rebellious beings he might have formed and preserved immaculate. The fall of the rebellious angels had no visible end to serve but to effect and hasten the fall of Adam. It appears from this system that God permitted the first man to sin that he might have the pleasure of showing his goodness in sacrificing his "only begotten Son" to reclaim men from the thraldom of Satan. He intrusted to Satan as much power as might enable him to work the ruin of our race, with the view of afterwards changing the projects of the great mass of mankind, by making one God to die, and thereby destroy the power of the Devil on the earth.

But has God succeeded in these projects to the end he proposed? Are men entirely rescued from the dominion of Satan? Are they not still the slaves of sin? Do they find themselves in the happy impossibility of kindling the divine wrath? Has the blood of the Son of God washed away the sins of the whole world? Do those who are reclaimed, those to whom he has made himself known, those who believe, offend not against heaven? Has the Deity, who ought, without doubt, to be perfectly satisfied with so memorable a

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sacrifice, remitted to them the punishment of sin? Is it not necessary to do something more for them? And since the death of his Son, do we find the Christians exempt from disease and from death? Nothing of all this has happened. The measures taken from all eternity by the wisdom and prescience of a God who should find against his plans no obstacles have been overthrown. The death of God himself has been of no utility to the world. All the divine projects have militated against the free-will of man, but they have not destroyed the power of Satan. Man continues to sin and to die; the Devil keeps possession of the field of battle; and it is for a very small number of the elect that the Deity consented to die.

You do indeed smile, Madam, at my being obliged seriously to combat such chimeras. If they have something of the marvellous in them, it is quite adapted to the heads of children, not of men, and ought not to be admitted by reasonable beings. All the notions we can form of those things must be mysterious; yet there is no subject more demonstrable, according to those whose interest it is to have it believed, though they are as incapable as ourselves to comprehend the matter. For the priests to say that they believe such absurdities, is to be guilty of manifest falsehood; because a proposition to be believed must necessarily be understood. To believe what they do not comprehend is to adhere sottishly to the absurdities of others; to believe things which are not compre-

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hended by those who gossip about them is the height of folly; to believe blindly the mysteries of the Christian religion is to admit contradictions of which they who declare them are not convinced. In fine, is it necessary to abandon one's reason among absurdities that have been received without examination from ancient priests, who were either the dupes of more knowing men, or themselves the impostors who fabricated the tales in question?

If you ask of me how men have not long ago been shocked by such absurd and unintelligible reveries, I shall proceed, in my turn, to explain to you this secret of the church, this mystery of our priests. It is not necessary, in doing this, to pay any attention to those general dispositions of man, especially when he is ignorant and incapable of reasoning. All men are curious, inquisitive; their curiosity spurs them on to inquiry, and their imagination busies itself to clothe with mystery every thing the fancy conjures up as important to happiness. The vulgar mistake even what they have the means of knowing, or, which is the same thing, what they are least practised in they are dazzled with; they proclaim it, accordingly, marvellous, prodigious, extraordinary; it is a phenomenon. They neither admire nor respect much what is always visible to their eyes; but whatever strikes their imagination, whatever gives scope to the mind, becomes itself the fruitful source of other ideas far more extravagant. The priests have had the art to prevail on the people to believe in their

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secret correspondence with the Deity; they have been thence much respected, and in all countries their professed intercourse with an unseen Divinity has given room for their announcement of things the most marvellous and mysterious.

Besides, the Divinity being a being whose impenetrable essence is veiled from mortal sight, it has been commonly admitted by the ignorant, that what could not be seen by mortal eye must necessarily be divine. Hence *sacred*, *mysterious*, and *divine*, are synonymous terms; and these imposing words have sufficed to place the human race on their knees to adore what seeks not their inflated devotion.

The three mysteries which I have examined are received unanimously by all sects of Christians; but there are others on which the theologians are not agreed. In fine, we see men, who, after they have admitted, without repugnance, a certain number of absurdities, stop all of a sudden in the way, and refuse to admit more. The Christian Protestants are in this case. They reject, with disdain, the mysteries for which the Church of Rome shows the greatest respect; and yet, in the matter of mysteries, it is indeed difficult to designate the point where the mind ought to stop.

Seeing, then, that our doctors, better advised, undoubtedly, than those of the Protestants, have adroitly multiplied mysteries, one is naturally led to conclude, they despaired of governing the mind of man, if there was any thing in their religion that

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was clear, intelligible, and natural. More mysterious than the priests of Egypt itself, they have found means to change every thing into mystery; the very movements of the body, usages the most indifferent, ceremonies the most frivolous, have become, in the powerful hands of the priests, sublime and divine mysteries. In the Roman religion all is magic, all is prodigy, all is supernatural. In the decisions of our theologians, the side which they espouse is almost always that which is the most abhorrent to reason, the most calculated to confound and overthrow common sense. In consequence, our priests are by far the most rich, powerful, and considerable. The continual want which we have of their aid to obtain from Heaven that grace which it is their province to bring down for us, places us in continual dependence on those marvellous men who have received their commission to treat with the Deity, and become the ambassadors between Heaven and us.

Each of our sacraments envelops a great mystery. They are ceremonies to which the Divinity, they say, attaches some secret virtue, by unseen views, of which we can form no ideas. In *baptism*, without which no man can be saved, the water sprinkled on the head of the child washes his spiritual soul, and carries away the defilement which is a consequence of the sin committed in the person of Adam, who sinned for all men. By the mysterious virtue of this water, and of some words equally unintelligible, the infant finds itself recon-

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ciled to God, as his first father had made him guilty without his knowledge and consent. In all this, Madam, you cannot, by possibility, comprehend the complication of these mysteries, with which no Christian can dispense, though, assuredly, there is not one believer who knows what the virtue of the marvellous water consists in, which is necessary for his regeneration. Nor can you conceive how the supreme and equitable Governor of the universe could impute faults to those who have never been guilty of transgressions. Nor can you comprehend how a wise Deity can attach his favor to a futile ceremony, which, without changing the nature of the being who has derived an existence it neither commenced nor was consulted in, must, if administered in winter, be attended with serious consequences to the health of the child.

In *Confirmation*, a sacrament or ceremony, which, to have any value, ought to be administered by a bishop, the laying of the hands on the head of the young confirmant makes the Holy Spirit descend upon him, and procures the grace of God to uphold him in the faith. You see, Madam, that the efficacy of this sacrament is unfortunately lost in my person; for, although in my youth I had been duly confirmed, I have not been preserved against smiling at this faith, nor have I been kept invulnerable in the credence of my priests and forefathers.

In the sacrament of *Penitence*, or confession, a ceremony which consists in putting a priest in possession of all one's faults, public or private, you will

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discover mysteries equally marvellous. In favor of this submission, to which every good Catholic is necessarily obliged to submit, a priest, *himself a sinner*, charged with full powers by the Deity, pardons and remits, in His name, the sins against which God is enraged. God reconciles himself with every man who humbles himself before the priest, and in accordance with the orders of the latter, he opens heaven to the wretch whom he had before determined to exclude. If this sacrament doth not always procure grace, very distinguishing to those who use it, it has, at all events, the advantage of rendering them pliable to the clergy, who, by its means, find an easy sway in their spiritual empire over the human mind, an empire that enables them, not unfrequently, to disturb society, and more often the repose of families, and the very conscience of the person confessing.

There is among the Catholics another sacrament, which contains the most strange mysteries. It is that of the *Eucharist*. Our teachers, under pain of being damned, enjoin us to believe that the Son of God is compelled by a priest to quit the abodes of glory, and to come and mask himself under the appearance of bread! This bread becomes forthwith the body of God—this God multiplies himself in all places, and at all times, when and where the priests, scattered over the face of the earth, find it necessary to command his presence in the shape of bread—yet we see only one and the same God, who receives the homage and adoration

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of all those good people who find it very ridiculous in the Egyptians to adore lupines and onions. But the Catholics are not simply content with worshipping a bit of bread, which they consider by the conjurations of a priest as divine; they eat this bread, and then persuade themselves that they are nourished by the body or substance of God himself. The Protestants, it is true, do not admit a mystery so very odd, and regard those who do as real idolaters. What then? This marvellous dogma is, without doubt, of the greatest utility to the priests. In the eyes of those who admit it, they become very important gentlemen, who have the power of disposing of the Deity, whom they make to descend between their hands; and thus a Catholic priest is, in fact, the creator of his God!

There is, also, *Extreme Unction*, a sacrament which consists in anointing with oil those sick persons who are about to depart into the other world, and which not only soothes their bodily pains, but also takes away the sins of their souls. If it produces these good effects, it is an invisible and mysterious method of manifesting obvious results; for we frequently behold sick persons have their fears of death allayed, though the operation may but too often accelerate their dissolution. But our priests are so full of charity, and they interest themselves so greatly in the salvation of souls, that they like rather to risk their own health beside the sick bed of persons afflicted with the most contagious diseases, than lose the opportunity of administering their salutary ointment.

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Ordination is another very mysterious ceremony, by which the Deity secretly bestows his invisible grace on those whom he has selected to fill the office of the holy priesthood. According to the Catholic religion, God gives to the priests the power of making God himself, as we have shown above; a privilege which without doubt cannot be sufficiently admired. With respect to the sensible effects of this sacrament, and of the visible grace which it confers, they are enabled, by the help of some words and certain ceremonies, to change a profane man into one that is sacred; that is to say, who is not profane any longer. By this spiritual metamorphosis, this man becomes capable of enjoying considerable revenues without being obliged to do any thing useful for society. On the contrary, heaven itself confers on him the right of deceiving, of annoying, and of pillaging the profane citizens, who labor for his ease and luxury.

Finally, *Marriage* is a sacrament that confers mysterious and invisible graces, of which we in truth have no very precise ideas. Protestants and Infidels, who look upon marriage as a civil contract, and not as a sacrament, receive neither more nor less of its visible grace than the good Catholics. The former see not that those who are married enjoy by this sacrament any secret virtue, whence they may become more constant and faithful to the engagements they have contracted. And I believe both you and I, Madam, have known many people on whom it has only conferred the grace of cordially detesting each other.

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I will not now enter upon the consideration of a multitude of other magic ceremonies, admitted by some Christian sectaries and rejected by others, but to which the devotees who embrace them, attach the most lofty ideas, in the firm persuasion, that God will, on that account, visit them with his invisible grace. All these ceremonies, doubtless, contain great mysteries, and the method of handling or speaking of them is exceedingly mysterious. It is thus that the water on which a priest has pronounced a few words, contained in his conjuring book, acquires the invisible virtue of chasing away wicked spirits, who are invisible by their nature. It is thus that the oil, on which a bishop has muttered some certain formula, becomes capable of communicating to men, and even to some inanimate substances, such as wood, stone, metals, and walls, those invisible virtues which they did not previously possess. In fine, in all the ceremonies of the church, we discover mysteries, and the vulgar, who comprehend nothing of them, are not the less disposed to admire, to be fascinated with, and to respect with a blind devotion. But soon would they cease to have this veneration for these fooleries, if they comprehended the design and end the priests have in view by enforcing their observance.

The priests of all nations have begun by being charlatans, castle builders, divines, and sorcerers. We find men of these characters in nations the most ignorant and savage, where they live by the

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ignorance and credulity of others. They are regarded by their ignorant countrymen as superior beings, endowed with supernatural gifts, favorites of the very Gods, because the uninquiring multitude see them perform things which they take to be mighty marvellous, or which the ignorant have always considered marvellous. In nations the most polished, the people are always the same; persons the most sensible are not often of the same ideas, especially on the subject of religion; and the priests, authorized by the ancient folly of the multitude, continue their old tricks, and receive universal applause.

You are not, then, to be surprised, Madam, if you still behold our pontiffs and our priests exercise their magical rites, or rear castles before the eyes of people prejudiced in favor of their ancient illusions, and who attach to these mysteries a degree of consequence, seeing they are not in a condition to comprehend the motives of the fabricators. Every thing that is mysterious has charms for the ignorant; the marvellous captivates all men; persons the most enlightened find it difficult to defend themselves against these illusions. Hence you may discover that the priests are always opinionatively attached to these rites and ceremonies of their worship; and it has never been without some violent revolution that they have been diminished or abrogated. The annihilation of a trifling ceremony has often caused rivers of blood to flow. The people have believed themselves lost and un-

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done when one bolder than the rest wished to innovate in matters of religion; they have fancied that they were to be deprived of inestimable advantages and invisible but saving grace, which they have supposed to be attached by the Divinity himself to some movements of the body. Priests the most adroit have overcharged religion with ceremonies, and practices, and mysteries. They fancied that all these were so many cords to bind the people to their interest, to allure them by enthusiasm, and render them necessary to their idle and luxurious existence, which is not spent without much money extracted from the hard earnings of the people, and much of that respect which is but the homage of slaves to spiritual tyrants.

You cannot any longer, I persuade myself, Madam, be made the dupe of these holy jugglers, who impose on the vulgar by their marvellous tales. You must now be convinced that the things which I have touched upon as mysteries are profound absurdities, of which their inventors can render no reasonable account either to themselves or to others. You must now be certified that the movements of the body and other religious ceremonies must be matters perfectly indifferent to the wise Being whom they describe to us as the great mover of all things. You conclude, then, that all these marvellous rites, in which our priests announce so much mystery, and in which the people are taught to consider the whole of religion as consisting, are nothing more than puerilities, to which people of understanding

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ought never to submit. That they are usages calculated principally to alarm the minds of the weak, and keep in bondage those who have not the courage to throw off the yoke of priests. I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

Of the pious Rites, Prayers, and Austerities of Christianity.

You now know, Madam, what you ought to attach to the mysteries and ceremonies of that religion you propose to meditate on, and adore in silence. I proceed now to examine some of those practices to which the priests tell us the Deity attaches his complaisance and his favors. In consequence of the false, sinister, contradictory, and incompatible ideas, which all revealed religions give us of the Deity, the priests have invented a crowd of unreasonable usages, but which are conformable to these erroneous notions that they have framed of this Being. God is always regarded as a man full of passion, sensible to presents, to flatteries, and marks of submission; or rather as a fantastic and punctilious sovereign, who is very seriously angry when we neglect to show him that respect and obeisance which the vanity of earthly potentates exacts from their vassals.

It is after these notions so little agreeable to the

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Deity, that the priests have conjured up a crowd of practices and strange inventions, ridiculous, inconvenient, and often cruel; but by which they inform us we shall merit the good favor of God, or disarm the wrath of the Universal Lord. With some, all consists in prayers, offerings, and sacrifices, with which they fancy God is well pleased. They forget that a God who is good, who knows all things, has no need to be solicited; that a God who is the author of all things has no need to be presented with any part of his workmanship; that a God who knows his power has no need of either flatteries or submissions, to remind him of his grandeur, his power, or his rights; that a God who is Lord of all has no need of offerings which belong to himself; that a God who has no need of any thing cannot be won by presents, nor grudge to his creatures the goods which they have received from his divine bounty.

For the want of making these reflections, simple as they are, all the religions in the world are filled with an infinite number of frivolous practices, by which men have long strove to render themselves acceptable to the Deity. The priests who are always declared to be the ministers, the favorites, the interpreters of God's will, have discovered how they might most easily profit by the errors of mankind, and the presents which they offer to the Deity. They are thence interested to enter into the false ideas of the people, and even to redouble the darkness of their minds. They have invented

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means to please unknown powers who dispose of their fate — to excite their devotion and their zeal for those invisible beings of whom they were themselves the visible representatives. These priests soon perceived that in laboring for the Gods they labored for themselves, and that they could appropriate the major part of the presents, sacrifices, and offerings, which were made to beings who never showed themselves in order to claim what their devotees intended for them.

You thus perceive, Madam, how the priests have made common cause with the Divinity. Their policy thence obliged them to favor and increase the errors of the human kind. They talk of this ineffable Being as of an interested monarch, jealous, full of vanity, who gives that it may be restored to him again; who exacts continual signs of submission and respect; who desires, without ceasing, that men may reiterate their marks of respect for him; who wishes to be solicited; who bestows no grace unless it be accorded to importunity for the purpose of making it more valuable; and, above all, who allows himself to be appeased and propitiated by gifts from which his ministers derive the greatest advantage.

It is evident that it is upon these ideas borrowed from monarchical courts here below that are founded all the practices, ceremonies, and rites that we see established in all the religions of the earth. Each sect has endeavored to make its God a monarch the most redoubtable, the greatest, the most despotic, and the most selfish. The people

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acquainted simply with human opinions, and full of debasement, have adopted without examination the inventions which the Deity has shown them as the fittest to obtain his favor and soften his wrath. The priests fail not to adapt these practices, which they have invented, to their own system of religion and personal interest; and the ignorant and vulgar have allowed themselves to be blindly led by these guides. Habit has familiarized them with things upon which they never reason, and they make a duty of the routine which has been transmitted to them from age to age, and from father to child.

The infant, as soon as it can be made to understand any thing, is taught mechanically to join its little hands in prayer. His tongue is forced to lisp a formula which it does not comprehend, addressed to a God which its understanding can never conceive. In the arms of its nurse it is carried into the temple or church, where its eyes are habituated to contemplate spectacles, ceremonies, and pretended mysteries, of which, even when it shall have arrived at mature age, it will still understand nothing. If at this latter period any one should ask the reason of his conduct, or desire to know why he made this conduct a sacred and important duty, he could give no explanation, except that he was instructed in his tender years to respectfully observe certain usages, which he must regard as sacred, as they were unintelligible to him. If an attempt was made to undeceive him in regard to these habitual futilities, either he would not listen, or he

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would be irritated against whoever denied the notions rooted in his brain. Any man who wished to lead him to good sense, and who reasoned against the habits he had contracted, would be regarded by him as ridiculous and extravagant, or he would repulse him as an infidel and blasphemer, because his instructions lead him thus to designate every man who fails to pursue the same routine as himself, or who does not attach the same ideas as the devotee to things which the latter has never examined.

What horror does it not fill the Christian devotee with if you tell him that his priest is unnecessary! What would be his surprise if you were to prove to him, even on the principles of his religion, that the prayers which in his infancy he had been taught to consider as the most agreeable to his God, are unworthy and unnecessary to this Deity! For if God knows all, what need is there to remind him of the wants of his creatures whom he loves? If God is a father full of tenderness and goodness, is it necessary to ask him to "give us day by day our daily bread"? If this God, so good, foresaw the wants of his children, and knew much better than they what they could not know of themselves, whence is it he bids them importune him to grant them their requests? If this God is immutable and wise, how can his creatures change the fixed resolution of the Deity? If this God is just and good, how can he injure us, or place us in a situation to require the use of that prayer which entreats the Deity *not to lead us into temptation?*

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You see by this, Madam, that there is but a very small portion of what the Christians pretend they understand and consider absolutely necessary that accords at all with what they tell us has been dictated by God himself. You see that the Lord's prayer itself contains many absurdities and ideas totally contrary to those which every Christian ought to have of his God. If you ask a Christian why he repeats without ceasing this vain formula, on which he never reflects, he can assign little other reason than that he was taught in his infancy to clasp his hands, repeat words the meaning of which his priest, not himself, is alone bound to understand. He may probably add that he has ever been taught to consider this formula requisite, as it was the most sacred and the most proper to merit the favor of Heaven.

We should, without doubt, form the same judgment of that multitude of prayers which our teachers recommend to us daily. And if we believe them, man, to please God, ought to pass a large portion of his existence in supplicating Heaven to pour down its blessings on him. But if God is good, if he cherishes his creatures, if he knows their wants, it seems superfluous to pray to him. If God changes not, he has never promised to alter his secret decrees, or, if he has, he is variable in his fancies, like man; to what purpose are all our petitions to him? If God is offended with us, will he not reject prayers which insult his goodness, his justice, and infinite wisdom?

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What motives, then, have our priests to inculcate constantly the necessity of prayer? It is that they may thereby hold the minds of mankind in opinions more advantageous to themselves. They represent God to us under the traits of a monarch difficult of access, who cannot be easily pacified, but of whom they are the ministers, the favorites, and servants. They become intercessors between this invisible Sovereign and his subjects of this nether world. They sell to the ignorant their intercession with the All-powerful; they pray for the people, and by society they are recompensed with real advantages, with riches, honors, and ease. It is on the necessity of prayer that our priests, our monks, and all religious men establish their lazy existence; that they profess to win a place in heaven for their followers and paymasters, who, without this intercession, could neither obtain the favor of God, nor avert his chastisements and the calamities the world is so often visited with. The prayers of the priests are regarded as a universal remedy for all evils. All the misfortunes of nations are laid before these spiritual guides, who generally find public calamities a source of profit to themselves, as it is then they are amply paid for their supposed mediation between the Deity and his suffering creatures. They never teach the people that these things spring from the course of nature and of laws they cannot control. O, no. They make the world believe they are the judgments of an angry God. The evils for which they can find

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no remedy are pronounced marks of the divine wrath; they are supernatural, and the priests must be applied to. God, whom they call so good, appears sometimes obstinately deaf to their entreaties. Their common Parent, so tender, appears to derange the order of nature to manifest his anger. The God who is so just, sometimes punishes men who cannot divine the cause of his vengeance. Then, in their distress, they flee to the priests, who never fail to find motives for the divine wrath. They tell them that God has been offended; that he has been neglected; that he exacts prayers, offerings, and sacrifices; that he requires, in order to be appeased, that his ministers should receive more consideration, should be heard more attentively, and should be more enriched. Without this, they announce to the vulgar that their harvests will fail, that their fields will be inundated, that pestilence, famine, war, and contagion will visit the earth; and when these misfortunes have arrived, they declare they may be removed by means of prayers.

If fear and terror permitted men to reason, they would discover that all the evils, as well as the good things of this life, are necessary consequences of the order of nature. They would perceive that a wise God, immutable in his conduct, cannot allow any thing to transpire but according to those laws of which he is regarded as the author. They would discover that the calamities, sterility, maladies, contagions, and even death itself are effects

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as necessary as happiness, abundance, health, and life itself. They would find that wars, wants, and famine are often the effects of human imprudence; that they would submit to accidents which they could not prevent, and guard against those they could foresee; they would remedy by simple and natural means those against which they possessed resources; and they would undeceive themselves in regard to those supernatural means and those useless prayers of which the experience of so many ages ought to have disabused men, if they were capable of correcting their religious prejudices.

This would not, indeed, redound to the advantage of the priests, since they would become useless if men perceived the inefficacy of their prayers, the futility of their practices, and the absence of all rational foundation for those exercises of piety which place the human race upon their knees. They compel their votaries always to run down those who discredit their pretensions. They terrify the weak minded by frightful ideas which they hold out to them of the Deity. They forbid them to reason; they make them deaf to reason, by conforming them to ordinances the most out of the way, the most unreasonable, and the most contradictory to the very principles on which they pretend to establish them. They change practices, arbitrary in themselves, or, at most, indifferent and useless, into important duties, which they proclaim the most essential of all duties, and the most sacred and moral. They know that man ceases to

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reason in proportion as he suffers or is wretched. Hence, if he experiences real misfortunes, the priests make sure of him; if he is not unfortunate they menace him; they create imaginary fears and troubles.

In fine, Madam, when you wish to examine with your own eyes, and not by the help of the pretensions set up and imposed on you by the ministers of religion, you will be compelled to acknowledge the things we have been considering as useful to the priests alone; they are useless to the Deity, and to society they are often very obviously pernicious. Of what utility can it be in any family to behold an excess of devotion in the mother of that family? One would suppose it is not necessary for a lady to pass all her time in prayers and in meditations, to the neglect of other duties. Much less is it the part of a Catholic mother to be closeted in mystic conversation with her priest. Will her husband, her children, and her friends applaud her who loses most of her time in prayers, and meditations, and practices, which can tend only to render her sour, unhappy, and discontented? Would it not be much better that a father or a mother of a family should be occupied with what belonged to their domestic affairs than to spend their time in masses, in hearing sermons, in meditating on mysterious and unintelligible dogmas, or boasting about exercises of piety that tend to nothing?

Madam, do you not find in the country you inhabit a great many devotees who are sunk in

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debt, whose fortune is squandered away on priests, and who are incapable of retrieving it? Content to put their conscience to rights on religious matters, they neither trouble themselves about the education of their children, nor the arrangement of their fortune, nor the discharge of their debts. Such men as would be thrown into despair did they omit one mass, will consent to leave their creditors without their money, ruined by their negligence as much as by their principles. In truth, Madam, on what side soever you survey this religion, you will find it good for nothing.

What shall we say of those fêtes which are so multiplied amongst us? Are they not evidently pernicious to society? Are not all days the same to the Eternal? Are there *gala* days in heaven? Can God be honored by the business of an artisan or a merchant, who, in place of earning bread on which his family may subsist, squanders away his time in the church, and afterwards goes to spend his money in the public house? It is necessary, the priests will tell you, for man to have repose. But will he not seek repose when he is fatigued by the labor of his hands? Is it not more necessary that every man should labor in his vocation than go to a temple to chant over a service which benefits only the priests, or hear a sermon of which he can understand nothing? And do not such as find great scruple in doing a necessary labor on Sunday frequently sit down and get drunk on that day, consuming in a few hours the receipts of their

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week's labor? But it is for the interest of the clergy that all other shops should be shut when theirs are open. We may thence easily discover why fêtes are necessary.

Is it not contrary to all the notions which we can form of the goodness and wisdom of the Divinity, that religion should form into duties both abstinence and privations, or that penitences and austerities should be the sole proofs of virtue? What should be said of a father who should place his children at a table loaded with the fruits of the earth, but who, nevertheless, should debar them from touching certain of them, though both nature and reason dictated their use and nutriment? Can we, then, suppose that a Deity wise and good interdicts to his creatures the enjoyment of innocent pleasures, which may contribute to render life agreeable, or that a God who has created all things, every object the most desirable to the nourishment and health of man, should nevertheless forbid him their use? The Christian religion appears to doom its votaries to the punishment of Tantalus. The most part of the superstitions in the world have made of God a capricious and jealous sovereign, who amuses himself by tempting the passions and exciting the desires of his slaves, without permitting them the gratification of the one or the enjoyment of the other. We see among all sects the portraiture of a chagrined Deity, the enemy of innocent amusements, and offended at the well being of his creatures. We see in all countries many

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men so foolish as to imagine they will merit heaven by fighting against their nature, refusing the goods of fortune, and tormenting themselves under an idea that they will thereby render themselves agreeable to God. Especially do they believe that they will by these means disarm the fury of God, and prevent the inflictions of his chastisements, if they immolate themselves to a being who always requires victims.

We find these atrocious, fanatical, and senseless ideas in the Christian religion, which supposes its God as cruel to exact sufferings from men as death from his only Son. If a God exempt from all sin is himself also the sufferer for the sins of all, which is the doctrine of those who maintain universal redemption, it is not surprising to see men that are sinners making it a duty to assemble in large meetings, and invent the means of rendering themselves miserable. These gloomy notions have banished men to the desert. They have fanatically renounced society and the pleasures of life, to be buried alive, believing they would merit heaven if they afflicted themselves with stripes and passed their existence in mummical ceremonies, as injurious to their health as useless to their country. And these are the false ideas by which the Divinity is transformed into a tyrant as barbarous as insensible, who, agreeably to *priestcraft*, has prescribed how both men and women might live in ennui, penitence, sorrow, and tears; for the perfection of monastic institutions consists in the

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ingenious art of self-torture. But sacerdotal pride finds its account in these austerities. Rigid monks glory in barbarous rules, the observance of which attracts the respect of the credulous, who imagine that men who torment themselves are indeed the favorites of heaven. But these monks, who follow these austere rules, are fanatics, who sacrifice themselves to the pride of the clergy who live in luxury and in wealth, although their duped, imbecile brethren have been known to make it a point of honor to die of famine.

How often, Madam, has your attention not been aroused when you recalled to mind the fate of the poor religious men of the desert, whom an unnecessary vow has condemned, as it were voluntarily, to a life as rigorous as if spent in a prison! Seduced by the enthusiasm of youth, or forced by the orders of inhuman parents, they have been obliged to carry to the tomb the chains of their captivity. They have been obliged to submit without appeal to a stern superior, who finds no consolation in the discharge of his slavish task but in making his empire more hard to those beneath him. You have seen unfortunate young ladies obliged to renounce their rank in society, the innocent pleasures of youth, the joys of their sex, to groan forever under a rigorous despotism, to which indiscreet vows had bound them. All monasteries present to us an odious group of fanatics, who have separated themselves from society to pass the remainder of their lives in unhappiness. The society of these

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devotees is calculated solely to render their lives mutually more unsupportable. But it seems strange that men should expect to merit heaven by suffering the torments of hell on earth; yet so it is, and reason has too often proved insufficient to convince them of the contrary.

If this religion does not call all Christians to these sublime perfections, it nevertheless enjoins on all its votaries suffering and mortifying of the body. The church prescribes privations to all her children, and abstinences and fasts; these things they practise among us as duties; and the devotees imagine they render themselves very agreeable to the Divinity when they have scrupulously fulfilled those minute and puerile practices, by which they tell us that the priests have proof whether their patience and obedience be such as are dictated by and acceptable to Heaven. What a ridiculous idea is it, for example, to make of the Deity a trio of persons; to teach the faithful that this Deity takes notice of what kinds of food his people eat; that he is displeased if they eat beef or mutton, but that he is delighted if they eat beans and fish! In good sooth, Madam, our priests, who sometimes give us very lofty ideas of God, please themselves but too often with making him strangely contemptible!

The life of a good Christian or of a devotee is crowded with a host of useless practices, which would be at least pardonable if they procured any good for society. But it is not for that purpose

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that our priests make so much ado about them; they only wish to have submissive slaves, sufficiently blind to respect their caprices as the orders of a wise God; sufficiently stupid to regard all their practices as divine duties, and they who scrupulously observe them as the real favorites of the Omnipotent. What good can there result to the world from the abstinence of meats, so much enjoined on some Christians, especially when other Christians judge this injunction a very ridiculous law, and contrary to reason and the order of things established in nature? It is not difficult to perceive amongst us that this injunction, openly violated by the rich, is an oppression on the poor, who are compelled to pay dearly for an indifferent, often an unwholesome diet, that injures rather than repairs the natural strength of their constitution. Besides, do not the priests sell this permission to the rich, to transgress an injunction the poor must not violate with impunity? In fine, they seem to have multiplied our practices, our duties, and our tortures, to have the advantage of multiplying our faults, and making a good bargain out of our pretended crimes.

The more we examine religion the more reason shall we have to be convinced that it is beneficial to the *priests alone*. Every part of this religion conspires to render us submissive to the fantasies of our spiritual guides, to labor for their grandeur, to contribute to their riches. They appoint us to perform disadvantageous duties; they prescribe

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impossible perfections, purposely that we may transgress; they have thereby engendered in pious minds scruples and difficulties which they condescendingly appease for money. A devotee is obliged to observe, without ceasing, the useless and frivolous rules of his priest, and even then he is subject to continual reproaches; he is perpetually in want of his priest to expiate his pretended faults with which he charges himself, and the omission of duties that he regards as the most important acts of his life, but which are rarely such as interest society or benefit it by their performance. By a train of religious prejudices with which the priests infect the mind of their weak devotees, these believe themselves infinitely more culpable when they have omitted some useless practice, than if they had committed some great injustice or atrocious sin against humanity. It is commonly sufficient for the devotees to be on good terms with God, whether they be consistent in their actions with man, or in the practice of those duties they owe to their fellow beings.

Besides, Madam, what real advantage does society derive from repeated prayers, abstinences, privations, seclusions, meditations, and austerities, to which religion attaches so much value? Do all the mysterious practices of the priests produce any real good? Are they capable of calming the passions, of correcting vices, and of giving virtue to those who most scrupulously observe them? Do we not daily see persons who believe themselves

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damned if they forget a mass, if they eat a fowl on Friday, if they neglect a confession, though they are guilty at the same time of great dereliction to society? Do they not hold the conduct of those very unjust, and very cruel, who happen to have the misfortune of not thinking and doing as they think and act? These practices, out of which a great number of men have created essential duties, but too commonly absorb all moral duties; for if the devotees are over-religious, it is rare to find them virtuous. Content with doing what religion requires, they trouble themselves very little about other matters. They believe themselves the favored of God, and that it is a proof of this if they are detested by men, whose good opinion they are seldom anxious to deserve. The whole life of a devotee is spent in fulfilling, with scrupulous exactitude, duties indifferent to God, unnecessary to himself, and useless to others. He fancies he is virtuous when he has performed the rites which his religion prescribes; when he has meditated on mysteries of which he understands nothing; when he has struggled with sadness to do things in which a man of sense can perceive no advantage; in fine, when he has endeavored to practise, as much as in him lies, the Evangelical or Christian virtues, in which he thinks all morality essentially consists.

I shall proceed in my next letter to examine these virtues, and to prove to you that they are contrary to the ideas we ought to form of God, useless to ourselves, and often dangerous to others. In the mean time, I am, &c.

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LETTER VIII.

Of Evangelical Virtues and Christian Perfection.

If we believe the priests, we shall be persuaded, that the Christian religion, by the beauty of its morals, excels philosophy and all the other religious systems in the world. According to them, the unassisted reason of the human mind could never have conceived sounder doctrines of morality, more heroical virtues, or precepts more beneficial to society. But this is not all; the virtues known or practised among the heathens are considered as *false virtues;* far from deserving our esteem, and the favor of the Almighty, they are entitled to nothing but contempt; and, indeed, are *flagrant sins* in the sight of God. In short, the priests labor to convince us, that the Christian ethics are purely divine, and the lessons inculcated so sublime, that they could proceed from nothing less than the Deity.

If, indeed, we call that divine which men can neither conceive nor perform; if by divine virtues we are to understand virtues to which the mind of man cannot possibly attach the least idea of utility; if by divine perfections are meant those qualities which are not only foreign to the nature of man, but which are irreconcilably repugnant to it,— then, indeed, we shall be compelled to acknowledge that the morals of Christianity are divine; at least we shall be assured that they have nothing in com-

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mon with that system of morality which arises out of the nature and relations of men, but on the contrary, that they, in many instances, confound the best conceptions we are able to form of virtue.

Guided by the light of reason, we comprehend under the name of virtue those habitual dispositions of the heart which tend to the happiness and the real advantage of those with whom we associate, and by the exercise of which our fellow-creatures are induced to feel a reciprocal interest in our welfare. Under the Christian system the name of virtues is bestowed upon dispositions which it is impossible to possess without supernatural grace; and which, when possessed, are useless, if not injurious, both to ourselves and others. The morality of Christians is, in good truth, the morality of another world. Like the philosopher of antiquity, they keep their eyes fixed upon the stars till they fall into a well, unperceived, at their feet. The only object which their scheme of morals proposes to itself is, to disgust their minds with the things of this world, in order that they may place their entire affections upon things above, of which they have no knowledge whatever; their happiness here below forms no part of their consideration; this life, in the view of a Christian, is nothing but a pilgrimage, leading to another existence, infinitely more interesting to his hopes, because infinitely beyond the reach of his understanding. Besides, before we can deserve to be happy in the world

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which we do not know, we are informed that we must be miserable in the world which we do know; and, above all things, in order to secure to ourselves happiness hereafter, it is especially necessary that we altogether resign the use of our own reason; that is to say, we must seal up our eyes in utter darkness, and surrender ourselves to the guidance of our priests. These are the principles upon which the fabric of Christian morals is evidently constructed.

Let us now proceed, Madam, to a more detailed examination of the virtues upon which the Christian religion is built. These virtues are Evangelical, &c. If destitute of them, we are assured that it is in vain for us to seek the favor of the Deity.

Of these virtues the first is Faith. According to the doctrine of the church, faith is the gift of God, a supernatural virtue, by means of which we are inspired with a firm belief in God, and in all that he has vouchsafed to reveal to man, although our reason is utterly unable to comprehend it. Faith is, says the church, founded upon the word of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Thus faith supposes, that God has spoken to man — but what evidence have we that God has spoken to man? The Holy Scriptures. Who is it that assures us the Holy Scriptures contain the word of God? It is the church. But who is it that assures us the church cannot and will not deceive us? The Holy Scriptures. Thus the Scriptures bear witness to the infallibility of the church — and the church,

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in return, testifies the truth of the Scriptures. From this statement of the case, you must perceive, that faith is nothing more than an implicit belief in the priests, whose assurances we adopt as the foundation of opinions in themselves incomprehensible. It is true, that as a confirmation of the truth of Scripture, we are referred to miracles — but it is these identical Scriptures which report to us and testify of those very miracles. Of the absolute impossibility of any miracles, I flatter myself that I have already convinced you.

Besides, I cannot but think, Madam, that you must be, by this time, thoroughly satisfied how absurd it is to say that the understanding is convinced of any thing which it does not comprehend; the insight I have given you into the books which the Christians call sacred, must have left upon your mind a firm persuasion, that they never could have proceeded from a wise, a good, an omniscient, a just, and all-powerful God. If, then, we cannot yield them a real belief, what we call faith can be nothing more than a blind and irrational adherence to a system devised by priests, whose crafty selfishness has made them careful from the earliest infancy to fill our tender minds with prepossessions in favor of doctrines which they judged favorable to their own interests. Interested, however, as they are in the opinions which they endeavor to force upon us as truth, is it possible for these priests to believe them themselves? Unquestionably not — the thing is out of nature. They are men like our-

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selves, furnished with the same faculties, and neither they nor we can be convinced of any thing which lies equally beyond the scope of us all. If they possessed an additional sense, we should perhaps allow that they might comprehend what is unintelligible to us; but as we clearly see that they have no intellectual privileges above the rest of the species, we are compelled to conclude, that their faith, like the faith of other Christians, is a blind acquiescence in opinions derived, without examination, from their predecessors; and that they must be hypocrites when they pretend to *believe* in doctrines of the truth of which they cannot be *convinced*, since these doctrines have been shown to be destitute of that degree of evidence which is necessary to impress the mind with a feeling of their probability, much less of their certainty.

It will be said that faith, or the faculty of believing things incredible, is the gift of God, and can only be known to those upon whom God has bestowed the favor. My answer is, that, if that be the case, we have no alternative but to wait till the grace of God shall be shed upon us — and that in the mean time we may be allowed to doubt whether credulity, stupidity, and the perversion of reason can proceed, as favors, from a rational Deity who has endowed us with the power of thinking. If God be infinitely wise, how can folly and imbecility be pleasing to him? If there were such a thing as faith, proceeding from grace, it would be the privilege of seeing things otherwise than as God has

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made them; and if that were so, it follows, that the whole creation would be a mere cheat. No man can believe the Bible to be the production of God without doing violence to every consistent notion that he is able to form of Deity! No man can believe that one God is three Gods, and that those three Gods are one God, without renouncing all pretension to common sense, and persuading himself that there is no such thing as certainty in the world.

Thus, Madam, we are bound to suspect that what the church calls a gift from above, a supernatural grace, is, in fact, a perfect blindness, an irrational credulity, a brutish submission, a vague uncertainty, a stupid ignorance, by which we are led to acquiesce, without investigation, in every dogma that our priests think fit to impose upon us — by which we are led to adopt, without knowing why, the pretended opinions of men who can have no better means of arriving at the truth than we have. In short, we are authorized in suspecting that no motive but that of blinding us, in order more effectually to deceive us, can actuate those men who are eternally preaching to us about a virtue which, if it could exist, would throw into utter confusion the simplest and clearest perceptions of the human mind.

This supposition is amply confirmed by the conduct of our ecclesiastics — forgetting what they have told us, that grace is the gratuitous present of God, bestowed or withheld at his sovereign pleas-

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ure, they nevertheless indulge their wrath against all those who have not received the gift of faith; they keep up one incessant anathema against all unbelievers, and nothing less than absolute extermination of heresy can appease their anger wherever they have the strength to accomplish it. So that heretics and unbelievers are made accountable for the grace of God, although they never received it; they are punished in this world for those advantages which God has not been pleased to extend to them in their journey to the next. In the estimation of priests and devotees, the want of faith is the most unpardonable of all offences—it is precisely that offence which, in the cruelty of their absurd injustice, they visit with the last rigors of punishment, for you cannot be ignorant, Madam, that in all countries where the clergy possess sufficient influence, the flames of priestly charity are lighted up to consume all those who are deficient in the prescribed allowance of faith.

When we inquire the motive for their unjust and senseless proceedings, we are told that faith is the most necessary of all things, that faith is of the most essential service to morals, that without faith a man is a dangerous and wicked wretch, a pest to society. And, after all, is it our own choice to have faith? Can we believe just what we please? Does it depend upon ourselves not to think a proposition absurd which our understanding shows us to be absurd? How could we avoid receiving, in our infancy, whatever impressions and opinions our

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teachers and relations chose to implant in us? And where is the man who can boast that he has faith — that he is fully convinced of mysteries which he cannot conceive, and wonders which he cannot comprehend?

Under these circumstances how can faith be serviceable to morals? If no one can have faith but upon the assurance of another, and consequently cannot entertain a real conviction, what becomes of the social virtues? Admitting that faith were possible, what connection can exist between such occult speculations and the manifest duties of mankind, duties which are palpable to every one who, in the least, consults his reason, his interest, or the welfare of the society to which he belongs? Before I can be satisfied of the advantages of justice, temperance, and benevolence, must I first believe in the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and all the fables of the Old Testament? If I believe in all the atrocious murders attributed by the Bible to that God whom I am bound to consider as the fountain of justice, wisdom, and goodness, is it not likely that I shall feel encouraged to the commission of crimes when I find them sanctioned by such an example? Although unable to discover the value of so many mysteries which I cannot understand, or of so many fanciful and cumbersome ceremonies prescribed by the church, am I, on that account, to be denounced as a more dangerous citizen than those who persecute, torment, and destroy every one of their fellow-crea-

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tures who does not think and act at their dictation? The evident result of all these considerations must be, that he who has a lively faith and a blind zeal for opinions contradictory to common sense, is more irrational, and consequently more wicked than the man whose mind is untainted by such detestable doctrines; for when once the priests have gained their fatal ascendency over his mind, and have persuaded him that, by committing all sorts of enormities, he is doing the work of the Lord, there can be no doubt that he will make greater havoc in the happiness of the world, than the man whose reason tells him that such excesses cannot be acceptable in the sight of God.

The advocates of the church will here interrupt me, by alleging that if divested of those sentiments which religion inspires, men would no longer live under the influence of motives strong enough to induce an abstinence from vice, or to urge them on in the career of virtue when obstructed by painful sacrifices. In a word, it will be affirmed that unless men are convinced of the existence of an avenging and remunerating God, they are released from every motive to fulfil their duties to each other in the present life.

You are, doubtless, Madam, quite sensible of the futility of such pretences, put forth by priests who, in order to render themselves more necessary, are indefatigable in endeavoring to persuade us that their system is indispensable to the maintenance of social order. To annihilate their sophistries it is

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sufficient to reflect upon the nature of man, his true interests, and the end for which society is formed. Man is a feeble being, whose necessities render him constantly dependent upon the support of others, whether it be for the preservation or the pleasure of his existence; he has no means of interesting others in his welfare except by his manner of conducting himself towards them; that conduct which renders him an object of affection to others is called virtue — whatever is pernicious to society is called crime — and where the consequences are injurious only to the individual himself, it is called vice. Thus every man must immediately perceive that he consults his own happiness by advancing that of others — that vices, however cautiously disguised from public observation, are, nevertheless, fraught with ruin to him who practises them — and that crimes are sure to render the perpetrator odious or contemptible in the eyes of his associates, who are necessary to his own happiness. In short, education, public opinion, and the laws point out to us our mutual duties much more clearly than the chimeras of an incomprehensible religion.

Every man on consulting with himself will feel indubitably that he desires his own conservation; experience will teach him both what he ought to do and what to avoid to arrive at this end; in consequence he will shrink from those excesses which endanger his being; he will debar himself from those gratifications which in their course would

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render his existence miserable; and he would make sacrifices, if it was necessary, in the view of procuring himself advantages more real than those of which he momentarily deprived himself. Thus he would know what he owes to himself and what he owes to others.

Here, Madam, you have a short but perfect summary of all morals, derived, as they must be, from the nature of man, the uniform experience and the universal reason of mankind. These precepts are compulsory upon our minds, for they show us that the consequences of our conduct flow from our actions with as natural and inevitable a certainty as the return of a stone to the earth after the impetus is exhausted which detained it in the air. It is natural and inevitable that the man who employs himself in doing good must be preferred to the man who does mischief. Every thinking being must be penetrated with the truth of this incontrovertible maxim, and all the ponderous volumes of theology that ever were composed can add nothing to the force of his conviction; every thinking being will, therefore, avoid a conduct calculated to injure either himself or others; he will feel himself under the necessity of doing good to others, as the only method of obtaining solid happiness for himself, and of conciliating to himself those sentiments on the part of others, without which he could derive no charms from society.

You perceive, then, Madam, that *faith* cannot in any manner contribute to the correction of social

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conduct, and you will feel that the popular supernatural notions cannot add any thing to the obligations that our nature imposes upon us. In fact, the more mysterious and incomprehensible are the dogmas of the church, the more likely are they to draw us aside from the plain dictates of Nature and the straight-forward directions of Reason, whose voice is incapable of misleading us. A candid survey of the causes which produce an infinity of evils that afflict society will quickly point out the speculative tenets of theology as their most fruitful source. The intoxication of enthusiasm and the frenzy of fanaticism concur in overpowering reason, and by rendering men blind and unreflecting, convert them into enemies both of themselves and the rest of the world. It is impossible for the worshippers of a tyrannical, partial, and cruel God to practise the duties of justice and philanthropy. As soon as the priests have succeeded in stifling within us the commands of Reason, they have already converted us into slaves, in whom they can kindle whatever passions it may please them to inspire us with.

Their interest, indeed, requires that we should be slaves. They exact from us the surrender of our reason, because our reason contradicts their impostures, and would ruin their plans of aggrandizement. Faith is the instrument by which they enslave us and make us subservient to their own ambition. Hence arises their zeal for the propagation of the faith; hence arises their implacable

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hostility to science, and to all those who refuse submission to their yoke; hence arises their incessant endeavor to establish the dominion of Faith, (that is to say, their own dominion,) even by fire and sword, the only arguments they condescend to employ.

It must be confessed that society derives but little advantage from this supernatural faith which the church has exalted into the first of virtues. As it regards God, it is perfectly useless to him, since if he wishes mankind to be convinced, it is sufficient that he wills them to be so. It is utterly unworthy of the supreme wisdom of God, who cannot exhibit himself to mortals in a manner contradictory to the reason with which he has endowed them. It is unworthy of the divine justice, which cannot require from mankind to be convinced of that which they cannot understand. It denies the very existence of God himself, by inculcating a belief totally subversive of the only rational idea we are able to form of the Divinity.

As it regards morality, faith is also useless. Faith cannot render it either more sacred or more necessary than it already is by its own inherent essence, and by the nature of man. Faith is not only useless, but injurious to society, since, under the plea of its pretended necessity, it frequently fills the world with deplorable troubles and horrid crimes. In short, faith is self-contradictory, since by it we are required to believe in things inconsistent with each other, and even incompatible with

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the principles laid down in the books which we have already investigated, and which contain what we are commanded to believe.

To whom, then, is faith found to be advantageous? To a few men, only, who, availing themselves of its influence to degrade the human mind, contrive to render the labor of the whole world tributary to their own luxury, splendor, and power. Are the nations of the earth any happier for their faith, or their blind reliance on priests? Certainly not. We do not there find more morality, more virtue, more industry, or more happiness; but, on the contrary, wherever the priests are powerful, there the people are sure to be found abject in their minds and squalid in their condition.

But Hope — Hope, the second in order of the Christian perfections, is ever at hand to console us for the evils inflicted by Faith. We are commanded to be firmly convinced that those who have faith, that is to say, those who believe in priests, shall be amply rewarded in the other world for their meritorious submission in this. Thus hope is founded on faith, in the same manner as faith is established upon hope; faith enjoins us to entertain a devout hope that our faith will be rewarded. And what is it we are told to hope for? For unspeakable benefits; that is, benefits for which language contains no expression. So that, after all, we know not what it is we are to hope for. And how can we feel a hope or even a wish for any object that is undefinable? How can priests incessantly speak

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to us of things of which they, at the same time, acknowledge it is impossible for us to form any ideas?

It thus appears that hope and faith have one common foundation; the same blow which overturns the one necessarily levels the other with the ground. But let us pause a moment, and endeavor to discover the advantages of Christian hope amongst men. It encourages to the practice of virtue; it supports the unfortunate under the stroke of affliction; and consoles the believer in the hour of adversity. But what encouragement, what support, what consolation can be imparted to the mind from these undefined and undefinable shadows? No one, indeed, will deny that hope is sufficiently useful to the priests, who never fail to call in its assistance for the vindication of Providence, whenever any of the elect have occasion to complain of the unmerited hardship or the transient injustice of his dispensations. Besides, these priests, notwithstanding their beautiful systems, find themselves unable to fulfil the high-sounding promises they so liberally make to all the faithful, and are frequently at a loss to explain the evils which they bring upon their flocks by means of the quarrels they engage in, and the false notions of religion they entertain; on these occasions the priests have a standing appeal to hope, telling their dupes that man was not created for this world, that heaven is his home, and that his sufferings here will be counterbalanced by indescribable bliss

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hereafter. Thus, like quacks, whose nostrums have ruined the health of their patients, they have still left to themselves the advantage of selling hopes to those whom they know themselves unable to cure. Our priests resemble some of our physicians, who begin by frightening us into our complaints, in order that they may make us customers for the hopes which they afterwards sell to us for their weight in gold. This traffic constitutes, in reality, all that is called religion.

The third of the Christian virtues is Charity; that is, to love God above all things, and our neighbors as ourselves. But before we are required to love God above all things, it seems reasonable that religion should condescend to represent him as worthy of our love. In good faith, Madam, is it possible to feel that the God of the Christians is entitled to our love? Is it possible to feel any other sentiments than those of aversion towards a partial, capricious, cruel, revengeful, jealous, and sanguinary tyrant? How can we sincerely love the most terrible of beings, — the living God, into whose hands it is dreadful to think of falling, — the God who can consign to eternal damnation those very creatures who, without his own consent, would never have existed? Are our theologians aware of what they say, when they tell us that the fear of God is the fear of a child for its parent, which is mingled with love? Are we not bound to hate, can we by any means avoid detesting, a barbarous father, whose injustice is so boundless

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as to punish the whole human race, though innocent, in order to revenge himself upon two individuals for the sin of the apple, which sin he himself might have prevented if he had thought proper? In short, Madam, it is a physical impossibility to love above all things a God whose whole conduct, as described in the Bible, fills us with a freezing horror. If, therefore, the love of God, as the Jansenists assert, is indispensable to salvation, we cannot wonder to find that the elect are so few. Indeed, there are not many persons who can restrain themselves from hating this God; and the doctrine of the Jesuits is, that to abstain from hating him is sufficient for salvation. The power of loving a God whom religion paints as the most detestable of beings would, doubtless, be a proof of the most supernatural grace, that is, a grace the most contrary to nature; to love that which we do not know, is, assuredly, sufficiently difficult; to love that which we fear, is still more difficult; but to love that which is exhibited to us in the most repulsive colors, is manifestly impossible.

We must, after all this, be thoroughly convinced that, except by means of an invisible grace never communicated to the profane, no Christian in his sober senses can love his God; even those devotees who pretend to that happiness are apt to deceive themselves; their conduct resembles that of hypocritical flatterers, who, in order to ingratiate themselves with an odious tyrant, or to escape his resentment, make every profession of attachment,

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whilst, at the bottom of their hearts, they execrate him; or, on the other hand, they must be condemned as enthusiasts, who, by means of a heated imagination, become the dupes of their own illusions, and only view the favorable side of a God declared to be the fountain of all good, yet, nevertheless, constantly delineated to us with every feature of wickedness. Devotees, when sincere, are like women given up to the infatuation of a blind passion by which they are enamoured with lovers rejected by the rest of the sex as unworthy of their affection. It was said by Madame de Sévigné that she loved God as a perfectly well-bred gentleman, with whom she had never been acquainted. But can the God of the Christians be esteemed a well-bred gentleman? Unless her head was turned, one would think that she must have been cured of her passion by the slightest reference to her imaginary lover's portrait as drawn in the Bible, or as it is spread upon the canvas of our theological artists.

With regard to the love of our neighbor, where was the necessity of religion to teach us our duty, which as men we cannot but feel, of cherishing sentiments of good will towards each other? It is only by showing in our conduct an affectionate disposition to others that we can produce in them correspondent feelings towards ourselves. The simple circumstance of being men is quite sufficient to give us a claim upon the heart of every man who is susceptible of the sweet sensibilities of our nature. Who is better acquainted than

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yourself, Madam, with this truth? Does not your compassionate soul experience at every moment the delightful satisfaction of solacing the unhappy? Setting aside the superfluous precepts of religion, think you that you could by any efforts steel your heart against the tears of the unfortunate? Is it not by rendering our fellow-creatures happy that we establish an empire in their hearts? Enjoy, then, Madam, this delightful sovereignty; continue to bless with your beneficence all that surround you; the consciousness of being the dispenser of so much good will always sustain your mind with the most gratifying self-applause; those who have received your kindness will reward you with their blessings, and afford you the tribute of affection which mankind are ever eager to lay at the feet of their benefactors.

Christianity, not satisfied with recommending the love of our neighbor, superadds the injunction of loving our enemies. This precept, attributed to the Son of God himself, forms the ground on which our divines claim for their religion a superiority of moral doctrine over all that the philosophers of antiquity were known to teach. Let us, therefore, examine how far this precept admits of being reduced to practice. True, an elevated mind may easily place itself above a sense of injuries; a noble spirit retains no resentful recollections; a great soul revenges itself by a generous clemency; but it is an absurd contradiction to require that a man shall entertain feelings of tenderness and regard for

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those whom he knows to be bent on his destruction; this love of our enemies, which Christianity is so vain of having promulgated, turns out, then, to be an impracticable commandment, belied and denied by every Christian at every moment of his life. How preposterous to talk of loving that which annoys us!—of cherishing an attachment for that which gives us pain!—of receiving an outrage with joy!—of loving those who subject us to misery and suffering! No; in the midst of these trials our firmness may perhaps be strengthened by the hope of a reward hereafter; but it is a mere fallacy to talk of our entertaining a sincere love for those whom we deem the authors of our afflictions; the least that we can do is to avoid them, which will not be looked upon as a very strong indication of our love.

Notwithstanding the solemn formality with which the Christian religion obtrudes upon us these vaunted precepts of love of our neighbor, love of our enemies, and forgiveness of injuries, it cannot escape the observation of the weakest among us, that those very men who are the loudest in praising are also the first and most constant in violating them. Our priests especially seem to consider themselves exempt from the troublesome necessity of adopting for their own conduct a too literal interpretation of this divine law. They have invented a most convenient salvo, since they affect to exclude all those who do not profess to think as they dictate, not only from the kindness of neigh-

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bors, but even from the rights of fellow-creatures. On this principle they defame, persecute, and destroy every one who displeases them. When do you see a priest forgive? When revenge is out of his reach! But it is never their own injuries they punish; it is never their own enemies they seek to exterminate. Their disinterested indignation burns with resentment against the enemies of the Most High, who, without their assistance, would be incapable of adjusting his own quarrels! By an unaccountable coincidence, however, it is sure to happen that the enemies of the church are the enemies of the Most High, who never fails to make common cause with the ministers of the faith, and who would take it extremely ill if his ministers should relax in the measure of punishment due to their common enemy. Thus our priests are cruel and revengeful from pure zeal; they would ardently wish to forgive their own enemies, but how could they justify themselves to the God of Mercies if they extended the least indulgence to his enemies?

A true Christian loves the Creator above all things, and consequently he must love him in preference to the creature. We feel a lively interest in every thing that concerns the object of our love; from all which, it follows that we must evince our zeal, and even, when necessary, we must not hesitate to exterminate our neighbor, if he says or does what is displeasing or injurious to God. In such a case, indifference would be criminal; a sincere

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love of God breaks out into a holy ardor in his cause, and our merit rises in proportion to our violence.

These notions, absurd as they are, have been sufficient in every age to produce in the world a multitude of crimes, extravagances, and follies, the legitimate offspring of a religious zeal. Infatuated fanatics, exasperated by priests against each other, have been driven into mutual hatred, persecution, and destruction; they have thought themselves called upon to avenge the Almighty; they have carried their insane delusions so far as to persuade themselves that the God of clemency and goodness could look on with pleasure while they murdered their brethren; in the astonishing blindness of their stupidity, they have imagined that in defending the temporalities of the church, they were defending God himself. In pursuance of these errors, contradicted even by the description which they themselves give us of the Divinity, the priests of every age have found means to introduce confusion into the peaceful habitations of men, and to destroy all who dared to resist their tyranny. Under the laughable idea of revenging the all-powerful Creator, these priests have discovered the secret of revenging themselves, and that, too, without drawing down upon themselves the hatred and execration so justly due to their vindictive fury and unfeeling selfishness. In the name of the God of nature, they stifled the voice of nature in the breasts of men; in the name of the

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God of goodness, they incited men to the fury of wild beasts; in the name of the God of mercies, they prohibited all forgiveness!

It is thus, Madam, that the earth has never ceased to groan with the ravages committed by maniacs under the influence of that zeal which springs from the Christian doctrine of the love of God. The God of the Christians, like the Janus of Roman mythology, has two faces; sometimes he is represented with the benign features of mercy and goodness; sometimes murder, revenge, and fury issue from his nostrils. And what is the consequence of this double aspect but that the Christians are much more easily terrified at his frightful lineaments than they are recovered from their fears by his aspect of mercy! Having been taught to view him as a capricious being, they are naturally mistrustful of him, and imagine that the safest part they can act for themselves is to set about the work of vengeance with great zeal; they conclude that a cruel master cannot find fault with cruel imitators, and that his servants cannot render themselves more acceptable than by extirpating all his enemies.

The preceding remarks show very clearly, Madam, the highly pernicious consequences which result from the zeal engendered by the love of God. If this love is a virtue, its benefits are confined to the priests, who arrogate to themselves the exclusive privilege of declaring when God is offended; who absorb all the offerings and monopo-

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lize all the homage of the devout; who decide upon the opinions that please or displease him; who undertake to inform mankind of the duties this virtue requires from them, and of the proper time and manner of performing them; who are interested in rendering those duties cruel and intimidating in order to frighten mankind into a profitable subjection; who convert it into the instrument of gratifying their own malignant passions, by inspiring men with a spirit of headlong and raging intolerance, which, in its furious course of indiscriminate destruction, holds nothing sacred, and which has inflicted incredible ravages upon all Christian countries.

In conformity with such abominable principles, a Christian is bound to detest and destroy all whom the church may point out as the enemies of God. Having admitted the paramount duty of yielding their entire affections to a rigorous master, quick to resent, and offended even with the involuntary thoughts and opinions of his creatures, they of course feel themselves bound, by entering with zeal into his quarrels, to obtain for him a vengeance worthy of a God — that is to say, a vengeance that knows no bounds. A conduct like this is the natural offspring of those revolting ideas which our priests give us of the Deity. A good Christian is therefore necessarily intolerant. It is true that Christianity in the pulpit preaches nothing but mildness, meekness, toleration, peace, and concord; but Christianity in the world is a

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stranger to all these virtues; nor does she ever exercise them except when she is deficient in the necessary power to give effect to her destructive zeal. The real truth of the matter is, that Christians think themselves absolved from every tie of humanity except with those who think as they do, who profess to believe the same creed; they have a repugnance, more or less decided, against all those who disagree with their priests in theological speculation. How common it is to see persons of the mildest character and most benevolent disposition regard with aversion the adherents of a different sect from their own! The reigning religion — that is, the religion of the sovereign, or of the priests in whose favor the sovereign declares himself — crushes all rival sects, or, at least, makes them fully sensible of its superiority and its hatred, in a manner extremely insulting, and calculated to raise their indignation. By these means it frequently happens that the deference of the prince to the wishes of the priests has the effect of alienating the hearts of his most faithful subjects, and brings him that execration which ought in justice to be heaped exclusively upon his sanctimonious instigators.

In short, Madam, the private rights of conscience are nowhere sincerely respected; the leaders of the various religious sects begin, in the very cradle, to teach all Christians to hate and despise each other about some theological point which nobody can understand. The clergy, when vested with power,

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never preach toleration; on the contrary, they consider every man as an enemy who is a friend to religious freedom, accusing him of lukewarmness, infidelity, and secret hostility; in short, he is denominated a false brother. The Sorbonne declared, in the sixteenth century, that it was heretical to say that heretics ought not to be burned. The ferocious St. Austin preached toleration at one period, but it was before he was duly initiated in the mysteries of the sacerdotal policy, which is ever repugnant to toleration. Persecution is necessary to our priests, to deter mankind from opposing themselves to their avarice, their ambition, their vanity, and their obstinacy. The sole principle which holds the church together is that of a sleepless watchfulness on the part of all its members to extend its power, to increase the multitude of its slaves, to fix odium on all who hesitate to bend their necks to its yoke, or who refuse their assent to its arbitrary decisions.

Our divines have, therefore, you see, very good reasons for raising humility into the rank of virtue. An amiable modesty, a diffident mildness of demeanor, are unquestionably calculated to promote the pleasures and the advantages of society; it is equally certain that insolence and arrogance are disgusting, that they wound our self-love and excite our aversion by their repulsive conduct; but that amiable modesty which charms all who come within its influence is a far different quality from

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that which is designated humility in the vocabulary of Christians. A truly humble Christian despises his own unworthiness, avoids the esteem of others, mistrusts his own understanding, submits with docility to the unerring guidance of his spiritual masters, and piously resigns to his priest the clearest and most irrefutable conclusions of reason.

But to what advantage can this pretended virtue lead its followers? How can a man of sense and integrity despise himself? Is not public opinion the guardian of private virtue? If you deprive men of the love of glory, and the desire of deserving the approbation of their fellow-citizens, are you not divesting them of the noblest and most powerful incitements by which they can be impelled to benefit their country? What recompense will remain to the benefactors of mankind, if, first of all, we are unjust enough to refuse them the praise they merit, and afterwards debar them from the satisfaction of self-applause, and the happiness they would feel in the consciousness of having done good to an ungrateful world? What infatuation, what amazing infatuation, to require a man of upright character, of talents, intelligence, and learning, to think himself on a level with a selfish priest, or a stupid fanatic, who deal out their absurd fables and incoherent dreams!

Our priests are never weary of telling their flocks that pride leads on to infidelity, and that a humble and submissive spirit is alone fitted to receive the truths of the gospel. In good earnest, should we

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not be utterly bereft of every claim to the name of rational beings, if we consent to surrender our judgment and our knowledge at the command of a hierarchy, who have nothing to give us in exchange but the most palpable absurdities? With what face can a reverend Doctor of Nonsense dare to exact from my understanding a humble acquiescence in a bundle of mysterious opinions, for which he is unable to offer me a single solid reason? Is it, then, presumptuous to think one's self superior to a class of pretenders, whose systems are a mass of falsities, absurdities, and inconsistencies, of which they contrive to make mankind at once the dupes and the victims? Can pride or vanity be, with justice, imputed to you, Madam, if you see reason to prefer the dictates of your own understanding to the authoritative decrees of Mrs. D——, whose senseless malignity is obvious to all her acquaintance?

If Christian humility is a virtue at all, it can be one only in the cloister; society can derive no sort of benefit from it; it enervates the mind; it benefits nobody but priests, who, under the pretext of rendering men humble, seek, in reality, only to degrade them, to stifle in their souls every spark of science and of courage, that they may the more easily impose the yoke of faith, that is to say, their own yoke. Conclude, then, with me, that the Christian virtues are chimerical, always useless, and sometimes pernicious to men, and attended with advantage to none but priests. Conclude that this

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religion, with all the boasted beauty of its morality, recommends to us a set of virtues, and enjoins a line of conduct, at variance with good sense. Conclude that, in order to be moral and virtuous, it is far from necessary to adopt the unintelligible creed of the priests, or to pride ourselves upon the empty virtues they preach, and still less to annihilate all sense of dignity in ourselves, by a degrading subjection to the duties they require. Conclude, in short, that the friend of virtue is not, of necessity, the friend of priestcraft, and that a man may be adorned with every human perfection, without possessing one of the Christian virtues.

All who examine this matter with a candid and intelligent eye, cannot fail to see that true morality — that is to say, a morality really serviceable to mankind — is absolutely incompatible with the Christian religion, or any other professed revelation. Whoever imagines himself the favored object of the Creator's love, must look down with disdain upon his less fortunate fellow-creatures, especially if he regards that Creator as partial, choleric, revengeful, and fickle, easily incensed against us, even by our involuntary thoughts, or our most innocent words and actions; such a man naturally conducts himself with contempt and pride, with harshness and barbarity towards all others whom he may deem obnoxious to the resentment of his Heavenly King. Those men, whose folly leads them to view the Deity in the light of a capricious, irritable, and unappeasable despot, can be nothing but gloomy and

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trembling slaves, ever eager to anticipate the vengeance of God upon all whose conduct or opinions they may conceive likely to provoke the celestial wrath. As soon as the priests have succeeded in reducing men to a state of stupidity gross enough to make them believe that their ghostly fathers are the faithful organs of the divine will, they naturally commit every species of crime, which their spiritual teachers may please to tell them is calculated to pacify the anger of their offended God. Men, silly enough to accept a system of morals from guides thus hollow in reasoning, and thus discordant in opinion, must necessarily be unstable in their principles, and subject to every variation that the interest of their guides may suggest. In short, it is impossible to construct a solid morality, if we take for our foundation the attributes of a deity so unjust, so capricious, and so changeable as the God of the Bible, whom we are commanded to imitate and adore.

Persevere, then, my dear Madam, in the practice of those virtues which your own unsophisticated heart approves; they will insure you a rich harvest of happiness in the present existence; they will insure you a rich return of gratitude, respect, and love from all who enjoy their benign influence; they will insure you the solid satisfaction of a well-founded self-esteem, and thus provide you with that unfailing source of inward gratification which arises from the consciousness of having contributed to the welfare of the human race. I am, &c.

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LETTER IX.

Of the Advantages contributed to Government by Religion.

Having already shown you, Madam, the feebleness of those succors which religion furnishes to morals, I shall now proceed to examine whether it procure advantages in themselves really politic, and whether it be true, as has so often been urged by the priests, that it is absolutely necessary to the existence of every government. Were we disposed to shut our eyes, and deliver ourselves up to the language of our priests, we should believe that their opinions are necessary to the public tranquillity, and the repose and security of the State; that princes could not, without their aid, govern the people, and exert themselves for the prosperity of their empire. Nor is this all; our spiritual pilots approach the throne, and gaining the ear of the sovereign, make him also believe that he has the greatest interest in conforming to their caprices, in order to subject men to the divine yoke of royalty. These priests mingle in all important political quarrels, and they too often persuade the rulers of the earth that the enemies of the church are the enemies of all power, and that in sapping the foundations of the altar, the foundations of the throne are likewise necessarily overthrown.

We have, then, only to open our eyes and consult history, to be convinced of the falsity of these

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pretensions, and to appreciate the important services which the Christian priests have rendered to their sovereigns. Ever since the establishment of Christianity, we have seen, in all the countries in which this religion has gained ground, that two rival powers are perpetually at war one with the other. We find *a* government within *the* government; that is to say, we find the Church, a body of priests, continually opposed to the sovereign power, and in virtue of their pretended *divine* mission and *sacred* office, pretending to give laws to all the sovereigns of the earth. We find the clergy, puffed up and besotted with the titles they have given themselves, laboring to exact the obedience due to the sovereign, pretending to chimerical and dangerous prerogatives, which none are suffered to question, without risking the displeasure of the Almighty. And so well have the priesthood managed this matter, that in many countries we actually see the people more inclined to lean to the authority of the Vicars of Jesus Christ than to that of the civil government. The priesthood claim the right of commanding monarchs themselves, and sustained by their emissaries and the credulity of the people, their ridiculous pretensions have engaged princes in the most serious affairs, sown trouble and discord in kingdoms, and so shook thrones as to compel their occupants to make submission to an intolerant hierarchy.

Such are the important services which religion has a thousand times rendered to kings. The peo-

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ple, blinded by superstition, could hesitate but little between God and the princes of the earth. The priests, being the visible organs of an invisible monarch, have acquired an immense credit with prejudiced minds. The ignorance of the people places them, as well as their sovereigns, at the mercy of the priests. Nations have continually been dragged into their futile though bloody quarrels; princes, for a long series of years, have either had to dispute their authority with the clergy, or become their tools or dupes.

The continual attention which the princes of Europe have been forced to pay to the clergy has prevented them from occupying their thoughts about the welfare of their subjects, who, in many instances the dupes of the priesthood, have opposed even the good their rulers desired to procure them. In like manner, the heads of the people, their kings and governors, too weak to resist the torrent of opinions propagated by the clergy, have been forced to yield, to bow, nay, even to caress the priesthood, and to consent to grant it all its demands. Whenever they have wished to resist the encroachments of the clergy, they have encountered concealed snares or open opposition, as the *holy* power was either too weak to act in the face of day, or strong enough to contend in the sunshine. When princes have wished to be listened to by the clergy, these last have invariably contrived to make them cowardly, and to sacrifice the happiness and respect of their people. Often have the hands of parricides

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and rebels been armed, by a proud and vindictive priesthood, against sovereigns the most worthy of reigning. The priests, under pretext of avenging God, inflict their anger upon monarchs themselves, whenever the latter are found indisposed to bend under their yoke. In a word, in *all* countries we perceive that the ministers of religion have exercised in all ages the most unbridled license. We every where see empires torn by their dissensions; thrones overturned by their machinations; princes immolated to their power and revenge; subjects animated to revolt against the prince that ought to give them more happiness than they actually enjoyed; and when we take the retrospect of these, we find that the ambition, the cupidity, and vanity of the clergy have been the true causes and motives of all these outrages on the peace of the universe. And it is thus that their religion has so often produced anarchy, and overturned the very empires they pretended to support by its influence.

Sovereigns have never enjoyed peace but when, shamefully devoted to priests, they submitted to their caprices, became enslaved to their opinions, and allowed them to govern in place of themselves. Then was the sovereign power subordinate to the sacerdotal, and the prince was only the first servant of the church; she degraded him to such a degree as to make him her hangman; she obliged him to execute her sanguinary decrees; she forced him to dip his hands in the blood of his own subjects whom the clergy had proscribed; she made

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him the visible instrument of her vengeance, her fury, and her concealed passions. Instead of occupying himself with the happiness of his people, the sovereign has had the complaisance to torment, to persecute, and to immolate honest citizens, thus exciting the just hatred of a portion of his people, to whom he should have been a father, to gratify the ambition and the selfish malevolence of some priests, always aliens in the state which nourishes them, and who only style themselves members of the realm in order to domineer, to distract, to plunder, and to devour with impunity.

How little soever you are disposed to reflect, you will be convinced, Madam, that I do not exaggerate these things. Recent examples prove to you that even in this age, so ambitious of being considered enlightened, nations are not secure from the shocks that the priests have ever caused nations to suffer. You have a hundred times sighed at the sight of the sad follies which puerile questions have produced among us. You have shuddered at the frightful consequences which have resulted from the unreasonable squabbles of the clergy. You have trembled with all good citizens at the sight of the tragical effects which have been brought about by the furious wickedness of a fanaticism for which nothing is sacred. In fine, you have seen the sovereign authority compelled to struggle incessantly against rebellious subjects, who pretend that their conscience or the interests of religion have obliged them to resist opinions the most agreeable to common sense, and the most equitable.

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Our fathers, more religious and less enlightened than ourselves, were witnesses of scenes yet more terrible. They saw civil wars, leagues openly formed against their sovereign, and the capital submerged in the blood of murdered citizens; two monarchs successively immolated to the fury of the clergy, who kindled in all parts the fire of sedition. They afterwards saw kings at war with their own subjects; a famous sovereign, Louis XIV., tarnishing all his glory by persecuting, contrary to the faith of treaties, subjects who would have lived tranquil, if they had only been allowed to enjoy in peace the liberty of conscience; and they saw, in fine, this same prince, the dupe of a false policy, dictated by intolerance, banish, along with the exiled Protestants, the industry of his states, and forcing the arts and manufactures of our nation to take refuge in the dominions of our most implacable enemies.

We see religion throughout Europe, without cessation, exerting a baleful influence upon temporal affairs; we see it direct the interests of princes; we see it divide and make Christian nations enemies of each other, because their spiritual guides do not all entertain the same opinions. Germany is divided into two religious parties whose interests are perpetually at variance. We every where perceive that Protestants are born the enemies of the Catholics, and are always in antagonism to them; while, on the other hand, the Catholics are leagued with their priests against all those whose mode of

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thinking is less abject and less servile than their own.

Behold, Madam, the signal advantages that nations derive from religion! But we are certain to be told that these terrible effects are due to the passions of men, and not to the Christian religion, which incessantly inculcates charity, concord, indulgence, and peace. If, however, we reflect even a moment on the principles of this religion, we should immediately perceive that they are incompatible with the fine maxims that have never been practised by the Christian priests, except when they lacked the power to persecute their enemies and inflict upon them the weight of their rage. The adorers of a jealous God, vindictive and sanguinary, as is obviously the character of the God of the Jews and Christians, could not evince in their conduct moderation, tranquillity, and humanity. The adorers of a God who takes offence at the opinions of his weak creatures, who reprobates and glories in the extermination of all who do not worship him in a particular way, for the which, by the by, he gives them neither the means nor the inclination, must necessarily be intolerant persecutors. The adorers of a God who has not thought fit to illuminate with an equal portion of light the minds of all his creatures, who reveals his favor and bestows his kindness on a few only of those creatures, who leaves the remainder in blindness and uncertainty to follow their passions, or adopt opinions against which the favored wage war, must of necessity be

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eternally at odds with the rest of the world, canting about their oracles and mysteries, supernatural precepts, invented purely to torment the human mind, to enthral it, and leave man answerable for what he could not obey, and punishable for what he was restrained from performing. We need not then be astonished if, since the origin of Christianity, our priests have never been a single moment without disputes. It appears that God only sent his Son upon earth that his marvellous doctrines might prove an apple of discord both for his priests and his adorers. The ministers of a church founded by Christ himself, who promised to send them his Holy Spirit to lead them into all the truth, have never been in unison with their dogmas. We have seen this infallible church for whole ages enveloped in error. You know, Madam, that in the fourth century, by the acknowledgment of the priests themselves, the great body of the church followed the opinions of the Arians, who disavowed even the divinity of Jesus Christ. The spirit of God must then have abandoned his church; else why did its ministers fall into this error, and dispute afterwards about so fundamental a dogma of the Christian religion?

Notwithstanding these continual quarrels, the church arrogates to itself the right of fixing the faith of the *true believers*, and in this it pretends to infallibility; and if the Protestant parsons have renounced the lofty and ridiculous pretensions of their Catholic brethren, they are not less certain in

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the infallibility of their decisions; for they talk with the authority of oracles, and send to hell and damnation all who do not yield submission to their dogmas. Thus on both sides of the cross they wish their assertions to be received by their adherents as if they came direct from heaven. The priests have always been at discord among themselves, and have perpetually cursed, anathematized, and doomed each other to hell. The vanity of each holy clique has caused it to adhere obstinately to its own peculiar opinions, and to treat its adversaries as heretics. Violence alone has generally decided the discussions, terminated the disputes, and fixed the standard of belief. Those pugnacious, brawling priests who were artful enough to enlist sovereigns on their side were *orthodox*, or, in other words, boasted that they were the exclusive possessors of the true doctrine. They made use of their credit to crush their adversaries, whom they always treated with the greatest barbarity.

But, after all, whatever the clergy may say, we shall find, even with a small share of attention, that it has ever been kings and emperors who, in the last resort, fixed the faith of the disputatious Christians. It has been by downright blows of the sword that those theological notions most pleasing to the Deity have been sustained in all countries. The true belief has invariably been that which had princes for its adherents. The faithful were those who had strength sufficient to exterminate their enemies, whom they never failed to treat

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as the enemies of God. In a word, princes have been truly infallible; we should regard them as the true founders of religious faith; they are the judges who have decided, in all ages, what doctrines should be admitted or rejected; and they are, in fine, the authorities which have always fixed the religion of their subjects.

Ever since Christianity has been adopted by some nations, have we not seen that religion has almost entirely occupied the attention of sovereigns? Either the princes, blinded by superstition, were devoted to the priests, or the rulers of nations believed that prudence exacted a concession on their part to the clergy, the true masters of their people, who considered nothing more sacred or more great than the ministers of their God. In neither case was the body politic ever consulted; it was cowardly sacrificed to the interests of the court, or the vanity and luxury of the priests. It is by a continuation of superstition on the part of the princes that we behold the church so richly endowed in times of ignorance; when men believed they would enrich Deity by putting all their wealth into the hands of the priests of a good God the declared enemy of riches. Savage warriors, destitute of the manners of men, flattered themselves that they could expiate all their sins by founding monasteries and giving immense wealth to a set of men who had made vows of poverty. It was believed that they would merit from the All-powerful a great advantage by recompensing laziness,

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which, in the priests, was regarded as a great good, and that the blessings procured by their prayers would be in proportion to the continual and pressing demands their poverty made on the wealthy. It is thus that by the superstition of princes, by that of the powerful classes, and of the people themselves, the clergy have become opulent and powerful; that monachism was honored, and citizens the most useless, the least submissive, and the most dangerous, were the best recompensed, the most considered, and the best paid. They were loaded with benefits, privileges, and immunities; they enjoyed independence, and they had that great power which flowed from so great license. Thus were priests placed above sovereigns themselves by the imprudent devotion of the latter, and the former were enabled to give the law and trouble the state with impunity.

The clergy, arrived at this elevation of power and grandeur, became redoubtable even to monarchs. They were obliged to bend under the yoke or be at war with clerical power. When the sovereigns yielded, they became mere slaves to the priests, the instruments of their passions, and the vile adorers of their power. When they refused to yield, the priests involved them in the most cruel embarrassments; they launched against them the anathemas of the church; the people were incited against them in the name of heaven; the nations divided themselves between the celestial and the terrestrial monarch, and the latter was reduced to great ex-

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tremities to sustain a throne which the priests could shake or even destroy at pleasure. There was a time in Europe when both the welfare of the prince and the repose of his kingdom depended solely upon the caprice of a priest. In these times of ignorance, of devotion, and of commotions so favorable to the clergy, a weak and poor monarch, surrounded by a miserable nation, was at the mercy of a Roman pontiff, who could at any instant destroy his felicity, excite his subjects against him, and precipitate him into the abyss of misery.

In general, Madam, we find that in countries where religion holds dominion, the sovereign is necessarily dependent upon the priests; he has no power except by the consent of the clergy; that power disappears as soon as he displeases the self-styled vicegerents of God, who are very soon able to array his subjects against him. The people, in accordance with the principles of their religion, cannot hesitate between God and their sovereign. God never says any thing except what his priests say for him; and the ignorance and folly in which they are kept by their spiritual guides prevent them from inquiring whether God's ambassadors faithfully render his decrees.

Conclude, then, with me, that the interests of a sovereign who would rule equitably are unable to accord with those of the ministers of the Christian religion, who in all ages have been the most turbulent citizens, the most rebellious, the most difficult to render subservient to law and order, and

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whose resistance has extended to the very assassination of obnoxious rulers. We shall be told that Christianity is a firm support of government; that it regards magistrates as the images of the Deity; and that it teaches that *all power comes from on high.* These maxims of the clergy are, however, best calculated to lull kings on the couch of slumber; they are calculated to flatter those on whom the clergy can rely, and who will serve their ambition; and their flatterers can soon change their tone when the princes have the temerity to question the pernicious tendency of priestly influence, or when they do not blindly lend themselves to all their views. Then the sovereign is an impious wretch, a heretic; his destruction is laudable; heaven rejoices in his overthrow. And all this is the religion of the Bible!

You know, Madam, that these odious maxims have been a thousand times enforced by the priests, who say the prince has *encroached upon the authority of the church;* and the people respond that *it is better to obey God than man.* The priests are only devoted to the princes when the princes are blindly led by the priests. These last preach arrogantly that the former ought to be exterminated, when they refuse to obey the church, that is to say, the priests; yet, how terrible soever may be these maxims, how dangerous soever their practice to the security of the sovereign and the tranquillity of the state, they are the immediate consequences drawn from Judaism and Christianity. We find

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in the Old Testament that the regicide is applauded; that treason and rebellion are approved. As soon as it is supposed that God is offended with the thoughts of men,—as soon as it is supposed that heretics are displeasing to him,—it is very natural to conclude that an impious and heretical sovereign, that is to say, one who does not obey a clerical body that set themselves up as the directors of his belief, who opposes the sacred views of an infallible church, and who might occasion the loss and apostasy of a large part of the nation,—it is natural that the priests should conclude it to be legitimate for subjects to attack such a prince, alleging their religion to be the most important thing in the world, and dearer than life itself. Actuated by such principles, it is impossible that a Christian zealot should not think he rendered a service to heaven by punishing its enemy, and a service to his country by disembarrassing it of a chief who might interpose an obstacle to his eternal happiness.

The obedience of the clergy is never otherwise than conditional. The priests submit to a prince, they flatter his power, and they sustain his authority, provided he submits to their orders, makes no obstacles to their projects, touches none of their interests, and changes none of the dogmas upon which the ministers of the church have founded their own grandeur. In fine, provided a government recognizes, as divine, clerical privileges that

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are plainly opposed to popular rights, and tend to subvert them, the hierarchy will submit to it.

These considerations prove how dangerous are the priesthood, since the end they purpose by all their projects is dominion over the mind of mankind, and by subjugating it to enslave their persons, and render them the creatures of despotism and tyranny. And we shall find, upon examination, that, with one or two exceptions, the pious have been the enemies of the progress of science and the development of the human understanding; for by brutalizing mankind they have invariably striven to bind them to their yoke. Their avarice, their thirst of power and wealth, have led them to plunge their fellow-citizens in ignorance, in misery, and unhappiness. They discourage the cultivation of the earth by their system of tithes, their extortions, and their secret projects; they annihilate activity, talents, and industry; their pride is to reign on the ruin of the rest of their species. The finest countries in Europe have, when blindly submissive to the priests, been the worst cultivated, the thinnest peopled, and the most wretched. The *Inquisition* in Spain, Italy, and Portugal has only tended to impoverish those countries, to debase the mind, and render their subjects the veriest slaves of superstition. And in countries where we see heaven showering down abundance, the people are poor and famished, while the priests and monks are opulent and bloated. Their kings are without

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power and without glory; their subjects languish in indigence and wretchedness.

The priests boast of the utility of their office. Independently of their prayers, from which the world has for so many ages derived neither instruction nor peace, prosperity nor happiness, their pretensions to teach the rising generations are often frivolous, and sometimes arrogant, since we have found others equally well calculated to the discharge of those functions, who have been good citizens, that have not drawn from the pockets of their neighbors the tenth of their earnings. Thus, in what light soever we view them, the pretensions of the priests are reduced to a nonentity, compared to the disservice they render the community by their exactions and dissolute lives.

In what consists, in effect, the education that our spiritual guides have, unhappily for society, assumed the vocation of imparting to youth? Does it tend to make reasonable, courageous, and virtuous citizens? No; it is incontestable that it creates ignoble men, whose entire lives are tormented with imaginary terrors; it creates superstitious slaves, who only possess monastic virtues, and who, if they follow faithfully the instructions of their masters, must be perfectly useless to society; it forms intolerant devotees, ready to detest all those who do not think like themselves; and it makes fanatics, who are ready to rebel against any government as soon as they are persuaded it is rebellious to the church. What do the priests

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teach their pupils? They cause them to lose much precious time in reciting prayers, in mechanically repeating theological dogmas, of which, even in mature life, they comprehend nothing. They teach them the dead languages, which, at the best, only serve for entertainment, being by no means necessary in the present form of society. They terminate these fine studies by a philosophy which, in clerical hands, has become a mere play of words, a jargon void of sense, and which is exactly calculated to fit them for the unintelligible science called *theology*. But is this theology itself useful to nations? Are the interminable disputes which arise between profound metaphysicians of such a character as to be interesting to the people who do not comprehend them? Are the people of Paris and the provinces much advanced in heavenly knowledge when the priests dispute among themselves about what should really be thought of grace?

In regard to the instruction imparted by the clergy, it is indeed necessary to have faith in order to discover its utility. Their boasted instruction consists in teaching ineffable mysteries, marvellous dogmas, narrations and fables perfectly ridiculous, panic terrors, fanatical and lugubrious predictions, frightful menaces, and above all, systems so profound that they who announce are not able to comprehend them. In truth, Madam, in all this I can see nothing useful. Should nations feel any extraordinary obligations to teachers who concoct doctrines that must always remain impenetrable

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for the whole human race? It must be confessed that our priests, who so painfully occupy themselves in arranging a pure creed for us, must signally lose all their labor. At any rate, the people are not much in the situation to profit by such sublime toils. Very frequently the pulpit becomes the theatre of discord; the sacred disclaimers launch injuries at each other, infusing their own passions into the bosoms of their *Christian* auditors, kindling their zeal against the enemies of the church, and becoming themselves the trumpets of party spirit, fury, and sedition. If these preachers teach morality, it is a kind of supernatural morality, little adapted to the nature of man. If they inculcate virtue, it is that theological virtue whose inutility we have sufficiently shown. If by chance some one among them allows himself to preach that morality and virtue which is practical, human, and social, you know, Madam, that he is proscribed by his confederates, and becomes an object of their acrimonious criticisms and their deadly hatred. He is also disdained by devotees who are attached to evangelical virtues that they cannot comprehend, and who consider nothing as more important than mysterious forms and ceremonies, in which zealots make morality to consist.

See, then, in what limits are entertained the important services that the ministers of the Lord have for so many centuries rendered to nations! They are not worth, in all conscience, the excessive price which is paid for them. On the contrary, if priests

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were treated according to their real merit, if their functions were appreciated at their just value, it would, perhaps, be found that they did not merit a larger salary than those empirics who, at the corners of the streets, vend remedies more dangerous than the evils they promise to cure.

It is by subjecting the immense revenues, lands, abbeys, and estates, which clerical bodies have levied upon the credulity of men, to just and equal taxation, as with other property; it is by rendering the church and state entirely distinct; it is by stripping the hierarchy of immunities not possessed by other citizens, and of privileges both chimerical and injurious; it is by rigorously exacting the same civil obedience alike from priests and people,—that government can be rightly administered, that justice can be impartially rendered, and that the nation, as a whole, can be trained to courage, activity, industry, intelligence, tranquillity, and patriotism. So long as there are two powers in a state, they will necessarily be at variance, and the one which arrogates the favor of the Almighty will have immense advantages over that which claims no authority above the earth. If both pretend to emanate from the same source, the people would not know which to believe; they would range themselves on each side; the combat would be furious, and the power of the government would be unable to maintain itself against the many heads of the ecclesiastical hydra. The magicians of Pharaoh yielded to the Jewish priests, and in

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conflicts between the church and state, the immunities of the priests,

"Like Aaron's serpent, swallowed all the rest."

If such is the case, you will inquire, Madam, how can an enlightened civil power ever make obedient citizens of rebellious priests, who have so long possessed the confidence of the people, and who can with impunity render themselves formidable to any government? I reply, that in spite of the vigilant cares and the redoubled efforts of the priesthood, the people have begun to be more enlightened; they are becoming weary of the heavy yoke, which they would not have borne so long had they not believed it was imposed upon them by the Most High, and that it was necessary to their happiness. It is impossible for error to be eternal; it must give way to the power of truth. The priests, who think, know this well, and the whole ecclesiastical body continually declaim against all those who wish to enlighten the human race and unveil the conspiracies of their spiritual guides. They fear the piercing eyes of philosophy; they fear the reign of reason, which will never be that of tyranny or anarchy. Governments, then, ought not to share the fears of the clergy, nor render themselves the executors of their vengeance; they injure themselves when they sustain the cause of their turbulent rivals, who have ever been the enemies of civil polity and perturbers of the public repose. The magistrates of a state league themselves with their

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enemies when they form an alliance with the priesthood, or prevent the people from recognizing their errors.

Governments are more interested than individuals in the destruction of errors that often lead to confusion, anarchy, and rebellion. If men had not become gradually enlightened, nations would now, as formerly, be under the yoke of the Roman pontiff, who could occasion revolution in their midst, overturn the laws, and subvert the government. But for the insensible progress of reason, states would now be filled with a tumultuous crowd of devotees, ready to revolt at the signal of an unquiet priest or a seditious monk.

You perceive, then, Madam, that men who think, and who teach others to think, are more useful to governments than those who wish to stifle reason and to proscribe forever the liberty of thought. You see that the true friends of a stable government are those who seek most sedulously to enlighten, educate, and elevate the people. You feel that by banishing knowledge and persecuting philosophy, government sacrifices its dearest interests to a seditious clergy, whose ambition and avarice push them to usurp boundless authority, and whose pride always makes them indignant at being in subjection to a power which they contend should be subordinate to themselves.

There is no priest who does not consider himself superior to the highest ruler of any country. We have often seen the priesthood avow preten-

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sions of this character. The clergy are always enraged when an attempt is made to subject them to the secular power. Such an attempt they regard as profane, and they denounce it as tyranny whenever it is sought to be enforced. They pretend that in all times the priesthood has been sacred, that its rights come from God himself, and that no government can, without sacrilege, or without outraging the Divinity, touch the property, the privileges, or the immunities which have been snatched from ignorance and credulity. Whenever the civil authority would touch the objects considered inviolable and sacred in the hands of the priests, their clamors cannot be appeased; they make efforts to excite the people against the government; they denounce all authority as tyrannical when it has the temerity to think of subjecting them to the laws, of reforming their abuses, and neutralizing their power to injure. But they consider authority legitimate when it crushes *their* enemies, though it appears insupportable as soon as it is reasonable and favorable to the people.

The priests are essentially the most wicked of men, and the worst citizens of a state. A miracle would be necessary to render them otherwise. In all countries they are the *spoiled children* of nations. They are proud and haughty, since they pretend it is from God himself they received their mission and their power. They are ingrates, since they assume to owe only to God benefits which they visibly hold from the generosity of govern-

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ments and the people. They are audacious, because for many ages they have enjoyed supremacy with impunity. They are unquiet and turbulent, because they are never without the desire of playing a great part. They are quarrelsome and factious, because they are never able to find out a method of enabling men to understand the pretended truths they teach. They are suspicious, defiant, and cruel, because they sensibly feel that they may well dread the discovery of their impostures. They are the spontaneous enemies of truth, because they justly apprehend it will annihilate their pretensions. They are implacable in their vengeance, because it would be dangerous to pardon those who wish to crush their doctrines, whose weakness they know. They are hypocrites, because most of them possess too much sense to believe the reveries they retail to others. They are obstinate in their ideas, because they are inflated with vanity, and because they could not consistently deviate from a method of thinking of which they pretend God is the author. We often see them unbridled and licentious in their manners, because it is impossible that idleness, effeminacy, and luxury should not corrupt the heart. We sometimes see them austere and rigid in their conduct in order to impose on the people and accomplish their ambitious views. If they are hypocrites and rogues, they are extremely dangerous; and if they are fanatical in good faith, or imbecile, they are not less to be feared. In fine, we almost always see

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them rebellious and seditious, because an authority derived from God is not disposed to bend to authority derived from men.

You have here, Madam, a faithful portrait of the members of a powerful body, in whose favor governments, for a long time, have believed it their duty to sacrifice the other interests of the state. You here see the citizens whom prejudice most richly recompenses, whom princes honor in the eyes of the people, to whom they give their confidence, whom they regard as the support of their power, and whom they consider as necessary to the happiness and security of their kingdoms. You can judge yourself whether the likeness delineated is correct. You are in a position to discover their intrigues, their underplots, their conduct, and their discourse, and you will always find that their constant object is to flatter princes for the purpose of governing them and keeping nations in slavery.

It is to please citizens so dangerous that sovereigns mingle in theological questions, take the part of those who succeed in seducing them, persecute all those who do not submit, proscribe with fury the friends of reason, and by repressing knowledge injure their own power. Because the priests, who urge princes to sacrilege when they combat for them, are indignant against the same princes when they refuse to destroy the enemies of their own particular clerical body. They likewise denounce sovereigns as impious if the latter treat theological disputes with the indifference they merit.

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When hereafter, reclaimed from their prejudices, princes wish to govern for the good of all, let them cease to hear the interested and often sanguinary councils of these pretended divine men, who, regarding themselves as the centre of all things, wish to have sacrificed for this object the happiness, the repose, the riches, and the honors of the state. Let the sovereign never enter into their dissensions, let him never persecute for religious opinions, which, among sectaries, are commonly on both sides equally ridiculous and destitute of foundation. They would never involve the government if the sovereign had not the weakness to mingle in them. Let him give unlimited freedom to the course of thinking, while he directs by just laws the course of acting on the part of his subjects. Let him permit every one to dream or speculate as he pleases, provided he conducts himself otherwise as an honest man and a good citizen. At least let the prince not oppose the progress of knowledge, which alone is capable of extricating his people from ignorance, barbarity, and superstition, which have made victims of so many Christian rulers. Let him be assured that enlightened and instructed citizens are more law-abiding, industrious, and peaceable than stupid slaves without knowledge and without reason, who will always be ready to take all the passions with which a fanatic wishes to inspire them.

Let the sovereign especially occupy himself with the education of his subjects, nor leave the clergy

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unobstructedly to impregnate his people with mystic notions, foolish reveries, and superstitious practices, which are only proper for fanatics. Let him at least counterbalance the inculcation of these follies by teaching a morality conformable to the good of the state, useful to the happiness of its members, and social and reasonable. This morality would inform a man what he owed to himself, to society, to his fellow-citizens, and to the magistrates who administered the laws. This morality would not form men who would hate each other for speculative opinions, nor dangerous enthusiasts, nor devotees blindly submissive to the priests. It would create a tranquil, intelligent, and industrious community; a body of inhabitants submissive to reason and obedient to just and legitimate authority. In a word, from such morality would spring virtuous men and good citizens, and it would be the surest antidote against superstition and fanaticism.

In this manner the empire of the clergy would be diminished, and the sovereign would have a less portentous rival; he would, without opposition, be assured of all rational and enlightened citizens; the riches of the clergy would in part reënter society, and be of use in benefiting the people; institutions now useless would be put to advantageous uses; a portion of the possessions of the church, originally destined for the poor, and so long appropriated by avaricious priests, would come into the hands of the suffering and the indigent, their legitimate proprietors. Supported by a nation who

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were sensible of the advantages he had procured them, the prince would no longer fear the cries of fanaticism, and they would soon be no longer heard. The priests, the lazy monks, and turbulent persons living in forced celibacy, could no longer calculate on the future, and, aliens in the state which nourished them, they would visibly diminish. The government, more rich and powerful, would be in a better situation to diffuse its benefits; and enlightened, virtuous, and beneficent men would constitute the support, the glory, and the grandeur of the state.

Such, Madam, are the ends which all governments would propose who opened their eyes to their own true interests. I flatter myself that these designs will not appear to you either impossible or chimerical. Knowledge and science, which begin to be generally diffused, are already advancing these results; they are giving an impulse to the march of the human mind, and in time, governments and people, without tumult or revolution, will be freed from the yoke which has oppressed them so long.

Do we see any thing useful in the pious endowments of our ancestors? We find them to consist of institutions invented to continue a lazy, monastic life; costly temples elevated and enriched by indigent people to augment the pride of the priests, and to erect altars and palaces. From the foundation of Christianity the whole object of religion has been to aggrandize the priesthood on the ruins of

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nations and governments. A jealous religion has exclusively seized on the minds of men, and persuaded them that they live upon earth merely to occupy themselves with their future happiness in the unknown regions of the empyrean. It is time that this prestige should cease; it is time that the human race should occupy itself with its own true interests. The interests of the people will always be incompatible with those of the guides who believe they have acquired an imprescriptible right to lead men astray. The more you examine the Christian religion, the more will you be convinced that it can be advantageous only to those whose object it is easily to guide mankind after having plunged them into darkness. I am, &c.

LETTER X.

Of the Advantages Religion confers on those who profess it.

I dare flatter myself, Madam, that I have clearly demonstrated to you, that the Christian religion, far from being the support of sovereign authority, is its greatest enemy; and of having plainly convinced you, that its ministers are, by the very nature of their functions, the rivals of kings, and adversaries the most to be feared by all who value or exercise temporal power. In a word, I think I have

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persuaded you, that society might, without damage, dispense with the services they render, or at least dispense with paying for them so extravagantly.

Let us now examine the advantages which this religion procures to individuals, who are most strongly convinced of its pretended truths, and who conform the most rigidly to its precepts. Let us see if it is calculated to render its disciples more contented, more happy, and more virtuous than they would be without the burden of its ministers.

To decide the question, it is sufficient to look around us, and to consider the effects that religion produces on minds really penetrated with its pretended truths. We shall generally find in those who the most sincerely profess and the most exactly practise them, a joyless and melancholy disposition, which announces no contentment, nor that interior peace of which they speak so incessantly, without ever exhibiting any undoubted manifestations of it. Whoever is in the enjoyment of peace within, shows some exterior marks of it; but the internal satisfaction of devotees is commonly so concealed, that we may well suspect it of being nothing but a mere chimera. Their interior peace, which they allege gives them a good conscience, is visible to others only by a bilious and petulant humor, that is not usually much applauded by those who come under its influence. If, however, there are occasionally some devotees who actually display the serene countenance of satisfaction and enjoyment, it is because the dismal ideas of religion

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are rendered inoperative by a happy temperament; or that such persons have not fully become impregnated with their system of faith, whose legitimate effect is to plunge its devotees into terrible inquietudes and sombre chagrins.

Thus, Madam, we are brought back to the contradictory discourses of those priests who, after having caused terror by their desolating dogmas, attempt to reassure us by vague hopes, and exhort us to place confidence in a God whom they have themselves so repulsively delineated. It is idle for them to tell us the yoke of Jesus Christ is light. It is insupportable to those who consider it properly. It is only light for those who bear it without reflection, or for those who assume it in order to impose it upon others, without intending to suffer its annoyances themselves.

Suffer me, Madam, to refer you to yourself. Were you happy, contented, or gay, when you made me the depository of the secret inquietudes inflicted upon you by prejudices, and which had commenced taking that fatal empire over your mind which I have endeavored to destroy? Was not your soul involved in woe in spite of your judgment? Were you not taking measures to wither all your happiness? In favor of religion, were you not ready to renounce the world, and disregard all you owe to society? If I was afflicted, I was not surprised. The Christian religion inevitably destroys the happiness and repose of those who are subjected by it; alarms and terrors are the objects

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of its pleasures; it cannot make those happy who fully receive it. It would certainly have plunged you into distress. All your faculties would have been injured, and your too susceptible imagination would have been carried to such dangerous extremes, that many others would have grieved at the result. A gentle and beneficent spirit, like yours, could never receive peace from Christianity. The evils of religion are sure, while its consolations are contradictory and vague. They cannot give that temper and tranquillity to the mind which is necessary to enable men to labor for their own happiness and that of others.

In effect, as I have already observed, it is very difficult for an individual to occupy himself with the happiness of another when he is himself miserable. The devotee, who imposes penances on his own head, who is suspicious of every thing, who is full of self-reproaches, and who is heated by visionary meditation, by fasting and seclusion, must naturally be irritated against all those who do not believe it their duty to make such absurd sacrifices. He can scarcely avoid being enraged at those audacious persons who neglect practices or duties that are claimed as the exactions of God. He will desire to be with those only who view things as he does himself; he will keep himself apart from all others, and will end by hating them. He believes himself obliged to make a loud and public parade of his mode of thinking, and he signalizes his zeal even at the risk of appearing ridiculous. If he

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showed indulgence, he would doubtless fear he should render himself an accomplice in a neglect of his God. He would reprehend such sinners, and it would be with acrimony, because his own soul was filled with it. In fine, if zealous, he would always be under the dominion of anger, and would only be indulgent in proportion as he was not bigoted.

Religious devotion tends to arouse fierce sentiments, that sooner or later manifest themselves in a manner disagreeable for others. The mystical devotees clearly illustrate this. They are vexed with the world, and it could not exist if the extravagances required by religion were altogether carried out. The world cannot be united to Jesus Christ. God demands our entire heart, and nothing is allowed to remain for his weak creatures. To produce the little zeal for heaven which Christians have, it is requisite to torment them, and thus lead them to the practice of those marvellous virtues in which they imagine is placed all their safety. A strange religion, which, practised in all its rigor, would drag society to ruin! The sincere devotee proposes impossible attainments, of which human nature is not capable; and as, in spite of all his endeavors, he is unable to succeed in their acquisition, he is always discontented with himself. He regards himself as the object of God's anger; he reproaches himself with all that he does; he suffers remorse for all the pleasures he experiences, and fears that they may occasion a fall from grace.

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For his greater security, he often avoids society which may at any moment turn him from his pretended duties, excite him to sin, and render him the witness or accomplice of what is offensive to zealots. In fine, if the devotee is very zealous, he cannot prevent himself from avoiding or detesting beings, who, according to his gloomy notions of religion, are perpetually occupied in irritating God. On the other hand, you know, Madam, that it is chagrin and melancholy that lead to devotion. It is usually not till the world abandons and displeases men that they have recourse to heaven; it is in the arms of religion that the ambitious seek to console themselves for their disgraces and disappointed projects; dissolute and loose women turn devotees when the world discards them, and they offer to God hearts wasted, and charms that are no longer in repute. The ruin of their attractions admonishes them that their empire is no longer of this world; filled with vexation, consumed with chagrin, and irritated against a society where they were deprived of enacting an agreeable part, they yield themselves up to devotion, and distinguish themselves by religious follies, after having run the race of fashionable vices, and been engaged in worldly scandals. With rancor in their hearts, they offer a gloomy adoration to a God who indemnifies them most miserably for their ascetic worship. In a word, it is passion, affliction, and despair to which most conversions must be attributed; and they are persons of such character

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who deliver themselves to the priests, and these mental aberrations and physical afflictions are the marvellous strokes of grace of which God makes use to lead men to himself.

It is not, then, surprising if we see persons subject to this devotion most commonly ruled by sorrow and passion. These mental moods are perpetually aggravated by religion, which is exactly calculated to imbitter more and more the souls thus filled with vexations. The conversation of a spiritual director is a weak consolation for the loss of a lover; the remote and flattering hopes of another world rarely make up for the realities of this; nor do the fictitious occupations of religion suffice to satisfy souls accustomed to intrigues, dissipation, and scandalous pleasures.

Thus, Madam, we see that the effects of these brilliant conversions, so well adapted to give pleasure to the Omnipotent and to his court, present nothing advantageous for the inhabitants of this lower world. If the changes produced by grace do not render those more happy upon whom they are operated, they cannot cause much admiration on the part of those who witness them. Indeed, what advantages does society reap from the greater part of conversions? Do the persons so touched by grace become better? Do they make amends for the evil they have done, or are they heartily and generously engaged in doing good to those by whom they are surrounded? A mistress, for example, who has been arrogant and proud,—

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does conversion render her humble and gentle? Does the unjust and cruel man recompense those to whom he has done evil? Does the robber return to society the property of which he has plundered it? Does the dissipated and licentious woman repair by her vigilant cares the wrongs that her disorders and dissipations have occasioned? No, far from it. These persons so touched and converted by God ordinarily content themselves with praying, fasting, religious offerings, frequenting churches, clamoring in favor of their priests, intriguing to sustain a sect, decrying all who disagree with their particular spiritual director, and exhibiting an ardent and ridiculous zeal for questions that they do not understand. In this manner they imagine they get absolution from God, and give indemnification to men; but society gains nothing from their miraculous conversion. On the other hand, devotion often exalts, infuriates, and strengthens the passions which formerly animated the converts. It turns these passions to new objects, and religion justifies the intolerant and cruel excesses into which they rush for the interest of their sect. It is thus that an ambitious personage becomes a proud and turbulent fanatic, and believes himself justified by his zeal; it is thus that a disgraced courtier cabals in the name of heaven against his own enemies; and it is thus that a malignant and vindictive man, under the pretext of avenging God, seeks the means of avenging himself. Thus, also, it happens that a woman, to in-

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demnify herself for having quitted rouge, considers she has the right to outrage with her acrid humor a husband whom she had previously, in a different manner, outraged many times. She piously denounces those who allow themselves the indulgence of the most innocent pleasures; in the belief of manifesting religious earnestness, she exhales downright passion, envy, jealousy, and spite; and in lending herself warmly to the interests of heaven she shows an excess of ignorance, insanity, and credulity.

But is it necessary, Madam, to insist upon this? You live in a country where you see many devotees, and few virtuous people among them. If you will but slightly examine the matter, you will find that among these persons so persuaded of their religion, so convinced of its importance and utility, who speak incessantly of its consolations, its sweets, and its virtues,—you will find that among these persons there are very few who are rendered happier, and yet fewer who are rendered better. Are they vividly penetrated with the sentiments of their afflicting and terrible religion? You will find them atrabilious, disobliging, and fierce. Are they more lightly affected by their creed? You will then find them less bigoted, more beneficent, social, and kind. The religion of the court, as you know, is a continual mixture of devotion and pleasure, a circle of the exercises of piety and dissipation, of momentary fervor and continuous irregularities. This religion connects Jesus Christ with

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the pomps of Satan. We there see sumptuous display, pride, ambition, intrigue, vengeance, envy, and libertinism all amalgamated with a religion whose *maxims* are austere. Pious casuists, interested for the great, approve this alliance, and give the lie to their own religion in order to derive advantage from circumstances and from the passions and vices of men. If these court divines were too rigid, they would affright their fashionable disciples seeking to reach heaven on "flowery beds of ease," and who embrace religion with the understanding that they are to be allowed no inconsiderable latitude. This is doubtless the reason why Jansenism, which wished to renew the austere principles of primitive Christianity, obtained no general influence at the Parisian court. The monkish precepts of early Christianity could only suit men of the temper of those who first embraced it. They were adapted for persons who were abject, bilious, and discontented, who, deprived of luxury, power, and honors, became the enemies of grandeurs from which they were excluded. The devotees had the art of making a merit of their aversion and disdain for what they could not obtain.

Nevertheless, a Christian, in consonance with his principles, should "take no thought for the morrow;" should have no individual possessions; should flee from the world and its pomps; should give his coat to the thief who stole his cloak; and, if smitten on one cheek, should turn the other to the

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aggressor. It is upon Stoicism that religious fanatics built their gloomy philosophy. The so-called perfections which Christianity proposes place man in a perpetual war with himself, and must render him miserable. The true Christian is an enemy both of himself and the human race, and for his own consistency should live secluded in darkness, like an owl. His religion renders him essentially unsocial, and as useless to himself as he is disagreeable to others. What advantage can society receive from a man who trembles without cessation, who is in a state of superstitious penance, who prays, and who indulges in solitude? Or what better is the devotee who flies from the world and deprives himself even of innocent pleasures, in the fear that God might damn him for participation in them?

What results from these maxims of a moral fanaticism? It happens that laws so atrocious and cruel are enacted, that bigots alone are willing to execute them. Yes, Madam, blameless as you know my whole life to have been, consonant to integrity and honesty as you know my conduct to be, and free as I have ever been from intolerance, my existence would be endangered were these letters I am now writing to you to appear in print, or even be circulated in manuscript with my name attached to them as author. Yes, Christians have made laws, now dominant here in France, which would tie me to the stake, consume my body with fire, bore my tongue with a red hot iron, deprive

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me of sepulture, strip my family of my property, and for no other cause than for my opinions concerning Christianity and the Bible. Such is the horrid cruelty engendered by Christianity. It has sometimes been called in question whether a society of atheists could exist; but we might with more propriety ask if a society of fierce, impracticable, visionary, and fanatical Christians, in all the plenitude of their ridiculous system, could long subsist.* What would become of a nation all of whose inhabitants wished to attain perfection by delivering themselves over to fanatical contemplation, to ascetical penance, to monkish prayers, and to that state of things set forth in the Acts of the Apostles? What would be the condition of a nation where no one took any "thought for the morrow"? — where all were occupied solely with heaven, and all totally neglected whatever related to this transitory and passing life? — where all made a merit of celibacy, according to the precepts of St. Paul? — and where, in consequence of constant occupation in the ceremonials of piety, no one had leisure to devote to the well-being of men in their worldly and temporal concerns? It is evident that such a society could only exist in the Thebaid, and even there only for a limited time, as it must soon be

* Upon this topic consult what Bayle says, *Continuation des Pensées diverses sur la Comète*, Sections 124, 125, tome iv., Rousseau de Genève, in his *Contrat Social*, l. 4, ch 8. See also the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*, letter first, pp. 45 to 54, edit. 8vo. The author discusses the same matter, and confirms his opinions by new reasonings, which particularly deserve perusal. — *Note of the Editor*, (NAIGEON.)

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annihilated. If some enthusiasts exhibit examples of this sort, we know that convents and nunneries are supported by that portion of society which they do not enclose. But who would provide for a country that abandoned every thing else for the purpose of heavenly contemplations?

We may therefore legitimately conclude that the Christian religion is not fitted for this world; that it is not calculated to insure the happiness either of societies or individuals; that the precepts and counsels of its God are impracticable, and more adapted to discourage the human race, and to plunge men into despair and apathy, than to render them happy, active, and virtuous. A Christian is compelled to make an abstraction of the maxims of his religion if he wishes to live in the world; he is no longer a Christian when he devotes his cares to his earthly good; and, in a word, a real Christian is a man of another world, and is not adapted for this.

Thus we see that Christians, to humanize themselves, are constantly obliged to depart from their supernatural and divine speculations. Their passions are not repressed, but on the contrary are often thus rendered more fierce and more calculated to disturb society. Masked under the veil of religion, they generally produce more terrible effects. It is then that ambition, vengeance, cruelty, anger, calumny, envy, and persecution, covered by the deceptive name of zeal, cause the greatest ravages, range without bounds, and even delude those who

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are transported by these dangerous passions. Religion does not annihilate these violent agitations of the mind in the hearts of its devotees, but often excites and justifies them; and experience proves that the most rigid Christians are very far from being the best of men, and that they have no right to reproach the incredulous either concerning the pretended consequences of their principles, or for the passions which are falsely alleged to spring from unbelief.

Indeed, the charity of the peaceful ministers of religion and of their pious adherents does not prevent their blackening their adversaries with a view of rendering them odious, and of drawing down upon their heads the malevolence of a superstitious community, and the persecution of tyrannical and oppressive laws; their zeal for God's glory permits them to employ indifferently all kinds of weapons; and calumny, especially, furnishes them always a most powerful aid. According to them, there are no irregularities of the heart which are not produced by incredulity; to renounce religion, say they, is to give a free course to unbridled passions, and he who does not believe surely indicates a corrupt heart, depraved manners, and frightful libertinism. In a word, they declare that every man who refuses to admit their reveries or their marvellous morality, has no motives to do good, and very powerful ones to commit evil.

It is thus that our charitable divines caricature and misrepresent the opponents of their supremacy,

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and describe them as dangerous brigands, whom society, for its own interest, ought to proscribe and destroy. It results from these imputations that those who renounce prejudices and consult reason are considered the most unreasonable of men; that they who condemn religion on account of the crimes it has produced upon the earth, and for which it has served as an eternal pretext, are regarded as bad citizens; that they who complain of the troubles that turbulent priests have so often excited, are set down as perturbators of the repose of nations; and that they who are shocked at the contemplation of the inhuman and unjust persecutions which have been excited by priestly ambition and rascality, are men who have no idea of justice, and in whose bosoms the sentiments of humanity are necessarily stifled. They who despise the false and deceitful motives by which, to the present time, it has been vainly attempted through the other world to make men virtuous, equitable, and beneficent, are denounced as having no real motives to practise the virtues necessary for their well-being *here*. In fine, the priests scandalize those who wish to destroy sacerdotal tyranny, and impostures dangerous alike to nations and people, as enemies of the state so dangerous that the laws ought to punish them.

But I believe, Madam, that you are now thoroughly convinced that the true friends of the human race and of governments cannot also be the friends of religion and of priests. Whatever may be the

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motives or the passions which determine men to incredulity, whatever may be the principles which flow from it, they cannot be so pernicious as those which emanate directly and necessarily from a religion so absurd and so atrocious as Christianity. Incredulity does not claim extraordinary privileges as flowing from a partial God; it pretends to no right of despotism over men's consciences; it has no pretexts for doing violence to the minds of mankind; and it does not hate and persecute for a difference of opinion. In a word, the incredulous have not an infinity of motives, interests, and pretexts to injure, with which the zealous partisans of religion are abundantly provided.

The unbeliever in Christianity, who reflects, perceives that without going out of this world there are pressing and real motives which invite to virtuous conduct; he feels the interest that he has in self-preservation, and of avoiding whatever is calculated to injure another; he sees himself united by physical and reciprocal wants with men who would despise him if he had vices, who would detest him if he was guilty of any action contrary to justice and virtue, and who would punish him if he committed any crimes, or if he outraged the laws. The idea of decency and order, the desire of meriting the approbation of his fellow-citizens, and the fear of being subjected to blame and punishment, are sufficient to govern the actions of every rational man. If, however, a citizen is in a sort of delirium, all the credulity in the world will

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not be able to restrain him. If he is powerful enough to have no fear of men on this earth, he will not regard the divine law more than the hatred and the disdain of the judges he has constantly before his eyes.

But the priests may perhaps tell us that the fear of an avenging God at least serves to repress a great number of latent crimes that would appear but for the influence of religion. Is it true, however, that religion itself prevents these latent crimes? Are not Christian nations full of knaves of all kinds, who secretly plot the ruin of their fellow-beings? Do not the most ostensibly credulous persons indulge in an infinity of vices for which they would blush if they were by chance brought to light? A man who is the most persuaded that God sees all his actions frequently does not blush to commit deeds in secret from which he would refrain if beheld by the meanest of human beings.

What, then, avails the powerful check on the passions which religion is said to interpose? If we could place any reliance on what is said by our priests, it would appear that neither public nor secret crimes could be committed in countries where their instructions are received; the priests would appear like a brotherhood of angels, and every religious man to be without faults. But men forget their religious speculations when they are under the dominion of violent passions, when they are bound by the ties of habit, or when they are blinded by great interests. Under such circum-

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stances they do not reason. Whether a man is virtuous or vicious depends on temperament, habit, and education. An unbeliever may have strong passions, and may reason very justly on the subject of religion, and very erroneously in regard to his conduct. The religious dupe is a poor metaphysician, and if he also acts badly he is both imbecile and wicked.

It is true the priests deny that unbelievers ever reason correctly, and pretend they must always be in the wrong to prefer natural sense to their authority. But in this decision they occupy the place of both judges and parties, and the verdict should be rendered by disinterested persons. In the mean time the priests themselves seem to doubt the soundness of their own allegations; they call the secular arm to the aid of their arguments; they marshal on their side fines, imprisonment, confiscation of goods, boring and branding with hot irons, and death at the stake, at this time in France, and in other and in most countries of Christendom; they use the scourge to drive men into paradise; they enlighten men by the blaze of the fagot; they inculcate faith by furious and bloody strokes of the sword; and they have the baseness to stand in dread of men who cannot announce themselves or openly promulgate their opinions without running the risk of punishment, and even death. This conduct does not manifest that the priests are strongly persuaded of the power of their arguments. If our clerical theologians acted in good

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faith, would they not rejoice to open a free course to thorough discussion? Would they not be gratified to allow doubters to propose difficulties, the solution of which, if Christianity is so plain and clear, would serve to render it more firm and solid? They find it answers their ends better to use their adversaries as the Mexicans do their slaves, whom they shackle before attacking, and then kill for daring to defend themselves.

It is very probable unbelievers may be found whose conduct is blamable, and this is because they in this respect follow the same line of reasoning as the devotee. The most fanatical partisans of religion are forced to confess that among their adherents a small number of the elect only are rendered virtuous. By what right, then, do they exact that incredulity, which pretends to nothing supernatural, should produce effects which, according to their own admissions, their pretended divine religion fails to accomplish? If all believers were invariably good men, the cause of religion would be provided with an adamantine bulwark, and especially if unbelievers were persons without morality or virtue. But whatever the priests may aver, the unbelievers are more virtuous than the devotees. A happy temperament, a judicious education, the desire of living a peaceable life, the dislike to attract hatred or blame, and the habit of fulfilling the moral duties, always furnish motives to abstain from vice and to practise virtue more powerful and more true than those presented by

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religion. Besides, the incredulous person has not an infinity of resources which Christianity bestows upon its superstitious followers. The Christian can at any time expiate his crimes by confession and penance, and can thus reconcile himself with God, and give repose to his conscience; the unbeliever, on the other hand, who has perpetrated a wrong, can reconcile himself neither with society, which he has outraged, nor with himself, whom he is compelled to hate. If he expects no reward in another life, he has no interest but to merit the homage that in all enlightened countries is rendered to virtue, to probity, and to a conduct constantly honest; he has no inducement but to avoid the penalties and the disdain that society decrees against those who trouble its well-being, and who refuse to contribute to its welfare.

It appears evident that every man who consults his understanding should be more reasonable than one who only consults his imagination. It is evident that he who consults his own nature and that of the beings who surround him, ought to have truer ideas of good and evil, of justice and injustice, and of honesty and dishonesty, than he who, to regulate his conduct, consults only the records of a concealed God, whom his priests picture as wicked, unjust, changeable, contradicting himself, and who has sometimes ordered actions the most contrary to morality and to all the ideas that we have of virtue. It is evident that he who regulates his conduct upon sacerdotal morality will only fol-

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low the caprice and passions of the priests, and will be a very dangerous man, while believing himself very virtuous. In fine, it is evident that while conforming himself to the precepts and counsels of religion, a man may be extremely pious without possessing the shadow of a virtue. Experience has proved that it is quite possible to adhere to all the unintelligible dogmas of the priests, to observe most scrupulously all the forms, and ceremonies, and services they recommend, and orally to profess all the Christian virtues, without having any of the qualities necessary to his own happiness, and to that of the beings with whom he lives. The saints, indeed, who are proposed to us as models, were useless members of society. We see them to have been either gloomy fanatics, who sacrificed themselves to the desolating ideas of their religion, or excited fanatics, who, under pretext of serving religion, have perpetually disturbed the repose of nations, or enthusiastic theologians, who from their own dreams have deduced systems exactly calculated to infuriate the brains of their adherents. A saint, when he is tranquil, proposes nothing whose accomplishment will benefit mankind, and only aims to keep himself safe and secluded in his retreat. A saint, when he is active, only appears to promulgate reveries dangerous to the world, and to uphold the interests of the church, that he confounds with the interest of God.

In a word, Madam, I cannot too often repeat it,

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every system of religion appears to be designed for the utility of the priests; the morality of Christianity has in view only the interests of the priesthood; all the virtues that it teaches have solely for an object the church and its ministers; and these ends are always to subject the people, to draw a profit from their toil, and to inspire them with a blind credulity. We ought, therefore, to practise morality and virtue without entering into these conspiracies. If the priests disapprove of those who do not agree with them, and refuse to award any probity to the thinkers who reject their injurious and useless notions, society, which needs for its own sustenance real and human virtues, will not adopt the sentiments nor espouse the quarrels of these men, visibly leagued together against it. If the ministers of religion require their dogmas, their mysteries, and their fanatical virtues to support their usurped empire, the civil government has a need of reasonable virtues, of an evident, and above all, of a pacific morality, in order to exercise its legitimate rights. In fine, the individuals, who compose every society, demand a morality which will render them happy in *this* world, without embarrassing themselves with what only pretends to secure their felicity in an imaginary sphere, of which they have no ideas except those received from the priests themselves.

The priests have had the art to unite their religious system with some moral tenets which are really good. This renders their mysteries more

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sacred, and lends authority to their ambiguous dogmas. By the aid of this artifice, they have given currency to the opinion that without religion there can be neither morality nor virtue. I hope, Madam, in my next letter, to complete the exposure of this prejudice, and to demonstrate, to whoever will reflect, how uncertain, abstract, and deceitful are the notions which religion has inspired. I shall clearly show, that they have often infected philosophers themselves; that up to the present time, they have retarded the progress of morality; and that they have transformed a science the most certain, plain, and sensible to every thinking man, into a system at once doubtful and enigmatical, and full of difficulties. I am, Madam, &c.

LETTER XI.

Of Human or Natural Morality.

By this time, Madam, you will have reflected on what I had the honor to address to you, and perceived how impossible it is to found a certain and invariable morality on a religion enthusiastic, ambiguous, mysterious, and contradictory, and which never agreed with itself. You know that the God who appears to have taken pleasure in rendering himself unintelligible, that the God who is partial and changeable, that the God whose precepts are

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at variance one with another, can never serve as the base on which to rear a morality that shall become practicable among the inhabitants of the earth. In short, how can we found justice and goodness on attributes that are unjust and evil; yet attributes of a Being who tempts man, whom he created, for the purpose of punishing him when tempted? How can we know when we do the will of a God who has said, *Thou shalt not kill*, and who yet allows his people to exterminate whole nations? What idea can we form of the morality of that God who declares himself pleased with the sanguinary conduct of Moses, of the rebel, the assassin, the adulterer, David? Is it possible to found the holy duties of humanity on a God whose favorites have been inhuman persecutors and cruel monsters? How can we deduce our duties from the lessons of the priests of a God of peace, who, nevertheless, breathes only sedition, vengeance, and carnage? How can we take as models for our conduct *saints*, who were useless enthusiasts, or turbulent fanatics, or seditious apostates; who, under the pretext of defending the cause of God, have stirred up the greatest ravages on the earth? What wholesome morality can we reap from the adoption of impracticable virtues, from their being supernatural, which are visibly useless to ourselves, to those among whom we live, and in their consequences often dangerous? How can we take as guides in our conduct priests, whose lessons are a tissue of unintelligible opinions, (*for all religion is*

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but opinion,) puerile and frivolous practices, which these gentlemen prefer to real virtues? In fine, how can we be taught *the truth*, conducted in an unerring path, by men of a changeable morality, calculated upon and actuated by their present interests, and who, although they pretend to preach good-will to men, humanity, and peace, have, as their text-book, a volume stained with the records of injustice, inhumanity, sedition, and perfidy?

You know, Madam, that it is impossible to found morality on notions that are so unfixed and so contrary to all our natural ideas of virtue. By virtue, we ought to understand the habitual dispositions to do whatever will procure us the happiness of ourselves and our species. By virtue, religion understands only that which may contribute to render us favorable to a hidden God, who attaches his favor to practices and opinions that are too often hurtful to ourselves, and little beneficial to others. The morality of the Christians is a mystic morality, which resembles the dogmas of their religion; it is obscure, unintelligible, uncertain, and subject to the interpretation of frail creatures. This morality is never fixed, because it is subordinate to a religion which varies incessantly its principles, and which is regulated according to the pleasure of a despotic divinity, and, more especially, according to the pleasure of priests, whose interests are changing daily, whose caprices are as variable as the hours of their existence, and who are, consequently, not always in agreement with one another.

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The writings which are the sources whence the Christians have drawn their morality, are not only an abyss of obscurity, but demand continual explications from their masters, the priests, who, in explaining, make them still more obscure, still more contradictory. If these oracles of heaven prescribe to us in one place the virtues truly useful, in another part they approve, or prescribe, actions entirely opposed to all the ideas that we have of virtue. The same God who orders us to be good, equitable, and beneficent, who forbids the revenging of injuries, who declares himself to be the God of clemency and of goodness, shows himself to be implacable in his rage; announces himself as bringing *the sword, and not peace;* tells us that he is come to set mankind at variance; and, finally, in order to revenge his wrongs, orders rapine, treason, usurpation, and carnage. In a word, it is impossible to find in the Scriptures any certain principles or sure rules of morality. You there see, in one part, a small number of precepts, useful and intelligible, and in another part maxims the most extravagant, and the most destructive to the good and happiness of all society.

It is in punctuality to fulfil the superstitious and frivolous duties, that the morality of the Jews in the Old Testament writings is chiefly conspicuous; legal observances, rites, ceremonies, are all that occupied the people of Israel. In recompense for their scrupulous exactness to fulfil these duties, they were permitted to commit the most frightful

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of crimes. The virtues recommended by the Son of God, in the New Testament, are not in reality the same as those which God the Father had made observable in the former case. The New Testament contradicts the Old. It announces that God is not pacified by sacrifices, nor by offerings, nor by frivolous rites. It substitutes in place of these, supernatural virtues, of which I believe I have sufficiently proved the inutility, the impossibility, and the incompatibility with the well-being of man living in society. The Son of God, by the writers of the New Testament, is set at variance with himself; for he destroys in one place what he establishes in another; and, moreover, the priests have appropriated to themselves all the principles of his mission. They are in unison only with God when the precepts of the Deity accord with their present interest. Is it their interest to persecute? They find that God ordains persecution. Are they themselves persecuted? They find that this pacific God forbids persecution, and views with abhorrence the persecution of his servants. Do they find that superstitious practices are lucrative to themselves? Notwithstanding the aversion of Jesus Christ from offerings, rites, and ceremonies, they impose them on the people, they surcharge them with mysterious rites: they respect these more than those duties which are of essential benefit to society. If Jesus has not wished that they should avenge themselves, they find that his Father has delighted in vengeance. If Jesus has declared that his kingdom is not of

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this world, and if he has shown contempt of riches, they nevertheless find in the Old Testament sufficient reasons for establishing a hierarchy for the governing of the world in a spiritual sense, as kings do in a political one, — for the disputing with kings about their power, — for exercising in this world an authority the most unlimited, a license the most terrific. In a word, if they have found in the Bible some precepts of a moral tendency and practical utility, they have also found others to justify crimes the most atrocious.

Thus, in the Christian religion, morality uniformly depends on the fanaticism of priests, their passions, their interests: its principles are never fixed; they vary according to circumstances: the God of whom they are the organs, and the interpreters, has not said any thing but what agrees best with their views, and what never contravenes their interest. Following their caprices, he changes his advice continually; he approves, and disapproves, of the same actions: he loves, or detests, the same conduct; he changes crime into virtue, and virtue into crime.

What is the result from all this? It is that the Christians have not sure principles in morality: it varies with the policy of the priests, who are in a situation to command the credulity of mankind, and who, by force of menaces and terrors, oblige men to shut their eyes on their contradictions, and minds the most honest to commit faults the greatest which can be committed against religion. It

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is thus that under a God who recommends the love of our neighbor, the Christians accustom themselves from infancy to detest an heretical neighbor, and are almost always in a disposition to overwhelm him by a crowd of arguments received from their priests. It is thus that, under a God who ordains we should love our enemies and forgive their offences, the Christians hate and destroy the enemies of their priests, and take vengeance, without measure, for injuries which they pretend to have received. It is thus, that under a just God, a God who never ceases to boast of his goodness, the Christians, at the signal of their spiritual guides, become unjust and cruel, and make a merit of having stifled the cries of nature, the voice of humanity, the counsels of wisdom, and of public interest.

In a word, all the ideas of justice and of injustice, of good and evil, of happiness and of misfortune, are necessarily confounded in the head of a Christian. His despotic priest commands him, in the name of God, to put no reliance on his reason, and the man who is compelled to abandon it for the guidance of a troubled imagination will be far more likely to consult and admit the most stupid fanaticism as the inspiration of the Most High. In his blindness, he casts at his feet duties the most sacred, and he believes himself virtuous in outraging every virtue. Has he remorse? his priest appeases it speedily, and points out some easy practices by which he may soon recommend himself to God. Has he

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committed injustice, violence, and rapine? he may repair all by giving to the church the goods of which he has despoiled worthy citizens; or by repaying by largesses, which will procure him the prayers of the priests and the favor of heaven. For the priests never reproach men, who give them of this world's goods, with the injustice, the cruelties, and the crimes they have been guilty, to support the church and befriend her ministers; the faults which have almost always been found the most unpardonable, have always been those of most disservice to the clergy. To question the faith and reject the authority of the priesthood, have always been the most frightful crimes; they are truly the sin against the Holy Ghost, which can never be forgiven either in this world or in that which is to come. To despise these objects which the priests have an interest in making to be respected, is sufficient to qualify one for the appellation of a blasphemer and an impious man. These vague words, void of sense, suffice to excite horror in the mind of the weak vulgar. The terrible word sacrilege designates an attempt on the person, the goods, and the rights of the clergy. The omission of some useless practice is exaggerated and represented as a crime more detestable than actions which injure society. In favor of fidelity to fulfil the duties of religion, the priest easily pardons his slave submitting to vices, criminal debaucheries, and excesses the most horrible. You perceive, then, Madam, that the Christian morality has really in

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view but the utility of the priests. Why, then, should you be surprised that they endeavor to make themselves arbitrary and sovereign; that they deem as faults, and as criminal, all the virtues which agree not with their marvellous systems? The Christian morality appears only to have been proposed to blind men, to disturb their reason, to render them abject and timid, to plunge them into vassalage, to make them lose sight of the earth which they inhabit, for visions of bliss in heaven. By the aid of this morality, the priests have become the true masters here below; they have imagined virtues and practices useful only to themselves; they have proscribed and interdicted those which were truly useful to society; they have made slaves of their disciples, who make virtue to consist in blind submission to their caprices.

To lay the foundations of a good morality, it is absolutely necessary to destroy the prejudices which the priests have inspired in us; it is necessary to begin by rendering the mind of man energetic, and freeing it from those vain terrors which have enthralled it; it is necessary to renounce those supernatural notions which have, till now, hindered men from consulting the volume of nature, which have subjected reason to the yoke of authority; it is necessary to encourage man, to undeceive him as to those prejudices which have enslaved him; to annihilate in his bosom those false theories which corrupt his nature, and which are, in fact, infidel guides, destructive of the real happiness of the

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species. It is necessary to undeceive him as to the idea of his loathing himself, and especially that other idea, that some of his fellow-creatures are not to labor with their hands for their support, but in spiritual matters for his happiness. In fine, it is necessary to influence him with self-love, that he may merit the esteem of the world, the benevolence and consideration of those with whom he is associated by the ties of nature or public economy.

The morality of religion appears calculated to confound society and replunge its members into the savage state. The Christian virtues tend evidently to isolate man, to detach him from those to whom nature has united him, and to unite him to the priests — to make him lose sight of a happiness the most solid, to occupy himself only with dangerous chimeras. We only live in society to procure the more easily those kindnesses, succors, and pleasures, which we could not obtain living by ourselves. If it had been destined that we should live miserably in this world, that we should detest ourselves, fly the esteem of others, voluntarily afflict ourselves, have no attachment for any one, society would have been one heap of confusion, the human kind savages and strangers to one another.

However, if it is true that God is the author of man, it is God who renders man sociable; it is God who wishes man to live in society where he can obtain the greatest good. If God is good, he cannot approve that men should leave society to become miserable; if God is the author of reason,

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he can only wish that men who are possessed of reason should employ this distinguishing gift to procure for themselves all the happiness its exercise can bring them. If God has revealed himself, it is not in some obscure way, but in a revelation the most evident and clear of all those supposed revelations, which are visibly contrary to all the notions we can form of the Divinity. We are not, however, obliged to dive into the marvellous to establish the duties man owes to man, since God has very plainly shown them in the wants of one and the good offices of another person. But it is only by consulting our reason that we can arrive at the means of contributing to the felicity of our species. It is then evident that in regarding man as the creature of God, God must have designed that man should consult his reason, that it might procure him the most solid happiness, and those principles of virtue which nature approves.

What, then, might not our opinions be were we to substitute the morality of reason for the morality of religion? In place of a partial and reserved morality for a small number of men, let us substitute a universal morality, intelligible to all the inhabitants of the earth, and of which all can find the principles in nature. Let us study this nature, its wants, and its desires; let us examine the means of satisfying it; let us consider what is the end of our existence in society; we shall see that all those who are thus associated are compelled by their natures to practise affection one to another,

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benevolence, esteem, and relief, if desired; we shall see what is that line of conduct which necessarily excites hatred, ill-will, and all those misfortunes which experience makes familiar to mankind; our reason will tell us what actions are the most calculated to excite real happiness and good will the most solid and extensive; let us weigh these with those that are founded on visionary theories; their difference will at once be perceptible; the advantages which are permanent we will not sacrifice for those that are momentary; we will employ all our faculties to augment the happiness of our species; we will labor with perseverance and courage to extirpate evil from the earth; we will assist as much as we can those who are without friends; we will seek to alleviate their distresses and their pains; we will merit their regard, and thus fulfil the end of our being on earth.

In conducting ourselves in this manner, our reason prescribes a morality agreeable to nature, reasonable to all, constant in its operation, effective in its exercise in benefiting all, in contributing to the happiness of society, collectively and individually, in distinction to the mysticism preached up by priests. We shall find in our reason and in our nature the surest guides, superior to the clergy, who only teach us to benefit themselves. We shall thus enjoy a morality as durable as the race of man. We shall have precepts founded on the necessity of things, that will punish those trans-

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gressing them, and rewarding those who obey them. Every man who shall prove himself to be just, useful, beneficent, will be an object of love to his fellow-citizens; every man who shall prove himself unjust, useless, and wicked will become an object of hatred to himself as well as to others; he will be forced to tremble at the violation of the laws; he will be compelled to do that which is good to gain the good will of mankind and preserve the regard of those who have the power of obliging him to be a useful member of the state.

Thus, Madam, if it should be demanded of you what you would substitute for the benefit of society, in place of visionary reveries, I reply, a sensible morality, a good education, profitable habits, self-evident principles of duty, wise laws, which even the wicked cannot misunderstand, but which may correct their evil purposes, and recompenses that may tend to the promotion of virtue. The education of the present day tends only to make youth the slaves of superstition; the virtues which it inculcates on them are only those of fanaticism, to render the mind subject to the priests for the remainder of life; the motives to duty are only fictitious and imaginary; the rewards and punishments which it exhibits in an obscure glimmering, produce no other effect than to make useless enthusiasts and dangerous fanatics. The principles on which enthusiasm establishes morality are changing and ruinous; those on which the morality of reason is established are fixed, and cannot be

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overturned. Seeing, then, that man, a reasonable being, should be chiefly occupied about his preservation and happiness — that he should love virtue — that he should be sensible of its advantages — that he should fear the consequences of crime — is it to be wondered I should insist so much on the practice of virtue as his chief good? Men ought to hate crime because it leads to misery. Society, to exist, must receive the united virtue of its members, obedience to good laws, the activity and intelligence of citizens to defend its privileges and its rights. Laws are good when they invite the members of society to labor for reciprocal good offices. Laws are just when they recompense or punish in proportion to the good or evil which is done to society. Laws supported by a visible authority should be founded on present motives; and thus they would have more force than those of religion, which are founded on uncertain motives, imaginary and removed from this world, and which experience proves cannot suffice to curb the passions of bad men, nor show them their duty by the fear of punishments after death.

If in place of stifling human reason, as is too much done, its perfectibility were studied; if in place of deluging the world with visionary notions, truth were inculcated; if in place of pleading a supernatural morality, a morality agreeable to humanity and resulting from experience were preached, we should no longer be the dupes of imaginary theories, nor of terrifying fables as the bases of

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virtue. Every one would then perceive that it is to the practice of virtue, to the faithful observation of the duties of morality, that the happiness of individuals and of society is to be traced. Is he a husband? He will perceive that his essential happiness is to show kindness, attachment, and tenderness to the companion of his life, destined by his own choice to share his pleasures and endure his misfortunes. And, on the other hand, she, by consulting her true interests, will perceive that they consist in rendering homage to her husband, in interdicting every thought that could alienate her affections, diminish her esteem and confidence in him. Fathers and mothers will perceive that their children are destined to be one day their consolation and support in old age, and that by consequence they have the greatest interest in inspiring them in early life with sentiments of which they may themselves reap the benefit when age or misfortune may require the fruits of those advantages that result from a good education. Their children, early taught to reflect on these things, will find their interest to lie in meriting the kindness of their parents, and in giving them proofs that the virtues they are taught will be communicated to their posterity. The master will perceive that, to be served with affection, he owes good will, kindness, and indulgence to those at whose hands he would reap advantages, and by whose labor he would increase his prosperity; and servants will discover how much their happiness depends on

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fidelity, industry, and good temper in their situations. Friends will find the advantages of a kindred heart for friendship, and the reciprocity of good offices. The members of the same family will perceive the necessity of preserving that union which nature has established among them, to render mutual benefits in prosperity or in adversity. Societies, if they reflect on the end of their association, will perceive that to secure it they must observe good faith and punctuality in their engagements. The citizen, when he consults his reason, will perceive how much it is necessary, for the good of the nation to which he belongs, that he should exert himself to advance its prosperity, or, in its misfortunes, to retrieve its glory. By consequence every one in his sphere, and using his faculties for this great end, will find his own advantage in restraining the bad as dangerous, and opposing enemies to the state as enemies to himself.

In a word, every man who will reflect for himself will be compelled to acknowledge the necessity of virtue for the happiness of the world. It is so obvious that justice is the basis of all society; that good will and good offices necessarily procure for men affection and respect; that every man who respects himself ought to seek the esteem of others; that it is necessary to merit the good opinion of society; that he ought to be jealous of his reputation; that a weak being, who is every instant exposed to misfortunes, ought to know what are his duties, and how he should practise them for the

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benefit of himself and the assembly of which he is a member.

If we reflect for one moment on the effects of the passions, we shall perceive the necessity of repressing them, if we would spare ourselves vain regrets and useless sorrows, which certainly always afflict those who obey not the laws. Thus, a single reflection will suffice to show the impropriety of anger, the dreadful consequences of revenge, calumny, and backbiting. Every one must perceive that in giving a free course to unbridled desires, he becomes the enemy of society, and then it is the part of the laws to restrain him who renounces his reason and despises the motives that ought to guide him.

If it is objected that man is not a free agent, and therefore is unable to restrain his passions, and that consequently the law ought not to punish him, I reply that the community are impelled by the same necessity to hate what is injurious, and for their own conservation and happiness have the right to restrain an unhappily organized individual who is impelled to injure himself and others. The inevitable faults of men necessarily excite the hatred of those who suffer from them.

If the man who consults his reason has real and powerful motives for doing good to others and abstaining from injuring them, he has present motives equally urgent to restrain him from the commission of vice. Experience may suffice to show him that if he becomes sooner or later the victim of his

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excesses, he ceases to be the friend of virtue, and exists only to serve vice, which will infallibly punish him. This being allowed, prudence, or the desire of preserving one's self free from the contamination of evil, ought to inculcate to every man his path of duty; and, unless blinded by his passions, he must perceive how much moderation in his pleasures, temperance, chastity, contribute to happiness; that those who transgress in these respects are necessarily the victims of ill health, and too often pass a life both infirm and unfortunate, which terminates soon in death.

How is it possible, then, Madam, from visionary theories to arrive at these conclusions, and establish from supernatural phantasms the principles of private and public virtue? Shall we launch into unknown regions to ascertain our duty and to keep our station in society? Is it not sufficient if we wish to be happy that we should endeavor to preserve ourselves in those maxims which reason approves, and on which virtue is founded? Every man who would perish, who would render his existence miserable, whoever would sacrifice permanent happiness for present pleasure, is a fool, who reflects not on the interests that are dearest to him.

If there are any principles so clear as the morality of humanity has been and is still proved to be, they are such as men ought to observe. They are not obscure notions, mysticism, contradictions, which have made of a science the most obvious and best demonstrated, an unintelligible science,

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mysterious and uncertain to those for whom it is designed. In the hands of the priests, morality has become an enigma; they have founded our duties on the attributes of a Deity whom the mind of man cannot comprehend, in place of founding them on the character of man himself. They have thrown in among them the foundations of an edifice which is made for this earth. They have desired to regulate our manners agreeably to equivocal oracles which every instant contradict themselves, and which too often render their devotees useless to society and to themselves. They have pretended to render their morality more sacred by inviting us to look for recompenses and punishments removed beyond this life, but which they announce in the name of the Divinity. In fine, they have made man a being who may not even strive at perfection, by a preordination of some to bliss, and consequent damnation of others, whose insensibility is the result of this selection.

Need we not, then, wonder that this supernatural morality should be so contrary to the nature and the mind of man? It is in vain that it aims at the annihilation of human nature, which is so much stronger, so much more powerful, than imagination. In despite of all the subtile and marvellous speculations of the priests, man continues always to love himself, to desire his well being, and to flee misfortune and sorrow. He has then always been actuated by the same passions. When these passions have been moderate, and have tended to the

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public good, they are legitimate, and we approve those actions which are their effects. When these passions have been disordered, hurtful to society, or to the individual, he condemns them; they punish him; he is dissatisfied with his conduct which others cannot approve. Man always loves his pleasures, because in their enjoyment he fulfils the end of his existence; if he exceeds their just bounds he renders himself miserable.

The morality of the clergy, on the other hand, appears calculated to keep nature always at variance with herself, for it is almost always without effect even on the priesthood. Their chimeras serve but to torture weak minds, and to set the passions at war with nature and their dogmas. When this morality professes to restrain the wicked, to curb the passions of men, it operates in opposition to the established laws of natural religion; for by preserving all its rigor, it becomes impracticable; and it meets with real devotees only in some few fanatics who have renounced nature, and who would be singular, even if their oddities were injurious to society. This morality, adopted for the most part by devotees, without eradicating their habits or their natural defects, keeps them always in a state of opposition even with themselves. Their life is a round of faults and of scruples, of sins and remorse, of crimes and expiations, of pleasures which they enjoy, but for which they again reproach themselves for having tasted. In a word, the morality of superstition necessarily car-

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ries with it into the heart and the family of its devotees inward distress and affliction; it makes of enthusiasts and fanatics scrupulous devotees; it makes a great many insensible and miserable; it renders none perfect, few good; and those only tolerable whom nature, education, and habit had moulded for happiness.

It is our temperament which decides our condition; the acquisition of moderate passions, of honest habits, sensible opinions, laudable examples, and practical virtues, is a difficult task, but not impossible when undertaken with reason for one's guide. It is difficult to be virtuous and happy with a temperament so ardent as to sway the passions to its will. One must in calmness consult reason as to his duty. Nature, in giving us lively passions and a susceptible imagination, has made us capable of suffering the instant we transgress her bounds. She then renders us necessary to ourselves, and we cannot proceed to consult our real interest if we continue in indulgence that she forbids. The passions which reason cannot restrain are not to be bridled by religion. It is in vain that we hope to derive succors from religion if we despise and refuse what nature offers us. Religion leaves men just such as nature and habit have made them; and if it produce any changes on some few, I believe I have proved that those changes are not always for the better.

Congratulate yourself, then, Madam, on being born with good dispositions, of having received

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honest principles, which shall carry you through life in the practice of virtue, and in the love of a fine and exalted taste for the rational pleasures of our nature. Continue to be the happiness of your family, which esteems and honors you. Continue to diffuse around you the blessings you enjoy; continue to perform only those actions which are esteemed by all the world, and all men will respect you. Respect yourself, and others will respect you. These are the legitimate sentiments of virtue and of happiness. Labor for your own happiness, and you will promote that of your family, who will love you in proportion to the good you do it. Allow me to congratulate myself if, in all I have said, I have in any measure swept from your mind those clouds of fanaticism which obscure the reason; and to felicitate you on your having escaped from vague theories of imagination. Abjure superstition, which is calculated only to make you miserable; let the morality of humanity be your uniform religion; that your happiness may be constant, let reason be your guide; that virtue may be the idol of your soul, cultivate and love only what is virtuous and good in the world; and if there be a God who is interested in the happiness of his creatures, if there be a God full of justice and goodness, he will not be angry with you for having consulted your reason; if there be another life, your happiness in it cannot be doubtful, if God rewards every one according to the good done here.

I am, with respect, &c.

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LETTER XII.

OF THE SMALL CONSEQUENCE TO BE ATTACHED TO MEN'S SPECULATIONS, AND THE INDULGENCE WHICH SHOULD BE EXTENDED TO THEM.

PERMIT me, Madam, to felicitate you on the happy change which you say has taken place in your opinions. Convinced by reasons as simple as obvious, your mind has become sensible of the futility of those notions which have for a long time agitated it; and the inefficacy of those pretended succors which religious men boasted they could furnish, is now apparent to you. You perceive the evident dangers which result from a system that serves only to render men enemies to individual and general happiness. I see with pleasure that reason has not lost its authority over your mind, and that it is sufficient to show you the truth that you may embrace it. You may congratulate yourself on this, which proves the solidity of your judgment. For it is glorious to give one's self up to reason, and to be the votary of common sense. Prejudice so arms mankind that the world is full of people who slight their judgment; nay, who resist the most obvious pleas of their understanding. Their eyes, long shut to the light of truth, are unable to bear its rays; but they can endure the glimmerings of superstition, which plunges them in still darker obscurity.

I am not, however, astonished at the embarrass-

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ment you have hitherto felt, nor at your cautious examination of my opinions, which are better understood the more thoroughly they are examined and compared with those they oppose. It is impossible to annihilate at once deep-rooted prejudices. The mind of man appears to waver in a void when those ideas are attacked on which it has long rested. It finds itself in a new world, wherein all is unknown. Every system of opinion is but the effect of habit. The mind has as great difficulty to disengage itself from its custom of thinking, and reflect on new ideas, as the body has to remain quiescent after it has long been accustomed to exercise. Should you, for instance, propose to your friend to leave off snuff, as a practice neither healthful nor agreeable in company, he will not probably listen to you, or if he should, it will be with extreme pain that he can bring himself to renounce a habit long familiarized to him.

It is precisely the same with all our prejudices; those of religion have the most powerful hold of us. From infancy we have been familiarized with them; habit has made them a sort of want we cannot dispense with: our mode of thinking is formed, and familiar to us; our mind is accustomed to engage itself with certain classes of objects; and our imagination fancies that it wanders in chaos when it is not fed with those chimeras to which it had been long accustomed. Phantoms the most horrible are even clear to it; objects the most familiar to it, if viewed with the calm eye of reason, are disagreeable and revolting.

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Religion, or rather its superstitions, in consequence of the marvellous and bizarre notions it engenders, gives the mind continual exercise; and its votaries fancy they are doomed to a dangerous inaction when they are suddenly deprived of the objects on which their imagination exerted its powers. Yet is this exercise so much the more necessary as the imagination is by far the most lively faculty of the mind. Hence, without doubt, it becomes necessary men should replace stale fooleries by those which are novel. This is, moreover, the true reason why devotion so often affords consolation in great disgraces, gives diversion for chagrin, and replaces the strongest passions, when they have been quenched by excess of pleasure and dissipation. The marvellous arguments, chimeras multiply as religion furnishes activity and occupation to the fancy; habit renders them familiar, and even necessary; terrors themselves even minister food to the imagination; and religion, the religion of priestcraft, is full of terrors. Active and unquiet spirits continually require this nourishment; the imagination requires to be alternately alarmed and consoled; and there are thousands who cannot accustom themselves to tranquillity and the sobriety of reason. Many persons also require phantoms to make them religious, and they find these succors in the dogmas of priestcraft.

These reflections will serve to explain to you the continual variations to which many persons are subject, especially on the subject of religion. Sen-

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sible, like barometers, you behold them wavering without ceasing; their imagination floats, and is never fixed; so often as you find them freely given up to the blackness of superstition, so often may you behold them the slaves of pernicious prejudices. Whenever they tremble at the feet of their priests, then are their necks under the yoke. Even people of spirit and understanding in other affairs are not altogether exempt from these variations of mental religious temperament; but their judgment is too frequently the dupe of the imagination. And others, again, timid and doubting, without spirit, are in perpetual torment.

What do I say? Man is not, and cannot always be, the same. His frame is exposed to revolutions and perpetual vicissitudes; the thoughts of his mind necessarily vary with the different degrees of changes to which his body is exposed. When the body is languid and fatigued, the mind has not usually much inclination to vigor and gayety. The debility of the nerves commonly annihilates the energies of the soul, although it be so remarkably distinguished from the body; persons of a bilious and melancholy temperament are rarely the subjects of joy; dissipation importunes some, gayety fatigues others. Exactly after the same fashion, there are some who love to nourish sombre ideas, and these religion supplies them. Devotion affects them like the vapors; superstition is an inveterate malady, for which there is no cure in medicine. And it is impossible to keep him free from super-

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stition, whose breast, the slave of fear, was never sensible of courage; nay, soldiers and sailors, the bravest of men, have too often been the victims of superstition. It is education alone that operates in radically curing the human mind of its errors.

Those who think it sufficient, Madam, to render a reason for the variations which we so frequently remark in the ideas of men, acknowledge that there is a secret bent of the minds of religious persons to prejudices, from which we shall almost in vain endeavor to rescue their understandings. You perceive, at present, what you ought to think of those secret transitions which our priests would force on you, as the inspirations of heaven, as divine solicitations, the effects of grace; though they are, nevertheless, only the effects of those vicissitudes to which our constitution is liable, and which affect the robust, as well as the feeble; the man of health, as well as the valetudinarian.

If we might form a judgment of the correctness of those notions which our teachers boast of, in respect to our dissolution at death, we shall find reason to be satisfied, that there is little or no occasion that we should have our minds disturbed during our last moments. It is then, say they, that it is necessary to attend to the condition of man; it is then that man, undeceived as to the things of this life, acknowledges his errors. But there is, perhaps, no idea in the whole circle of theology more unreasonable than this, of which the credulous, in all ages, have been the dupes. Is it not at

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the time of a man's dissolution that he is the least capable of judging of his true interest? His bodily frame racked, it may be, with pain, his mind is necessarily weakened or chafed; or if he should be free from excruciating pain, the lassitude and yielding of nature to the irrevocable decrees of fate at death, unfit a man for reasoning and judging of the sophisms that are proposed as panaceas for all his errors. There are, without doubt, as strange notions as those of religion; but who knows that body and soul sink alike at death?

It is in the case of health that we can promise ourselves to reason with justness; it is then that the soul, neither troubled by fear, nor altered by disease, nor led astray by passion, can judge soundly of what is beneficial to man. The judgments of the dying can have no weight with men in good health; and they are the veriest impostors who lend them belief. The truth can alone be known, when both body and mind are in good health. No man, without evincing an insensible and ridiculous presumption, can answer for the ideas he is occupied with, when worn out with sickness and disease; yet have the inhuman priests the effrontery to persuade the credulous to take as their examples the words and actions of men necessarily deranged in intellect by the derangement of their corporeal frame. In short, since the ideas of men necessarily vary with the different variations of their bodies, the man who presumes to reason on his death bed with the man in health, arrogates what ought not to be conceded.

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Do not, then, Madam, be discouraged nor surprised, if you should sometimes think of ancient prejudices reclaiming the rights they have for a long time exercised over your reason; attribute, then, these vacillations to some derangement in your frame — to some disordered movements of mind, which, for a time, suspend your reason. Think that there are few people who are constantly the same, and who see with the same eyes. Our frame being subject to continual variations, it necessarily follows that our modes of thinking will vary. We think one custom the result of pusillanimity, when the nerves are relaxed and our bodies fatigued. We think justly when our body is in health; that is to say, when all its parts are fulfilling their various functions. There is one mode of thinking, or one state of mind, which in health we call uncertainty, and which we rarely experience when our frame is in its ordinary condition. We do not then reason justly, when our frame is not in a condition to leave our mind subject to incredulity.

What, then, is to be done, when we would calm our mind, when we wish to reflect, even for an instant? Let reason be our guide, and we shall soon arrive at that mode of thinking which shall be advantageous to ourselves. In effect, Madam, how can a God who is just, good, and reasonable, be irritated by the manner in which we shall think, seeing that our thoughts are always involuntary, and that we cannot believe as we would, but as our convictions increase, or become weakened? Man

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is not, then, for one instant, the master of his ideas, which are every moment excited by objects over which he has no control, and causes which depend not on his will or exertions. St. Augustine himself bears testimony to this truth: "There is not," says he, "one man who is at all times master of that which presents itself to his spirit." Have we not, then, good reason to conclude, that our thoughts are entirely indifferent to God, seeing they are excited by objects over which we have no control, and, by consequence, that they cannot be offensive to the Deity?

If our teachers pique themselves on their principles, they ought to carry along with them this truth, that a just God cannot be offended by the changes which take place in the minds of his creatures. They ought to know that this God, if he is wise, has no occasion to be troubled with the ideas that enter the mind of man; that if they do not comprehend all his perfections, it is because their comprehension is limited. They ought to recollect, that if God is all-powerful, his glory and his power cannot be affected by the opinions and ideas of weak mortals, any more than the notions they form of him can alter his essential attributes. In fine, if our teachers had not made it a duty to renounce common sense, and to close with notions that carry in their consequences the contradictory evidence of their premises, they would not refuse to avow that God would be the most unjust, the most unreasonable, the most cruel of tyrants, if he should

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punish beings whom he himself created imperfect, and possessed of a deficiency of reason and common sense.

Let us reflect a little longer, and we shall find that the theologians have studied to make of the Divinity a ferocious master, unreasonable and changing, who exacts from his creatures qualities they have not, and services they cannot perform. The ideas they have formed of this unknown being are almost always borrowed from those of men of power, who, jealous of their power and respect from their subjects, pretend that it is the duty of these last to have for them sentiments of submission, and punish with rigor those who, by their conduct or their discourse, announce sentiments not sufficiently respectful to their superiors. Thus you see, Madam, that God has been fashioned by the clergy on the model of an uneasy despot, suspicious of his subjects, jealous of the opinions they may entertain of him, and who, to secure his power, cruelly chastises those who have not littleness of mind sufficient to flatter his vanity, nor courage enough to resist his power.

It is evident, that it is on ideas so ridiculous, and so contrary to those which nature offers us of the Divinity, that the absurd system of the priests is founded, which they persuade themselves is very sensible and agreeable to the opinions of mankind; and which is very seriously insulted, they say, if men think differently; and which will punish with severity those who abandon themselves to the gui-

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dance of reason, the glory of man. Nothing can be more pernicious to the human kind than this fatal madness, which deranges all our ideas of a just God — of a God, good, wise, all-powerful, and whose glory and power neither the devotion nor rebellion of his creatures can affect. In consequence of these impertinent suppositions of the priesthood, men have ever been afraid to form notions agreeable to the mysterious Sovereign of the universe, on whom they are dependent; their mind is put to the torture to divine his incomprehensible nature, and, in their fear of displeasing him, they have assigned to him human attributes, without perceiving that when they pretend to honor him, they dishonor Deity, and that being compelled to bestow on him qualities that are incompatible with Deity, they actually annihilate from their mind the pure representation of Deity, as witnessed in all nature. It is thus, that in almost all the religions on the face of the earth, under the pretext of making known the Divinity, and explaining his views towards mortals, the priests have rendered him incomprehensible, and have actually promulgated, under the garb of religion, nothing save absurdities, by which, if we admit them, we shall destroy those notions which nature gives us of Deity.

When we reflect on the Divinity, do we not see that mankind have plunged farther and farther into darkness, as they assimilated him to themselves; that their judgment is always disturbed when they would make their Deity the object of their medita-

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tions; that they cannot reason justly, because they never have any but obscure and absurd ideas; that they are almost always in uncertainty, and never agree with themselves, because their principles are replete with doubt; that they always tremble, because they imagine that it is very dangerous to be deceived; that they dispute without ceasing, because that it is impossible to be convinced of any thing, when they reason on objects of which they know nothing, and which the imaginations of men are forced to paint differently; in fine, that they cruelly torment one another about opinions equally uninteresting, though they attach to them the greatest importance, and because the vanity of the one party never allows it to subscribe to the reveries of the other?

It is thus that the Divinity has become to us a source of evil, division, and quarrels; it is thus that his name alone inspires terror; it is thus that religion has become the signal of so many combats, and has always been the true apple of discord among unquiet mortals, who always dispute with the greatest heat, on subjects of which they can never have any true ideas. They make it a duty to think and reason on his attributes; and they can never arrive at any just conclusions, because their mind is never in a condition to form true notions of what strikes their senses. In the impossibility of knowing the Deity by themselves, they have recourse to the opinion of others, whom they consider more adroit in theology, and who pretend to an

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intimate acquaintance with God, being inspired by him, and having secret intelligence of his purposes with regard to the human kind. Those privileged men teach nothing to the nations of the earth, except what their reveries have reduced to a system, without giving them ideas that are clear and definite. They paint God under characters the most agreeable to their own interests; they make of him a good monarch for those who blindly submit to their tenets, but terrible to those who refuse to blindly follow them.

Thus you perceive, Madam, what those men are who have obviously made of the Deity an object so bizarre as they announce him, and who, to render their opinions the more sacred, have pretended that he is grievously offended when we do not admit implicitly the ideas they promulgate of God. In the books of Moses God defines himself, *I am that I am;* yet does this inspired writer detail the history of this God as a tyrant who tempts men, and who punishes them for being tempted; who exterminated all the human kind by a deluge, except a few of one family, because one man had fallen; in a word, who, in all his conduct, behaves as a despot, whose power dispenses with all the rules of justice, reason, and goodness.

Have the successors of Moses transmitted to us ideas more clear, more sensible, more comprehensible of the Divinity? Has the Son of God made his Father perfectly known to us? Has the church, perpetually boasting of the light she diffuses

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among men, become more fixed and certain, to do away our uncertainty? Alas! in spite of all these supernatural succors, we know nothing in nature beyond the grave; the ideas which are communicated to us, the recitals of our infallible teachers, are calculated only to confound our judgment, and reduce our reason to silence. They make of God a pure spirit; that is to say, a being who has nothing in common with matter, and who, nevertheless, has created matter, which he has produced from his own fiat — his essence or substance. They have made him the mirror of the universe, and the soul of the universe. They have made him an infinite being, who fills all space by his immensity, although the material world occupies some part in space. They have made him a being all powerful, but whose projects are incessantly varying, who neither can nor will maintain man in good order, nor permit the freedom of action necessary for rational beings, and who is alternately pleased and displeased with the same beings and their actions. They make him an infinite good Father, but who avenges himself without measure. They make of him a monarch infinitely just, but who confounds the innocent with the guilty, who has mingled injustice and cruelty, in causing his own Son to be put to death to expiate the crimes of the human kind; though they are incessantly sinning and repenting for pardon. They make of him a being full of wisdom and foresight, yet insensible to the folly and shortsightedness of mor-

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tals. They make him a reasonable being who becomes angry at the thoughts of his creatures, though involuntary, and consequently necessary; thoughts which he himself puts into their heads; and who condemns them to eternal punishments if they believe not in reveries that are incompatible with the divine attributes, or who dare to doubt whether God can possess qualities that are not capable of being reconciled among themselves.

Is it, then, surprising that so many good people are shocked at the revolting ideas, so contradictory and so appalling, which hurl mortals into a state of uncertainty and doubt as to the existence of the Deity, or even to force them into absolute denial of the same? It is impossible to admit, in effect, the doctrine of the Deity of priestcraft, in which we constantly see infinite perfections, allied with imperfections the most striking; in which, when we reflect but momentarily, we shall find that it cannot produce but disorder in the imagination, and leaves it wandering among errors that reduce it to despair, or some impostors, who, to subjugate mankind, have wished to throw them into embarrassment, confound their reason, and fill them with terror. Such appear, in effect, to be the motives of those who have the arrogance to pretend to a secret knowledge, which they distribute among mankind, though they have no knowledge even of themselves. They always paint God under the traits of an inaccessible tyrant, who never shows himself but to his ministers and favorites, who

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please to veil him from the eyes of the vulgar; and who are violently irritated when they find any who oppose their pretensions, or when they refuse to believe the priests and their unintelligible farragoes.

If, as I have often said, it be impossible to believe what we cannot comprehend, or to be intimately convinced of that of which we can form no distinct and clear ideas, we may thence conclude that, when the Christians assure us they believe that God has announced himself in some secret and peculiar way to them that he has not done to other men, either they are themselves deceived, or they wish to deceive us. Their faith, or their belief in God, is merely an acceptance of what their priests have taught them of a Being whose existence they have rendered more than doubtful to those who would reason and meditate. The Deity cannot, assuredly, be the being whom the Christians admit on the word of their theologians. Is there, in good truth, a man in the world who can form any idea of a spirit? If we ask the priests what a spirit is, they will tell us that a spirit is an immaterial being who has none of the passions of which men are the subjects. But what is an immaterial spirit? It is a being that has none of the qualities which we can fathom; that has neither form, nor extension, nor color.

But how can we be assured of the existence of a being who has none of these qualities? It is by *faith*, say the priests, that we must be assured of

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his existence. But what is this *faith?* It is to adhere, without examination, to what the priests tell us. But what is it the priests tell us of God? They tell us of things which we can neither comprehend nor they reconcile among themselves. The existence, even of God, has, in their hands, become the most impenetrable mystery in religion. But do the priests themselves comprehend this ineffable God, whom they announce to other men? Have they just ideas of him? Are they themselves sincerely convinced of the existence of a being who unites incompatible qualities which reciprocally exclude the one or the other? We cannot admit it; and we are authorized to conclude, that when the priests profess to believe in God, either they know not what they say, or they wish to deceive us.

Do not then be surprised, Madam, if you should find that there are, in fact, people who have ventured to doubt of the existence of the Deity of the theologians, because, on meditating on the descriptions given of him, they have discovered them to be incomprehensible, or replete with contradiction. Do not be astonished if they never listen, in reasoning, to any arguments that oppose themselves to common sense, and seek, for the existence of the priests' Deity, other proofs than have yet been offered mankind. His existence cannot be demonstrated in revelations, which we discover, on examination, to be the work of imposture; revelations sap the foundations laid down for belief in a Divinity, which they would wish to establish.

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This existence cannot be founded on the qualities which our priests have assigned to the Divinity, seeing that, in the association of these qualities, there only results a God whom we cannot comprehend, and by consequence of whom we can form no certain ideas. This existence cannot be founded on the moral qualities which our priests attribute to the Divinity, seeing these are irreconcilable in the same subject, who cannot be at once good and evil, just and unjust, merciful and implacable, wise and the enemy of human reason.

On what, then, ought we to found the existence of God? The priests themselves tell us that it is on reason, the spectacle of nature, and on the marvellous order which appears in the universe. Those to whom these motives for believing in the existence of the Divinity do not appear convincing, find not, in any of the religions in the world, motives more persuasive; for all systems of theology, framed for the exercise of the imagination, plunge us into more uncertainty respecting their evidence, when they appeal to nature for proofs of what they advance.

What, then, are we to think of the God of the clergy? Can we think that he exists, without reasoning on that existence? And what shall we think of those who are ignorant of this God, or have no belief in his existence; who cannot discover him in the works of nature, either as good or evil; who behold only order and disorder succeeding alternately? What idea shall we form of those men who regard matter as eternal, as

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actuated on by laws peculiar to itself; as sufficiently powerful to produce itself under all the forms we behold; as perpetually exerting itself in nourishing and destroying itself, in combining and dissolving itself; as incapable of love or of hatred; as deprived of the faculties of *intelligence* and *sentiment* known to belong to beings of our species, but capable of supporting those beings whose organization has made them intelligent, sensible, and reasonable?

What shall we say of those Freethinkers who find neither good nor evil, neither order nor disorder, in the universe; that all things are but relative to different conditions of beings, of which they have evidence; and that all that happens in the universe is necessary, and subjected to destiny? In a word, what shall we think of these men?

Shall we say that they have only a different manner of viewing things, or that they use different words in expressing themselves? They call that *Nature* which others call the *Divinity;* they call that *Necessity* which all others call the *Divine decrees;* they call that the *Energy* of *Nature* which others call the *Author* of *Nature;* they call that *Destiny*, or *Fate*, which others call *God*, whose laws are always going forward.

Have we, then, any right to hate and to exterminate them? No, without doubt; at least, we cannot admit that we have any reason that those should perish, who speak only the same language with ourselves, and who are reciprocally beneficial

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to us. Nevertheless, it is to this degree of extravagance that the baneful ideas of religion have carried the human mind. Harassed, and set on by their priests, men have hated and assassinated each other, because that in religious matters they agree not to one creed. Vanity has made some imagine that they are better than others, more intelligible, although they see that theology is a language which they neither understand, nor which they themselves could invent. The very name of Freethinker suffices to irritate them, and to arm the fury of others, who repeat, without ceasing, the name of God, without having any precise idea of the Deity. If, by chance, they imagine that they have any notions of him, they are only confused, contradictory, incompatible, and senseless notions, which have been inspired in their infancy by their priests, and those who, as we have seen, have painted God in all those traits which their imagination furnished, or those who appear more conformed to their passions and interests than to the well-being of their fellow-creatures.

The least reflection will, nevertheless, suffice to make any one perceive, that God, if he is just and good, cannot exist as a being known to some, but unknown to others. If Freethinkers are men void of reason, God would be unjust to punish them for being blind and insensible, or for having too little penetration and understanding to perceive the force of those natural proofs on which the existence of the Deity has been founded. A God full of equity

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cannot punish men for having been blind or devoid of reason. The Freethinkers, as foolish as they are supposed, are beings less insensible than those who make professions of believing in a God full of qualities that destroy one another; they are less dangerous than the adorers of a changeable Deity, who, they imagine, is pleased with the extermination of a large portion of mankind, on account of their opinions. Our speculations are indifferent to God, whose glory man cannot tarnish—whose power mortals cannot abridge. They may, however, be advantageous to ourselves; they may be perfectly indifferent to society, whose happiness they may not affect; or they may be the reverse of all this. For it is evident that the opinions of men do not influence the happiness of society.

Hence, Madam, let us leave men to think as they please, provided that they act in such a manner as promotes the general good of society. The thoughts of men injure not others; their actions may—their reveries never. Our ideas, our thoughts, our systems, depend not on us. He who is fully convinced on one point, is not satisfied on another. All men have not the same eyes, nor the same brains; all have not the same ideas, the same education, or the same opinions; they never agree wholly, when they have the temerity to reason on matters that are enveloped in the obscurity of imaginative fiction, and which cannot be subject to the usual evidence accompanying matters of report, or historic relation.

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Men do not long dispute on objects that are cognizable to their senses, and which they can submit to the test of experience. The number of self-evident truths on which men agree is very small; and the fundamentals of morality are among this number. It is obvious to all men of sense, that beings, united in society, require to be regulated by justice, that they ought to respect the happiness of each other, that mutual succor is indispensable; in a word, that they are obliged to practise virtue, and to be useful to society, for personal happiness. It is evident to demonstration, that the interest of our preservation excites us to moderate our desires, and put a bridle on our passions; to renounce dangerous habits, and to abstain from vices which can only injure our fortune, and undermine our health. These truths are evident to every being whose passions have not dominion over his reason; they are totally independent of theological speculations, which have neither evidence nor demonstration, and which our mind can never verify; they have nothing in common with the religious opinions on which the imagination soars from earth to sky, nor with the fanaticism and credulity which are so frequently producing among mankind the most opposite principles to morality and the well-being of society.

They who are of the Freethinkers' opinions are not more dangerous than they who are of the priests' opinions. In short, Christianity has produced effects more appalling than heathenism. The speculative principles of the Freethinkers have done no

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injury to society; the contagious principles of fanaticism and enthusiasm have only served to spread disorder on the earth. If there are dangerous notions and fatal speculations in the world, they are those of the devotees, who obey a religion that divides men, and excites their passions, and who sacrifice the interests of society, of sovereigns, and their subjects, to their own ambition, their avarice, their vengeance and fury.

There is no question that the Freethinker has motives to be good, even though he admit not notions that bridle his passions. It is true that the Freethinker has no invisible motives, but he has motives, and a visible restraint, which, if he reflects, cannot fail to regulate his actions. If he doubts about religion, he does not question the laws of moral obligation; nor that it is his duty to moderate his passions, to labor for his happiness and that of others, to avoid hatred, disdain, and discord as crimes; and that he should shun vices which may injure his constitution, reputation, and fortune. Thus, relatively to his morality, the Freethinker has principles more sure than those of superstition and fanaticism. In fine, if nothing can restrain the Freethinker, a thousand forces united would not prevent the fanatic from the commission of crimes, and the violation of duties the most sacred.

Besides, I believe that I have already proved that the morality of superstition has no certain principles; that it varies with the interests of the priests, who explain the intentions of the Divinity, as they

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find these accordant or discordant to their views and interests; which, alas! are too often the result of cruel and wicked purposes. On the contrary, the Freethinker, who has no morality but what he draws from the nature and character of man, and the constant events which transpire in society, has a certain morality that is not founded either on the caprice of circumstances or the prejudices of mankind; a morality that tells him when he does evil, and blames him for the evil so done, and that is superior to the morality of the intolerant fanatic and persecutor.

You thus perceive, Madam, on which side the morality of the Freethinkers leans, what advantages it possesses over that inculcated on the superstitious devotee, who knows no other rule than the caprice of his priest, nor any other morality than what suits the interest of the clergy, nor any other virtues than such as make him the slave of their will, and which are too often in opposition to the great interests of mankind. Thus you perceive, that what is understood by the natural morality of the Freethinker, is much more constant and more sure than that of the superstitious, who believe they can render themselves agreeable to God by the intercession of priests. If the Freethinker is blind or corrupted, by not knowing his duties which nature prescribes to him, it is precisely in the same way as the superstitious, whose invisible motives and sacred guides prevent him not from going occasionally astray.

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These reflections will serve to confirm what I have already said, to prove that morality has nothing in common with religion; and that religion is its own enemy, though it pretends to dispense with support from other sources. True morality is founded on the nature of man; the morality of religion is founded only on the chimeras of imagination, and on the caprice of those who speak of the Deity in a language too often contrary to nature and right reason.

Allow me, then, Madam, to repeat to you, that morality is the only natural religion for man; the only object worthy his notice on earth; the only worship which he is required to render to the Deity. It is uniform, and replete with obvious duties, which rest not on the dictation of priests, blabbing chit-chat they do not understand. If it be this morality which I have defined, that makes us what we are, ought we not to labor strenuously for the happiness of our race? If it be this morality that makes us reasonable; that enables us to distinguish good from evil, the useful from the hurtful; that makes us sociable, and enables us to live in society to receive and repay mutual benefits; we ought at least to respect all those who are its friends. If it be this morality which sets bounds to our temper, it is that which interdicts the commission in thought, word, or action, of what would injure another, or disturb the happiness of society. If it attach us to the preservation of all that is dear to us, it points out how by a certain line of conduct we may preserve

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ourselves; for its laws, clear and of easy practice, inflict on those who disobey them instant punishment, fear, and remorse; on the other hand, the observance of its duties is accompanied with immediate and real advantages, and notwithstanding the depravity which prevails on earth, vice always finds itself punished, and virtue is not always deprived of the satisfaction it yields, of the esteem of men, and the recompense of society; even if men are in other respects unjust, they will concede to the virtuous the due meed of praise.

Behold, Madam, to what the dogmas of natural religion reduce us: in meditating on it, and in practising its duties, we shall be truly religious, and filled with the spirit of the Divinity; we shall be admired and respected by men; we shall be in the right way to be loved by those who rule over us, and respected by those who serve us; we shall be truly happy in this world, and we shall have nothing to fear in the next.

These are laws so clear, so demonstrable, and whose infraction is so evidently punished, whose observance is so surely recompensed, that they constitute the code of nature of all living beings, sentient and reasoning; all acknowledge their authority; all find in them the evidence of Deity, and consider those as sceptics who doubt their efficacy. The Freethinker does not refuse to acknowledge as fundamental laws, those which are obviously founded on the God of Nature, and on the immutable and necessary circumstances of

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things cognizable to the faculties of sentient natures. The Indian, the Chinese, the savage, perceives these self-evident laws, whenever he is not carried headlong by his passions into crime and error. In fine, these laws, so true, and so evident, never can appear uncertain, obscure, or false, as are those superstitious chimeras of the imagination, which knaves have substituted for the truths of nature and the dicta of common sense; and those devotees who know no other laws than those of the caprices of their priests, necessarily obey a morality little calculated to produce personal or general happiness, but much calculated to lead to extravagance and inconvenient practices.

Hence, charming Eugenia, you will allow mankind to think as they please, and judge of them after their actions. Oppose reason to their systems, when they are pernicious to themselves or others; remove their prejudices if you can, that they may not become the victims of their caprices; show them the truth, which may always remove error; banish from their minds the phantoms which disturb them; advise them not to meditate on the mysteries of their priests; bid them renounce all those illusions they have substituted for morality; and advise them to turn their thoughts on that which conduces to their happiness. Meditate yourself on your own nature, and the duties which it imposes on you. Fear those chastisements which follow inattention to this law. Be ambitious to be approved by your own understanding, and you will

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rarely fail to receive the applauses of the human kind, as a good member of society.

If you wish to meditate, think with the greatest strength of your mind on your nature. Neve abandon the torch of reason; cherish truth sir cerely. When you are in uncertainty, pause, follow what appears the most probable, alwa abandoning opinions that are destitute of fou dation, or evidence of their truth and benefit t society. Then will you, in good truth, yield to th impulse of your heart when reason is your guide then will you consult in the calmness of passion and counsel yourself on the advantages of virtue and the consequences of its want; and you may flatter yourself that you cannot be displeasing to a wise God, though you disbelieve absurdities, nor agreeable to a good God in doing things hurtful to yourself or to others.

Leaving you now to your own reflections, I shall terminate the series of Letters you have allowed me to address you. Bidding you an affectionate farewell, I am truly yours.

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